

### **Abstract**

In the United States, underrepresented racial minority (URM) students continue to face psychological barriers that undermine their achievement and fuel disparities in academic outcomes. In the current research, we tested whether a multicultural ideology intervention could improve URM students' grade-point-averages (GPAs) during the first two years of college, and thereby reduce the racial achievement gap. Specifically, first-year college students ( $N = 407$ ) read a diversity statement that represented the schools' diversity ideology in terms of either multiculturalism or colorblindness. URM students who read a multicultural diversity statement earned higher GPAs two years later compared to those who read a colorblind diversity statement. Furthermore, they earned higher GPAs compared to a non-participant campus-wide control group. The current study is the first to demonstrate the long-term and causal academic benefits of a multicultural ideology intervention for URM students.

**Keywords:** diversity, intervention, colorblind, multicultural, higher education

**A Diversity Ideology Intervention: Multiculturalism Reduces the Racial Achievement Gap**

In the United States, college achievement critically impacts students' future success (Brand & Xie, 2010). Yet, African American, Latino, and Native American students—or underrepresented racial minority (URM) students—obtain lower grades and drop out of college at higher rates than their White and Asian counterparts (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Although access to material resources undoubtedly contributes to this racial achievement gap, subtle cues in the school environment (e.g., approach to diversity, curriculum) also play a role. For example, when universities overlook—rather than celebrate—the value and strength of students' different backgrounds or social group memberships (Schofield, 2007), this can lead URM students to feel poorly equipped to succeed there (Fryberg, Covarrubias, & Burack, 2013; Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013). These psychological experiences can undermine their academic performance (Chavous et al., 2016; Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Social psychologists have leveraged this understanding of the importance of psychological experiences to develop “wise” interventions aimed at closing the racial achievement gap (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014; Walton & Wilson, 2018). Wise interventions focus on changing how people understand themselves in their educational environments (e.g., whether students feel academically prepared; Stephens, Hamedani & Destin, 2014; Townsend, Stephens, Smallets, & Hamedani, 2019). They do so in a way that initiates self-reinforcing processes that persist to improve students' long-term academic outcomes (Walton & Wilson, 2018). For example, by teaching students that ability can grow and intelligence is malleable, a growth mindset intervention improved the psychological experience and long-term grades of URM students (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

In the current research, we leverage the wise intervention approach to test a novel *multicultural ideology intervention*. To do so, we draw upon the literature on diversity ideologies, or beliefs about how best to approach and manage diversity (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000; Plaut, 2002). We theorize that representing a school's diversity ideology in terms of multiculturalism can improve URM students' GPAs, and thereby reduce the racial achievement gap. Further, in an exploratory manner, we consider the possibility that multiculturalism can do so by increasing URM students' engagement and improving the quality of their experiences in college (see our pre-registration here [http://bit.ly/OSF\\_Link1](http://bit.ly/OSF_Link1)).

### **Diversity Ideologies**

U.S. colleges and universities frequently tout the importance of diversity. Yet they do so in different ways. The two most prominent diversity ideologies are colorblindness and multiculturalism (Rattan & Ambady, 2013). The core tenet of the colorblind diversity ideology is that social group differences,<sup>1</sup> such as those due to race or social class, should be *avoided* (Plaut, Thomas, Hurd, & Romano, 2018). Underlying this ideology is the assumption that if people simply avoid social group differences, they will no longer have the opportunity to discriminate or enact bias (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Previous literature has operationalized colorblindness in one of two ways: by emphasizing individuals' unique identities or their similarities (Plaut, 2002; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008; Schofield, 2007). When emphasizing individuals' unique identities, colorblindness asserts that people should be judged on the basis of individual achievement (Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007). In contrast, when emphasizing similarities across individuals, colorblindness

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term *social group differences* to refer to variation in the experiences, opportunities, or outcomes of diverse social groups (e.g., race or social class).

asserts that people are ultimately the same and should be treated without regard to their social group differences (Markus et al., 2000).

Multiculturalism offers an alternative approach to diversity, one that focuses on *attending* to social group differences. The multicultural ideology argues that social group differences are meaningful, motivating, and can be a source of strength (Plaut, 2010; Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). Underlying this ideology is the assumption that people who are members of different social groups often have different experiences and perspectives, and therefore it is important to recognize and value these differences (Markus, 2008; Rattan & Ambady, 2013).

### **Diversity Ideologies and Academic Achievement**

Interdisciplinary research suggests that exposure to multiculturalism has significant potential to benefit URM students in college. By recognizing and celebrating the value and strength of different experiences (e.g., feeling different, having different perspectives; Schofield, 2007), multiculturalism can foster more positive academic experiences and engagement for underrepresented students (Banks, 2007; Dover, 2013; Hytten & Bettez, 2011; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013; Sleeter, 1991, 2011; Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013; Townsend, Stephens, Smallets, & Hamedani, 2019). For example, research in multicultural education and related interventions suggest that recognizing and celebrating students' differences are associated with increase sense of agency, self-confidence, and engagement (Gurin, Nagda & Zuniga, 2013; Sleeter, 2011; Nelson Laird, Engberg & Hurtado 2005).

Furthermore, lab and survey studies in social psychology suggest that exposure to multiculturalism improves URM students' psychological experiences and engagement-related outcomes. For example, exposure to multiculturalism (vs. colorblindness) increases racial and ethnic minorities positive identification with their group and self-esteem (Verkuyten, 2005;

2009). Additionally, exposure to multiculturalism (vs. colorblindness) promotes URMs' psychological engagement and persistence at work, increases their sense of having power, and enhances their self-efficacy (Gündemir, Dovidio, Homan, & De Dreu, 2017; Gündemir, Homan, Usova, & Galinsky, 2017; Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Vorauer & Quesnel, 2017).

We theorize that these types of positive psychological experiences and engagement-related benefits should improve students' academic outcomes. Consistent with this theorizing, studies in social psychology suggest that exposure to multiculturalism has the potential to improve URM students' academic achievement. Research finds that URM students' exposure to multiculturalism (vs. colorblindness) leads to improved performance on cognitive and math tasks in the laboratory (Brannon et al., 2015; Holoien & Shelton, 2012; Wilton, Good, Moss-Racusin, & Sanchez, 2015). Taken together, these prior studies suggest that multiculturalism should increase URM students' engagement and the quality of their experiences in college, which should, in turn, improve their academic performance.

Although previous research documents that multiculturalism can influence outcomes *related* to URM students' academic performance (e.g., cognitive tasks), research has yet to examine whether experimentally exposing URM students to multiculturalism can improve their *actual* academic performance in college (e.g., their GPAs). Additionally, beyond short-term lab studies, research has not examined whether multiculturalism can be translated into a wise intervention (i.e., one focused on changing students' experiences) that can foster long-term academic benefits (Walton & Wilson, 2018). In the first intervention of its kind, the present study tests whether multiculturalism can increase URM students' grades in college.

## Current Research

In the current research, we test whether a multicultural ideology intervention can improve the grades of URM students and thereby reduce the racial achievement gap in college. We test the four hypotheses outlined below. Three of these four hypotheses were pre-registered ([http://bit.ly/OSF\\_Link1](http://bit.ly/OSF_Link1)). We did not preregister Hypothesis 2 pertaining to the campus wide control condition because, at the time of the preregistration, we did not expect to have access to these data.

*Hypothesis 1:* Exposure to multiculturalism compared to colorblindness will improve the academic performance (i.e., grades) of URM students.<sup>2</sup>

*Hypothesis 2 (not pre-registered):* Exposure to multiculturalism will improve the academic performance (i.e., grades) of URM students compared to students who did not participate in the intervention (i.e., whom we refer to as a *campus-wide control group*).

*Hypothesis 3 (exploratory):* Exposure to multiculturalism compared to colorblindness will improve URM students' engagement in college and the quality of their college experiences. These improvements will help to explain the benefits of multiculturalism.

*Hypothesis 4:* Exposure to multiculturalism compared to colorblindness will not impact the grades of White and Asian students.

## Method

### Participants

**Participants exposed to the intervention.** Half-way through the fall term, we emailed all URM first-year students and a comparable number of White and Asian first-year students at a

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<sup>2</sup> In our pre-registration, we hypothesized that multiculturalism would also improve first-generation students' grades. However, the intervention had no effect on their GPAs. We speculate that this was because first-generation students were only 16% of the sample and thus, we were underpowered to detect an effect (see Supplemental Materials for details section II (A:4-5)).

private, selective university and asked them to complete a survey. As our pre-registration indicates, our target sample size was 600 participants to account for the 60% retention rate that we have observed in prior interventions (e.g., Stephens et al., 2014).

A total of 565 students participated. Twelve could not be included in the analyses because they were missing data central to our analyses (i.e., race and GPA). In our pre-registration ([http://bit.ly/OSF\\_Link2](http://bit.ly/OSF_Link2)), which was created before we collected or analyzed the GPA data, we determined that we would exclude participants who did not pay attention to the manipulation (i.e., the diversity statement). Accordingly, we excluded 146 participants ( $n = 64$  URM;  $n = 82$  White and Asian) who said “No” to the attention check: “Did you pay attention to the content of the diversity statement you read?” Excluded participants were distributed comparably across the multicultural ( $n = 70$ ) and colorblind ( $n = 76$ ) conditions,  $\chi^2(1) = .003, p = .96$ . We used the remaining sample ( $n = 407$  participants; 38% URMs) to examine the intervention’s effects on students’ two year-cumulative GPAs.

**Nonparticipants in the campus-wide control group.** We had the opportunity to compare the GPA results from the two intervention conditions to data from a campus-wide control group ( $N = 1,317$ ). This control group included all students who were in the same cohort as the intervention participants, but who did not participate in the intervention. There were 1,221 nonparticipants ( $n = 222$  URMs) who had the necessary data to compare their two-year cumulative GPAs to participants in the intervention conditions. Combined with participants exposed to the intervention (total  $N = 1628$ ), post hoc power analysis using G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), indicated that we achieved 62% power to detect the interaction effect ( $\eta^2 = .004$ ) we observed for the academic performance outcome.

## Procedure

**Intervention.** Participants were randomly exposed to one of two intervention manipulations: a multicultural diversity statement (multicultural condition;  $n = 208$ ) or a colorblind diversity statement (colorblind condition;  $n = 199$ ). The intervention was delivered during students' first term in college—a key transitional period when students were likely making sense of their experiences and especially receptive to information about their university's views of diversity (Cook, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, & Cohen, 2012; Walton, 2014).

Drawing on previous research on diversity ideologies and related interventions, we asked participants to read and evaluate a potential diversity statement for an incoming student guide, which served as our manipulation of the university's approach to diversity (Apfelbaum, Stephens, & Reagans, 2016; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Stephens et al., 2014). Although this was not the university's official diversity statement, we reasoned that reading about a potential diversity statement should give students an indication of what the school considers an appropriate way to think about and respond to diversity.

In both conditions, the diversity statement conveyed that their school valued and celebrated diversity and inclusion. The key difference between the two conditions was that the multicultural statement emphasized the value of diversity and inclusion by *attending* to social group differences, whereas the colorblind statement did so by *avoiding* social group differences (i.e., either by emphasizing individuals' unique identities or similarities across individuals; Plaut, 2010). For example, in the multicultural condition, participants read, "It is our responsibility to leverage our differences as strengths to ensure that we create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus" and "only by learning about people with different backgrounds and viewpoints can we

challenge our assumptions, test our ideas, and broaden our understanding of the world.” In contrast, the colorblind diversity statement emphasized both similarities across individuals and individuals’ unique identities. Participants in the colorblind condition read “It is our responsibility to leverage our similarities as strengths to ensure that we create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive campus” and “only by learning about the unique perspectives and qualities of each and every individual community member can we challenge our assumptions, test our ideas, and broaden our understanding of the world.” See Supplementary Materials, section I(A), for the full diversity statements.

Immediately after reading the diversity statement, participants completed a short survey, which included an exercise to help them to internalize the intervention message (i.e., a *saying-is-believing* exercise; Stephens et al., 2014; Yeager & Walton, 2011) and a manipulation check to assess their perceptions of the messages conveyed in the intervention conditions. This survey also contained a variety of additional measures to assess their perceptions of the diversity statement and their anticipated experiences for their first year in college. None of these measures was influenced by the diversity ideology intervention. These additional measures and analyses are reported in the Supplemental Materials section II(B).

**End-of-year survey.** To test exploratory Hypothesis 3 (i.e., that multiculturalism would improve URM students’ engagement and the quality of their college experiences), participants completed an end-of-year survey that contained a variety of measures assessing students’ actual engagement and experiences during their first year in college. None of these measures was influenced by the diversity ideology intervention. These measures and analyses are reported in the Supplemental Materials section II(C). We speculate that these non-significant results could be because our sample was highly underpowered. Indeed, out of the 206 participants who

completed the survey, only 79 were URM students. Post hoc power analysis using G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), indicated that we achieved 33% power to detect the largest interaction effect ( $\eta^2 = .011$ ) we observed in the end-of-year measures.

## Measures

**Manipulation check.** To assess whether the diversity statement effectively conveyed multiculturalism vs. colorblindness, participants completed two items assessing the extent to which they perceived the diversity statement as: “Recognizing and valuing differences [similarities]” on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

**Academic Performance.** The university registrar provided students’ official grades for every term throughout their first two years in college. Following previous research (Walton & Cohen, 2011), we do not include the first year fall term GPA in any GPA analyses because students’ first year fall term grades include academic outcomes (e.g., tests, assignments) that occurred before the intervention was delivered. To evaluate the long-term impact of the intervention, we examined the cumulative GPA of students at the end of their second year (i.e., students’ cumulative GPA from their first winter term through their second spring term).

## Results

### Analysis Strategy

In our analyses, to increase the chance that any effects resulted from the intervention rather than pre-existing skills and demographic differences, we controlled for a standard set of covariates utilized in previous interventions (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014; Townsend, Stephens, Smallets, & Hamedani, 2019): participants’ SAT scores, family income (not low SES = 0; low SES = 1), generation status (continuing-generation = 0; first-generation = 1), and gender (male = 0; female = 1). Our pre-registration did not indicate that we would use covariates, nor

did it indicate which statistical analyses we would employ. Nevertheless, our results are largely equivalent without covariates (see Supplementary Materials section II(A:1)).

We obtained participants' academic and demographic information both from the university registrar and from the survey administered immediately after the intervention. For objective measures such as SAT scores, cumulative GPA, and Pell grant status, the analyses used data from the university registrar because we reasoned that these data would be more accurate than students' retrospective self-reports. However, for participants' current social identities (i.e., gender, race, and generation-status), the analyses used participants' self-report data from the survey. For any missing social identity data, the analyses used data from the registrar.

We grouped White and Asian students together in these analyses given that both groups tend to have higher GPAs than other racial groups and would likely not benefit academically from exposure to multiculturalism (Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Kao & Thompson, 2003). Nevertheless, when we exclude Asian students from the analyses and compare URM vs. White students, the results are equivalent (see Supplemental Materials section II(A:2-3)).

**Manipulation check.** To examine whether the diversity statements successfully conveyed the intended messages, we conducted 2 (race: URM vs. White and Asian) x 2 (condition: multicultural vs. colorblind) analyses of covariances (ANCOVAs) controlling for the covariates listed above. First, we found a main effect of condition,  $F(1, 295) = 30.22, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$ , suggesting that the multicultural message successfully conveyed that the university recognized and valued differences. Specifically, participants in the multicultural condition viewed the diversity statement as recognizing and valuing *differences* significantly more ( $M = 6.16, SD = 0.98$ ) than those in the colorblind condition ( $M = 5.38, SD = 1.41$ ). There was no

significant main effect of race,  $F(1, 295) = 0.32, p = .57$ , or an interaction,  $F(1, 295) = 0.88, p = .35$ .

Second, we found a main effect of condition,  $F(1, 295) = 46.10, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$ , suggesting that the colorblind message successfully conveyed that the university recognized and valued similarities. Specifically, participants in the colorblind condition viewed the diversity statement as recognizing and valuing *similarities* significantly more ( $M = 5.34, SD = 1.32$ ) than those in the multicultural condition ( $M = 4.11, SD = 1.68$ ). There was no main effect of race,  $F(1, 295) = 1.54, p = .22$ , or interaction effect,  $F(1, 295) = 0.02, p = .90$ .

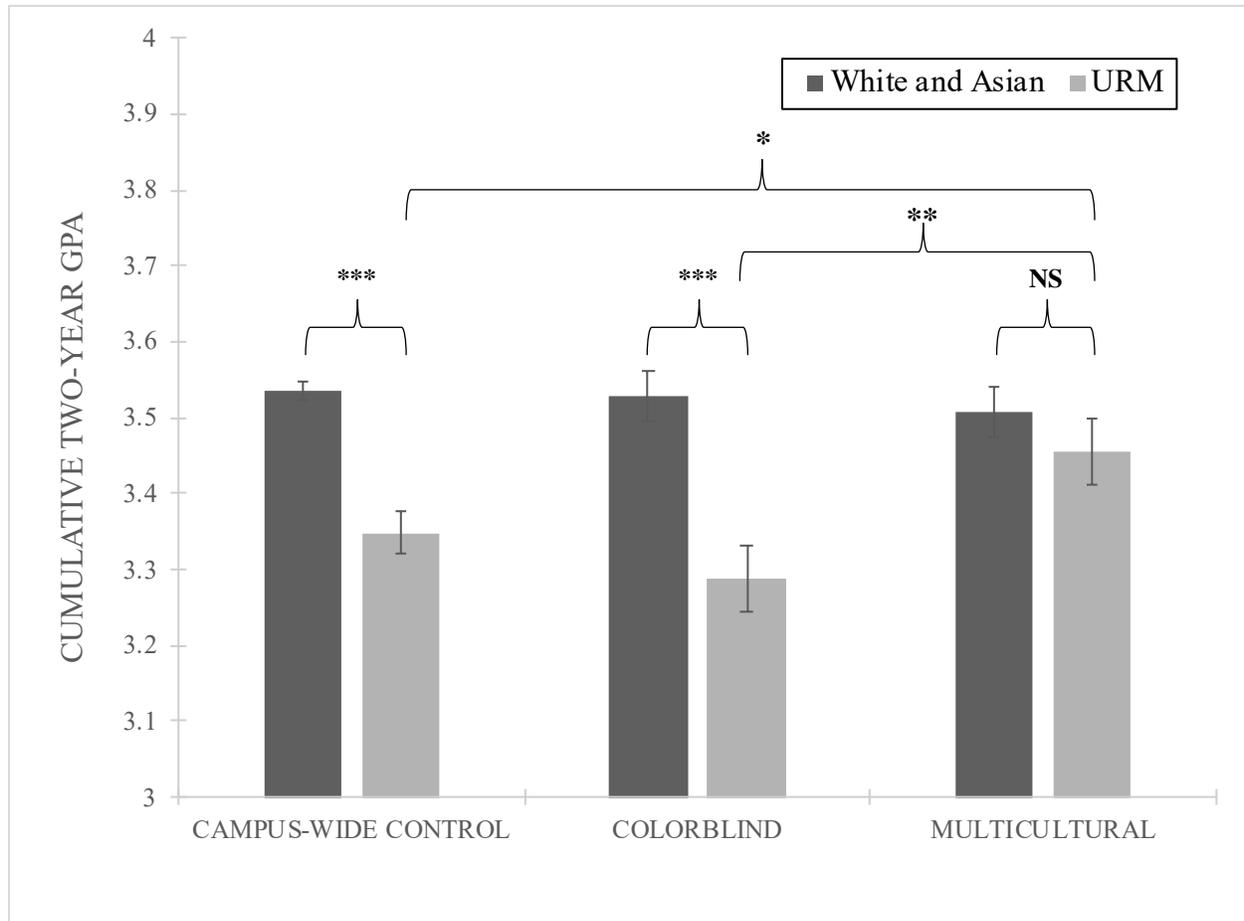
### **Academic Performance**

First, we tested our theorizing that multiculturalism can benefit the academic performance of URM students. To do so, we conducted a 2 (race: URM vs. White and Asian) x 3 (condition: multicultural vs. colorblind vs. campus-wide control) analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) controlling for the same set of covariates. We found a significant main effect of race,  $F(1, 1618) = 29.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ , and no main effect of intervention condition,  $F(2, 1618) = 1.84, p = .16, \eta^2 = .002$ . These main effects were qualified by a significant race x intervention condition interaction,  $F(2, 1618) = 3.38, p = .03, \eta^2 = .004$ .

Supporting Hypothesis 1, URM participants in the multicultural condition earned significantly higher GPAs than URM participants in the colorblind condition,  $p = .006$ , 95% CI [0.05, 0.29]. Furthermore, supporting Hypothesis 2, URM participants in the multicultural condition earned significantly higher GPAs than nonparticipants in the campus-wide control group,  $p = .03$ , 95% CI [0.009, 0.204]. Moreover, URM participants in the colorblind condition did not differ from URM nonparticipants in the campus-wide control group,  $p = .23$ , 95% CI [-0.16, 0.04]. These results suggest that the multicultural intervention improved URM students'

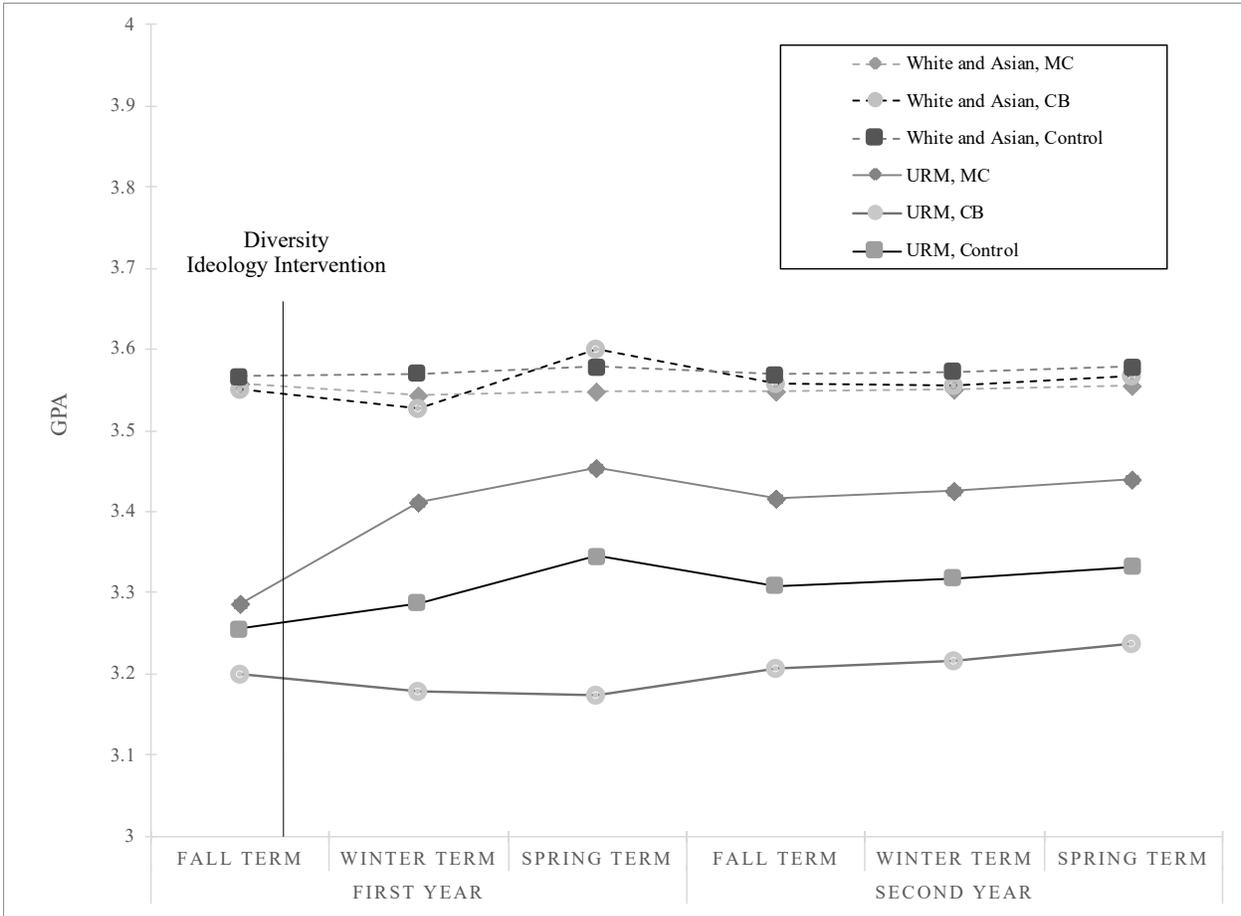
academic outcomes compared to both (1) the colorblind condition and (2) what they would typically experience in college the absence of a such an intervention. In contrast to URM participants, and consistent with Hypothesis 4, the intervention conditions did not affect White and Asian students' GPAs,  $F(2, 1618) = 0.29, p = .75, \eta^2 = .000$ .

Second, we tested our theorizing that, by improving the performance of URM students, multiculturalism would also serve to reduce the racial achievement gap. As shown in Figure 1, in the colorblind condition,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.35, -0.13], and campus-wide control condition,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.24, 0.13], we found a significant racial achievement gap between URM participants and White and Asian participants. However, in the multicultural condition, we found that their GPAs did not differ significantly,  $p = .34$ , 95% CI [-0.16, -0.06]. Consistent with our theorizing, the achievement gap in the multicultural condition was 73% smaller than the campus-wide control condition and 79% smaller than the colorblind condition.



**Figure 1.** Cumulative two-year GPA as a function of race and intervention condition. Marginal adjusted means are presented. Error bars show standard errors of the mean. Note that key contrasts are highlighted in this figure.

Finally, we explored whether the intervention effects on academic achievement varied over time. To do so, we conducted a GLM Repeated Measure with time as the within-subject factor and Greenhouse-Geisser's correction. Results are shown in Figure 2. Suggesting that the intervention effects persisted and were consistent across terms during the first two years in college, no significant main effects of time, or interactions with time, emerged ( $p > .05$ ; see detailed results in Supplemental Materials section II(A:7)). Nevertheless, consistent with the GPA results reported above, the expected significant race x condition interaction remained,  $F(2.91, 1542) = 4.95, p = .007$ .



**Figure 2.** MC = Multicultural, CB = Colorblind. GPA over the first two years in college as a function of race and condition. Marginal adjusted means for each term GPA are presented. Note that the vertical line indicates that the diversity ideology intervention was conducted in the middle of the fall term. As students’ fall term grades include academic outcomes (e.g., tests) that occurred before the intervention was delivered, we do not include the fall term GPA in the time-series analyses.

**Discussion**

We developed and tested a novel multicultural diversity ideology intervention, which improved the academic achievement of URM students throughout their first two years in college. Halfway through students’ first term in college, reading a multicultural diversity statement led URM students to earn higher GPAs two years later. Furthermore, representing a school’s diversity ideology in terms of multiculturalism significantly reduced the racial achievement gap.

The present research contributes to the growing literature on wise interventions that aim to shape students' psychological experiences in a way that produces lasting benefits over time (e.g., Yeager & Walton, 2011). This literature often focuses on emphasizing shared experiences, affirming the self, or changing students' mindsets about the nature of ability (Walton & Wilson, 2018). The current research is the first to demonstrate that representing a school's approach to diversity in terms of multiculturalism can improve URM students' long-term academic achievement in college. Indeed, by conveying that a school recognized and celebrated the value of URM students' different experiences in college, multiculturalism helped to reduce the racial achievement gap for nearly two years.

Although the multicultural intervention shares some degree of overlap with difference-education interventions (Stephens et al., 2014; Townsend et al., 2019) the ideas that they communicate are also conceptually distinct. First, although multiculturalism and difference-education both acknowledge the importance of social group differences, difference-education provides additional context about the source of these social group differences. Specifically, difference-education teaches students that their current experiences of being different or feeling different in college have contextual sources, i.e., that they emerge from participating in different sociocultural contexts over time. Second, although multiculturalism and difference-education both recognize the positive elements of difference, difference-education helps students understand how difference can matter in both positive and negative ways. Future research should examine how the particular messages of these two interventions impact students' outcomes; for example, by considering when it may prove more beneficial for students to gain a contextual understanding of difference versus a simpler multicultural message that celebrates its positive elements.

The present research also advances prior literature regarding the benefits of multiculturalism for racial and ethnic minorities (Plaut, 2010). Previous research demonstrates that exposure to multiculturalism is associated with positive outcomes *related* to academic achievement (Holoien & Shelton, 2012; Plaut et al., 2009; Wilton et al., 2015). The current research extends these findings by demonstrating that exposure to a multicultural diversity ideology intervention can causally improve the long-term (and real-world) academic achievement of URM college students. An academic benefit such as this may have significant and long-term benefits for URM students' success after college (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Cheah, 2012; Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

Finally, the present research contributes to the literature on diversity ideologies. Much of previous research in this area focuses on the comparison between multiculturalism and colorblindness (Plaut et al., 2018; Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Wilton et al., 2015). While this comparison is important, it leaves open the question of whether colorblindness harms racial and ethnic minorities or whether multiculturalism benefits them. By comparing the results for multicultural, colorblind, and nonparticipant campus-wide control conditions, the current research helps to answer this question: multiculturalism can improve the performance of URM students compared to both colorblindness and the absence of any diversity ideology.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

While the current research found that the diversity ideology intervention influenced the long-term GPAs of URM students, at the time the intervention was delivered, there were no immediate effects on students' self-reported anticipated experiences. It is possible that we did not find evidence of immediate effects of the intervention because these experiences can take time to emerge. Indeed, while some studies show that interventions can have immediate effects, other

research find that can emerge over time (Cohen, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, Apfel, & Brzustoski, 2009; Harackiewicz et al., 2014; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014; Tibbetts, Priniski, Hecht, Borman, & Harackiewicz, 2018; Townsend, Stephens, Smallets, & Hamedani, 2019; Walton & Cohen, 2007, 2011). It is important, therefore, for future research to continue to investigate how these wise interventions influence experiences both immediately and over time.

Future research should also identify the psychological and behavioral mechanisms that explain why the multicultural diversity ideology improves URM students' academic performance. Based on previous research on the benefits of multiculturalism and other theoretically-related interventions, we explored the possibility that the multicultural intervention would improve URM students' GPAs by fostering engagement and improving the quality of their college experiences (Plaut et al., 2009; Vorauer & Quesnel, 2017). However, we did not find any evidence of any mediators. One possible explanation for our null findings is that we obtained a small sample for the end-of-year follow-up survey, and thus we were under-powered (33%) to detect any effects related to possible mechanisms. Alternatively, it is possible that we did not capture the mechanisms through which the intervention influenced students' achievement. For example, multiculturalism could have improved grades by reducing URM students' stress or their health during the college transition (Levine, Markus, Austin, Chen, & Miller, 2019; Levy, Heissel, Richeson, & Adam, 2016).

Future research should not only identify the processes through which multiculturalism benefits students academically, but also examine potential moderators of these benefits. One important question is whether this intervention would be effective in different contexts. For example, if schools do not have programming or resources related to diversity and inclusion, or if they lack significant numbers of underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities, students would

be unlikely to perceive a multicultural diversity statement as authentic or meaningful. In such a context, we suggest that that the current intervention would be unlikely to benefit URM students (Apfelbaum, Stephens, & Reagans, 2016; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008).

### **Conclusion**

Though colleges and universities across the U.S. frequently espouse the importance of diversity and inclusion, they often do not fully acknowledge the significance of students' differences, nor do they fully value their strengths (Schofield, 2007). The present research suggests that it is not enough for schools to merely promote diversity and inclusion; the specific *diversity ideology* matters. The current research demonstrates that representing a school's diversity ideology in terms of multiculturalism is one powerful way to improve the long-term academic achievement of URM students. Indeed, attending to, valuing, and affirming people's social group differences can ultimately help to reduce the racial achievement gap.

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