

Implementing a Holistic University Admissions Process to Increase Diversity and Improve Diabetes Care and Education

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Abstract

Holistic review is an admissions strategy assessing an applicant's experiences alongside measures of academic achievement resulting in equity among the admissions continuum.

Results from holistic review used in a Doctor of Physical Therapy Program admissions process increased the diversity of the student population and resulted in a population more closely representative of the state.

Nurses and dietitians are top care providers engaged in diabetes care and education and the poster authors propose that this model would increase the diversity of ADCES members and improve diabetes care and education.

This poster presents a competency-based admissions process and demonstrates how interprofessional collaboration can positively impact diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging efforts for dietetics students.

Background

"If you don't have the right look, the right connections, or the right numbers then you don't have a chance."

- Student (DPT Program Applicant)

- There are negative impacts from increased admissions competition on students from underserved and disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Low income students have less access to advanced courses, standardized test materials and tutors, and funds to retake standardized tests for better scores.
- Students from low income households often work to assist with college expenses and as a result have lower GPAs than their counterparts who focus only on academics. They are also less likely to apply to competitive programs due to lack of trust with the admissions process.

"Strategies to expand and diversify our diabetes workforce are necessary to increase health equity and optimal diabetes care and education outcomes while also reducing health disparities."

- Key Indicators of Workforce Areas for Development (NPS2021)

- Over 37 million people in the U.S. have diabetes and an additional 96 million adults have prediabetes.
- The 2021 National Practice and Workforce Survey demonstrated a lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and provides support for identifying and addressing this gap in diabetes care and education that can impact the specialty's sustainability, diversity, and growth while also guiding strategy development for future workforce and practice setting initiatives.
- Because services provided by Diabetes Care and Education Specialists (DCESs) play a key role in improving patient and economic outcomes, and ensuring compliance with clinical practice guidelines for diabetes and cardiometabolic conditions, a diverse and inclusive DCES workforce is warranted.

Methodology

- Program acceptance criteria traditionally include a minimum score requirement on standardized tests, a specific grade point average (GPA) range, and a writing sample.
- A multidisciplinary team of faculty and staff were assembled and trained on the admissions platform, scoring systems, interview formats, and phases of the admission process (screening and selection).
- Applicants were screened based on answers to eight individual questions, academic achievement, and seven metrics associated with applicant experiences.
- Program acceptance of applicants resulted from individual interview scores (25%), applicant experiences and group interview scores (50%), and academic achievement (25%).

Testimony of a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)

"Despite my GPA and years of experience in dietetics and nutrition – including working with RDNs to train dietetic interns and extensive international experiences – my applications for admission into Dietetic Internships were going no where fast. As an African-American immigrant to the U.S. my applications kept failing into the proverbial "black hole." On one hand I was good enough to help train interns but on the other was not good enough to be accepted into the same program at the same university where I worked.

Ageism, racism, and discrimination were my significant barriers, and this is why many minorities trained in dietetics and nutrition often never become RDNs. We "don't fit the bill" in a majority White America and profession.

After ten years of expending effort with no results, caught in a system stacked against me, by a miracle God circumvented the racist system and I was accepted into the Tulane University School of Public Health Dietetic Internship Program. This miracle happened two months before the start of the program because one intern dropped out. By a stroke of destiny I became the sixth and final intern in that cohort. Someone on the decision committee saw value in ME and did not just see ME as a number! The rest, as they say, is history!

This Internship was a turning point in my life as I went from working menial jobs to working at the state, local, and federal levels. Since then, I believe I have made significant contributions to several areas, including nutrition and dietetics, and diabetes to name a few. That open door at Tulane has led to my work in health equity, the pharmaceutical industry, academia, public health, and clinical care. Additionally my earning power and its impact on my family's health and well-being, ability to gain wealth, and our decision to continue living in this country will impact several generations.

Today as an ADCES Fellow, with many accolades and awards for my work, including the Hubert Humphries Award for Service to America, the CDC Director's Public Health Impact Award, the State of Georgia Governor's Award, and others, I am living proof that allowing diverse individuals into dietetic, nursing, medical, and allied health programs can change the trajectory of an individual's life and even change a nation. I challenge you to bring diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into your allied health professional application process – your profession, patients, clients, community, and nation will thank you for it."

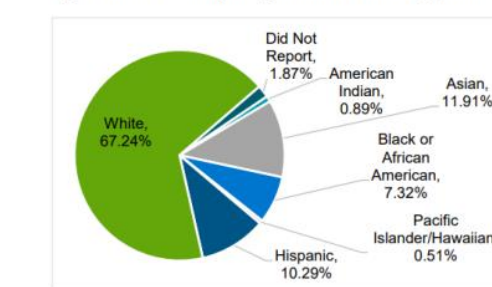
- Magon Saunders, DHSc, MS, RDN, LD, DCES, FADCES

Outcomes

DPT Applicants/ Accepted by Race & Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity Designations	Total Applicants in PTCAS		Total Accepted Applicants in PTCAS	
	#	%	#	%
American Indian	177	0.89%	82	0.70%
Asian	2,382	11.91%	1,351	11.49%
Black or African American	1,463	7.32%	573	4.87%
Pacific Islander/Hawaiian	101	0.51%	59	0.50%
Hispanic	2,057	10.29%	1,000	8.50%
White	13,447	67.24%	8,471	72.03%
Did Not Report	373	1.87%	225	1.91%
Total	20,000	100%	11,761	100%

Figure 6. Race/Ethnicity Designations for PTCAS Applicants*



* Racial and ethnicity categories in graph are not mutually exclusive.

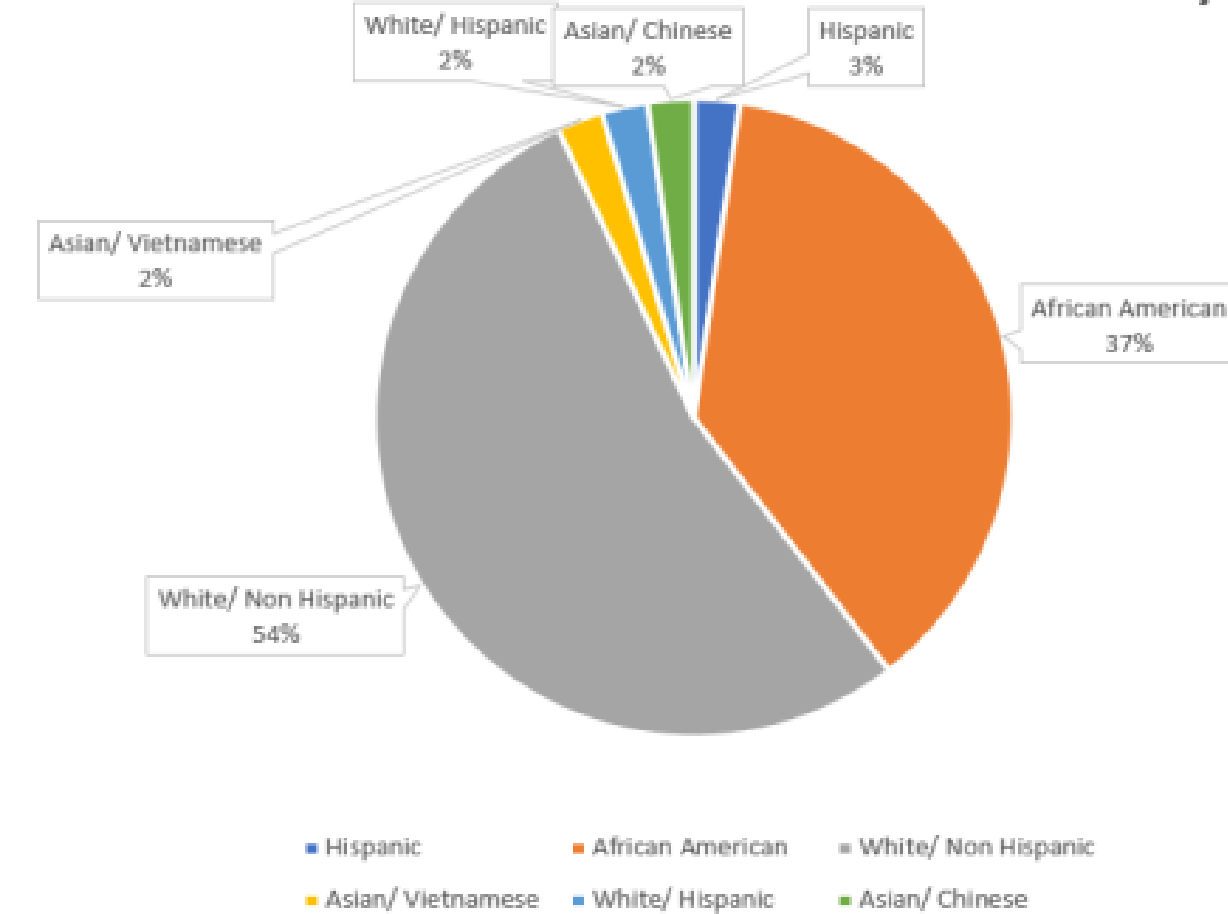
PTCAS applicants in the 2018-2019 admissions cycle were able to select one or more race and ethnicity categories. Categories in the table and graph below are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, the report total in the table below exceeds the total number of PTCAS applicants.



Holistic Admissions Process (AY 2021-2022)

	Black	White	Other
Louisiana Population	32%	61%	7%
University of LA Monroe (DPT Program)	37%	56%	7%
University of LA System	24%	58%	18%
Southern University System (HBCU)	75%	14%	11%
LA State University System	15%	55%	30%

ULM DPT Student Cohort - Diversity



Conclusions

- Holistic admissions practices considered all elements of the application and valued applicants as unique individuals.
- Provided a decreased comparison among applicants and an increased consideration of opportunities afforded to applicants.
- Considered academic opportunity in one's high school, family background, ongoing hardships, extenuating circumstances, and other contextual factors.
- Created discipline diversity among admissions committee members and resulted in a mixture of administration, faculty, and staff.
- Applied a broad perspective to each applicant because each represented discipline viewed candidates through their own lens.
- Resulted in admitting students who will most likely collaborate well interprofessionally.
- Recruitment and retention efforts resulting in diverse and under-represented populations that are both interested in and qualified to serve as Diabetes Care and Education Specialists will impact diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging efforts for dietetics students while.
- These efforts hold promise of improving the experience of diabetes care and education, improving population health, and reducing per capita costs of health care.

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