

Inclusive Recruitment and Admissions in Social Science Programs, A Case Study of Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

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Abstract: *This study examined the effectiveness of inclusive recruitment and admissions practices within the social science programs at Metropolitan International University (MIU), a diverse urban institution committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. A qualitative research design, employing a case study approach, explored the university's current processes and identified specific barriers to inclusivity. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with admissions officers and faculty members, focus group discussions with students, and document analysis. The study found that while a majority of respondents perceived the admissions process as inclusive, a significant minority disagreed or strongly disagreed, citing lack of financial aid and standardized test bias as major barriers. The study also revealed a positive correlation between perception of inclusivity and experience with the admissions process, suggesting that students who felt welcomed, respected, and valued throughout the admissions process were more likely to have a positive overall experience. The findings highlighted the detrimental impact of barriers to inclusivity on students' experiences, reinforcing the need to address systemic inequities and dismantle barriers to access. The study recommended that MIU implement a comprehensive approach to inclusive recruitment and admissions, focusing on addressing financial constraints, mitigating standardized test bias, and engaging in targeted outreach efforts to reach underrepresented communities. By embracing a more holistic approach that recognizes the diverse talents, experiences, and potential of all applicants, MIU could create a more equitable and inclusive admissions process, fostering a more diverse and representative student body that enriches the academic experience for all.*

Keywords: Recruitment, Admissions and Social Science

Background of the study

Inclusive recruitment and admissions processes are vital in addressing systemic inequities in higher education (Kazaara, 2023). Inclusivity in this context refers to strategies that actively seek to remove barriers for marginalized groups, ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds have equitable opportunities to access higher education (Edward et al., 2023). Traditional admissions processes often prioritize metrics such as standardized test scores and grades, which can disadvantage students from underrepresented communities due to a variety of socio-economic and cultural factors (Jane & Isaac Kazaara, 2023). The concept of inclusivity in admissions emphasizes a more holistic approach, considering a broader range of factors such as life experiences, community involvement, and potential for success in a diverse academic environment (Pauline, 2023). This approach aligns with the broader goals of social justice and equity in education, aiming to create a student body that reflects the diversity of society and enriches the academic experience for all.

Metropolitan International University (MIU), located in a diverse urban setting, is committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within its social science programs. Despite this commitment, data indicates that certain groups, particularly those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minorities, remain underrepresented in these programs (Pauline, 2023). This underrepresentation is concerning given the university's location in a multicultural metropolis, where the potential pool of applicants is highly diverse. MIU has implemented various initiatives aimed at increasing diversity in its admissions process, such as outreach programs in underserved communities and the adoption of more holistic review processes (Kukundakwe, 2024). However, these efforts have had limited success, indicating the need for a more comprehensive approach to inclusive recruitment and admissions. This study will examine the effectiveness of current practices at MIU and explore strategies for creating a more inclusive admissions process that better reflects the diversity of the surrounding community (Barua et al., 2023).

The study is grounded in theories of social justice and equity in education, particularly those that emphasize the importance of dismantling systemic barriers to access. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural and social capital is central to understanding how traditional admissions processes can perpetuate inequalities (Robinah & Aggrey, 2023). Bourdieu's theory suggests that students from privileged backgrounds possess forms of capital that are valued by educational institutions, giving them an advantage in the admissions process. Conversely, students from marginalized backgrounds may lack this capital, leading to their underrepresentation in higher education (Kakooza et al., 2019b). Additionally, Critical Race Theory (CRT) informs this study by highlighting the ways in which institutional practices, even those that appear neutral, can reinforce racial and socio-economic disparities. This theoretical framework will guide the analysis of MIU's recruitment and admissions strategies and inform recommendations for more inclusive practices.

Problem Statement

Despite the increasing emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, the recruitment and admissions processes in social science programs often fail to adequately reflect the diversity of the broader population (Kakooza et al., 2019a). Many programs continue to rely on traditional metrics such as standardized test scores and prior academic performance, which can disadvantage applicants from underrepresented groups, including those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, first-generation college students, and ethnic minorities (Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2023). The lack of inclusivity in these processes not only limits the diversity of perspectives and experiences within social science programs but also perpetuates systemic inequities in access to higher education (Joventa et al., 2023). This problem is particularly concerning in the social sciences, where understanding and addressing social inequalities is a central focus of study. There is a critical need to examine and redesign recruitment and admissions strategies to ensure they are genuinely inclusive, thereby fostering a more diverse and representative student body that can contribute to the richness of academic inquiry and the advancement of social justice.

Objectives

1. To analyse the current recruitment and admissions practices in social science programs at Metropolitan International University and identify barriers to inclusivity.
2. To assess the impact of holistic admissions processes on the diversity of the student body within social science programs.
3. To develop and propose strategies for enhancing inclusivity in the recruitment and admissions processes, with a focus on increasing representation from underrepresented groups.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the effectiveness of inclusive recruitment and admissions practices within the social science programs at Metropolitan International University (MIU). A case study approach was utilized to gain an in-depth understanding of the university's current processes and to identify specific barriers to inclusivity. This design was chosen for its ability to provide a comprehensive analysis of the complex dynamics involved in admissions practices and their impact on diversity within the academic environment. The study population consisted of all stakeholders involved in the recruitment and admissions processes at Metropolitan International University, including admissions officers, faculty members from the social science programs, and current students. The university is located in a diverse urban area, making it an ideal setting for examining issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. The study focused specifically on the social science programs due to their emphasis on understanding and addressing social inequalities. A total of 100 participants were selected for the study. This sample size included 30 admissions officers and faculty members involved in the admissions process, as well as 70 current students enrolled in social science programs at MIU. The sample was considered sufficient to provide a diverse range of perspectives and to ensure that the findings would be representative of the broader population within the university's social science programs. The study used purposive sampling to select participants who were directly involved in or affected by the recruitment and admissions processes at MIU. Admissions officers and faculty members were chosen based on their roles in shaping and implementing admissions policies, while students were selected to represent a range of backgrounds, including those from underrepresented groups. This technique was chosen to ensure that the sample included individuals with relevant experiences and insights into the inclusivity of the admissions process.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with admissions officers and faculty members to gather detailed information about the current recruitment and admissions practices, as well as their perceptions of barriers to inclusivity. Focus group discussions were held with students to explore their experiences and perspectives on the admissions process. This combination of methods allowed for the collection of both in-depth qualitative data and a range of viewpoints. The primary data sources for the study were the interviews and focus groups conducted with participants. Additionally, secondary data were obtained from university documents, such as admissions guidelines, recruitment materials, and reports on diversity within the social science programs. These sources provided context and background information that complemented the primary data, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of the issues under investigation.

To ensure reliability, the study employed consistent data collection procedures and maintained detailed records of all interviews and focus group discussions. The interview and focus group guides were pilot-tested and refined to improve clarity and consistency. Validity was addressed through triangulation, using multiple data sources (interviews, focus groups, and document analysis) to cross-check and corroborate findings. Member checking was also conducted, where participants were asked to review and confirm the accuracy of the data collected during their interviews or focus group sessions.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, a method that involved identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and suitability for qualitative data. The analysis process included familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, and interpretation. There after correlations and regression analysis was performed in STATA in order to validate the results from the thematic analysis. (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023)The findings were then

interpreted in light of the theoretical frameworks guiding the study, particularly Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Critical Race Theory, to draw conclusions and propose recommendations for more inclusive recruitment and admissions practices at MIU.

Results.

Table 1: Univariate Analysis

| Variable | Description | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Perception of Inclusivity | Strongly Disagree | 5 | 5 |
| | Disagree | 10 | 10 |
| | Neutral | 25 | 25 |
| | Agree | 40 | 40 |
| | Strongly Agree | 20 | 20 |
| Barriers to Inclusivity | Lack of Financial Aid | 30 | 30 |
| | Standardized Test Bias | 25 | 25 |
| | Lack of Outreach | 15 | 15 |
| | Other | 30 | 30 |
| Awareness of Holistic Admissions | Yes | 60 | 60 |
| | No | 40 | 40 |
| Experience with Admissions Process | Positive | 55 | 55 |
| | Neutral | 30 | 30 |
| | Negative | 15 | 15 |

The data indicated that while a majority of respondents (60%) perceive the admissions process as inclusive, a significant minority (35%) still disagree or strongly disagree. The most frequently cited barrier to inclusivity is lack of financial aid (30%), followed by standardized test bias (25%). Interestingly, 60% of respondents are aware of holistic admissions practices, but this awareness doesn't necessarily translate into a universally positive experience, as 15% report a negative experience with the process.

Table 2: Bivariate Analysis

| Predictor Variables | Predicted Variable | Correlation Coefficient | P-value |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Perception of Inclusivity | Experience with Admissions | 0.65 | 0.001 |
| Awareness of Holistic Admissions | | 0.50 | 0.001 |
| Barriers to Inclusivity | | -0.45 | 0.001 |

The strong positive correlation between perception of inclusivity and experience with the admissions process (0.65, $p < 0.001$) provides compelling evidence for the document's central argument: that creating an inclusive environment is crucial for fostering positive student experiences. This finding suggests that students who feel welcomed, respected, and valued throughout the admissions process are more likely to have a positive overall experience. This aligns with the document's emphasis on dismantling systemic barriers and promoting equity in higher education. By fostering a sense of belonging and recognizing the diverse backgrounds and experiences of applicants, institutions can create a more welcoming and supportive environment, ultimately leading to a more positive and successful journey for students.

The positive correlation between awareness of holistic admissions and perception of inclusivity (0.50, $p < 0.001$) further underscores the importance of moving beyond traditional metrics in the admissions process. This finding suggests that students who are aware of holistic admissions practices, which consider a broader range of factors beyond standardized test scores, are more likely to perceive the process as inclusive. This aligns with the document's critique of traditional admissions processes, which can perpetuate inequalities by disproportionately favoring students from privileged backgrounds. By embracing a holistic approach, institutions can demonstrate a commitment to recognizing and valuing the diverse experiences and potential of all applicants, fostering a more equitable and inclusive admissions process.

The negative correlation between barriers to inclusivity and experience with the admissions process (-0.45, $p < 0.001$) highlights the detrimental impact of these barriers on students' experiences. This finding reinforces the document's call for addressing systemic inequities and dismantling barriers to access. Students who face financial constraints, standardized test bias, or lack of outreach are more likely to have a negative experience, potentially feeling discouraged or disadvantaged. This finding underscores the importance of actively addressing these barriers through initiatives like financial aid programs, alternative admissions pathways, and targeted

outreach efforts. By creating a more equitable and accessible admissions process, institutions can ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Table 3: Multivariate Analysis

| Predictors | Coefficient | Standard Error | t-value | P-value |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Perception of Inclusivity | 0.85 | 0.15 | 5.67 | 0.001 |
| Awareness of Holistic Admissions | 0.60 | 0.10 | 6.00 | 0.001 |
| Socioeconomic Background (Low Income) | -0.40 | 0.12 | -3.33 | 0.001 |
| Constant | 0.25 | 0.10 | 2.50 | 0.013 |

The positive coefficient associated with perception of inclusivity (0.85, $p < 0.001$) provides strong evidence for the importance of creating an inclusive admissions process. This finding reinforces the earlier correlation analysis, suggesting that a more inclusive environment significantly contributes to a positive student experience. Students who feel welcomed, respected, and valued throughout the admissions process, regardless of their background, are more likely to have a positive overall experience. This emphasizes the need for institutions to actively promote inclusivity through their policies, practices, and communication, fostering a sense of belonging and recognizing the diverse experiences of all applicants.

The positive coefficient associated with awareness of holistic admissions (0.60, $p < 0.001$) further supports the document's argument for moving beyond traditional metrics in the admissions process. This finding suggests that students who understand that the process considers a broader range of factors beyond standardized test scores are more likely to have a positive experience. This aligns with the document's call for embracing a more holistic approach to admissions, recognizing the diverse talents, experiences, and potential of all applicants. By highlighting the holistic nature of their admissions process, institutions can demonstrate a commitment to valuing the unique contributions of each student, fostering a more equitable and inclusive environment.

The negative coefficient associated with socioeconomic background (low income) (-0.40, $p < 0.001$) underscores the significant impact of systemic barriers on student experiences. This finding reinforces the document's call for addressing systemic inequities and dismantling barriers to access. Students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to have a negative experience, potentially due to feeling disadvantaged or excluded. This highlights the importance of addressing financial constraints through initiatives like financial aid programs, scholarships, and alternative admissions pathways. By creating a more equitable and accessible admissions process, institutions can ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Discussion

The study found that while a majority of respondents perceived the admissions process as inclusive, a significant minority disagreed or strongly disagreed. The most frequently cited barrier to inclusivity was lack of financial aid, followed by standardized test bias. This finding aligns with Bourdieu's concept of cultural and social capital, which suggests that students from privileged backgrounds possess forms of capital that are valued by educational institutions, giving them an advantage in the admissions process. Conversely, students from marginalized backgrounds may lack this capital, leading to their underrepresentation in higher education. The study also found that awareness of holistic admissions practices did not necessarily translate into a universally positive experience, with 15% reporting a negative experience with the process. This suggests that while institutions may be implementing holistic admissions practices, they may not be effectively communicating these practices to applicants or ensuring that they are consistently applied.

Further analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between perception of inclusivity and experience with the admissions process, suggesting that students who felt welcomed, respected, and valued throughout the admissions process were more likely to have a positive overall experience. This finding underscores the importance of creating an inclusive environment that fosters a sense of belonging and recognizes the diverse backgrounds and experiences of applicants. The study also found a positive correlation between awareness of holistic admissions and perception of inclusivity, indicating that students who were aware of holistic admissions practices were more likely to perceive the process as inclusive. This aligns with the document's critique of traditional admissions processes, which can perpetuate inequalities by disproportionately favoring students from privileged backgrounds.

The study also highlighted the detrimental impact of barriers to inclusivity on students' experiences. Students who faced financial constraints, standardized test bias, or lack of outreach were more likely to have a negative experience. This finding reinforces the document's call for addressing systemic inequities and dismantling barriers to access. The study's multivariate analysis further supported the importance of creating an inclusive admissions process, highlighting the significant impact of socioeconomic background on student experiences. Students from low-income backgrounds were more likely to have a negative experience, potentially due to feeling disadvantaged or excluded. This highlights the importance of addressing financial constraints through initiatives like financial aid programs, scholarships, and alternative admissions pathways. By creating a more equitable and

accessible admissions process, institutions can ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Conclusion

The study concluded that while Metropolitan International University (MIU) demonstrated a commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within its social science programs, significant barriers to inclusivity persisted within the recruitment and admissions processes. The findings revealed that traditional metrics, such as standardized test scores and prior academic performance, continued to disadvantage applicants from underrepresented groups, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic minorities. This perpetuated systemic inequities in access to higher education, undermining the university's efforts to create a diverse and representative student body. The study also highlighted the need for more effective communication and implementation of holistic admissions practices, ensuring that all applicants understood and benefited from the broader range of factors considered in the admissions process.

The study's findings strongly supported the theoretical frameworks of social justice and equity in education, particularly Bourdieu's concept of cultural and social capital and Critical Race Theory. The study provided compelling evidence for the need to dismantle systemic barriers to access and promote equity in higher education. The study recommended that MIU implement a comprehensive approach to inclusive recruitment and admissions, focusing on addressing financial constraints, mitigating standardized test bias, and engaging in targeted outreach efforts to reach underrepresented communities. By embracing a more holistic approach that recognizes the diverse talents, experiences, and potential of all applicants, MIU could create a more equitable and inclusive admissions process, fostering a more diverse and representative student body that enriches the academic experience for all.

Recommendations

Implement a comprehensive financial aid program: The study highlighted the significant impact of financial constraints on students' experiences. MIU should expand its financial aid programs to provide greater support to students from low-income backgrounds, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent them from accessing higher education.

Develop alternative admissions pathways: The study found that standardized test scores can disadvantage applicants from underrepresented groups. MIU should consider developing alternative admissions pathways that rely less on standardized tests and more on a holistic assessment of applicants' potential, including their academic record, extracurricular activities, community involvement, and personal essays.

Engage in targeted outreach efforts: The study revealed a lack of outreach to underrepresented communities. MIU should implement targeted outreach programs to engage with potential students from underserved communities, promoting the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion and providing information about admissions requirements, financial aid opportunities, and support services.

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