



**Diversity and Equity in Postsecondary STEM Education: Moving Past the
Interest-Convergence Dilemma**
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Introduction

“Science has not been served well by our past prejudice and discrimination; we have lost time, talent, and ideas.” *Shirley Malcolm*

Malcolm, S. M. (1981, October 9). Women/minorities in science and technology. *Science*, 214 , 4517, p. 137.

Interest-Convergence Dilemma

Interest-Convergence (Bell, 1980; 2004) suggests that progress toward equality depends on whether such opportunities best serve the interests of affluent society. The historical advancement of marginalized populations is a result of being fortuitous beneficiaries of measures directed at furthering aims other than equity.

Bell, D. A. (1980). *Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma*. *Harvard Law Review*, 93 (3), 518–533.

Bell, D. (2004). *Silent covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the unfulfilled hopes for racial reform*. New York: Oxford University Press

Rationale for Diversity and Equity in Postsecondary STEM Education

- Primary focus on the economic implications for persistent inequalities in STEM fields
- In the face of growing global competitiveness, strengthen the U.S. advantage in STEM
- Diversity is a 'competitive asset' for increasing human capital in STEM education

Emphasis on Compositional Diversity

If you recruit just numbers, you bring students who are all over the board. You don't have the programs in place, they are not successful, and then everyone is, "I told you they couldn't be successful here . . . [T]hey just don't have what it takes—it's just not part of their background." *STEM Diversity Program Director, 'Lake University'*

Baber, L.D. (2015). Considering the interest-convergence dilemma in STEM education. *Review of Higher Education*, 38(2), 251-270.

Short-Term Cost-Benefit Approach

“Everything was cast as budget. While [the Dean] certainly was a proponent of diversity . . . [the Dean would] look at it in terms of greater return, ‘What does this cost versus what do I get out of it?’”
Administrator, ‘Hill University’

Outside the Core Mission

“[Our program] is viewed as pro-bono work. It’s viewed as charity. It’s viewed as eating your spinach because it’s good for you.” *STEM Diversity Program Director, ‘Lake University’*

Beyond the Interest-Convergence Dilemma

- STEM equity means giving more attention to institutional transformation for retention, not just individual development for persistence.
- STEM equity challenges the hypocrisy of supporting calls to increase diversity while cutting/reducing campus programs that have demonstrated success (e.g. TRIO, McNair, LSAMP).
- STEM equity recognizes that as long as faculty engagement with diversity initiatives is considered trivial and not ingrained into the reward structure of the institution, progress toward equitable opportunities will remain limited.

Equity-Minded STEM Educators

There is, then, good news that is like water to a thirsty soul. It is the opportunity existing all around us to recognize the injustices that exist and to accept the challenge to make things better. . . . The victory goes to those who accept the challenge and, against all the odds, go forward. *Derek Bell, 2012*

Bell, D. (2012). What's diversity got to do with it? *Seattle Journal for Social Justice*, 6 (2), 527–532.

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