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# Diffusion in Education: An Examination of Enrollment Diversity in Postsecondary Institutions

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DIFFUSION IN EDUCATION: AN EXAMINATION OF ENROLLMENT  
DIVERSITY IN POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
Applied Sociology

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by  
Lisa Christine Widener  
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Accepted by:  
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## ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the diffusion of diversity through proportional increases in diverse enrollment among postsecondary institutions. Specifically, it tests whether the diffusion pattern of diversity will follow the model predicted by classic neoinstitutionalists, diffusing from high to low status actors, or in the case of controversial innovations follow the path predicted by Gerbasi's (2002) Status Contingent Diffusion Theory, diffusing from low to high status actors. This study argues that diversity is a controversial innovation and will thus follow the diffusion path posited by Gerbasi (2002). This research predicts that lower status postsecondary institutions will "adopt," or proportionally increase, diversity before and to a greater extent than middle and high status institutions. This argument is tested by using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS) and *U.S. News and World Report*. The pattern of diffusion predicted by the Status Contingent Diffusion Theory is supported with the results of the analysis.

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have used new institutionalism as a framework for studying organizational behavior. Social researchers have applied the theory to the diffusion of innovations throughout organizational environments, including institutions of higher education. Studies have applied new institutionalism to investigate diversity among post-secondary institutions (Oplatka 2004; Rowan and Miskel 1999) as well as the diffusion of innovations in higher education, such as internet distance learning (Gerbas 2002). To date, there has not been a study that combines the diffusion of diversity through the post-secondary environment.

Most traditional new institutionalism studies analyze the diffusion (or adoption) of a specific innovation—a specific change of organizational behavior. I propose that by measuring the level of change in African American enrollment over time, this thesis can test the result or outcome of multiple innovations a postsecondary institution has taken. Furthermore, this study assumes that the more thorough a postsecondary institution's innovating effort to increase diversity, the greater the proportional increase of African American students. This study will test some of the propositions of the Status Contingent Diffusion Theory (Gerbas 2002). Specifically, Gerbas (2002) argues that when an innovation is controversial, the path of diffusion changes—low status institutions will adopt an innovation before high and middle status institutions. This is different from the traditional, non-controversial adoption path in which high status institutions will adopt before middle and high status institutions.

Diversity in higher education is a controversial topic. In light of the debate about diversity in current literature, policies and programs aimed at increasing diversity on university campuses is controversial. Specifically, there have been a number of court cases concerning the incorporation of race-conscious decision making. I propose analyzing the diffusion of diversity through the proportional change in African American enrollments throughout postsecondary institutions over time. Such an analysis facilitates an understanding of whether the diffusion of diversity follows the path that new institutionalists propose, from high to low status institutions, or the modified path proposed by the Status Contingent Diffusion Theory, from low to high status institutions. This thesis predicts that the adoption of diverse enrollment, measured by the level and direction of proportional change in African American enrollment from 1980 to 2004, will follow the diffusion path Gerbasi (2002) outlined in her proposed Status Contingent Diffusion Theory.

Because of the competitive nature of higher education, status will be a factor in the processes of competitive isomorphism throughout the organizational environment of higher education. Isomorphism refers to the trend of increased homogeneity across organizations within an organizational field. Competitive isomorphism occurs in organizational fields in which institutions are in market competition with one another for scarce resources. Incorporating status into the analyses will allow the present study to test for competitive isomorphism outlined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and multiple adopter categories outlined by Rogers (2003)

## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE AND THEORY

The new institutionalism perspective is a theory devoted to the behaviors, interactions, and structures of institutions or organizations. Researchers within this field investigate the reasons why many organizations are increasingly becoming more similar to one another, in spite of the vast differences in their initial establishment. This growing similarity is referred to as homogeneity, which institutionalists explain through processes of isomorphism. In order to test this theory, researchers analyze the diffusion of innovations. Specifically, research over the past several decades has shown that homogeneity across organizational fields results from isomorphic processes, including the diffusion of civil service reform (Golbert & Zucker, 1983), educational innovation (Corwin 1972; Gerbasi 2002; March and March 1977), medical innovation (Burt 1987; Kmac and Skaggs 2005), human resource and other specialty departments (Dobbin and Sutton 1998), and the equality of women through their ordination into the ministry (Chaves 1996).

This review of literature and theory contains four sections. The first section will review the current literature published by scholars who have theorized and studied organizational behavior using new institutionalism theory. The second section describes the diffusion of innovations within organizational environments from a new institutionalist perspective. This section further discusses elements of the diffusion process, isomorphic processes and structural characteristics. The third section focuses on the Status Contingent Diffusion Theory proposed by Gerbasi (2002). This section reviews research on the role of status across postsecondary institutions in the diffusion of innovations. The fourth section with discuss diversity within the organizational field of higher education.

## New Institutionalism and Organizational Behavior

John W. Meyer and Richard Scott were responsible for the emergence of “new” institutionalism in sociology during the 1970’s (Rowan and Miskel 1999). Prior to that time, social researchers were interested in organizational theory, which views organizations as closed, rational systems with autonomy in decision-making most concerned with efficiency (Rowan and Miskel 1999). Models used by organizational theorists (“old” institutionalism) perceive social and organizational action occurring within an unbounded rationality. “Such models have been central to a variety of theories in the social sciences, including micro-economic theories of the firm, pluralist political theories, and closed systems theories of organizations” (Rowan and Miskel p. 359). This quote illustrates the ubiquity of the theory in multiple social science areas prior to 1970. Newer models of the theory, known as new institutionalism, view organizational actors not as autonomous, but as embedded within a larger socially-organized environment. The rules and regulations of this environment have the ability to constrain and shape social action (Rowan and Miskel 1999).

Since the emergence of new institutionalism in the 1970’s, the theory has increasingly become the dominant perspective in the study of organizations and their environments (Hoy and Miskel 1996). Many researchers using the new institutionalism theoretical viewpoint study the diffusion of innovations. Proponents of new institutionalism postulate that through processes of isomorphism, organizations and their activities become homogenous over time (Birnbaum 1983; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Dobbin and Sutton 1998; March and March 1977; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Tolbert and Zucker 1983).

Homogeneity among organizations is due to various sources of isomorphism. According to Hawley (1968), isomorphism describes the driving mechanisms that compel

one unit or organization to resemble other units or organizations subject to the same environmental circumstances. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) assert that there are two types of isomorphism: competitive and institutional. Competitive isomorphism occurs in open-systems organizational fields in which institutions are in market competition with one another for scarce resources. Institutional isomorphism views organizations as competing for prestige and institutional legitimacy. Organizations not only compete for scarce resources, but also look to other organizations for forms of social and economic fitness, and these forms in turn become legitimate. Both forms of isomorphism together help to explain the modern world of organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Both competitive and institutional isomorphism operate in the field of higher education with regard to increasing diversity. Postsecondary institutions are in market competition with one another for talented and diverse students. Because the pool of talented and diverse students is small in relation to the vast number of postsecondary institutions, some schools will be able to adopt diversity to a greater extent than others. This helps to explain the early adoption of diversity in some sectors of higher education. A discussion of which types of institutions will adopt first is found in the latter sections of this literature review. Institutions in higher education are also competing for national rankings, such as the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings which are included in the present study. This type of competition illustrates institutional isomorphism because in competing for rankings, postsecondary institutions are competing for prestige and institutional legitimacy. Institutional isomorphic change occurs as a result of three mechanisms, or isomorphic processes. These processes are discussed below.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) advance three types of isomorphic pressures: (1) coercive, (2) mimetic, and (3) normative. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) assert that coercive isomorphic change results from formal and informal pressures, such as legal and/or institutional forces, exerted on organizations by other organizations. When there is some degree of uncertainty within the organizations' environment, the way in which organizations respond to such uncertainty is a direct result of mimetic forces of isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Mimetic isomorphic pressures drive imitation, or copying, among organizations. Dobbin and Sutton (1998) found evidence for coercive isomorphic forces in their analysis of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972. The changing federal regulations caused organizations to reorganize. The researchers also found evidence for mimetic isomorphism. The ambiguous laws of Equal Opportunity, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, and Pension Reform lacked a direct method of compliance, which left many organizations uncertain of how to comply. Due to this uncertainty, some organizations established specialty departments as a method of compliance. There was then a dramatic increase of specialty departments because of mimetic isomorphism—organizations imitated the methods of compliance of other organizations. These organizations established specialty department because of the law, a result of coercive isomorphism, and because of the ambiguity of the law, a result of mimetic isomorphism (Dobbin and Sutton 1998).

The third type of institutional mechanisms outlined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) are normative pressures. Normative pressures for isomorphic organizational change result mostly from external sources, such as professionalization (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Zucker 1987). Two important sources of normative isomorphism result from formal education and an increase in the span of organizational networks (DiMaggio and Powell

1983; Zucker 1987). Individuals are subject to socialization within any organizational environment, including the postsecondary environment. The socialization that occurs within a given profession creates a pool of candidates who are interchangeable for similar positions across a variety of organizations. Socialization occurs through processes such as filtering personnel, in-service educational programs, and employer-professional school networks and acts as an isomorphic force for organizational change (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

March and March (1977) find that within the educational environment, executives are socialized to the extent that they are nearly indistinguishable from one another. This study shows that individuals in superintendent positions become more homogenous over time (March and March 1977). This illustrates the normative pressures for institutional isomorphism, which results in increased homogeneity across different schools. Birnbaum (1983) also provides evidence for processes of isomorphism in higher education. During the period from 1960 to 1980 there was substantial growth in the number of higher education institutions. Although there was a wide variety in types of institutions in 1960, there was a slight decrease in the types of institutions by 1980. The majority of newly established institutions imitated the higher education structures and values of those that were already in place in 1960 (Birnbaum 1983). These studies illustrate the processes of isomorphism in organizational behaviors.

I propose both coercive and mimetic isomorphic processes operate in the field of higher education with regard to increasing diversity. Postsecondary institutions that receive federal funding are regulated by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and by the Fourteenth Amendment (“An Evidentiary Framework” 1996). These institutions are limited constitutionally regarding policies aimed at achieving diversity. I propose that because of the

federal regulations regarding diversity and because of the ambiguous court rulings on incorporating diversity-related policies into organizational behaviors, publicly funded institutions take a risk in adopting such policies. Thus, these institutions are not being pressured to adopt diversity. There is a lack of coercive isomorphism in the public sector of higher education. I propose that privately funded institutions have greater flexibility to adopt diversity-related policies because these universities are not as dependent upon federal funding and thus not as limited constitutionally. Once a group of privately funded institutions adopts this change, mimetic pressures for organizational change will occur within the private sector of higher education. The types of institutional isomorphic processes do not always act independently of one another (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). A lack of coercive pressures and the presence of mimetic isomorphism will result in privately funded institutions “adopting” a greater proportional increase of diverse enrollment than publicly funded institutions.

#### Diffusion of Innovations from a Neoinstitutionalist Perspective

One aspect of organizations neoinstitutionalists analyze is the isomorphic processes in the diffusion of innovations. Before progressing into further empirical research, it is necessary to review the diffusion of innovation perspective. This is important because researchers who conduct empirical studies from a new institutionalism framework often research the diffusion of innovations as a way to understand organizational homogeneity. Everett M. Rogers is one of the preeminent researchers exploring this field of sociology. *Diffusion of Innovations*, now in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition, presents a comprehensive overview of the conceptual foundations of the theory as well as empirical evidence for support. In general,

the diffusion of innovation theory is a theory of communication based on how an idea becomes accepted (Rogers 2003). Diffusion of innovations is a general theory explaining how an innovation is communicated to society. More than merely a theory of communication, diffusion theory is specifically concerned with the diffusion of new ideas or innovations (Rogers 2003).

The work of Ronald S. Burt is also fundamental to the study of the diffusion of innovations. The diffusion of innovations is the process by which some members in a given (social) system adopt a new idea or innovation until most members adopt the innovation (Burt 1987). In general, diffusion refers to the *spread* of some thing. Rogers (2003) recognizes that diffusion is a result of four elements of the process of diffusion: 1) innovation, 2) communication through channels, 3) over time, and 4) among social systems. Researchers analyze the extent to which these elements are present in the processes of diffusion and isomorphism. The following discussion reviews these four elements in greater detail.

Rogers (2003) explains that the newness of an innovation is what makes diffusion special. The diffusion of an innovation, something new and special, inherently adds some uncertainty to the environment of a given population of organizations. Rogers (2003) describes diffusion as a form of social change. Social change becomes the end result of a new idea through the diffusion of the innovation to society (Rogers 2003). Over the last three decades, many new institutionalists have contemplated the diffusion of innovations (Burt 1987; Chaves 1996; Gerbasi 2002; Kmec and Skaggs 2005; Minkoff 1999; Tolbert and Zucker 1983; Valente 1996;).

Communication through specific channels is the second aspect of innovation diffusion (Rogers 2003). Multiple communication channels exist, including mass media and interpersonal channels (Rogers 2003; Strange and Soule 1998). Decisions to adopt a new idea are rarely based on empirical research, but rather on subjective evaluations that are taken from other similar individuals or organizations who have already adopted the innovation (Rogers 2003; Valente 1996). In many cases, the adoption of an innovation is an attempt to obtain legitimacy within an institutional environment (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Zucker 1987).

Time is the third element in the diffusion process (Rogers 2003). Rogers (2003) proposes adopter categories for five different segments of a given social system according to the time it takes to adopt an innovation. “*Innovativeness* is the degree to which an individual or other unit of adoption is relatively earlier in adopting new ideas than the other members of a system” (Rogers p. 22). On the basis of innovativeness, the categories include: (1) innovators, (2) early adopters, (3) early majority, (4) late majority, and (5) laggards. This perspective puts forth that members within any given category have a great deal in common with each other (Rogers 2003). For example, members in the innovator and early adopter categories are likely to be of higher socioeconomic status, frequently use channels of mass media, and do not solely learn new ideas from peers (Rogers 2003). The opposite is true for members in the late majority and laggard categories.

The final aspect of the diffusion process concerns members of a social system. Rogers (2003) defines a social system as “a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal” (Rogers p. 37). Social systems have

structures and norms that allow for regularity and stability for individual's behavior within the system.

The present study includes two elements of the diffusion process: innovation and time. The "innovation" of diversity is the result of postsecondary institutions' efforts to increase diversity. The proportional change in African American enrollment captures the result of innovation, rather than testing one specific innovation. I also incorporate time by testing for Rogers (2003) proposed adopter categories. This thesis predicts that low status postsecondary institutions will "adopt" an increased proportion of African American students before middle and high status institutions. Thus, low status institutions will represent the innovator and early adopter categories. Communication through specific channels is not directly included or tested in this study. Additionally, this thesis does not specifically include social systems.

Investigating the diffusion of innovations in an organizational field is one way to test for processes of isomorphism. A review of empirical research illuminates three main themes. First, many researchers incorporate and analyze at least one of the elements of diffusion outlined by Rogers (2003) (1. innovation 2. though communication channels 3. over time 4. in social systems). Second, by including such elements into analyses, researchers are able to test the isomorphic processes outlined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Third, the structural characteristics of organizations, such as status and competition (Burt 1987), are often included in innovation diffusion studies to more fully understand what variables are significant in predicting who will adopt an innovation. In other words, researchers test for isomorphic pressures and include structural characteristics in an effort to describe what is significant in predicting innovation adoption. The following discussion of research will

illustrate how the four elements of the diffusion process are studied by new institutionalism researchers and their analysis of isomorphic and environmental pressures.

### *Elements of the Diffusion Process*

Many new-institutionalism researchers include elements of the diffusion process outlined by Rogers (2003), such as Tolbert and Zucker (1983) who investigate adopter categories and the rate of adoption. With regard to the adoption of civil service reform, the authors find that the characteristics of the city initially are significant predictors. This finding supports that the adoption of civil service reform is related to the internal needs of the city. Tolbert and Zucker (1983) find that younger cities will be more likely to adopt while older cities will maintain their organizational structures set in place at the time of their establishment. A recurring theme will be presented in the discussion that follows, younger organizations or groups are more likely to adopt a diffusing innovation more quickly than older groups or organizations.

Ronald Corwin studied educational innovation in his 1972 article published in the *International Review of Education*. Specifically, Corwin analyzed the extent to which primary and secondary schools in more or less advantaged areas found adoption of the Teacher Corps desirable. Organizations, after rejecting or accepting an innovation, recognize three sets of consequences: desirable vs. undesirable, direct vs. indirect, and anticipated vs. unanticipated (Rogers 2003). Corwin's (1972) results demonstrate that older schools, which are arguably more set in their ways, are more likely to reject the educational innovation of the Teacher Corps program. Dobbin and Sutton (1998) also find that older organizations lag behind others in the adoption of 'compliance' offices created in order to show compliance to new

civil rights laws. Additionally, Chaves (1996) finds that older established denominations adopt the ordination of women at a slower rate than newer established denominations. These empirical research studies specifically include Rogers' (2003) adopter categories in their analysis of the diffusion of an innovation. Most often, older organizations or groups lag behind newer groups in the adoption of an innovation (Chaves 1996; Corwin 1972; Dobbin and Sutton 1998; Tolbert and Zucker 1983). To use Rogers' own terminology, these groups represent the laggard category of innovation adoption.

Research has demonstrated that age plays a significant role in the adoption of an innovation. The present study analyzes the role of status in the diffusion of increased African American enrollment throughout postsecondary institutions. Because it is impossible to disentangle the roles of age and status of such institutions in this thesis, the age of a postsecondary institution will be included as a control variable in order to solely test the role of status.

#### *Isomorphic Processes and Structural Characteristics*

In addition to including elements of the diffusion process, new institutionalism researchers test the extent to which isomorphism plays a role in an organization's adoption of innovations. New institutionalists are interested in discovering why organizations, over time, resemble one another. This spread of homogeneity is referred to as isomorphism. Isomorphism is relevant to organizations due to the main proposition of new institutionalism. Organizations are affected by a variety of external forces, including community values, politics, and history (Hoy and Miskel 2001). In many cases, decisions (for adopting an innovation) are made based upon gaining legitimacy rather than on

becoming more efficient (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Dobbin and Sutton 1998; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Zucker, 1987). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that in post-industrial societies, the formal structure of an organization is a function of the rules and regulations of the institutionalized environment as opposed to a function of what is efficient according to an organization's actual activities.

Because of the pressure of external forces, competition is one source of isomorphism for organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The diffusion of organizational structure is an example. The structure itself is not necessarily diffused because of efficiency, but because it keeps the organization competitively equipped within the institutional environment (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). DiMaggio and Powell use hospitals as an example. Institutions, such as hospitals, with a large professional labor force are mostly driven by status competition. Organizations become homogenous over time in order to maintain the same opportunities for resources and prestige. Institutions in higher education are also in competition because of the professional nature of the field. Postsecondary institutions are in competition with one another for status, prestige, and resources (Oplatka 2004). Thus, the diffusion of innovations should predict processes of isomorphism in competitive environments, including the environment of higher education. Further exploration of isomorphism and higher education will be discussed in detail later in this literature review.

In addition to the elements of the diffusion process and isomorphic pressures to adopt an innovation, researchers also study the effect of structural characteristics in diffusion of innovation studies. A discussion of the literature will further illustrate this point. Burt (1987) tests cohesion and structural equivalence in his research on the diffusion of

Tetracycline. Burt (1987) finds that both status and competition among doctors and physicians significantly affects the rate of adoption. Additional research has shown that status significantly predicts an organization's rate of adoption, or more generally, adoption behavior (Amsterdamska 1985; Corwin 1972; Tolbert and Zucker 1983). Conversely, Kmec and Skaggs (2005) do not find significant support for status in their analysis of the adoption of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action policies. Because of these contradictory findings, including the status of post-secondary institutions in analyzing the pattern of the proportional increase of African American enrollment throughout postsecondary institutions would add to the current literature on diffusion and new institutionalism.

This section has reviewed how elements of the diffusion process, isomorphic processes, and structural characteristics of organizations affect the diffusion path of an innovation. Classic new institutionalism predicts that the path of diffusion begins with high status organizations and diffuses to all other members of the organizational environment. With regard to diversity in higher education, the classic neoinstitutionalist argument hypothesizes that high status institutions will have a greater proportional increase of African American students than middle and low status institutions. The following section will explore the role of status in diffusion studies in more detail.

### Status Contingent Diffusion Theory

The previous sections have outlined the classic theory of new institutionalism. In addition, I have outlined what this theoretical framework would predict about increasing diversity in higher education, if it is assumed diversity is a non-controversial innovation. Neoinstitutionalists would predict that diversity is adopted first by high status institutions,

followed by middle and low status institutions. The present section of the literature review discusses Gerbasi's (2002) Status Contingent Diffusion Theory, a theoretical framework that incorporates the degree to which an innovation is controversial, status, and routines into predicting the pattern of diffusion. However, before progressing further into this modified neoinstitutionalist theory, it is necessary to more fully discuss the role of status in diffusion research.

Many researchers have studied the process of isomorphism in academia. Before the driving mechanisms that compel one organization to resemble other organizations subject to the same environmental circumstances was coined "isomorphism," researchers in the academic field referred to this trend as "academic drift" (Berdahl 1985). Specifically, Berdahl (1985) was referring to the tendency of lower status colleges and universities to adopt the structures and norms of their more prestigious counterparts. The pattern of diffusion of an innovative structure or norm is initially adopted by high status universities, followed by middle and low status institutions. Stated differently, neoinstitutionalists proffer that the diffusion of an innovation throughout an organizational field begins with high status actors and spreads to low status actors. Status is often used as an explanatory variable in predicting and explaining the path of diffusion throughout an organizational environment.

Diffusion researchers (Dobbin and Sutton 1998; Rogers 1995; Tolbert and Zucker 1983) and higher education researchers (Amsterdamska 1985; Corwin 1972) conclude that status is an important aspect to consider in predicting and explaining the behavior of an organization. Podolny (1993) proposes a definition of status within a market: "I define a producer's status within the market as the perceived quality of that producer's products in relation to the perceived quality of that producer's competitor's goods" (p. 830). The quality

of a producer, or an organization, is a culmination of the opinions and actions of others. More specifically, status is a “signal” of the fundamental quality of a firm’s products (Podolny 1993). Spence (1972) notes that one criterion a signal must meet is that an indicator of quality must be at least somewhat manipulable by the actor. The producer has at least partial control over the perceived quality of his or her goods. The status of a producer or organization may be relatively stable, however, mobility in the status hierarchy within a given market or organizational environment can occur. Two consequences result from the possibility of manipulating organizational status. The first potential consequence stems from Weber’s (1978) proposed status closure, in which elites tend to create lifestyles that lower classes cannot match. Although Weber (1978) focuses status closure at the individual level, the same phenomenon is possible for institutions within an organizational environment. The rankings put forth by *U.S. News and World Report* each year are valued by institutions of higher education, potential and current students, parents, etc. Each year, universities located on the highest rung of the hierarchy strive to maintain their privileged position. The second potential consequence of status mobility occurs when organizations lower on the status hierarchy try to enhance their own status or to change the status hierarchy all together (Podolny 1993). Gerbasi (2002) argues that all individuals and organizations are “status strivers,” who are never completely satisfied with their placement in the status hierarchy.

In the environment of higher education, higher status postsecondary institutions exhibit status closure by striving to maintain their placement in the hierarchy of higher education. Simultaneously, lower status schools are constantly striving to move up in that hierarchy. The presence of both status closure and status strivers complicates the diffusion

path predicted by neoinstitutionalists. Gerbasi (2002) uses such theories of status to propose a Status Contingent Diffusion Theory. This theory predicts that both status and routines<sup>1</sup> affect the diffusion path of an innovation. Gerbasi (2002) argues that most new institutionalists study the diffusion of legitimated, non-controversial innovations. Status Contingent Diffusion Theory posits that the pattern of diffusion changes when investigating controversial innovations. Gerbasi (2002) theorizes that when an innovation is controversial, defined by a low probability of adoption within a field, the pattern of isomorphic diffusion changes. The diffusion no longer begins with high status actors. Conversely, low status actors will adopt the controversial innovation first, followed by higher status actors later (Gerbasi 2002).

Despite the actual path of diffusion, the research studies discussed above suggest both status and reputation are factors of isomorphism in higher education. Zucker (1987) concurs, positing that innovations that have an impact on an organization's reputation will diffuse more quickly than those that do not. The reputation, and therefore status, of an organization is related to the isomorphic diffusion of an innovation. Morpew and Huisman (2002) demonstrate evidence for status as a factor in isomorphism in education. Non-flagship (low status) universities adopted the legitimized structures and norms of more prestigious, flag-ship universities (Morpew and Huisman, 2002). Research on the diffusion of civil service reform (Dobbin and Sutton 1998) and the diffusion of human resource departments (Tolbert and Zucker 1983) illustrate that status does predict the isomorphic diffusion of an innovation. When early adopters were also high status actors, the more likely

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<sup>1</sup> Although Gerbasi (2002) includes both status and routines, the present research only includes indicators of status.

the innovation would predict further diffusion and isomorphism within an organizational field (Dobbin and Sutton 1998; Tolbert and Zucker 1983). Thus, high status actors are more likely to adopt an innovation before lower status actors. When this does occur, the innovation becomes legitimized, regardless of efficiency, within the institutional environment (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Conversely, organizations that fail to adopt legitimized innovations are seen as less acceptable and less legitimized in their activities.

### Diversity in Higher Education

Over the past two decades, there has been substantial debate in the academic literature about diversity in higher education (Fish 2000; Gurin et. al. 2003; Hurtado 1992; Willie 1987; Wilson 1995). Diversity issues on college and university campuses have become increasingly controversial in recent years (Astin 2001). For example, some groups on campus protest when post-secondary institutions endeavor to recruit and retain more historically underrepresented racial groups (Astin 2001). Gurin (1999) analyzed the learning outcomes of students in post-secondary institutions, and found evidence that diversity in the classroom and on campus produces positive effects. Positive learning outcomes included growth in active thinking processes, growth in motivation in terms of drive to achieve, intellectual self-confidence, the highest post-graduate degree aspirations, and the greatest growth in student values placed on their intellectual and academic skills (Gurin 1999). Terenzini and her colleagues (2001) also find support for positive learning outcomes associated with diversity in higher education. Specifically, the results of the study demonstrate that structural diversity in the classroom is significantly related to student self-reported gains in problem-solving and group skills. Both of these studies suggest that

diversity in the postsecondary environment has a significantly positive effect on students in higher education.

The debate over the outcomes of diversity is one way in which institutions demonstrate the compelling need for diversity in higher education. Within the political arena, the Courts review governmental programs and policies involving race-conscious decision making through a process known as “strict scrutiny” (“An Evidentiary Framework” 1996; Friedl 2002). Under this form of evaluation, an agency or institution must demonstrate that its policies are “narrowly tailored” to achieve a “compelling governmental interest” (“An Evidentiary Framework” 1996; Friedl 2002). Proponents of diversity throughout the field of higher education argue that the positive educational and social outcomes associated with diversity are a compelling interest (Gurin 1999; Terenzini et. al. 2001) and that policies are therefore constitutional (Kenny and Ward 2001). Opponents of race-conscious programs contend that such policies do not have compelling benefits and thus violate Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fourteenth Amendment (“An Evidentiary Framework” 1996). Because institutions of higher education that receive federal funding are regulated by both Title VI and the Fourteenth Amendment, they are subject to constitutional limitations regarding policies aimed at achieving diversity. Thus, many publicly funded postsecondary institutions may be hesitant to incorporate race-conscious policies.

The Court’s decisions regarding diversity as a compelling need in higher education are often times ambiguous (“An Evidentiary Framework” 1996). Postsecondary institutions must be able to demonstrate that policies aimed at achieving diversity are a compelling governmental interest that are narrowly tailored to avoid overextending preferences to

minorities beyond what is necessary (Friedl 2002). Because of the ambiguous nature of recent court decisions and the need to demonstrate or prove that diversity-related policies are a compelling governmental interest, the nature of diversity in higher education is controversial. There is a risk associated with incorporating race-conscious programs and policies. Because of this risk, adopting diversity in higher education is a controversial innovation.

This discussion has illustrated that racial diversity on higher education campuses is controversial. The present thesis proposes that due to the controversial nature of diversity, the diffusion path of proportional increases of diversity will not follow the path outlined by most new institutionalists, beginning with high status actors and diffusing to low status actors. Diversity, as measured through the proportional change of African American enrollment over time, will follow the path outlined by the Status Contingent Diffusion Theory. Specifically, low status institutions will “adopt” an increase in the proportion of African American students before high and middle status institutions.

### Hypotheses

The following study will test the diffusion path of diversity throughout postsecondary institutions. As previously discussed, this thesis will measure the proportional level of change in African American enrollment throughout postsecondary institutions as an indicator of efforts to diversify. Postsecondary institutions are adopting a variety of diversity-related innovations, such as Multicultural/Intercultural Centers or senior diversity officers on campus. Most institutions adopting such innovations are aimed at achieving diversity on campus. Increasing diversity is the outcome, or end result, of innovating efforts.

As Rogers (2003) defines diffusion, it is a form of social change. Social change becomes the end result of a new idea through the diffusion of the innovation to society. I argue that by measuring the proportional increase of African American enrollment over time, this thesis directly measures the outcome of innovating efforts, and thus social change. This study also indirectly measures the diffusion of innovations. The final outcome of social change is important in terms of the controversial “innovation” of diversity.

Measuring this path of diffusion facilitates a classic new institutionalism research question. Specifically, this thesis tests whether the diffusion path of diversity follows the path proposed by most neoinstitutionalists (high status to low status actors) or the path predicted by Gerbasi’s (2003) Status Contingent Diffusion Theory (low status to high status actors). Most neoinstitutionalists view the adoption of innovations as a dichotomous outcome: either an organization adopts or does not adopt. Gerbasi (2002) includes another element into the diffusion process in her study. Specifically, she looks at variations in how organizations adopt an innovation, or to what extent they adopt. For the purposes of the present study, a similar variation of standard dichotomous outcome will be employed. Measuring the proportional increase of African American enrollment over time will allow this thesis to explore the extent to which postsecondary institutions have made efforts to adopt or increase diversity. The present study investigates the diffusion of diversity through postsecondary institutions using a lagged ordinary least squares regression model. The preceding discussion of the diffusion of innovation literature supports that both the status and reputation of an organization are significant elements in the path of diffusion.

In addition to testing status, funding will also be analyzed in relation to the diffusion path of diversity. Research has illustrated the impact of the funding of an institution on

African American enrollment (Bennett and Xie 2003; Gerbasi 2002). I propose that because diversity is a controversial innovation and because of the ambiguous court rulings on including diversity-related policies, publicly funded institutions take a risk in incorporating race-conscious decision making on campus. Privately funded institutions have greater flexibility to include such policies aimed at achieving diversity and have a greater proportional increase in African American enrollment. The formal hypotheses of this thesis are stated below.

H1: The proportional increase of African American students enrolled in a postsecondary institution will be greater in privately funded institutions than publicly funded institutions.

H2: The proportional increase of African American students enrolled in a postsecondary institution will be greater in low status institutions than high and middle status institutions.

## CHAPTER THREE DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present study will analyze significant factors predicting the diffusion path of diversity throughout postsecondary institutions. This is accomplished by examining the effect over time of institutional characteristics on the pattern of proportional increases of African American enrollment. This chapter describes the data set utilized, the dependent, independent and control variables, as well as the statistical method of analysis.

### Data

The data for this study is obtained from two sources. The first source is the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). This data system of the National Center for Education Statistics provides yearly data for all primary providers of postsecondary education. Institutional characteristics and race/ethnicity data are obtained from 1980 until 2004. The data set is comprised of institutions under the following categorizations: 4 year college or above, any geographic region, any state or outlying area, and degree-granting institution, Doctoral/Research Universities—Extensive, Doctoral/Research Universities—Intensive, Masters Colleges and Universities I, Masters Colleges and Universities II, Baccalaureate Colleges—liberal arts; Baccalaureate Colleges—General. The second source of data comes from *U.S. News and World Report*. This resource provides two different types of university rankings of each institution merged into the data set.

### Variables Utilized

The dependent variable is the percentage of African American enrollment in 2004. This is calculated by dividing the total number of African American men and women enrolled in 2004 by the total number of students enrolled in the same academic year. The Supreme Court upheld race-conscious admissions policies that are geared towards promoting diversity in higher education in the 1978 case of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (Joint Statement of Constitutional Law Scholars 2003). This decision was reaffirmed in the recent Supreme Court case in 2003, *Grutter v. Bollinger* (Joint Statement of Constitutional Law Scholars 2003). The present study examines the diffusion of diversity through postsecondary institutions. Because of the *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* decision, I argue that institutions wanting to promote diversity would do so by increasing diversity in their enrollment percentages. This thesis will capture the diffusion of diversity throughout institutions of higher education from 1980 to 2004 by using the percentage of African American enrollment in 2004 as the dependent variable.

There are several independent variables to include in the analyses. The present study will test the status components of Gerbasi's (2002) Status Contingent Diffusion Theory. In order to test this theory, the present study will include the same indicators of status Gerbasi (2002) used in her research. This includes three separate measures of status. The first measure is the ranking of an institution's reputation, provided by *U.S. News and World Report*. Presidents, provosts, and deans of admissions rank peer institutions on a range from 1, marginal, to 5, distinguished. The average of these rankings provides the first indicator of status. *U.S. News and World Report* also details whether or not a school is recognized nationally, regionally recognized or not recognized at all by peer institutions. These three

categories will be coded high, middle, and low status institutions, respectively. This represents the second, categorical indicator of status. The third measure of status utilizes the Carnegie Classification, which denotes research/doctoral institutions, masters institutions, and bachelors institutions. Gerbasi (2002) notes that although the Carnegie Classification does not overtly measure status, it does facilitate “comparisons across similar institutions, recognizing that differing institutional levels may operate in different ways” (p. 13).

Bachelors and Doctoral granting institutions will be included into the regression analyses, while Masters granting institutions are utilized as the reference category.

The second independent variable included is whether an institution is publicly or privately funded. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) assert that coercive isomorphism results from formal and informal pressures exerted by other organizations. A degree of uncertainty within an organizational environment facilitates mimetic isomorphism. In order to test for the presence of these forms of isomorphism, an indicator of whether an institution is publicly or privately funded is included. This independent variable is a dummy variable; an institution is either public or private (1=private).

This research study will also include control variables. Control variables help to ensure that the significant relationships observed in the ordinary least squares regressions are attributable to the independent variables and not to other extraneous variables. Including some possible extraneous variables into the analysis as control variables does this. The size of the institution may attract different groups of students. The enrollment size of a postsecondary institution is the first control variable used in this analysis. Only institutions with greater than 2000 students enrolled are included into the analysis.

The second control variable is the age of the institution. New institutionalism predicts that older organizations will lag behind newer ones in the adoption of an innovation. Tolbert and Zucker (1983) show that younger cities are more likely to adopt civil service reform than their older counterparts. Corwin (1972) found that older schools were more likely to reject the Teacher Corps program. Dobbin and Sutton's (1998) research demonstrates that older organizations lag behind others in the adoption of 'compliance' offices created to show compliance to civil rights laws. Additionally, Chaves (1996) finds that longer-established denominations adopt the ordination of women at a slower rate than newer-established denominations. The literature overwhelmingly supports that age affects the rate of diffusion within an organizational context. Because it is impossible to disentangle the roles of age and status of postsecondary institutions, age is included as a control variable in order to test for the relationship between status and the diffusion path of diversity. Additionally, the city size in which an institution is located is included as a control variable. The size of the city is incorporated to control for the attraction medium- and large-sized cities may have for students, as well as any attraction that may vary with student races.

The third control variable is the regional location of the institution. Bennett and Xie (2003) found that the location was important in understanding the enrollment of African Americans. The present study will include where the institution is located regionally. This categorical variable denotes the regions: Mideast, Greatlakes, Plains, Southeast, Southwest, Mountain, West and New England. New England, the region with the oldest history of higher education, will be the reference category.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the control, independent and dependent variables. In 2004, the average institution had been established for 106 years.

Table 1: Means and Standard deviations for Variables Used in Analysis of the Diffusion of Proportional Increase of African American Enrollment.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Control Variables</b>		
Institution Age	106.212	46.805
City Size		
Within SMA of <250,000	.147	.354
Within SMA 250,000-499,999	.151	.358
Within SMA 500,000-999,999	.148	.355
SMA 1,000,000-1,999,999 outside center city	.034	.179
SMA 1,000,000-1,999,999 inside center city	.068	.252
SMA 2,000,000 + outside center city	.099	.299
SMA 2,000,000 + inside center city	.104	.305
Outside any SMA	.249	.433
Region		
New England	.087	.282
Mideast	.226	.418
Greatlakes	.151	.358
Plains	.087	.282
Southeast	.226	.418
Southwest	.073	.261
Mountain	.033	.179
West	.098	.298
Outlying	.019	.133
<b>Independent Variables</b>		
Recognition Ranking		
Not Recognized	.081	.272
Regionally Recognized	.575	.495
Nationally Recognized	.344	.475
Reputation Ranking	2.961	.568
Carnegie Classification		
Bachelors Institution	.142	.348
Masters Institution	.519	.500
Doctoral Institution	.339	.473
Institution Funding		
Public	.614	.487
Private	.386	.487
Proportion African American Enrollment 1980	.101	.187
<b>Dependent Variable</b>		
Proportion African America Enrollment 2004	.120	.190

Source: IPEDS and *U.S. News and World Report* (N = 723)

Approximately 45% of postsecondary institutions are located in the Mideast and Southeast regions. The majority of schools, about 58%, are regionally recognized by *U.S. News and World Report*. Very few institutions (.080) are not recognized at all. The average reputation ranking of all postsecondary institutions included into the analysis is 2.961, with a standard deviation of .568. Most universities and colleges are masters granting institutions (52%), followed by doctoral (34%) and bachelors (14%) institutions. Publicly funded institutions constitute the majority of schools, totaling 61% of the sample size. The average proportion of African American enrollment across all institution types increased by two percentage points from 1980 to 2004, from 10% to 12%. Comparing means utilizing a t-test illustrates that this increase in the proportion of African American enrollment is significant ( $p < .001$ ).

### Model Choice

Neoinstitutionalists tend to use models that measure a dichotomous outcome (adopt or do not adopt) because they are mostly interested in homogeneity. In focusing on such an outcome, neoinstitutionalists are unable to examine any possible variation in the outcomes of adoption. This section will first discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using such an analytical approach as well as the widely-used model of event history analysis.

Following this discussion, I argue the advantages of a lagged ordinary least squares regression to analyze the extent to which a postsecondary institution adopts diversity.

Event history analysis (EHA) is the predominant methodological approach used by neoinstitutionalists to study the diffusion of innovations. “Event-history analysis focuses on the occurrence of events or ‘changes of state,’ which is the rate (per unit of time) of movement from one state to another...” (Chaves 858). While this type of methodological

analysis remains one that is robust, it only measures dichotomous outcomes—either an organization adopts or fails to adopt an innovation in the case of innovation diffusion research. Gerbasi (2002) argues for measuring the extent of adoption of internet distance learning (IDL) throughout postsecondary institutions. As previously discussed, she predicts that because IDL is a controversial innovation, there will be some degree of variation in its adoption as opposed to the undifferentiated adoption predicted by neoinstitutionalism. This prediction hinges on an examination of both status processes and routines. This thesis only tests the role of status indicators in the diffusion of proportional increases in African American enrollment.

Similar to the adoption of IDL, it is likely that postsecondary institutions adopt diversity-related innovations in varying degrees. The current research is concerned with measuring the extent to which postsecondary institutions “adopt” diversity. Diversity for the purposes of this thesis can best be measured by analyzing the proportional increase of African American students over time. A lagged ordinary least squares (OLS) regression can measure such a change over time. This is the appropriate statistical method when an innovation is viewed as a continuous process that occurs over time, not as a dichotomous outcome.

In *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the United States Supreme Court upheld the previous ruling in the 1978 case of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (Joint Statement of Constitutional Law Scholars 2003). The 1978 ruling “held that student body diversity is a compelling governmental interest that can justify the use of race as a ‘plus’ factor in a competitive admissions process” (Joint Statement of Constitutional Law Scholars p. 1). The *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (and *Grutter v. Bollinger* reaffirms) illustrates a time in which

postsecondary institutions were concerned with race in the admissions process. Related to the present study, the year of this court ruling can be used for the present analysis because 1978 and later represents a period of time in which higher education was concerned with diversity.

The IPEDS data set consists of institutional data from 1980 to 2004. Because 1980 is the first year of data following 1978, this year will be utilized as the lag term. Specifically, the percentage of African American enrollment in 1980 is included as a lag term into the OLS regression. A lag term is a measure of the dependent variable at an earlier point in time. The percentage of African American enrollment in 1980 is included into the independent variables (as a lag term) in order to test for the diffusion of diversity from 1980 to 2004. Including this lag term also controls for the base level of diversity prior to and at the beginning of the time period under analysis. Specifically, this allows this thesis to test for the diffusion path of increased African American enrollment. Hypothesis 2 predicts that low status institutions will adopt before middle and high status institutions. Low status institutions will increase the proportion of African American enrollment faster than middle and high status institutions because these institutions started increasing first in the time period 1980-2004. Given that the last year available at the time of data collection was 2004 in IPEDS, the proportion of African American students in this year is used as the dependent variable. This study tests the diffusion path of diversity, or the proportional increase of African American students, from 1980 to 2004.

## CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS

This chapter will present the results of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses. The first portion of this section will discuss the models that were estimated using a non-lagged OLS regression technique in order to highlight the relationship between the independent and control variables to the dependent variable. Non-lagged models are estimated for both 1980 and 2004. The second section will present models estimated with a lagged ordinary least squares regression technique.

Surrogate

### Non-lagged Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models

Non-lagged OLS regression models demonstrate the relationship between the independent and control variables to the percentage of African American enrollment. Such models illustrate the postsecondary environment at one specific point in time. This thesis seeks to test the diffusion path of diversity from 1980 to 2004. The lagged OLS regression models illustrate diversity in higher education over time. In order to understand the pattern of diffusion over time, it is necessary to analyze each year included into the lagged analysis separately. It is important to analyze the state of diversity in 1980 in order to better evaluate the diffusion pattern of diversity over time. Table 2 illustrates the unstandardized coefficients from the non-lagged OLS regression models predicting the proportion of African American students in 1980.

Large, urban cities are significantly associated with a greater proportion of African American enrollment in 1980 ( $p < .001$ ) as compared to institutions located in cities with

Table 2: Unstandardized Coefficients from Non-lagged OLS Regression Models Predicting the Proportion of African American Enrollment in 1980.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
Constant	.111***	.052*	.069**	.244**
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Institution Age	.000	.000	.000	.000**
City Size <sup>1</sup>				
Within SMA 250,000-499,999	.016	-.006	.002	.011
Within SMA 500,000-999,999	.010	-.003	.011	.010
SMA 1,000,000-1,999,999 outside center city	-.004	.014	.033	.050
SMA 1,000,000-1,999,999 Inside center city	.018	.023	.042	.065*
SMA 2,000,000 + outside center city	.021	.041	.056*	.074**
SMA 2,000,000 + inside center city	.092***	.102***	.119***	.166***
Outside any SMA	.011	.001	-.002	-.010
Region <sup>2</sup>				
Midwest		.063*	.057*	.057*
Greatlakes		.041	.029	.034
Plains		.007	-.003	.000
Southeast		.172***	.155***	.177***
Southwest		.031	.011	.031
Mountain		-.015	-.038	-.016
West		-.005	-.020	.012
<b>Independent Variables</b>				
Institution Funding <sup>3</sup>				
Private			-.053***	-.044**
Recognition Ranking <sup>4</sup>				
Nationally Recognized				-.043*
Reputation Ranking				-.082***
Carnegie Classification <sup>5</sup>				
Bachelors Institution				.046*
Doctoral Institution				-.014
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.012	.120	.134	.214

Source: IPEDS and *U.S. News and World Report* (N=723)

\*p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

1. Reference Category: Anywhere within an SMA of <250,000

2. Reference Category: New England

3. Reference Category: Public

4. Reference Category: Not recognized and Regionally Recognized

5. Reference Category: Masters Institution

less than 250,000 inhabitants. The same trend is true in the next three non-lagged OLS regression models. Including region, funding, and status indicators does not affect this relationship. Consistently, cities with populations greater than 2 million inside the center city are significantly associated with greater proportions of African American students in 1980. In models 3 and 4, large cities with the populations greater than 2,000,000 outside of the center city are significantly associated with a greater proportion of African American students as compared to the reference category of cities with less than 250,000 persons. In the last model, cities with populations ranging from 1 million to just under 2 million are significantly associated with a greater proportion of African American students ( $p < .05$ ) when region, funding, and status indicators are included into the analysis.

The second non-lagged OLS regression model for 1980 includes the region in which an institution is located in addition to the control variables. Postsecondary institutions located in the Mideast and Southeast are both positively and significantly associated with the proportion of African American students in 1980. Universities in the Mideastern region of the country are significantly associated with a greater proportion of African American students ( $p < .05$ ) as compared to institutions located in New England. Institutions located in the Southeast are also significantly associated with a greater proportion of African American enrollment ( $p < .001$ ). The significance of these regions remains constant in the second, third, and fourth non-lagged OLS regression models for 1980.

In the last two non-lagged OLS models, the funding of postsecondary institutions is included. Privately funded institutions are negatively and significantly related to the proportion of African American enrollment in 1980. Publicly funded institutions are

associated with greater proportions of African American students than privately funded institutions.

Status indicators significantly explain the proportion of African American students in 1980. Nationally recognized institutions are negatively and significantly associated with this proportion ( $p < .05$ ) as compared to regionally recognized and not recognized schools. Regionally recognized and not recognized institutions have greater proportions of African American students in 1980 than nationally recognized institutions. Bachelors institutions are positively and significantly related to the proportion of African American students ( $p < .05$ ) as compared to Masters institutions. Bachelors granting institutions have greater proportions of African American students in 1980 than Masters institutions. The reputation ranking of an institution significantly explains the proportion of African American students in 1980. This status indicator is negatively and significantly associated to the independent variable ( $p < .001$ ). Low status institutions are associated with greater proportions of African American enrollment than both middle and high status universities.

The 1980 non-lagged OLS regression models demonstrate the relationship between African American enrollment and various institutional characteristics. The first model includes only control variables. This model explains little of this relationship ( $R^2 = .012$ ). The region in which an institution is located is included in the second model. The regional location of an institution explains more about the proportion of African American enrollment in 1980 ( $R^2 = .120$ ). The third model includes the funding type of postsecondary institutions. Whether an institution is publicly or privately funded not does significantly improve the statistical model ( $R^2 = .134$ ). Including Gerbasi's (2002) status indicators significantly improves the estimation power of the fourth model ( $R^2 = .214$ ). The status of

an institution is significantly related to the proportion of African American students enrolled in postsecondary institutions in 1980.

The first part of this section has discussed models predicting the proportion of African American students in 1980. In order to more fully understand the proportional increase of diversity over time, it is also necessary to analyze the proportion of African American students in 2004. Table 3 illustrates the non-lagged OLS regression models predicting African American enrollment in 2004.

The 2004 non-lagged OLS regression models demonstrate similar results to the 1980 regression models. Large, urban cities are significantly associated with the proportion of African American enrollment in 2004 ( $p < .05$ ). Cities larger than 2,000,000 persons within the center city become more significantly associated with the proportion of African American enrollment in 2004 ( $p < .001$ ) with the addition of regional location of the institution, funding, and status indicators into the regression models. Cities larger than 2,000,000 inhabitants outside of the center city become significant in models 3 and 4 ( $p < .01$ ). Larger cities are significantly associated with a greater proportion of African American enrollment as compared to other smaller cities.

The next three models include the region in which a postsecondary institution is located. Postsecondary institutions located in the West are positively and significantly associated with a larger proportion of African American students ( $p < .05$ ) than institutions located in New England. Universities in the Southeast are positively and significantly related to the proportion of African American students in 2004 ( $p < .001$ ). Postsecondary institutions in this region are significantly associated with greater proportions of African American students than schools located in New England. The unstandardized coefficients

Table 3: Unstandardized Coefficients from Non-lagged OLS Regression Models Predicting the Proportion of African American Enrollment in 2004.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
Constant	.141***	.079**	.097***	.302**
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Institution Age	.000*	.000*	.000	.000
City Size <sup>1</sup>				
Within SMA 250,000-499,999	.018	-.006	.002	.010
Within SMA 500,000-999,999	.010	-.004	.011	.009
SMA 1,000,000-1,999,999 outside center city	-.012	.016	.037	.053
SMA 1,000,000-1,999,999 Inside center city	.008	.019	.040	.058
SMA 2,000,000 + outside center city	.018	.046	.061*	.076**
SMA 2,000,000 + inside center city	.074*	.088***	.107***	.147***
Outside any SMA	.008	-.004	-.007	-.015
Region <sup>2</sup>				
Midwest		.062*	.055*	.053*
Greatlakes		.032	.019	.020
Plains		.000	-.010	-.010
Southeast		.199***	.180***	.199***
Southwest		.043	.022	.036
Mountain		-.031	-.055	-.036
West		-.026	-.043	-.012
<b>Independent Variables</b>				
Institution Type <sup>3</sup>				
Private			-.057***	-.040*
Recognition Ranking <sup>4</sup>				
Nationally Recognized				-.052*
Reputation Ranking				-.092***
Carnegie Classification <sup>5</sup>				
Bachelors Institution				.034
Doctoral Institution				.000
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.007	.164	.181	.268

Source: IPEDS and *U.S. News and World Report* (N=723)

\*p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

1. Reference Category: Anywhere within an SMA of <250,000

2. Reference Category: New England

3. Reference Category: Public

4. Reference Category: Not recognized and Regionally Recognized

5. Reference Category: Masters Institution

for institutions located in the Southeast increased from the 1980 non-lagged OLS regression model to the present non-lagged 2004 statistical model. Over the 24 year time period, the importance of the Southeastern region has increased in estimation power for predicting the proportion of African American enrollment.

Model 3 illustrates privately funded schools are negatively and significantly associated with the proportion of African American enrollment ( $p < .001$ ). Publicly funded institutions are more likely to have greater proportions of African American students than privately funded universities. Although this is the same trend the 1980 non-lagged regression model illustrated, the significance of institutional funding has decreased from  $p < .01$  to  $p < .05$ . In 2004, the estimation power of institutional funding in predicting the proportion of African American students is less than what it was in 1980.

The fourth non-lagged OLS regression model includes the status indicators of postsecondary institutions. The reputation ranking of an institution is negatively and significantly associated with the proportion of African American students in 2004 ( $p < .001$ ). Low status institutions are more likely to have a greater proportion of African American students than both middle and high status universities. Institutions with high reputation rankings are affected more negatively with regard to the proportion of African American students in 2004 than 1980—the unstandardized regression coefficient rises from 8.2% to 9.2%. With each non-lagged OLS regression including additional independent variables, the adjusted  $R^2$  increases. The first model ( $R^2 = .007$ ) explains very little about the proportion of African American students in 2004. Each subsequent model better explains the proportion of African American enrollment in 2004. The fourth model ( $R^2 = .268$ ) is the

best model. This supports including the proportion of African American students in 2004 as the dependent variable in the lagged OLS regression models.

### Lagged Ordinary Least Squares Regression Models

The first part of this section has discussed the non-lagged OLS regression models predicting the proportion of African American enrollment in 1980 and 2004. In order to analyze the degree of proportional change in African American enrollment over time, a lagged OLS regression model is utilized. Four models were estimated using this technique. The first model includes only control variables. The second model includes whether an institution is privately or publicly funded. The third model incorporates the multiple regions in which postsecondary institutions are located. The fourth and final model incorporates the three status indicators. Table 4 presents the predictions from all four models.

One noteworthy change from the non-lagged OLS regression models to the lagged OLS regression models is the size of the adjusted  $R^2$  values. Including the proportion of African American students in 1980 as the lag term causes a vast increase in these values because it is a measure of the dependent variable at an earlier time period. Subsequently, this measure significantly predicts the proportion of African American students in 2004. Including this lag term allows the lagged OLS regression models to control for the base rate of diversity prior to the time period under analysis. By doing so, the present research is able to test the relationship between institutional characteristics and the path of increased proportions of African American students. A more in-depth discussion of the diffusion pattern of diversity concludes this section.

Table 4: Unstandardized Coefficients from Lagged OLS Regression Models 1980-2004 Predicting Proportional Increase of African American Enrollment

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
Constant	.031***	.029***	.031	.072
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Institution Age	-.008*	-.009*	-.008*	-.002
City Size <sup>1</sup>				
Within SMA 250,000-499,999	.003	-.001	.000	-.001
Within SMA 500,000-999,999	.000	-.002	.000	-.001
SMA 1,000,000-1,999,999 outside center city	-.008	.003	.006	.005
SMA 1,000,000-1,999,999 Inside center city	-.010	-.003	-.001	-.004
SMA 2,000,000 + outside center city	-.002	.006	.008	.006
SMA 2,000,000 + inside center city	-.017*	-.010	-.007	-.010
Outside any SMA	-.003	-.005	-.005	-.006
Region <sup>2</sup>				
Midwest		.002	.001	-.001
Greatlakes		-.007	-.009	-.012
Plains		-.006	-.007	-.010
Southeast		.034***	.032***	.032***
Southwest		.013	.011	.007
Mountain		-.016	-.019	-.021
West		-.022**	-.024**	-.024**
<b>Independent Variables</b>				
Institution Funding <sup>3</sup>				
Private			-.007	.001
Recognition Ranking <sup>4</sup>				
Nationally Recognized				-.012
Reputation Ranking				-.015***
Carnegie Classification <sup>5</sup>				
Bachelors Institution				-.010
Doctoral Institution				.013
Percentage African American Enrollment 1980	.987***	.957***	.955***	.943***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.939	.946	.946	.948

Source: IPEDS and *U.S. News and World Report* (N=723)

\*p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

1. Reference Category: Anywhere within an SMA of <250,000

2. Reference Category: New England

3. Reference Category: Public

4. Reference Category: Not recognized and Regionally Recognized

5. Reference Category: Masters Institution

Despite the large estimation power of the lag term, each lagged statistical model increasingly explains more of the relationship between institutional characteristics and the proportional change in African American enrollment over the 24 year time period. This is not surprising as the adjusted  $R^2$  also increases with each addition of independent variables in the non-lagged OLS regression models. The first lagged regression model explains a great deal of the proportional change of African American students from 1980 to 2004 ( $R^2 = .939$ ). In addition to the control variables, the second lagged statistical model incorporates the region in which an institution is located. As was the case in the non-lagged models, this independent variable improves upon the first model ( $R^2 = .946$ ). Including the funding type of a postsecondary institution does not improve upon the model 2. This independent variable did not significantly improve the non-lagged OLS regression models either. Including the status indicators into the analyses improves the estimation power of model 4 ( $R^2 = .948$ ). This is not surprising because the indicators of status improved the predictive power of the non-lagged regression models. While controlling for the base rate of diversity, this model illustrates that the status of an institution is still significantly related to the proportional change in African American enrollment from 1980 to 2004.

The age of a postsecondary institution is significant in the first two lagged ordinary least squares regression models ( $p < .05$ ). As the age of an institution decreases, or the more recently a postsecondary institution is founded, the greater the proportional increase in African American enrollment. Younger institutions are significantly associated with a greater proportional increase of African American students from 1980 to 2004 than older institutions. In the first model, large urban cities with greater than 2,000,000 inhabitants are negatively and significantly associated with an increase in the proportion of African

American enrollment ( $p < .05$ ). Larger cities increased the proportion of African American students less than other smaller-sized cities between 1980 and 2004.

The second lagged OLS regression model includes the region in which a postsecondary institution is located. Institutions located in the Southeast and West regions are significantly associated with changes in the proportion of African American students enrolled in a postsecondary institution in the remaining three regression models. Institutions in the Southeast are positively and significantly associated with a proportional increase in African American enrollment ( $p < .001$ ) from 1980 to 2004. Universities located in the Southeast had a greater proportional increase of African American students as compared to institutions located in New England. This is consistent with the non-lagged models; institutions in the Southeast were more significant predictors of African American enrollment in 2004 than in 1980. Institutions located in the West are negatively and significantly associated with a proportional increase of African American enrollment ( $p < .01$ ). Universities located in the West are associated with a smaller proportional increase of African American enrollment than institutions in New England.

The third lagged OLS regression model incorporates the funding type of an institution into the analysis. Hypothesis 1 predicts that the proportional increase of African American students enrolled in a postsecondary institution will be greater in privately funded institutions than publicly funded institutions. Privately funded institutions are negatively but not significantly associated with a proportional increase of African American students over time. This third model is never significant but is consistent with hypothesis 1. However, the sign of the unstandardized coefficient changes to positive when status indicators are included into the lagged OLS regression. The non-lagged 2004 regression models

demonstrate a decrease in the significance of institutional funding in predicting the proportion of African American enrollment from the 1980 models. The results from the lagged OLS regression models are consistent with the results from previous non-lagged models. The data do not support that a proportional increase of African American students enrolled in postsecondary institutions will be greater in privately funded institutions than publicly funded institutions.

The final lagged OLS regression model includes the status indicators used by Gerbasi (2002). Hypothesis 2 predicts that the proportional increase of African American students enrolled in a postsecondary institution will be greater in low status institutions than high and middle status institutions. The first status indicator is the recognition ranking of a postsecondary institution. Being a nationally recognized school (high status) compared to regionally recognized or not recognized institutions (low status) is negatively, but not significantly, associated with a proportional increase of African American students. Although not significant, this status indicator illustrates the inverse relationship between status and the proportional increase of African American enrollment.

The academic reputation of the institution is on a scale of 1 (marginal) to 5 (distinguished). This reputation ranking is significantly and negatively associated with adopting diversity ( $p < .001$ ). Higher status institutions are significantly associated with smaller proportional changes in African American enrollment. Low status institutions are associated with a greater proportional increase of African American students than middle and high status institutions. The greater an institution's academic reputation ranking the less is the proportional increase of African American enrollment.

Compared to masters institutions, doctoral institutions are positively, but not significantly associated with proportional increase of diverse enrollment. Bachelors granting institutions are negatively but not significantly associated with the proportional increase of African American enrollment. Being a bachelors, masters, or doctoral institution does not significantly explain the proportional increase of African American students. The three status indicators demonstrate that low status universities are more likely to adopt diversity, or increase the proportion of African American enrollment, than high and middle status institutions as predicted by hypothesis 2.

## CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to analyze the diffusion path of diversity in higher education over time. More specifically, I set out to test whether the diffusion path of diversity would follow the path proposed by neoinstitutionalists or the modified path predicted in Gerbasi's (2002) Status Contingent Diffusion Theory. The diffusion path predicted by neoinstitutionalists begins with high status actors adopting an innovation first, followed by low and middle status actors. Gerbasi's (2002) theory predicts that controversial innovations will follow a different path, one in which low status organizations adopt an innovation before middle and high status organizations. Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of new institutionalism and the diffusion of innovations, I argued that analyzing the proportional increase of African American enrollment over time was a way in which to measure the end result of diversity-related innovating efforts. In addition to testing the role of status indicators on this diffusion path, I also predicted that institutional funding would significantly explain the proportional increase of diverse enrollments over time.

Results from the non-lagged OLS regression models suggest that larger cities are significantly associated with greater proportions of African American students. Postsecondary institutions located in larger, more urban cities consistently have a greater proportion of African American students as compared to smaller cities. Urban cities generally have greater populations of underrepresented groups, which may explain the larger proportional base rate of African American students. The lagged regression models demonstrate that large urban center cities are negatively associated with the proportional increase of African American enrollments from 1980 to 2004. Institutions located in these

cities had lower levels of proportional increase than other, smaller-sized cities. The non-lagged models illustrated larger base proportions of African American students. Because of a larger base level of African American students, institutions in larger cities did not significantly increase the proportion of diverse enrollment over time.

Estimates from both the lagged OLS regression models demonstrate that the proportional increase of African American students enrolled in postsecondary institutions are significantly associated with the region in which an institution is located. Postsecondary institutions in the Southeast are significantly and positively associated with greater proportions of African American students than universities located in the Northeast. The results from the lagged OLS regression models illustrate that the Southeast has been effective in increasing the proportion of African American students from 1980 until 2004. Western institutions are significantly associated with a smaller proportional increase of African American students than universities located in the Northeast. In terms of neoinstitutionalism, institutions in the Southeast “adopted” diversity before and to a greater extent than institutions located in other regions. These findings are even more important when one considers that institutions in the Southeast began with a greater proportion of African American students in 1980. Institutions in the West did not “adopt” a large proportional increase of African American students from 1980 to 2004.

I conclude that the change in proportion of African American students enrolled in postsecondary institutions is significantly associated with the region in which an institution is located. These findings are interesting when recalling the study used as an impetus for including region into the regression analyses. Bennett and Xie (2003) found that African Americans are more likely to enroll in colleges located in the Northeast over institutions in

the West, North Central, and South. The results of the present research contradict the previous relationship between African American enrollment and Southeastern institutions.

The first hypothesis predicts that the proportional increase of African American students enrolled in a postsecondary institution will be greater in privately funded institutions than publicly funded institutions. This hypothesis is based on DiMaggio and Powell (1983), who assert that coercive isomorphic change results from formal and informal pressures, such as legal and/or institutional forces, exerted on organizations by other organizations. Due to a lack of external pressures as compared to public institutions, privately funded institutions should exhibit more flexibility in organizational behaviors and admissions policies. Greater flexibility should allow private institutions to incorporate race-conscious policies that are geared towards achieving diversity to a greater extent than public institutions. The result of this flexibility should illustrate the ability of private institutions to increase the proportion of African American students to a greater extent than public institutions. The results from the lagged OLS regression models do not support the first hypothesis. The lagged statistical regression models suggest that privately funded institutions did not increase the proportion of diverse study body enrollment to a greater extent than publicly funded institutions. The proportional increase in African American enrollment is not greater for private institutions than public institutions. Private institutions may not have more flexibility in organizational behaviors as compared to public schools; or private institutions may have more flexibility but do not use it to promote diversity are possible explanations for the results of this research.

The second and final hypothesis predicts that the proportional increase of African American students enrolled in postsecondary institutions will be greater in low status

institutions than high and middle status institutions. The academic reputation of the institution rests on a scale of 1 (marginal) to 5 (distinguished). This reputation ranking is significantly and negatively associated with increasing diversity. As the reputation of an institution increases, the institution is less likely to “adopt” greater proportions of African American enrollment. Low status institutions are associated with a greater proportional increase of African American students than middle and high status institutions. The greater an institution’s academic reputation ranking the less is the proportional increase of African American enrollment. The data supports Gerbasi’s (2002) Status Contingent Diffusion Theory hypothesis: low status institutions are significantly more likely to “adopt” controversial innovations before middle and high status institutions. Because the base rate of diversity is controlled for by including the lag term (proportion of African American enrollment in 1980), it is possible to state that low status institutions increased the proportion of African American enrollment faster than middle and high status institutions. I conclude that the data support hypothesis 2, specifically that low status institutions adopt greater proportions of diverse enrollments than their higher status counterparts. This finding is even more robust considering the results demonstrated in Table 2, the 1980 non-lagged regression models. In 1980, low status institutions had greater proportions of African American students than high and middle status institutions. Despite this high level of diverse enrollment in the beginning of the time period under analysis, low status schools were still able to proportionally increase African American enrollments greater than high and middle status institutions.

### Limitations

This study has tested the end result of diversity-related innovating efforts of postsecondary institutions. Most innovation of diffusion research directly tests the adoption of a specific innovation, behavior, or structural change. I have argued that higher education institutions may be adopting a variety of innovations aimed at increasing diversity on campus. The outcome of such innovations is an increase in the proportion of underrepresented groups. I have chosen to use African American students to illustrate a diverse group in this thesis. By measuring the proportional increase or change in African American enrollment, this study has measured the outcome of institutional innovating efforts. Rogers (2003) states that the outcome of an innovation is social change. This thesis has measured one aspect of social change. This particular operationalization of diversity presents a limitation to this research. By not measuring the extent of adoption of a specific innovation or behavior, this thesis is not directly comparable to other neoinstitutionalist and diffusion of innovation studies. Measuring the adoption of a specific diversity-related innovation would greatly improve the predictions of the OLS models. For example, future research should analyze the diffusion path of multicultural or intercultural centers, senior diversity officers, or required diversity training for students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, future research should explore the institutions that have been successful in increasing proportions of diversity over time. Specifically, future researchers may investigate which types of innovating efforts aimed at increasing diversity are making a significant difference in increasing diversity on campus.

## Conclusions

In this thesis, I have analyzed the diffusion of an innovation which does not follow the characteristic diffusion model path predicted by typical neoinstitutionalists, beginning with high status actors/organizations and diffusing to middle and low status actors/organizations. In terms of increasing the proportion of diversity in higher education, which is a controversial innovation, the classic new institutionalist pattern is reversed. Lower status postsecondary institutions “adopt” a greater proportional increase of diverse enrollment before and to a greater extent than middle and high status institutions. The results of this thesis lend support to Gerbasi’s (2002) Status Contingent Diffusion Theory. However, this research study did not include the routines component of Gerbasi’s (2002) theory. Future researcher should include this element in diffusion of diversity studies to provide greater support for Gerbasi’s (2002) proposed model of diffusion path for controversial innovations.

The proportion of African American enrollment represents only one historically underrepresented group. Future diffusion research should analyze the diffusion of proportional increases of other minority groups. The results could be compared to the present diffusion path of increased proportions of African American students.

I have found support in this thesis that controversial innovations will follow a diffusion path different than the pattern predicted by classic neoinstitutionalists. Gerbasi (2002) elaborated on status processes and routines in order to offer an explanation for this atypical pattern of diffusion. She coined this explanation the Status Contingent Diffusion Theory. This thesis finds support for the status processes component of this theory. Specifically, low status institutions will “adopt” or increase the proportion of diversity on

campus first, and high and middle status institutions will “adopt” later. The results of this thesis support that the predictions of the Status Contingent Diffusion Theory can help researchers understand the diffusion pattern of controversial innovations. Future research can expand of the predictions and implications of this theory.

The results of this thesis also have implications for diversity in the environment of higher education. Studies have shown that diversity in the classroom and campus interactions produces a number of positive learning outcomes for students and faculty (Gurin et. al. 1999; Gurin et. al. 2003; Terenzini 2001). However, this thesis has shown that in 2004 high and middle status universities are still falling behind low status institutions in terms of diversity on campus. Institutions across the country have and are currently establishing diversity plans aimed at promoting diversity in higher education. In 2004, not recognized and regionally recognized institutions had a significantly greater proportion of African American students than nationally recognized institutions. In the same year, schools with higher academic reputation rankings had significantly fewer proportions of African American students. It would seem that if an institution wants to give the best education, increasing diversity would be a part of the equation. The *U.S. News and World Report* rankings are generally coveted by institutions wishing to maintain their high rankings and by institutions striving to move up in the status hierarchy. There is something inherently wrong with the picture this thesis portrays. Despite the well-documented positive outcomes associated with diversity, institutions with high rankings are continuing to miss the boat with regard to increasing diversity on campus.

Steinberg, Piraino, and Haveman (2007) seek to understand circumstances of low-income students in higher education by addressing the prevalence of undergraduates

supported by Pell Grants. In public sector institutions, as the median SAT score increases (a measure of selectivity) the number of students receiving Pell Grants decreases. The same trend occurs for private sector intuitions. More selective schools have smaller proportions of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants than less selective schools. The degree to which an institution is selective has an impact on a postsecondary school's status rankings. Private and public schools strive to climb the status hierarchy in higher education by seeking out students with high SAT scores. This directly impacts the economic diversity of the undergraduate student body.

One theoretical implication of this research concerns the distinction made between public and private institutions. This research found that the type of funding was not significantly associated with the proportional increase of African American enrollment over time. This may be due to the complexity of funding sources in higher education. For example, the distinction made between public versus private institutions may be less evident than I had originally hypothesized because the way in which money flows in higher education is extremely complex for public and private institutions alike. It may be the case that public institutions are able to increase African American enrollment more than private institutions because of the relatively low in-state cost. Public institutions located in regions in which there are large proportions of historically underrepresented college-eligible students, such as the Southeast, are able to offer the tuition reductions for instate students which may lead to an increase in diversity.

This discussion has illuminated a form of tension that is present in higher education between increasing diversity on postsecondary campuses and maintaining a high status rankings. As I have mentioned, high status institutions are still lacking in racial and

economic diversity despite the research demonstrating the positive learning outcomes associated with such diversity. This thesis has only looked at the bottom line with regard to racial diversity: the proportional increase of African American students over time. Higher status institutions may want to demonstrate that they are devoted to diversity by creating a Diversity Plan or by establishing a Senior Diversity Officer position on campus. Although this thesis has not directly measured these types of innovating efforts, high status institutions still fall short of really increasing diversity because increasing diversity is associated with decreasing a postsecondary institution's level of status. Thus, there is a fine line between increasing diversity and an institution's status. High status institutions may only increase racial and economic diversity up to a certain point so as not to directly impact their level of status. In light of the recent Pell Grant research and the results of this thesis, I urge postsecondary institutions to explore the state of diversity on their campuses. Additionally, colleges and universities must investigate the adverse impact status rankings have on racial diversity and economic diversity.

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