

**Study Purpose and Research Questions:** The purpose of this research is to fill several gaps in the literature on college student engagement by exploring differences in engagement for White students, Black students, and Black/White biracial students *within* and *between* different institutional types. To achieve this purpose, this study explores the following research questions:

1. How does engagement compare for Black, White, and biracial students with Black and White heritage *within* historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and non-HBCUs?
2. How does engagement compare for biracial students with Black and White heritage *between* HBCUs and non-HBCUs?

**Conceptual Framework:** The current study rests on the three conceptual premises. The first is that increased student engagement is better for all. The second is that race and institutional type influence students' engagement practices. Third, biracial students experience race differently than their monoracial peers. What is unknown, however, is if differences in engagement exist for Black students, White students, and Black/White biracial students within HBCUs and non-HBCUs as well as if differences in engagement exist between Black/White biracial students enrolled at HBCUs and non-HBCUs.

**Data Source and Sample:** The data for this study come from the 2014 and 2013 administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The sample for this study consists of responses from 135,397 first-years (40% of the sample) and 207,771 seniors at 981 colleges and universities. Thirty-six of these institutions are considered to be HBCUs. 36,704 students (11% of the sample) chose only Black or African American, 303,864 (89%) chose only White, and 2,600 (< 1%) chose both Black or African American and White. Central to this study is students' enrollment in an HBCU or non-HBCU. Most of the sample was enrolled in a non-HBCU (FY: 98%/SR: 99%).

**Measures and Analyses:** To answer how BL, BL/WH, and WH students engage differently than one another at HBCUs and non-HBCUs, students' scores on eleven aggregate measures (see table 1) were examined, comparing the BL/WH scores to one another (at HBCUs versus non-HBCUs) and to their monoracial peers (within HBCUs and non-HBCUs). Additionally, BL and WH students' engagement was examined within HBCUs and non-HBCUs. These comparisons were made using t-tests and Cohen's d effect sizes. Statistical significance was reported for  $p \leq .001$ . More explicitly, within HBCUs, engagement was compared for the three pairings of BL, BL/WH, and WH students; within non-HBCUs, engagement was compared for the three pairings of BL, BL/WH, and WH students; and finally BL/WH student engagement was compared for students at HBCUs and non-HBCUs. First-year and senior results were all analyzed separately due to the different contexts of the first and senior year in college.

## **Results:**

**HBCU Student Engagement.** BL/WH have higher DD than BL students at HBCUs ( $d=.37$ ,  $p=.001$ ). There were no statistically significant differences between BL/WH and WH students at HBCUs ( $p \leq .001$ ). BL students have higher RI ( $d=.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ), CL ( $d=.47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), SF

( $d=.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ), SE ( $d=.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and pg ( $d=.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than WH students at HBCUs. BL students have lower DD ( $d=.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than WH students at HBCUs.

**Non-HBCU Student Engagement.** BL/WH students have higher DD than BL students at non-HBCUs ( $d=.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ). BL/WH students have lower HO ( $d=.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ), QR ( $d=.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ), LS ( $d=.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ), CL ( $d=.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ), ET ( $d=.19$ ,  $p < .001$ ), QI ( $d=.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and pg ( $d=.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

BL/WH students have higher RI ( $d=.07$ ,  $p = .001$ ), DD ( $d=.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and SE ( $d=.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than WH students at non-HBCUs. BL/WH students have lower QR ( $d=.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and QI ( $d=.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than WH students at non-HBCUs.

BL students have higher HO ( $d=.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ), RI ( $d=.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ), LS ( $d=.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ), DD ( $d=.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ), ET ( $d=.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ), SE ( $d=.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ), pg ( $d=.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than WH students at non-HBCUs. BL students have lower CL ( $d=.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than WH students at non-HBCUs.

**BL/WH Student Engagement.** BL/WH at non-HBCUs have higher QI ( $d=.37$ ,  $p=.001$ ) than BL/WH at HBCUs.

**Study Significance:** First, Black students are more engaged than White students at non-HBCUs, as well as White students at HBCUs, and biracial Black/White peers at non-HBCUs. This finding is significant as it challenges dominant discourses that often frame Black students in a deficit manner, i.e. as less engaged than their White peers (see DeSousa & King, 1992). Second, DD was the one engagement indicator that biracial students were more engaged in than their White and Black counterparts at non-HBCUs and their Black counterparts at HBCUs. This finding supports literature that suggests biracial individuals may navigate several different communities due to their embodiment of multiple racial identities (Yancey & Lewis, 2009). It also elicits the question, “Are biracial students more apt to report diverse encounters because the majority of people they interact with on campus diverge from their multiple racial/ethnic backgrounds?”

Additionally, at HBCUs, both White and biracial students engage more than Black students in DD. However, at non-HBCUs, biracial and Black students engage in DD more than White students. This finding suggests that DD may be linked to the racial demographics of an institution. Therefore, practitioners must explore how (and if) structural diversity may shift to enhance DD for White students at non-HBCUs and DD for Black students at HBCUs.

Finally, while biracial students engage similarly to their peers at HBCUs, their engagement within non-HBCUs is troubling. Biracial students were less engaged on seven out of the eleven engagement indicators when compared to their Black peers. They were also less engaged in QR and QI than their White peers. While biracial students were significantly less engaged in QI when compared to Black peers and White peers at non-HBCUs, QI was higher at these institutions than at HBCUs. Scholars and practitioners must focus on the intricacies of QI for biracial students at both institutional types. Moreover, scholars must explore why biracial students and White students do not engage differently than one another at HBCUs, but engage differently at non-HBCUs.

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Table 1. Engagement Indicators

<b>Engagement Indicator</b>	<b>Abbrev.</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Higher-Order Learning	HO	HO represents how much students' coursework emphasizes challenging cognitive tasks such as application, analysis, judgment, and synthesis.
Reflective & Integrative Learning	RI	RI represents how much students are motivated to make connections between their learning and the world and people around them.
Quantitative Reasoning	QR	QR represents how often students are asked to evaluate, support, and critique arguments using numerical or statistical information.
Learning Strategies	LS	LS represents how often students actively engage with course material rather than approaching learning as absorption.
Collaborative Learning	CL	CL represents how often students worked on group projects, asked others to help with difficult material or explained it to others, and worked through course material in preparation for exams with peers.
Discussions with Diverse Others	DD	DD represents how often students had discussions with people who are different from them in terms of race or ethnicity, economic background, religion beliefs, or political views.
Student-Faculty Interaction	SF	SF represents how often students interacted with their faculty outside of courses such as talking about career plans, discussing course content, discussing academic performance, and working on non-course activities.
Effective Teaching Practices	ET	ET represents how much students perceive being exposed to teaching practices that have been found to promote student learning.
Quality of Interactions	QI	QI represents the quality of student interactions with their peers, advisors, faculty, and other staff and offices.
Supportive Environment	SE	SE represents students' perceptions of how much their institution emphasizes services and activities that support their learning and development.
Perceived Gains	pg	pg represents students' perceptions of how much that their educational experience has contributed to their growth and development in a variety of areas.

More information about the Engagement Indicators can be found on the NSSE website: [nsse.iub.edu](http://nsse.iub.edu).