

Diversity in Sociology and Environmental Sociology: What we Know About our Discipline

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As an initial effort of the ETS Committee on Racial Diversity, we put together this brief article to establish clarity around the state of diversity in our field. The following is a summary of available data regarding diversity in the American Sociological Association and the Environment and Technology section. The data in this summary draw on two sources. The first is an ASA Research Brief (2005), *Race and Ethnicity in the Sociology Pipeline*. Although dated, this report provides important information regarding points of equality and points of disproportionate “leakage”¹ throughout the academic careers of scholars of color, especially African American scholars, in sociology. The second set of data focuses on diversity in the Environment and Technology section from 2005 to 2016. It comes directly from ASA membership database and was compiled by ASA Research Department.

Diversity in Sociology

Approximately 16 percent of all sociology bachelor’s degree recipients in 2004 were African American, higher than the percent of African Americans in the U.S. population. Almost 10 percent of U.S. bachelor’s degrees were awarded to Hispanic/Latino(a) students, and 5 percent were awarded to Asian/Asian American students. These statistics represent a slight but positive increase of the selected racial/ethnic groups under examination over the decade under examination (1995-2005) (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007).

¹ The committee has serious concerns about the term “leakage” because of its passive nature and implicit colorblindness. The work of the leakage discourse suggests that students of color just fall out-which suggests that the students themselves may be to blame while eclipsing the institutional structures within which racism is reproduced. Rather, volumes of literature illustrate that the system is structured in such a way to push people of color out, and maintain extant hierarchies (Wyse 2014; Gutiérrez et al 2012; Brunsma, Embrick, and Shin 2017).

Table 1. Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded to Selected Racial/Ethnic Groups In Sociology from U.S. colleges and universities: 1995-2004

Racial/Ethnic Groups	1995-1998	2000-2004
African American	15.2%	16.3%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	7.6%	9.6%
Asian	4.7%	5.4%

However, for sociology students who go on to graduate study, the ASA Brief reports, clear racial and ethnic divisions emerge. While about half of white master’s degree recipients go on to complete a PhD, only 15 percent of African American master’s degree recipients obtain a doctoral degree (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007). As a result, in 2004, 352 doctorate degrees were awarded to white students in sociology, compared with only 40 to African Americans and 25 to Hispanic/Latino(a) and Asian scholars combined.

Table 2. Doctoral Degrees Awarded to Select Racial/Ethnic Groups in Sociology: 1995-2004

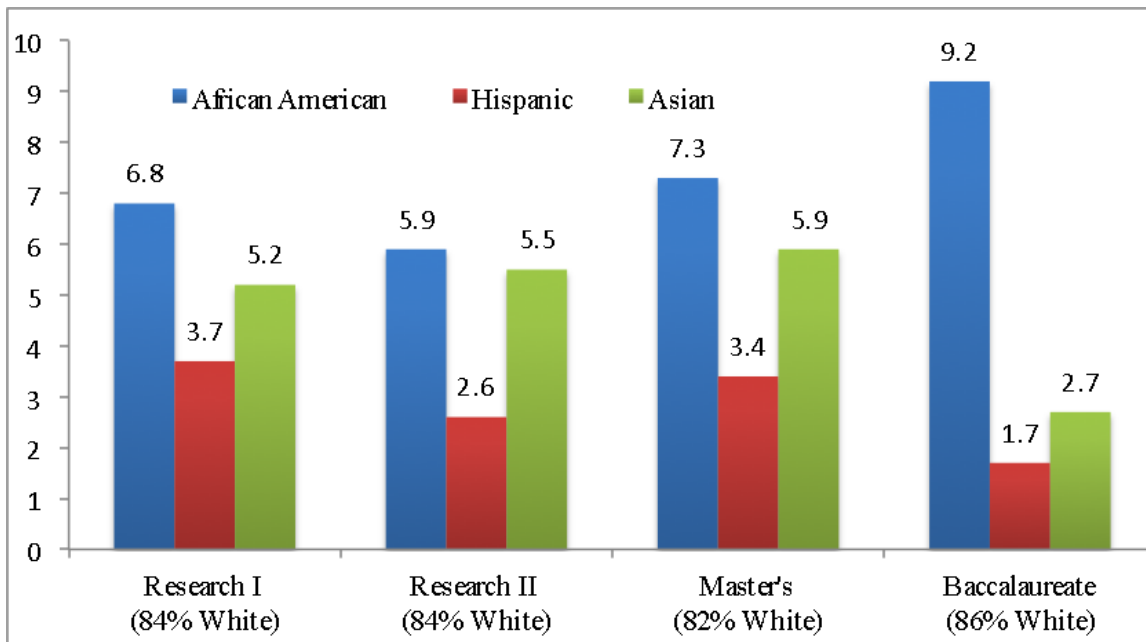
Racial/Ethnic Groups	1995-1998	2000-2004
African American	7.6%	9.4%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	3.1%	5.4%
Asian/Asian American	6.4%	5.6%

The ASA Brief also provides data on tenure-track and postdoctoral employment rates. Given the relatively small numbers of African American doctoral recipients in any given year (approximately 40), the data show a relatively strong demand for these new Ph.D.’s, but less of a demand for Asian/Asian American and Hispanic/Latino(a) scholars. For example, in 1998 almost 72% of African American sociology PhD graduates obtained a tenure-track or postdoctoral position, compared with 58% Whites, 31% Asian/Asian American or Pacific Islander, and 64% Hispanic (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007).

Scholars of color, however, were unequally distributed based on the type of academic institutions where they were hired. African Americans were somewhat under-represented at Research and Doctoral universities and over-represented in Bachelor’s-only institutions compared to their percentage within all institutional sociology faculty in the U.S. In contrast, Hispanics/Latinos(as) and Asian/Asian Americans were underrepresented at Bachelor’s-only institutions. For example, in 2000/2001 Whites made up 84% of sociology faculty members at research 1 institutions compared to just around 7% African American, 4% Hispanic/Latino(a), and 5% Asian/Asian American faculty members at Research 1 institutions (see Figure 1). It is important to note that

these numbers may not provide an accurate picture of demand--nevertheless, it appears that faculty of color are over-represented in Bachelor's-only institutions and under-represented at research and doctoral institutions (Spalter-Roth and Erskine 2007). Other research has highlighted that scholars of color are also overrepresented in the contract side of the academy. In other words, they do not hold tenure track positions but are rather employed instructors, adjuncts, postdoctoral associates, research scientists, assistant teaching professors, and professors of practice (Mascarenhas 2016).

Figure 1. African American, Hispanic/Latino/a, and Asian/Asian American Faculty by Institution Type: 2000/2001 (Percent of Total Faculty)



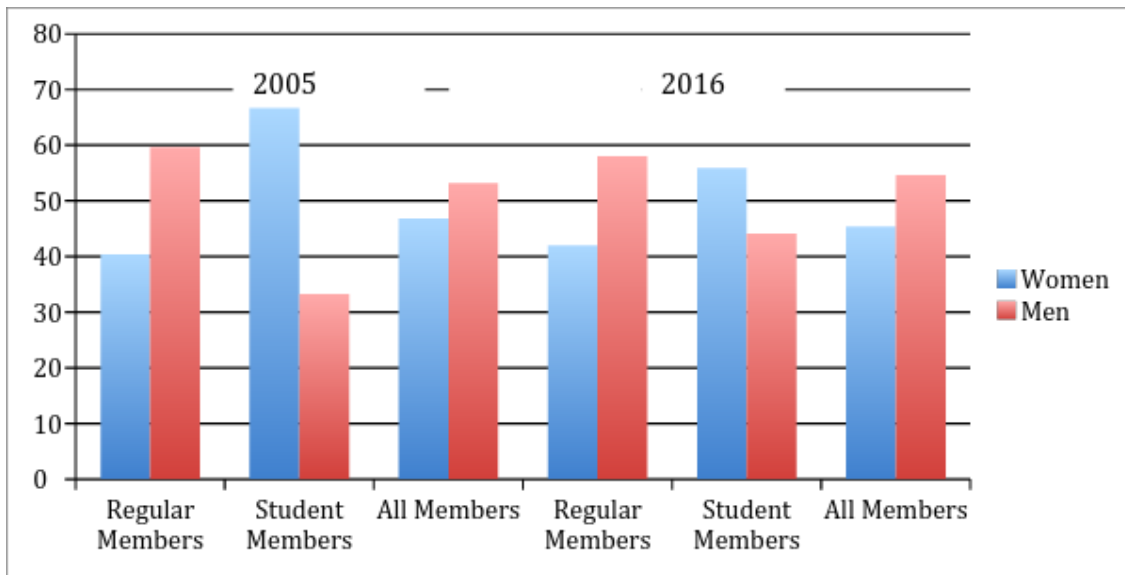
There are innumerable concerns regarding the failures of sociology, and academia more generally, to support and retain scholars of color. In addition to the injustice of “colorblind” white favoritism, scholars of color bring new topics, skills, and insights to the academy. The ASA brief notes that each racial/ethnic group had a strong interest in sociological perspectives and knowledge based on their own race or ethnic group. In effect, not having scholars of color in the academic pipeline, as tenure-track faculty, post-doctorates, and as teachers, ensures that sociology remains a “white space” (Anderson 2015). Other research has argued that this white space is not limited to the university; academic journals, editorial boards, and the accepted scope of empirical and theoretical expertise also constitute white spaces in academia (Anderson 2015, Bonilla-Silva 2010, Bonilla-Silva 2015, Feagin 1991, Morris 2015, Pellow 2016). The same can be said of

our national funding agencies, NSF and NIH, and funding agencies, whose program officers and review panels remain predictably white (Mascarenhas 2016). The lack of nonwhites in these spaces suggests that there might be underfunding and lack of support for key sociological topic areas that white reviewers are less familiar with.

Diversity in Environmental Sociology

Environmental sociology is a relatively new section of the ASA, officially forming in 1976 as an outgrowth of America’s environmental movement and the need to strengthen sociologists’ ability to contribute to environmental impact assessments, which had recently been mandated by national legislation (Dunlap 2016). Over its four decades the membership has steadily grown to more than 500 (504) in 2016. In terms of gender, there is a noteworthy failure to retain women from student to faculty members. For example, in 2005 two thirds of student membership were women (67% women, 33% men) compared with 40% for regular members (40% women, 60% men). This gender trend is consistent a decade later for regular members (42% women, 58% men); however, there was also a noticeable drop in women student members during this period (from 67% to 56%). The data suggests that the loss rate of women from student to faculty may be decreasing in comparison to a decade ago. Overall membership increased from 359 to 504 over the last decade (2005-2016).

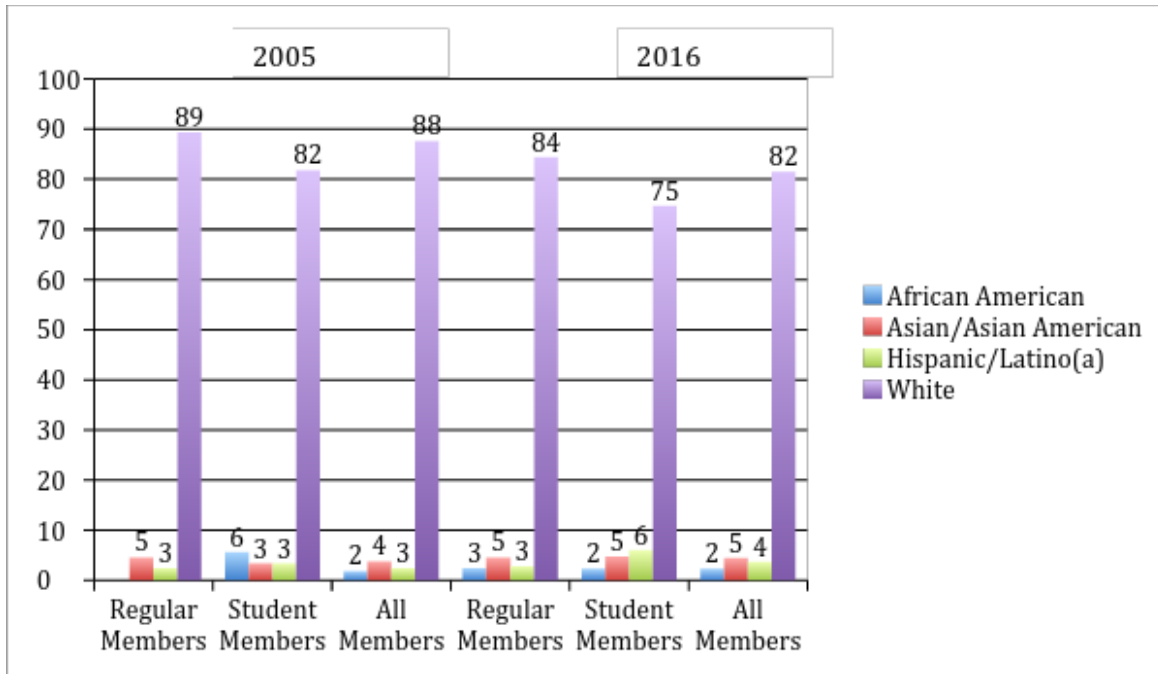
Figure 2. Section of Environment, Technology, and Society Gender Distribution by percent: 2005-2016



The percentage of African American, Hispanic/Latino(a), and Asian/Asian American scholars in the ETS section is very low in comparison to other ASA sections and the

association overall. Over the decade, the percentage of Asian/Asian American and Hispanic/Latino(a) regular members in the section has remained relatively consistent (4.6% Asian/Asian American in both 2005 and 2016, and 2.5% Hispanic/Latino(a) in 2005 compared with 2.8% in 2016). Regular ETS members who identify as African American increased from zero members in 2005 to seven in 2016, an increase to 2.5% of section membership.

Figure 3. Section of Environment, Technology, and Society Selected Race Distribution by percent: 2005-2016



The percentage of scholars of color who are regular members of the ETS Section is much lower than doctorate degrees awarded to members of these groups in sociology overall, suggesting that this section fails to attract and retain a disproportionate number of scholars of color compared with the overall discipline.

The data also seems to suggest a mixed trend in the membership of students of color in the ETS section over the decade. For example, African American student membership decreased threefold, from 6% in 2005 to 2% in 2016. However, both Asian/Asian American and Hispanic/Latino(a) student membership increased slightly from 3% for both groups to 5% Asian/Asian American students and 6% Hispanic/Latino(a) students. While the increases for Asian/Asian American and Hispanic/Latino(a) students over the decade are modest, it is important to also note that the actual number of students of color in the section remains very low, constituting what

Moore (2008) describes as a “micro-minority” in an otherwise exclusively white institutional space (Moore 2008) (See Table 3).

Table 3. Race distribution of ETS student membership: 2005 and 2016.

Racial/Ethnic Group	2005	2016
African American	5.7%	2.4%
Asian/Asian American	3.4%	4.8%
Hispanic/Latino(a)	3.4%	6%
White	81.8%	74.7%
Other	5.7%	1.8%
Multiple	n.a	10.2%

To conclude, the ETS section of the ASA remains highly segregated by race. Moreover, while there have been some gains in diversity in the discipline of sociology, these gains have not been achieved in ETS. More research needs to be conducted on understanding why there continues to be a loss of underrepresented faculty and student membership in the ETS section across advancing rank within the discipline. Towards this end the ETS Committee on Racial Diversity will be conducting a confidential survey available to all section members and follow-up interviews with those interested. We look forward to strengthening the ETS section by creating a racially conscious space with greater capacity to engage in the robust and engaged social science needed for the present environmental and intellectual climate. We also invite all members to share your ideas and concerns with us.

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