

Inclusivity and representation in College – US & Brazil

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Inclusion and representation are cornerstones of modern college culture; further, as colleges become increasingly diverse, students expect to feel safe and welcome. In spite of efforts to make all people feel embraced on their campuses, each college has a varying level of inclusion and representation. Given our recent trip to Brazil, we thought it would be interesting to highlight the unique ways in which both Brazilian universities and American institutions emphasize inclusion and representation. Additionally, following this comparison, certain improvements will be hypothesized.

Historically speaking, American universities have not always been locales of inclusion and representation. Case in point, prior to the mid-twentieth century, virtually no people of color were admitted to major universities. Further, it was only after legislation, like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965, that people of color began attending major universities (Williams 2023). With this backdrop, a picture can be painted on how colleges in the United States embrace inclusion and representation.

Given our position as Penn students, let us first begin by discussing the University of Pennsylvania's methods. Penn has a number of ways in which it promotes inclusion and representation. Firstly, on an admissions level, Penn recruits students from a multitude of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Penn 2025). Prior to 2025, this practice was common in many American universities; further, a study from 2022 by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that 30% of U.S. colleges and universities used race as a factor (NBER 2022). Similarly, on a campus level, Penn offers a wide variety of ways to engage with cultural identities with the LGBTQ+ center, Maaku, and La Casa Latina. By allowing marginalized students to have buildings that affirm their identities and create a sense of familiarity, the school vies to foster safety and community.

Brazilian universities also promote inclusion and representation albeit in somewhat different ways. Starting with the college admissions process, Law 12,711, which requires affirmative action policies, reserves at least 50% of enrollment slots for public education students, with specific racial sub-quotas for Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian students. In Brazil, much like the United States, this law has caused controversy and led to attacks on students who benefit from it. As for Brazilian universities, we decided to focus on The University of São Paulo (USP) as it has a similar respective prestige to UPenn. At USP,

several cultural centers exist, including *Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* (CEAA) and *Núcleo de Apoio à Diversidade Sexual* (NADS). CEAA is a center for Afro and Asian Brazilians or anyone who would like to learn more about Afro-Brazilian and Asian-Brazilian culture. NADS is USP's LGBTQ+ center (USP 2025).

Ultimately, the United States and Brazil have many similarities and some differences when it comes to inclusion and representation. Perhaps the largest difference is the way in which diversity practices impact admissions; moreover, Brazil uses a quota system to admit marginalized students whereas the United States, prior to 2025, employed affirmative action to its college admissions in a way that was not entirely disclosed to the public. So, what's next? Well, we feel that these systems are integral to the quality and validity of higher education. Moreover, without diverse backgrounds and perspectives, innovation and improvement will not occur in academic landscapes. Under the United States' new administration, an alarming amount of these policies are being rolled back in order to ensure "fairness"; however, if inequality still exists, one must wonder how protections and opportunities afforded to those affected by this inequality is "unfair". In Brazil, fortunately, inclusion and representation is still a major factor for admissions, allowing those from underprivileged backgrounds to soar high and reach their full potential.

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