Bridging the Gap: BME student achievement at UCL

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Aims

- Background
- BME project on Undergraduate student achievement at UCL 2014
- Outcomes
- Faculty of Brain Sciences Change Maker project
- Future directions
UCL BME Undergraduate Achievement Project 2014

• All of these people were involved!

• Teresa McConlogue (Senior Teaching Fellow in CALT), Shanell Johnson (Black and Minority Ethnic Students' Officer, UCLU), Dr Julie Evans (Faculty Tutor for Brain Sciences), Dr Alastair McClelland (Programme Director BSc Psychology), Dr Sylvia Vitello, Dr Matthew Jones and Dr Francina Clayton from the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences
Background

• Recent research has found a consistent achievement gap in terms of final degree grades between white and BME undergraduate students in the UK.

• This size of this gap varies but is around 17% - though smaller in Russell group universities and for some subject disciplines.

• The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU, 2013), analysing Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data for the 2011-12 academic year, reported that 71.5% of UK White students graduating 2011-2012 did so with a good degree (1\textsuperscript{st}/2:1) vs 53.8% of BME students.

• Differences between different BME groups, BME covers hugely diverse communities so crucial not to make generalisations.
What did we do?

- We looked at the final degree % mark for students who graduated from 2011-2013 in all faculties except Medical Sciences.

- This was complete data where ethnicity and degree mark were available - 7,542 students of a possible 8,742.

- We carried out some statistical analyses (ANOVA) looking at white vs BME achievement generally and then separately for UK white vs BME students.

- We looked at any differences in achievement between BME groups.

- We looked at non-completion rates for white vs BME students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Domicile Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. White</td>
<td>3117</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. African-Caribbean (AC)</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. South Asian</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Chinese (mainly non-EU)</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other Asian</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mixed: white and A-C</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Mixed: white and Asian</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Other (mixed, other ethnicity including Arab)</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4947</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What did we find?

• There was a small but statistically significant difference between the achievement of white students vs BME students (including international BME students), 66.2% vs 64.5%, though both cohorts would have been awarded the same degree class.

• When we looked at the data for UK students only, there was still a small but statistically significant difference between white vs BME students, 66% vs 64.8%.
What did we find?

• The size of the difference varied across Faculties with no difference for Arts & Humanities and Laws.

Brain Sciences: 1.6%  Built Environment: 3.6%
Engineering: 3.4%    Life Sciences: 2.6%
MAPS: 2%            SHS: 2.4%

• Completion rates were comparable, 6.9% of white students did not complete vs 6.7% BME
Interview data – why?

- In line with the evidence from previous literature, key was a lack of a feeling of belonging in some cases.

- Some students raised issues of curriculum not being inclusive, not reflecting issues of diversity, equality or discrimination.

- Other studies have shown that compared to white students some BME students may have more family and cultural obligations.

- Rigorous research is rare!
What did we do?

- Plan of action and guidance approved by UCL Education committee relating to
  - Annual monitoring of BME achievement statistics – now part of the ASER process.
  - Student experience now part of the compulsory Faculty Diversity and Equality plans
  - Curriculum development: Liberating the Curriculum steering group, ongoing.
  - Belonging interventions – e.g. BME alumni, mentors, films of BME students, ongoing.
  - Review BME student recruitment and retention, ongoing.
What is ChangeMakers?

• Enhancing the learning experience
• Working in partnership (staff-students)
• Innovation / new ideas
ChangeMakers / BME Project

Enhancing the student experience, academic achievement and support for career ambitions of BME students
Aims of project

• Build on previous quantitative research carried out at UCL through a qualitative approach

• Build on existing research from national policy reports and academic literature

• Obtain a richer insight into UK BME student issues

• Develop strategies and design interventions for any problems identified

• Explore UK BME issues with a larger group of students covering UG and PGT
What does the project entail?

- Collaboration with the UCLU BME Student Officer
- Two student leads
- Two focus groups
- Amazon vouchers for participants!
Exploring the BME student life cycle

Admissions

Graduating and beyond
Themes

• Experiences when applying to UCL
• Realities on arrival
• Curriculum
• Assessment
• Relations with staff (academic and admin)
• Social experiences / inclusivity and belongingness
• Perceptions and perceived differences
• Barriers to career progression including doctoral studies
What will we do with the findings?

- Disseminate findings to staff and students across the Faculty and the wider UCL community, including VP Education & Student Affairs
- Raise at central UCL committee level
- Use data collected to inform action plans, possibly through further staff-student collaborations and ChangeMaker projects
- Consider and develop ideas that can feed into the Faculty’s long term Equality and Diversity Strategy
- Look at exploring staff views to gain an alternative perspective
BME student experience

- Positive environment
- Misunderstandings – dealt with swiftly by existing checks and balances

My motivations for taking part in the project:

- Unique issues
- Proactivity
- Enhancement of future student experience