

17.7.2025

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**Title**

Measuring changes in institutional diversity: the US context / Michael S. Harris ; Molly K. Ellis

**Publication year**

2020

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education. - 79 (2020) 2, S. 345 - 360

**Inventory number**

49125

**Keywords**

Ausland : USA : Hochschulwesen allgemein ; Ausland : USA : Studenten, Studium, Lehre

**Abstract**

The level of diversity present in a national higher education system plays an important role in enabling the system to respond to a variety of demands from society. Within the US context, diversity is often hailed as a strength although research has found a consistent decline in institutional diversity for the last 40 years. This article uses data from 1989 to 2014 to compare the level of diversity present across American higher education. The article draws on institutional theory to understand how institutions change in respond to environmental pressures impacting institutional diversity. The findings demonstrate that institutional diversity has continued to decrease and demonstrates how institutional decisions impact overall diversity present in the system. To conclude, the article discusses the causes and potential concerns for national systems that experience decreased institutional diversity. An improved understanding of the current state of institutional diversity provides useful measures for evaluating national higher education systems and raises critical questions for the mission and activities of higher education institutions themselves. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)