

6-12-2014

Benefits of diversity on the pitch and in the classroom

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Recommended Citation

Hemesath M. 2014 June 12. Benefits of diversity on the pitch and in the classroom [blog]. Quad 136. [Accessed 2017 June 6]. <http://blogs.csbsju.edu/mhemesath/2014/06/12/benefits-of-diversity-on-the-pitch-and-in-the-classroom/>.

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Benefits of Diversity on the Pitch and in the Classroom



In honor of the World Cup which starts today, I thought it might be interesting to look at recent research on diversity using soccer data. In a variant of the sabermetrics craze which uses data to analyze baseball (made famous by statistician Bill James and the book and movie, *Moneyball*), political scientists Keith Ingersoll, Edmund J. Malesky and Sebastian M. Saiegh used data from the UEFA Champions League **to examine the impact of diversity on team performance**. They write:

Questions regarding the costs and benefits of diversity for organizational performance affect debates over immigration, university admissions and business hiring decisions. While almost all interlocutors recognize the benefits of diverse talents, perspectives and experiences, there are legitimate questions about the costs that can arise when working groups must negotiate multiple language and cultural roadblocks... The results are clear and straightforward: There is a positive relationship between diversity and performance that is visible even among the very best teams in the world. Teams that eschew international talent to cultivate solely homegrown are likely to come up short on the world's biggest stage.

(For those who are interested, one of the authors is interviewed on by the [Marketplace Business](#) desk.)

What is most interesting to me as an educator are the implications for diversity on campus. While one must be careful when generalizing and tasks in the workplace are often rather different than those on the soccer pitch, it does not seem too much of a stretch to think that students who are educated in a more diverse environment—ethnically, culturally, geographically, religiously, economically, politically etc.—might well be exposed to ways of thinking that challenge and strengthen their own and might be better prepared to work in diverse world. This argues for seeking students from diverse backgrounds whose presence on campus and in classrooms generates what economists call positive externalities for their classmates.

Like most colleges, we at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University have seen increasing diversity on our campuses in the past decade, a trend that is likely to continue in the years ahead to the benefit of all students.

As an aside, if you are in a World Cup pool and want to use these result, the authors write, "Brazil and Argentina are the most well-known beneficiaries of this arrangement, with national team starters in all of the top five world leagues. Other teams to watch, if we are right, are Belgium and France, which also will start a number of players with diverse international experience."

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | June 12th, 2014 | Categories: [Economics](#), [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).