



BY TRICIA BISOUX
ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA GODEASSI

How unconscious biases could be preventing business schools from reaching their goals for diversity.

BREAKING THROUGH BIAS

THE FOLLOWING RIDDLE has been circulating for many years: *A man and his son are both rushed to the hospital after a car accident. There, the doctor sees the boy and says, "I can't treat this patient. He's my son." How is this possible?*

Many who haven't heard it before are stumped by the question. And that's what makes it such a classic example of how the human brain is wired for biases related to race, gender, and other human characteristics, says Katie Lampley, director of the office of diversity and inclusion at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts. "I love this riddle, because we're now having people respond with, 'Oh, it's a gay couple!' They're proud that they're so progressive." That is, they are until she tells them the answer—and they must face the fact that it hadn't occurred to them that the doctor, the boy's mother, is a woman.

Even self-proclaimed feminists often jump to the conclusion that "doctor = man." Why? It happens because our brains have evolved to make quick situational assessments based on patterns they have perceived to be true in the past, driven by what we learn as children or what we've seen reinforced by our cultural contexts. For our human ancestors living out in the wild, this ability was a means of survival. In today's world, Lampley explains, it can lead to us to make decisions that disproportionately—and often unintentionally—favor the cultural majority. In the United States and Europe, that majority is most likely to be white, heterosexual, Christian, and male.

To illustrate how deeply seated hidden biases can be, Lampley points to Project Implicit, a nonprofit based at Harvard University in Cambridge,

Massachusetts. The nonprofit is a collaboration of researchers who study implicit social cognition, which they define as the thoughts and feelings we have that are beyond our conscious awareness and control. As part of their work, social scientists analyze data they collect from the Implicit Association Test (IAT), a tool originally created in 1998 by social psychologists from the University of Washington. The IAT has been adapted for Project Implicit's ongoing research by psychologists at Harvard, UW, and the University of Virginia. Designed to discover an individual's unconscious associations about gender, race, sexual orientation, or other attributes, the IAT has provided fascinating and sometimes unexpected insights into how unconscious bias works, says Lampley.

"Black people who take the test show high positive associations for white people, the same as white people who take the test. Gay people who take the test associate 'gay' with bad and

'heterosexual' with good, the same as heterosexuals who take the test," she explains. "This tool doesn't reinforce the idea that only certain groups are biased and others are not. It shows that we are all subject to bias, and in some way we all default to positive associations toward the majority, whatever the majority is."

As many business schools struggle to attract more women and minorities, diversity officers are growing more aware of the ways unconscious bias could be hindering their efforts. It's one thing to launch initiatives designed to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion; it's quite another to realize that the people carrying out those initiatives could be undermining these goals without even realizing it. Bolstered by a growing body of research, business and academic leaders are engaging in new conversations about the impact of unconscious bias—and adopting evidence-based strategies to better understand it, identify it, and counteract it.

PERCEPTION IS REALITY

In many ways, academia faces the same diversity challenges as the general business world, says Lisa Kepinski, founder and director of the Inclusion Institute, a Germany-based coaching and consulting firm focused on helping organizations increase the diversity of their workforces. And just like the companies she advises, business schools are subject to subtle yet pervasive biases that could be getting in the way of their goals.

"One issue could be that business schools don't feel inclusive for women and minorities, so these groups hold back," says Kepinski. "They lack confidence in the institution to help them realize their full potential."

Kepinski cites an example that Iris Bohnet includes in her book *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*. Bohnet, a professor at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, relates how, about ten years ago, Kennedy faculty were dismayed to realize that every portrait of a leader or alumnus displayed in

WHERE TO BEGIN

If business schools want to identify and counteract bias in their academic cultures, experts on the topic note that the following areas are great places to start:

Classrooms. A business school's classrooms are the spaces where faculty and students will spend a large amount of their time—which makes them crucial areas for bias mitigation. Which students do faculty members call on most? Which students speak the most? By observing classroom dynamics, business faculty might discover, for instance, that they call on men more than women, or that those from cultures that value individuality might speak up more than those from cultures that value conformity.

Melissa Thomas-Hunt of Vanderbilt University suggests that professors concerned about whether they're treating their students equitably might invite observers to their classrooms to provide objective feedback. Or, they could watch classroom recordings to see if, for example, they are unconsciously favoring men's voices over women's in discussions, or even one side of the room over the other. Once made aware of any personal bias, they can create workarounds to help them overcome it.

"I've found that I have certain blind spots in the classroom, so I now let my students know that from the beginning of the class," says Thomas-Hunt. "I tell them, 'You're in my blind spot, so if your hand has been up and I haven't called on you, you need to wave—I won't think you're being rude.'"

What's discussed is as important as who is discussing it, adds Brent Smith of Saint Joseph's University, particularly if business faculty facilitate discussions of real-world events. For instance, Smith notes that many students are aware that, in the world of sports, NFL player Colin Kaepernick began taking a knee during the U.S. national anthem to draw attention to the treatment of African Americans by police officers; this initial protest has grown into a larger statement as more NFL players started to kneel or lock arms while the anthem played. Such a news story, says Smith, presents "an opportunity to look at a very current event that has all kinds of ramifications in connection to marketing, to ethics, and to business and society."



their building featured a white male.

The portraits were chosen “un-thinkingly,” Bohnet says in “Designing a Bias-Free Workplace,” a July 16, 2016, interview with *Harvard Business Review*. Once faculty realized the discrepancy, they commissioned new portraits, including those of Ida B. Wells, a 19th- and 20th-century African American journalist and suffragist; and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president of Liberia, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and Kennedy School graduate. “By changing the artwork in the building, the school showed itself to be more inclusive rather than white male-dominant,” says Kepinski.

A person’s ability to realize his or her own unconscious biases is part of what Brent Smith calls “cultural competence.” Smith, an associate professor of marketing at the Haub School of Business at Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, defines this term as “the ability to recognize that culture is always a factor that influences how people perceive and respond to the

world.” An organization engages its cultural competence, then, when it recognizes that its culture has unconsciously defaulted to a status quo—in ways that could be sending a message to the world that is different from what it intended.

“Every organization has a culture, but if our community looks and feels the same as it did ten or 20 years ago, how diverse, how inclusive are we really? What have we learned in that time? What makes us look, feel, and sound different than we did X number of years ago?” Smith asks. By consciously making such then-and-now comparisons, he stresses, an organization can get a true gauge of how diverse it really is and how far it might still be from embracing a more inclusive worldview.

JUST ‘BEING DIVERSE’ ISN’T ENOUGH

Business schools’ efforts to attract and enroll more women and minorities are widespread and often well promoted—but they also might be incomplete.

Smith points out, for instance, that many schools prioritize diversity—but only narrow parts of it. In this case, academic leaders might notice that one demographic is underrepresented in the faculty or student body—women, say, or African Americans. In response, they might focus great attention on correcting that imbalance. But in doing so, they might pay far less attention to other underrepresented groups. “When you hyperemphasize one demographic,” says Smith, “you will likely marginalize others.”

This type of “bias by omission” can especially affect the LGBT community, according to Matt Kidd, executive director of Reaching Out MBA (ROMBA), a global association for LGBT MBAs. “I have yet to see a business school that has not said it is committed to diversity. But the reality is that diversity means a lot of different things to different people,” says Kidd. “Some folks include LGBT in that definition, but others do not. Because being LGBT is something that people can

Common language. Whether through workshops, conversations, or retreats, schools can help their faculty, students, and staff develop a common language around issues of diversity and bias, so that everyone is on the same page. For instance, more schools are raising awareness about referring to members of the LGBT community with their preferred pronouns. “Pronoun usage is an unconscious bias that many people don’t think about,” says Matt Kidd of Reaching Out MBA. “In general, faculty need to think about the language they use around gender and be conscious of the audience in the room.”

Commitment of resources. “The top leadership in educational institutions can be absolutely committed to putting metrics in place, but the individuals tasked with doing the work often do not have the capacity,” says Thomas-Hunt. This commitment requires attention to what staff members need to make a school’s goals happen, she emphasizes, whether it’s a redistribution of work to free up their time, the hiring of additional staff, or the allocation of extra funds.

Conversations. Surveys that ask students and faculty to share how they feel about the campus culture could be a school’s most valuable tool to gauge the impact of bias on campus, says Joelle Emerson

of Paradigm. “I advise schools to talk to current students from all backgrounds about what led them to go to business school, and then to ask them how they are experiencing the culture now,” she says. “If, for example, women express feeling less like they belong on campus than men, the school should design interventions to address that.”

Kidd would like to see business schools include conversations about LGBT during every student and faculty orientation, as part of diversity awareness activities. “Many schools have students from countries such as India or Indonesia, where identifying as LGBT is illegal—in some cases, you could be executed for it,” he says. “Talking about the value of the LGBT community is a pretty big deal.”

Thomas-Hunt agrees that if business schools truly want to unveil areas of concern, they should talk directly and regularly to the members of their communities. “If you have a student women’s organization, do you know to what degree it invites and includes a broad array of women to participate? Do international women feel welcome? Do minority women feel that the women’s organization is for them, or do they feel peripheral? That’s a piece of the conversation that business schools haven’t yet addressed very well.”

IT'S NOT EVIDENCE OF BIAS

EACH TIME A NONMINORITY IS PROMOTED OVER AN EQUALLY QUALIFIED MINORITY. BUT IF IT'S HAPPENING MANY TIMES OVER, IT'S TIME TO DIG DEEPER FOR SYSTEMIC UNCONSCIOUS BIAS.

'cover,' some think that maybe it doesn't deserve the same seat at the table as other pillars of diversity. When that's the case, that indicates bias."

It's a bias that has real consequences in terms of how many people identifying as LGBT pursue business education. Twenty-eight ROMBA affiliate schools that provided data to the organization for its "State of the LGBT MBA 2015–2016" survey reported that only 3.43 percent of students enrolled in their MBA programs, on average, were openly LGBT. While that's a slight increase (of nearly a half percent) over ROMBA's 2014–2015 data, it indicates that business schools have yet to reach this community in meaningful ways. "Compared to estimates of the general LGBT population," Kidd says, "that number is under the mark." By comparison, a 2016 Gallup poll finds that 7.3 percent of millennials—those individuals born between 1980 and 1998—identify as LGBT.

Business schools can run into yet another pitfall when they aim to recruit more diverse students and faculty, without also addressing hidden biases in their programs that could marginalize underrepresented groups once they arrive. After all, if those who do come to campus do not feel welcome, they are less likely to stay, let alone recommend the program to their peers.

Take just one prominent feature of business education: team projects. Most faculty take great pains to populate each student team with individuals from different backgrounds, so that students are exposed to a wide range of perspectives. But when unconscious bias slips into the process, underrepresented groups still could be at a disadvantage, says Melissa Thomas-Hunt, vice provost of inclusive excellence at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and a professor of management at its Owen Graduate School of Management. Thomas-Hunt's focus on diversity and inclusion grew from research in which she and her co-authors discovered "systemic patterns in the ways individuals were being

tapped—or not being tapped—to contribute" as part of team-based projects.

"Let's say that Melissa has underperformed, which is somehow congruent with the expectations I have of African Americans. Going forward, I'm going to see Melissa through that lens," Thomas-Hunt explains. In other words, an individual of a certain gender or race could exhibit the same behaviors as his or her teammates, but if just one of those behaviors corresponded with a race- or gender-based stereotype, that individual's work could be viewed as less valuable. Thomas-Hunt's research suggests that once a stereotype has been triggered, team members may no longer call on that person to contribute in meaningful ways.

Such findings suggest that efforts to build diverse teams and communities work best—or perhaps at all—when implemented alongside policies that address bias and debunk stereotypes.

In business education, nonprofits such as The PhD Project and the Consortium of Graduate Study in Management represent deliberate efforts to attract more minorities to careers as business academics. The work of these organizations is an important and necessary first step, says Smith of the Haub School. However, he emphasizes that the challenge of diversity does not stop at the point of hire, but rather continues throughout a professor's career, especially when it comes to advancement to leadership roles.

Smith points out that many professors are assigned to positions of leadership because someone with seniority spoke on their behalf. But minority faculty often do not have someone to speak for their talents, simply because their networks might not include those

making leadership decisions. As a result, their contributions might be overlooked. "There are a lot of us with talent, but so often our talent is not acknowledged when it comes to being asked to chair committees or take on a new initiatives," says Smith. "There just aren't that many of us at any level in higher ed, but especially in business schools."

Smith himself received one of his first introductions to business doctoral education while attending an information session offered by The PhD Project in the late 1990s. Soon after he came to the Haub School, he was the only black tenure-track faculty member in his department. Over time, he sought out administrative roles as he gained experience. Now that he is one of three minority faculty members, he mentors the others as much as he can. "As we move up, we need to reach back. For many of us, it takes an introduction from a known quantity who will say, 'Here's a capable person. Keep him on your radar,'" he says. "Yes, The PhD Project is a very important instrument that helps us get into academe, but once we're there, we face a whole new set of issues."

Smith is quick to emphasize that it's not evidence of bias each time a qualified nonminority is promoted over an equally qualified minority. But if it's happening many times over, "it's time to dig deeper, because that signals a systemic issue of unconscious bias when we look at the overall data and have to ask, 'Why are there still so few of us?' We can assume the nonminority was qualified, but was a minority qualified before the other person was ready? It might not be intentional, but it happens more often than we might be comfortable acknowledging. It's how unconscious bias rears its ugly head."



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PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT REACTIONS TO SEEING EVIDENCE OF THEIR BIASED THINKING. SOME MIGHT MAKE CHANGES, BUT SOME MIGHT GET ANGRY AT THE RESULTS.

COGNITIVE VERSUS STRUCTURAL BIASES

According to Lampley of Bentley, our decision making is largely affected by two kinds of biases. Only by addressing both types of biases can an organization reduce the impact they have on its culture and operations.

The first, *cognitive bias*, refers to the internal mental associations all human beings make, consciously and unconsciously, about all aspects of the world, from the food they prefer to the people they meet. Cognitive biases are deeply rooted in a person's family, culture, social status, religious affiliation, and nationality. In situations where someone must analyze information quickly, it can be almost impossible to excise cognitive bias from the thinking process.

Even so, one way to address cognitive biases is by simply making people aware of their default associations, perhaps through a workshop or use of tools such as the IAT. The goal, of course, is to inspire people to take steps to supersede their own personal biases. However, they will have different reactions to seeing evidence of their biased thinking. Some might immediately make meaningful behavioral changes, but some might even get angry at the results. "Then, you have individuals for whom it's eye opening," says Thomas-Hunt. "It causes them to think, 'Oh, I hadn't thought about that.' But they don't know what to do with it."

That's why it's equally important for leaders to identify and address the second type, *structural bias*, which refers to how an organization or institution sets up its processes and designs its culture and environment. "Even if we want to treat everyone equitably, structural biases could form barriers that prevent us from doing so," says Lampley. The good news is that, because they are external and procedural, structural biases can be much easier than cognitive biases to change.

Structural biases can appear anywhere in an institutional culture, but experts advise leaders to focus first on making small procedural changes in areas where

biases can do the most harm. For instance, faculty care a great deal about hiring and often seek to be involved in the selection of their future colleagues. For that reason, Thomas-Hunt suggests that schools embed anti-bias training in hiring workshops that are already in place. (See "Should B-Schools Be Hiring Blind?" on page 30.)

She points to another structural bias that might disproportionately affect women: Administrators often will ask female faculty members to take on ancillary assignments in service of the school, but turn to male faculty with more career-building, high-visibility assignments. Thomas-Hunt encourages administrators to take steps to counteract this tendency, so they can ensure that women are not disproportionately tasked with time-consuming but low-visibility service obligations. "When female faculty members have given all they have to give, they will start to pull back," she says. "That leaves students asking, 'Where are the female professors who can mentor me?'"

Kidd of ROMBA points to how business schools decide to target certain groups of applicants. In the case of LGBT, it might not be that schools have structural biases in place to disadvantage the members of this community, but simply that they have no programs designed to serve them directly. To address this gap, two years ago the organization launched the ROMBA Fellowship program. Each year, participating schools provide scholarships worth a minimum of US\$10,000 for up to two LGBT applicants. In addition, ROMBA delivers leadership content to these students throughout their two-year programs. So far, 68 students have been selected as ROMBA Fellows. This year, 41 business schools offered fellowships, up from 18 the first year.

The creation of the fellowships was a structural change that has inspired more schools to see the LGBT community as

an untapped source of talent, says Kidd. He adds, "We want to create more out leaders within business schools, who will become out alumni and spokespeople for the school, wherever they go."

Deciding where and how to adopt strategies to work around cognitive and structural interventions can be a singular challenge for organizations, says Kepinski. She hopes a project that she has launched with Tinna Nielsen, creator of the nonprofit Move the Elephant for Inclusiveness, will help business and academic leaders ease into the process. In what they call the Inclusion Nudges initiative, Kepinski and Nielsen have collected bias-busting best practices from researchers and practitioners on a dedicated website and in a guidebook for leaders. Because these behavioral "nudges" are field-tested and often easily implemented, the pair believes that organizations can use them to make significant progress in building diversity. (To see examples, read "Small Nudges for Big Changes" on page 26.)

MUTED POTENTIAL

Perhaps most alarmingly, underrepresented groups often respond to hidden bias by changing their behaviors and personalities in ways that help them conform to group norms—women might bow to pressure to act more traditionally "feminine" or members of minority groups might change their names to ones that sound more traditionally Caucasian. But this tendency can be self-defeating, says Kidd of ROMBA. In the LGBT community, for example, it can lead to many people "covering" their identities, because they believe doing so will make it easier for them to find jobs.

"The No. 1 question we hear, particularly from new MBA students, is, 'Why does it matter for me to be out, when I'm just looking to get a job?'" says Kidd.



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SMALL NUDGES FOR BIG CHANGES

It's easy to think that business schools or other organizations can achieve true diversity and inclusion only through large sweeping initiatives. But that's a myth, say Tinna Nielsen of Move the Elephant for Inclusiveness and Lisa Kepinski of the Inclusion Initiative. The pair emphasize that small interventions implemented in systemic ways can have the greatest impact on creating more inclusive cultures.

In 2013, Nielsen and Kepinski teamed up to found Inclusion Nudges, an online community dedicated to sharing best practices related to increasing diversity in business. As part of the initiative, they release annual editions of the *Inclusion Nudges Guidebook*. The 2016 edition includes more than 70 examples of nudges, shared by practitioners in a range of industries, to help people overcome unconscious bias against underrepresented groups.

Implementing just one nudge can make a difference, says Kepinski. But when companies implement multiple small nudges in mission-critical areas of their operations, they can transform their cultures.

The guidebook offers these three categories of nudges:

Feel-the-need nudges. These link directly to people's emotions and desire to do what's right by bringing their attention to unconscious biases that they can immediately see as unfair. For example, the guidebook mentions a company that wanted to start a sponsorship program for its female senior executives, but faced resistance from executives who believed they already treated men and women fairly. So, these executives were brought together and shown a photo of the 130 male and female employees who would be at the sponsorship level. They were asked, how many did they know? They responded with the names of many of the people pictured. Then, they were shown a photo that pictured only the women. The comparatively silent room inspired greater support for the program.

Other feel-the-need nudges might involve showing employees pictures of their organization's executive committee or partners to highlight a lack of diversity. Or, individuals might be asked to list all the famous leaders they can think of, as a way to see if their lists are diverse or if they reflect a limited worldview. "These nudges reveal to leaders hidden patterns where bias can crop up and interfere with their objectives for fairness and equity," Kepinski explains.

Process nudges. These focus on people's decision making. In another example from the guidebook, a company's leaders wanted to increase women's representation in its workforce. For their process nudge, they distributed paper glasses, or "gender lenses," to the members of its hiring committee. The prop served as a physical reminder for the committee members to be aware of any gender bias that might arise during their evaluations of candidates.

Another process nudge could be to remove identifying information regarding a job applicant's name and gender until later in the interviewing process. Yet another is to provide employees with



ongoing real-time performance feedback rather than to conduct annual performance reviews—this nudge helps avoid “recency bias,” in which supervisors take into account only their employees’ most recent work.

Framing nudges. These encourage people to reframe the way they look at the world by changing the language they use. For example, Kepinski explains that an organization might face more opposition than it expects if it asks its staff to “increase diversity,” especially among those who find that the phrase implies a preference for hiring women and minorities, rather than a desire to equalize the playing field. That kind of resistance was clearly illustrated in the now-infamous online post written by Google engineer James Damore, which came to light in August. In it, Damore rails against the company's diversity policy as misguided and preferential.

While companies always will face some opposition to their diversity-driven initiatives, they can reframe those initiatives in ways that better highlight the benefits of diversity and inspire greater buy-in. For instance, instead of setting goals to “increase diversity,” a company might set goals to “decrease homogeneity” or “increase performance by including more diverse perspectives.”

Nielsen points to another example of a framing nudge from the guidebook called “flipping the default.” One place where this nudge works is within committees deciding which employees in an organization deserve promotion. “Instead of making a list of candidates ‘who are ready’ and discussing why the committee thinks so, committees can choose the default stance that that ‘all are ready’ and then discuss why each candidate is not,” Nielsen says. This simple switch in mindset removes at least some bias from the process because it ensures that everyone is considered for advancement, not just a select few.

Nielsen and Kepinski would like all organizations—business schools included—to invest the time to apply inclusion nudges to their operations, and more generally, to learn more about the insights about bias coming from the behavioral and social sciences. “Too often people tend to think there is a quick fix—a ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution to mitigate bias and increase inclusiveness,” says Nielsen. “There is not!”

Designing inclusive organizations is a basic competency that leaders must learn, say Nielsen and Kepinski. They believe that business schools are in a great position to teach that vital 21st-century skill.

► **The 2016 edition of the 262-page *Inclusion Nudges Guidebook* is available for £22.99 (approximately US\$30), and the 2017 edition is scheduled for release in March 2018, at the same price. All proceeds go to support the Inclusion Nudges initiative. A shorter 40-page overview of the guidebook is available for free download. For information about the initiative and guidebook, visit www.inclusion-nudges.org.**

“But the reality is that it comes down to their happiness and performance on the job. Companies like Deloitte have done studies that show that when employees are covering like this, retention rates are lower, happiness is lower, and performance is lower.” More unfortunate, he adds, is that many companies are seeking out the diverse talent of LGBT individuals, “so if students aren’t self-identifying, they’re essentially walking past doors that are open for them.”

An even more dangerous aspect of hidden bias: Most of those affected by it have little recourse against it. In their article “Why Subtle Bias Is So Often Worse Than Blatant Discrimination,” which also appeared July 16, 2016, in *Harvard Business Review*, co-authors Eden King and Christen Jones cite a woman who sued her former employer for discrimination based on instances in which she had been assigned lesser work or pressured to be less assertive—and lost her case. King and Jones suggest that her experience illustrates how unconscious bias can essentially mute the careers of women and minority groups.

BIAS TRAINING IN B-SCHOOLS

But there is good news. Because of the complexities surrounding bias, many business and academic leaders are seeking external help to address the problem directly. They are turning not only to the latest research highlighting best practices in fighting bias, but also to firms that specialize in addressing hidden bias and building more inclusive organizations.

For instance, Paradigm, a consulting firm based in San Francisco, California, offers assessments, workshops, and other resources to help its clients eliminate bias from their operations. So far, Paradigm lists organizations such as Pinterest, Udacity, and *The New York Times* among its clients. This past summer, Paradigm’s founder and CEO Joelle Emerson worked with a business school for the first time, when she co-taught “Building Diverse and Inclusive Organizations,” a two-credit, ten-day workshop

for MBAs at Stanford Business School. The company plans similar efforts with other business schools as well.

“Leadership engagement is absolutely essential to designing more inclusive organizations,” says Emerson. “This kind of training should be in the core curriculum of every business school. Business schools are a great intervention point to get future leaders thinking strategically about inclusion, diversity, and unconscious bias.”

That said, she recognizes that b-school administrators might be so overwhelmed by the complexities involved in increasing diversity and inclusion, they might fail to make bias training a priority. But just because the problem of bias is complex, she says, doesn’t mean the solutions need to be.

“Many of the companies we work with are so consumed with what goals are the ‘right’ goals to meet, they don’t effect any change at all. I’m guessing this will be the same for many business schools. Should the goal be linked to the population in your community? Should it be linked to graduation rates? When we partner with clients, we help them figure out what the right metrics are,” says Emerson.

“You can overcomplicate this. At a minimum, set goals for improvement. For example, if 10 percent of your student body is made up of black and Latino students, set a goal to make that 15 percent for next year. When considering the entire student experience, look at admissions rates to see how those vary across different demographic groups and think about what you can do to reduce those disparities.”

Thomas-Hunt of Vanderbilt would like to see more training to help business schools look for bias much earlier in the educational timeline. Too often, she stresses, business schools focus so much on diversity in their graduate business programs, they miss the unconscious signals women and minorities receive during their high school and undergraduate years about potential careers in business. “It isn’t unconscious bias

in graduate business programs that is keeping the rate of women’s enrollment below 50 percent,” says Thomas-Hunt. “It starts a lot sooner.”

Business schools might need the most guidance when it comes to addressing unconscious bias in their curricula, says Smith of the Haub School. Accrediting bodies such as AACSB and EFMD might even need to push the issue “to make sure we’re infusing these issues, this content, into our courses,” he argues.

He calls on all business educators and leaders to examine how they can personally address bias within their own spheres of influence. “We all need to do what we can do in our space, whether it’s in hiring, or in deciding promotions, or in giving people opportunities to lead. We all need people near us who can help us recalibrate our radar when necessary. That’s all part of cultural competence,” Smith says. “We all need to be asking, ‘How diverse is our circle of colleagues? Who signals for me what’s happening? Who’s my barometer and sounding board? Who will make sure we are continually monitoring how we’re performing when it comes to diversity and inclusion?’”

But most important, says Thomas-Hunt, is for business schools and businesses to keep doing this work. “We have so much information coming at us, we simply can’t be mindful of bias at all times,” she says. “That’s why we need processes that hold us accountable, that allow us to evaluate all candidates the same way, call on students in the classroom equitably. We must create these checkpoints so that we don’t need a constant script running in our heads about whether we are seeing things in a biased way.”

With the right strategies in place, these experts say that we might all be better equipped to sidestep our unconscious biases and make more deliberate decisions. In business education, doing so could make the difference between business schools that are striving to become more diverse and inclusive and business schools that already are. **D**

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