A photograph of a diverse group of college students walking on a campus. The students are of various ethnicities and ages, some looking towards the camera and others looking away. They are wearing casual clothing like hoodies, jackets, and backpacks. The background is slightly blurred, showing more students and trees.

**Many Boston campuses reflect new levels of diversity, with more international students than ever before.**

But at Boston's elite universities, the percentage of black student enrollment has barely budged in 35 years.

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BOSTON. RACISM. IMAGE. REALITY. COLLEGES

# LOST ON CAMPUS, AS

# COLLEGES LOOK ABROAD

SPOTLIGHT-LOGO CREATED WITH SKETCH. THE SPOTLIGHT TEAM  
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2017

*The series was reported by Nicole Dungca, Akilah Johnson, Liz Kowalczyk, Andrew Ryan, Adrian Walker, Todd Wallack and editor Patricia Wen. Today's story was written by Dungca.*

*Note to our readers: Race is one of the most important issues facing Boston. Because of that, the Globe has made this story free and available to everyone.*

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One day this fall, Rachel Domond, a third-year student at Northeastern University, conducted a counting exercise that has become all too familiar for many African-American students. She sat on the red couches on the second floor of the Curry Student Center and scanned the room for others who looked like her.

It didn't take long to count. It never does.

"I see one black person over there," she said, motioning across the room to a group of about 40 students. "But for the most part, I see white faces, and I see all of these international students."

For many black students in Boston, the word "diversity" is taking on a global, multicultural meaning that has little to do with them. Boston has become a leader in attracting foreign students, but at the same time it lags behind other parts of the country when it comes to enrolling black college students from closer to home.

In this Athens of America, packed with top colleges, the enrollment of African-American students in Greater Boston's universities was less than 7 percent in 2015, notably less than most other major metro areas, according to the most recent federal data on students at every level. Nationally, the average for black enrollment is 11 percent.

At the 10 largest private universities that give this region its renowned reputation in higher education, it was even lower: about 5 percent.

Perhaps most troubling: In some universities, the percentage of African-American student enrollment has barely budged since 1980.

In 1980 at Boston University, African-Americans were 4 percent of the student body — and 35 years later, it was still the same.

In the same year, African-Americans made up 5 percent of the student body at Harvard University—and the latest federal data show no change.

WHITEINTERNATIONALBLACKHISPANICASIANOTHER  
19802015

At Northeastern University, the percentage of African-Americans declined.

Meanwhile, international recruitment has become Boston-area universities' new growth industry, with those students already representing more than twice the percentage of black students.

The Globe Spotlight Team examined Boston-area universities' enrollment patterns as part of its exploration into why Boston is seen nationally as a city unfriendly to black people. It looked at the role area universities play in educating a critical mass of African-American graduates — people who could, as in other cities, form the next generation of civic and political leadership. It found that Boston-area universities are not producing that critical mass.

The reason? Some area universities do not appear to have shown the will or creativity required to aggressively recruit black students, or simply have not made it the kind of priority that recruiting international students has become. Less easy to measure is whether Boston's high costs, unwelcoming reputation, and scarcity of other black students on campuses here discourages them from the start.

Either way, the city loses.

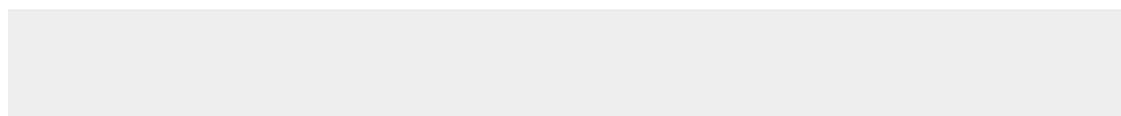
## Diversity of a different sort

Students such as Chantel Haigler, 18, question whether her university — Northeastern — has skewed priorities, which only reinforces alienation from the black students whom administrators say they care so much about recruiting and retaining.

Northeastern's enrollment of international students has more than tripled over the past decade. Three in 10 students last year hailed from abroad, with many from China and India who can pay full private tuition.

“The school likes the ‘diversity’ that gives them the status to claim they’re diverse, while getting the money from these students to fund the school the way they need to,” said Haigler, a first-year student from New York. “Bringing in more black kids would cost them more money because in the end, many of us can’t afford these schools because of institutional issues. So why spend more when you can get diversity and get money at the same time?”

The intense recruitment of international students has always been a touchy subject. Universities say that bringing foreign students into US campuses is part of helping American students adjust to a globalizing workforce, but critics of this view say international students are primarily money-makers for schools.





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In an ideal world, there is no reason recruiting international students automatically comes at the cost of black enrollment. But in this era of limited resources, critics still wonder whether there's a connection between the aggressive recruitment efforts for students abroad and the low numbers of black students.

College officials deny aggressive recruitment of international students diminishes a robust commitment to boosting minorities from within the United States and say both goals can be pursued rigorously at the same time.

“It’s not a zero-sum game,” said Michael Armini, senior vice president at Northeastern. “Recruiting students is important across the US and around the world. One doesn’t come at the expense of the other.”

But some metrics can raise questions. At Boston University, for example, two admissions officers are dedicated to developing plans for recruiting underrepresented minorities for all undergraduates. Meanwhile, seven people — one director and six admission representatives — are dedicated to international admissions, according to the university’s website.

The notion that black people in Boston are getting left behind, even amid

growing diversity, bothers such people as Carol Fulp. “We like to think of ourselves as a ‘global city’ and unless we provide opportunity for all citizens of our city, we’re going to lose out to other cities that are even more progressive and even more diverse,” said Fulp, the president of The Partnership, an organization dedicated to supporting a diverse workforce in the city.



Rachel Domond, a student at Northeastern University, says she often thinks about how few black students are on campus. (Suzanne Kreiter/Globe Staff)

While some studies show that Boston has a hard time keeping college graduates of all races — blacks and whites leave at about the same rate — Census data on millennials suggest Boston fares especially poorly in boosting its population of young black adults, graduates or otherwise.

For every black millennial added to the region from 2010 to 2015, more than two whites were added, along with nearly two Asians and more than two Latinos, according to an analysis by William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, a nonprofit research group in Washington, D.C.

Black students say they are reminded daily of the lack of diversity.

“You start looking at it, and you start saying, ‘Are you guys not making an effort? Why aren’t more black people coming to BC?’ ” said Aadon Penny, who graduated from Boston College with an MBA in 2016 and is now in New York. “They advertised the program as so diverse, but the diversity in Boston was so different. They’re building up diversity in some ways, but it really doesn’t feel that way.”

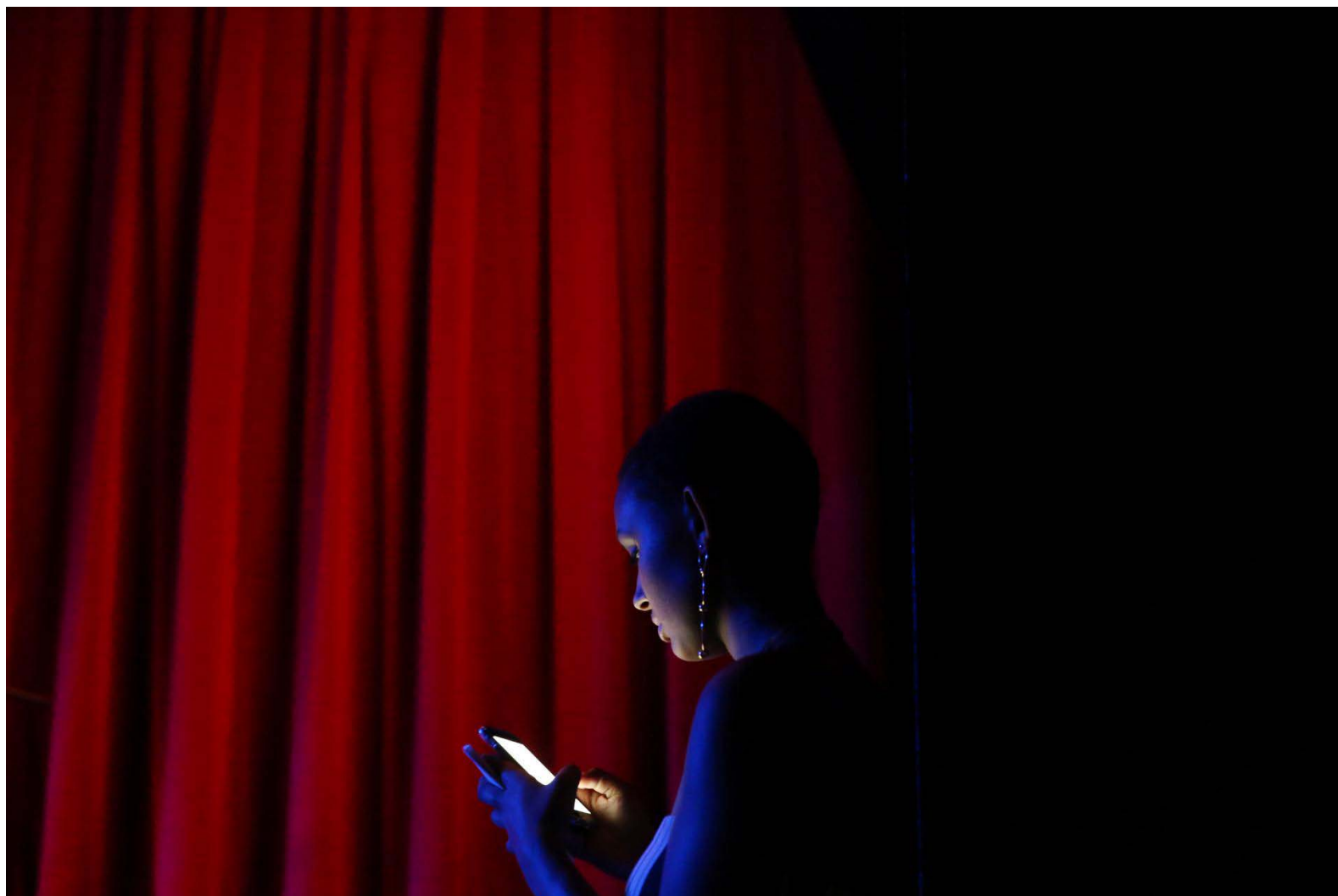
The efforts that schools make to recruit foreign students are substantial. At Northeastern, the university began a “pathways program” to guarantee foreign students admission if they could pass intensive English language classes — and without taking the SATs and ACTs that are required for American students. Harvard administrators took frequent visits to China, where the interest for American college educations had exploded.

Besides a boost in diversity, the increase in international students has meant more full-tuition revenue, because foreign students don’t qualify for need-based financial aid at many schools. In contrast, African-American and Latino-American students disproportionately rely on offers of financial aid.

Administrators say they’re not just chasing money from international students. In fact, a Harvard spokeswoman said 75 percent of its international undergraduate students receive need-based financial aid.

Northeastern says that in 2016, the school had a number of international students from such countries as Ethiopia and Nigeria, which added to the diversity of school.

Many black students say they appreciate seeing campuses that are less exclusively white. Northeastern reports that in 2016, its percentage of black students was 5 percent, reversing a downward trend from the latest federal data.



Eden Desta, vice president of the Northeastern Black Student Association, prepared to introduce a performer during “Kickback” at AfterHours, a venue on campus. (Craig F. Walker/Globe Staff)

Schools also point out that they’ve grown their Asian-American and Latino-American populations in recent years. More American students also identify as multiracial, a category that the federal government started

counting in 2008. Of Northeastern's American students in 2016, for example, 3 percent were multiracial.

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How can universities recruit more black students to Boston?

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your thoughts and  
experiences

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But critics of aggressive international recruitment persist. At a recent conference in Boston, in front of thousands of high school counselors and admissions officers, a professor from the University of Southern California lamented how colleges will “go to the ends of the earth” to recruit star athletes or wealthy international students. But he said they have a limited playbook when it comes to finding more black students, especially those who are not among the most elite minority students with the best grades and SAT scores who are intensely sought after by top schools.

“International students are often full-paying students, and there’s an economic incentive for institutions to recruit them,” said professor Shaun Harper, who has studied the achievement of black and Latino men in higher education. “It enhances their brand.”

## Campus culture

Although Boston universities enroll a relatively small percentage of black students, the collective number still reaches into the tens of thousands.

Those students — lured by glossy marketing brochures showing ivy-lined campuses full of students of all races laughing on the quad — flow into Boston each fall.

But they soon realize they are part of a small population on campus — one of the reasons that may drive some black students away from enrolling here.

Fresh from their first day of classes this September, freshmen slowly filed into a meeting of the Northeastern Black Student Association in the John D. O'Bryant African-American Institute, named after the first black member of the Boston School Committee. They were there for advice.

After Pictionary and pizza, the new students turned their attention to upperclassmen telling them to reach out to professors, study abroad, and regularly check the online syllabus.

But they were also honest about the subject that united them: What it was like to be black at Northeastern.



Rose Ajegwu embraced James Tukpah during the Northeastern Black Student Association's "Kickback" event. The group tries to unite black students, holding meetings that sometimes include frank discussions on what it means to be black on campus. (Craig F. Walker/Globe Staff)

**They laughed about their favorite barbershops or hair braiders, and the older students hinted at the kind of subtle, offensive comments that would be familiar to any black student: Are you on a sports scholarship? You're really a student here? Do you think medical school is really for you?**

**Sitting in the front of the room, one junior told them to stay strong together.**

**"The little microaggressions will eat at you," said Kyumon Murrell, a 21-year-old from Long Island. "And if you don't have that support network, it**

will crush you.”

The Globe spoke to more than four dozen students and alumni from Boston-area schools, and many had similar experiences: While they were grateful for their educations, they felt the isolation of being the only black student in classes, they questioned how to fit in at overwhelmingly white campuses, and they sometimes experienced overt racism that made them ready to leave Boston.

Colleges have long known such issues exist. In 2011, a Boston College survey revealed to administrators that black students, compared to students of other racial groups, were the most dissatisfied with their time at Boston College.

The same survey, an administrator said, revealed that many white students were “tired of talking about diversity.”

The lack of black faces isn’t apparent just in the student population. At nearly every school in the region, the proportion of black professors is even smaller than its proportion of black students.

At Boston University, Roscoe Giles, an engineering professor who is black, said that black students say it’s not uncommon for them to go four years without having a professor that looked like them. At his institution, 2.6 percent of the more than 2,500 full-time instructional staff were black in 2015, according to federal data.





Boston University engineering professor Roscoe Giles, one of the few black faculty members in his department, says that black students have told him that they could go through four years on campus without having a black professor. (John Tlumacki/Globe Staff)

**Giles was part of a 2016 task force that focused on diversifying the faculty, and its final report described a culture that included “subtle vestiges and overt expressions of racism and ethnic discrimination” and noted how the region’s high cost of living could hurt retention.**

**“When there is low representation of yourself, it becomes hard for people who are coming in and considering coming to widely identify that the conditions exist for them to be successful,” he said.**

**Some black students worry that they’re losing spaces and traditions that have helped them adjust. Sernah Essien, a Boston University senior in charge of its black student union, lamented that the university didn’t hold**

its annual reception for black students this year. Instead, the school invited various multicultural organizations, the College Republicans, and several fraternities to a larger group event. A Boston University spokesman didn't say why such changes were made.

Others struggle with blatant racism. At Boston College this fall, hundreds of students rallied on the campus after someone defaced a sign to say "Black Lives Don't Matter." And at nearby Salem State University, an anonymous vandal wrote a message telling a black person to die, using the n-word.

Melissa Potter Forde, who left New York City to attend Northeastern, recalls being taken aback when a classmate handing out Valentines asked her about whether she would want one with a "colored" Disney princess on it. She remembered waiting in vain for cabs after nights out, only to be told that many of them don't pick up black people. It was far from the carefree sanctuary for college kids that she had imagined.

"I had the impression that it was this liberal city and that the race relations were on par with Los Angeles or New York," said Forde, who graduated from Northeastern in 2006, but finished her last semester in New York. "But I realize there's still a time of evolution that's still taking place in the city. Racism was a big part of why I left."



Boston College seniors Maria Guerra (left) and Araba Mantey comforted each other during an opening prayer at a march and rally at Boston College in Chestnut Hill this fall. The event was held to protest racism after a “Black Lives Matter” sign was defaced on campus. (Craig F. Walker/Globe Staff)

## Best practices

There are plenty of reasons Boston-area colleges must work harder than schools in other regions to attract African-American students. For starters, Boston has a smaller black population to draw from, compared to other cities. It’s expensive to live here. Boston’s national reputation does not help. Nor does the dearth of black students and faculty on campus.

Yet, with a focused effort and a little creativity, drastically increasing the

proportion of black students is certainly possible. Other metro areas, particularly those with larger black populations, have demonstrated how it can be done.

Federal statistics show that African-American students make up about 12 percent of enrollment in universities in the Chicago area; 13 percent in Philadelphia; 22 percent in Washington, D.C.; 20 percent in Miami; and 32 percent in Atlanta. Of the top 10 metro areas in the country, only Los Angeles has a smaller proportion than Boston. It has 6 percent black enrollment, one percentage point lower than our region.

At least one selective private school in Massachusetts has found a way to match those numbers.

Amherst College, a small liberal arts institution with about 1,850 undergraduates about two hours away from Boston, counts black students as nearly 12 percent of its student body.

While Amherst educates far fewer students than larger universities do, its minority recruitment efforts stand out. Officials there attribute some of their success to longstanding generous policies that have eliminated loans for all students who need financial aid. But it's more than money: Officials say they also pay for travel for many prospective students to visit the campus, even before they apply, and they make sure to visit many low-income and majority-minority high schools regularly.

Some Boston-area colleges are using some of those techniques, to good advantage, particularly at the undergraduate level.

Part of the growth of Boston University's African-American enrollment in its freshman class this past year — to 4.3 percent — resulted from a

financial aid policy similar to Amherst's: giving enough aid to most low-income undergraduate students to ensure they wouldn't need to take out loans to attend. Tufts and MIT have implemented similar measures.

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*“ We like to think of ourselves as a ‘global city’ and unless we provide opportunity for all citizens of our city, we’re going to lose out to other cities that are even more progressive and even more diverse, ” said Carol Fulp, president of The Partnership, an organization dedicated to a diverse workforce in the city.*

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But that's still a step behind Amherst, which takes away loans for all students on financial aid and largely replaces them with grants. Out of the dozens of four-year colleges in the metro area, only Harvard appears to do the same.

Officials at Harvard were reluctant to comment on its recruitment of black students or its current involvement in a US Department of Justice investigation related to race. That investigation focuses on whether it has discriminated against Asian-Americans. They directed the Globe to its latest first year undergraduate enrollment figures from this fall, which classified 13.2 percent of the students as black, though that also includes multi-racial students. This figure differs from how the federal government reports university racial statistics.

Another step aimed at boosting minority faculty hiring and student enrollment is the appointment of a senior academic administrator with authority for diversity issues. BU took that step this year, appointing a

provost for diversity and inclusion. A task force at the university reported that 11 of 16 other similar colleges across the country — including Northeastern — had already done something similar.

Some schools, such as Boston College, also offer summer programs that provide extra tutoring as a way to make sure that students who enter college succeed toward graduation.

But critics say such initiatives won't, on their own, solve recruitment issues. Advocates for more diversity in higher education point to colleges' obsession with national rankings as part of the problem. Overreliance on those rankings can systematically shut out many black students, they say.

In the widely read U.S. News & World Report rankings, standardized test scores, grade point averages, and the percentage of alumni donors are some of the most important criteria for general rankings. Student and faculty racial diversity are not.

Every year, schools continue to rely on the SATs and ACTs as some of the primary gatekeepers for college — even though many black students, disproportionately educated in lower-performing public schools, score below the desired scores required for admission.

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The differences are stark: A Brookings Institution study estimated that on

the math portion of the SATs, roughly 6 percent of whites and a quarter of Asians who took the test scored at least a 700 out of an 800 scale in 2015.

By comparison, only about 1.7 percent of Latino test-takers are estimated to have done the same. And black students, who made up about 13 percent of test-takers, were even less likely to score that high: About 1 percent scored at least 700, according to estimates.

While some research has pointed to SAT scores predicting college success, one large 2014 study has shown that high school grades can be a more important measure for predicting how well a student will do. The study used data from several schools that no longer require SAT scores for admission — an option that some hope will help more minorities and low-income students get into college.

“The hardest part, by far, is getting them in,” said Marvin Loiseau, a former Babson College admissions officer who is now a dean of recruitment at the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology in Boston.

## What next

The question is whether universities will make black enrollment more of a priority — and whether, over the next many years, that would help change the view of Boston as an unwelcoming place.

It's no small task. When Avery Bullock, a University of Virginia senior originally from the South, attended a Massachusetts General Hospital program meant to encourage minorities to pursue medicine, she recalled hearing vague warnings about the city from her aunt, who told her to keep

racism “in the back of her head.”

She kept it mind when she and a group of black friends were thrown out of a jazz club for not buying drinks, she said, even though a white couple hadn't done the same and got to stay. Or when a black physician told her program that he had been called the n-word twice in as many days. The whole experience made her wary of returning to Boston for medical school, she said.

Meanwhile, many of the black students who have enrolled here say they are working to be heard on campus. This spring at Harvard University, a group of black students organized the first “Black Commencement” across all graduate schools at Harvard University. Hundreds of black students gathered with friends and family near the law school, clad in dark robes and colorful stoles made of traditional African kente cloth.





Graduates listened to the master of ceremonies as they took part in the Black Commencement at Harvard University in Cambridge in May. Students attended the ceremony, designed to celebrate their unique struggles and achievements at the elite institution, which has been grappling with its historical ties to slavery. (Keith Bedford/Globe Staff)

**Looking out at his peers on a sunny May day for the occasion, Duwain Pinder, a Harvard Business School graduate who spoke at the commencement, candidly talked about his feelings about the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. He made people laugh when he said they have all had to explain that Africa isn't a country. And he returned to the "microaggressions" so commonly associated with higher education, black students, and Boston — but this time, there was a tinge of hope.**

**"We have endured the constant questioning of our legitimacy and our capacity," he said. "And yet, here we are."**

He paused, and the black graduates applauded.

Are Boston's universities more diverse than they were 35 years ago? Each dot represents 1 percent of students in...



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Source: US Department of Education. The data include schools that offer at least a bachelor's degree or above and exclude students who did not report ethnicity. In 1980, "other" includes Native American students. In 2015,

"other" includes Native American, Hawaiian, and multiracial students. Students who identify as both Hispanic and another race are counted in Hispanic category. Numbers may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

To contact the Spotlight Team working on this project, write to [race@globe.com](mailto:race@globe.com) or contact the writer of this story at [nicole.dungca@globe.com](mailto:nicole.dungca@globe.com).

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# A BETTER BOSTON? THE CHOICE IS OURS

*Available Saturday, December 16,  
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