

Campus Climate Survey, 2008 Summary Report

Under the direction of the College Diversity Roundtable, and co-chairs Norman Burnett and Beth Olivares, the College and the Eastman School of Music completed a campus climate assessment for diversity in the spring of 2008. The purpose of this assessment was to take a snapshot of undergraduate student experiences on our campuses at this particular point in time. Because neither the College nor Eastman has engaged in such a survey in quite some time, our understanding of the ways in which our students perceive the climate is anecdotal and incomplete. The results being reported here refer only to students in the College.

The results of the 2008 assessment are a starting point for discussion and for educating ourselves and our students about the community in which we live and work. We do not intend to publish this data. Neither do we have the ability to make any particularly useful comparisons between us and our peer institutions; such data is not available. However, what the data does allow are some comparisons among and between subsets of our own students, and a somewhat more nuanced understanding of some of their backgrounds, experiences, and belief systems. Our plan is to use this survey (or a similar instrument) every second year, so that we can begin to understand trends in students over time.

A total of 1,251 College students (30.4% of our undergraduate population) completed the campus climate assessment. No group of students was over- or under-sampled in the survey; the class, gender, and ethnic breakdown of respondents is roughly equivalent to their representation in the university.

The assessment asked respondents about their prior experience with diversity, peer relationships, camaraderie among racial/ethnic groups, their attitudes towards diversity programs and policies, intergroup relations, and their academic and co-curricular experiences at the university. Questions also addressed whether or not respondents had experienced harassment while at the university. The domains of diversity that were measured included: gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political viewpoint, socioeconomic status, and disability. The assessment contained 175 questions, including a number of open-ended questions, resulting in a very rich set of information about our students. Some of the more salient results include:

- Prior experiences with diversity: Just under 60% of respondents indicated that prior to coming to the university, the majority of their close friends and the communities in which they lived were similar to them in regards to ethnic/racial background. These responses did not vary substantially by race of respondent.
- Peer relationships: overall, 74% report feeling accepted by students at this university; 58% indicate that it is easy to make new friends here. These responses did not vary substantially by race of respondent.
- Intergroup relations and camaraderie among racial/ethnic groups: overall, 63% report that there is a high level of respect at this institution for students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. However, the response to this question, and several others in this subset, varies substantially by race: 58% of Asian students; 38% of Black students; 67% of White students; and 47% of Hispanic students report a high level of respect.
- Attitudes towards diversity programs/policies: Overall, approximately 20% of students report being "highly resentful" of special consideration for minority students in admissions, financial aid and academic support programs. However, this is another area in which responses vary substantially by the race of the respondent: approximately

4% of Black, 13% of Hispanic, 15% of Asian, and 22% of White students report being highly resentful of such consideration. In their answers to open-ended questions within the survey, a number of students across ethnicities betrayed a relative naiveté regarding the university's admissions and financial aid practices, which will be addressed in a number of educational forums.

- Academic experiences: the overwhelming majority of students surveyed report classroom environments free of racial tensions (97.3%); being welcome in class (98.1%); and being educated in classes that encourage multiple views and perspectives (97.2%). However, as in other areas, some responses vary substantially by sub-population: for example, 19.7% of Black students report feeling isolated when group work is required in class, vs. 3.8% of White students. 31.7% of Black, and 17.5% of Hispanic students report being expected to speak on behalf of other people of their race in class, vs. less than 1% of White students. See following for additional responses that relate to the classroom experience.
- Impact of campus diversity on development and learning: 87% of respondents indicate that experiences on campus have helped them develop a belief that learning about people who are different is valuable. 85% believe that their experiences with diversity have prepared them to work in diverse places.
- Harassment: 12.6% of students reported having had what they would define as a harassment experience; the overwhelming majority of those instances took the form of verbal remarks that came from other students. The reported harassment was predominantly based on "other" (31%), along with gender (27.7%), and race/ethnicity (16.1%). A number of students indicated that they chose "other," because the experience was both gender and sexuality, or gender and racially-motivated. A flaw in the survey was that students could only indicate one type of harassment.

The main concerns voiced by students in the open-ended responses have to do with misperceptions of "Affirmative Action" in admissions; the self-segregation of students by race; and a constellation of social justice and equity issues including the perceived overrepresentation of undereducated minority employees in food and building service worker positions.

Data collected from this assessment will form the basis for productive conversations and educational programs for students, including resident adviser training; a day of campus climate conversations on January 19th, and other programs that will be developed by the students themselves.

Because of the length and depth of the instrument, further analysis is warranted, and the data can be queried by sub-population. However, in order to protect confidentiality, answers from any group with fewer than 30 respondents cannot be queried, and answers to all of the open-ended questions will remain protected. Additional data is available from Beth Olivares (bolv@admin.rochester.edu), if you would like to review it.