Experiencing Diversity at UD: Race/Ethnicity (*Volume 1*)

Executive Summary

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Introduction

In Fall 2015, a University of Delaware student became alarmed by what she perceived to be a noose hanging from a tree in front of Mitchell Hall. Others saw the same possibility and contacted the campus police. Although an investigation determined that the objects hanging from the tree were the remnants of lanterns from a UD festival welcoming international students, the possibility of a noose was troubling—it was a reminder of both a racist past and continuing racialized experiences on campus.

Although the noose incident contributed, this campus climate survey is part of UD's ongoing Inclusive Excellence strategy for diversity [Inclusive Excellence action plan], led by the Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity (VPD), the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) and the Center for the Study of Diversity (CSD). The DLE survey was undertaken to provide information that could support ongoing efforts to impact climate, culture and institutional change at UD.

This Report highlights the findings of the Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey, and provides recommendations for strengthening the University of Delaware's campus climate for Inclusive Excellence.

Survey Participants

The DLE survey was distributed to all 17,575 registered undergraduate students on the Newark campus in spring 2016. Respondents to the DLE survey (N = 3,696, 21.2% of total population) were slightly more diverse (see Figure 1), and includes a higher percentage of females (68.1% v. 57.7%) than the overall UD student population. The responses were weighted based on gender and race to account for the disproportionality and reflect the characteristics of the UD student population.

Further, most are full-time (95.2%) and are representative of all levels of college standing: 1st year (25.1%), 2nd year (24.3%), 3rd year (21.8%), 4th year (25.0%), and 5th year/beyond (3.9%). Most participants are traditional college aged (95.9%) and are continuing generation university students (82.8%).

Campus climate

In this survey, Campus climate refers to psychological and social characteristics of students' perceptions and experiences of UD. The DLE survey was developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA, and has been administered to over 200 schools across the country over the last six years. The DLE is organized in four sections:

Campus Climate: The first section is the formal assessment of campus climate, consisting of the nine variables, each assessed with multiple items. Following are sample statements for each variable:

- ***Sense of Belonging***— "I feel a sense of belonging to this campus."
- ***Academic Validation***— "Felt that my contributions were valued in class."
- ***General Interpersonal Validation***—"Faculty believe in my potential to succeed academically"
- ***Institutional Commitment to Diversity***— "Has a long standing commitment to diversity."
- ***Positive Cross-Racial Interaction***—"Had meaningful and honest discussions about race/ethnic relations outside of class."
- ***Negative Cross-Racial Interaction***—"Felt insulted or threatened because of my race/ethnicity."
- ***Discrimination and Bias***—"Heard insensitive or disparaging remarks from faculty"
- ***Harassment***— "Threats of physical violence."
- ***Conversations across Difference***— "From a socioeconomic class (religion/sexual orientation etc.) different from your own."

Institutional Practices: The second section assesses students' perception of campus practices and their engagement in opportunities for diverse interactions.

- ***Curriculum of Inclusion***— "Opportunities for intensive dialogue between students with different backgrounds and beliefs."
- ***Co-Curricular Diversity Activities***— "Attended panels or debates about diversity issues."
- ***Navigational Action***— "Since entering this college, how often have you utilized academic advising?"
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Student Learning Outcomes: This section obtained self-reported assessments of academic learning practices and outcomes as well as other indications of active citizenship and attitudes about being a critical and ethical member within a diverse society.

- ***Habits of Mind***— "Seek solutions to problems and explain them to others."
- ***Integration of Learning***—"Apply concepts from courses to real life situations
- ***Academic Self-Concept***— Self-rated academic ability."
- ***Pluralistic Orientation***— "Ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues."
- ***Civic Engagement***— "Performed community service."

Sexual Misconduct: This section asked respondents to self-report experiences of unwanted sexual contact and sexual assault, and if these instances were reported. Results from this section of the DLE will be available in a report being prepared by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (IRE).

- ***Unwanted Sexual Contact***— "Since you entered this college have you experienced any unwanted: non-verbal behavior, verbal behavior, physical contact."
- ***Sexual Assault***— multiple items about experiencing committed or attempted acts of a sexual nature or sexual intercourse occurring without the victim freely giving consent or against someone who is unable to consent or refuse.

Additional Section-- Inclusion/Exclusion/Welcome Spaces. UD added 20 items to the DLE survey covering topics of inclusion, exclusion, welcome spaces, and sexual misconduct knowledge. This report only focuses on the six items that describe experiences of exclusion and inclusion and the six items that

describe welcome spaces. Analysis of sexual misconduct knowledge will be presented in a separate report by the IRE.

The exclusion/inclusion items were created by the Center for the Study of Diversity based on literature in micro-aggressions (Sue, 2010), and micro-affirmations (Rowe, 2008). The welcome spaces items were created by Residence Life.

- Students first identified their most salient social identity,

- Second, students described examples of their experiences of inclusion/exclusion based on that identity, and how they responded to them.

- Next they described a situation where someone else was made to feel uncomfortable because of their social identity and how they responded to that.

- They then rated the extent to which they felt isolated, discouraged or excluded *because of that social identity (Exclusion).*

- Next they rated the extent to which felt they belonged, were supported, or were validated *because of that social identity (Inclusion).*

- Finally, they indicated how often they felt unwelcome in certain student-centered campus spaces (library, residence halls, classrooms, dining halls, Little Bob, student centers) *because of that social identity (Welcome Spaces).*

Summary of Main Findings

In previous sections we presented the results in detail for all campus climate variables. We examined how race affected campus climate as well as the interaction of campus climate variables with a variety of outcomes. Following are five general results that summarize the main findings of the DLE survey

1. **Underrepresented Minorities and Asian-American students have more negative experiences of the campus climate than White students.**
   URM students report more negative cross-racial interactions, more frequent experiences of discrimination and bias, and weaker belief in UD's commitment to diversity than White students

2. **Racial differences in campus climate relate directly to important educational outcomes.**
   Another important finding is that academic validation is a positive predictor of GPA for White and URM students, but not for Asian American students

3. **Perceiving that the Institution is committed to Diversity and having more positive interactions and fewer negative interactions with diverse others are positively related to Sense of Belonging for both White and URM students.**
   Overall, students value the institutions commitment to diversity and the more they do, the greater their sense of belonging to UD. URM students are less likely to perceive the

university is committed to diversity and perhaps, this perception may lessen their sense of belonging to UD. They are also more likely to have negative interactions with others, which may also play a role in diminished sense of belonging at this campus.

4. **Diversity experiences and curriculum are associated with greater pluralistic orientation and civic mindedness for both White and URM students.**
Pluralistic orientation and civic engagement enhanced when students feel supported by faculty/staff, when they interact with diverse students, and engage in diversity related activities. Experiences that may adversely affect campus climate can also serve as a catalyst to civic engagement. For both White and URM students, negative cross-racial interactions are associated with greater civic engagement. For URM students, perceptions that UD is not committed to diversity also are associated with greater civic mindedness.

5. **Race is a more salient social identity for URM and Asian American than for White students, and is the basis for feeling more excluded and less welcome on campus.**
Although all students report feeling equally **included**, relative to White students, URM and Asian American students feel more **excluded** by their peers and feel **less welcome** in student spaces on campus--especially in their residence halls and classrooms.

Recommendations

This DLE survey provides the most comprehensive picture of the diversity and inclusion experiences of UD undergraduate students regarding race/ethnicity. We will examine other aspects of student experiences in later reports. The results are organized to examine the relationships between campus climate experiences and student outcomes related to academics, sense of belonging, tolerant attitudes, and civic engagement within the context of racial/ethnic diversity.

1. **Conduct campus climate surveys of students (graduate and undergraduate) every three years, and conduct a campus climate survey for faculty and staff every five years, at all UD campuses.**
2. **Develop focused strategies for enhancing academic and interpersonal validation for all students, particularly URM students.**
3. **Examine spaces and places where negative cross-racial interactions take place and develop strategies to reduce their occurrence.**
4. **Increase opportunities for students to have positive cross-racial interactions and discussions across differences.**
5. **Enhance the Multicultural requirement, and co-curricular opportunities to expand knowledge and exposure to diversity, and assess both student participation and outcomes through exit surveys.**
6. **Engage students more directly in diversity inspired activities**.

Conclusion

We see these initial recommendations from this report as a complement to the Inclusive Excellence action goals, specifically focusing on race/ethnicity. While this report does not mention other minoritized groups, subsequent reports will address issues of campus climate for groups that are female, LGBTQ, transfer, first-generation, international, with disabilities, and based on academic classification. Nonetheless, this report does deserve special attention and consideration from administrators, faculty and staff. Strategies need to be formulated for ameliorating situations that have adverse effects on campus climate and student experiences. We hope that this report will serve as a working tool to help develop interventions for student success and for promoting aspects of campus life that affirm students individually and collectively. The goal should be to make significant strides in creating an equitable campus community in which students thrive, in which diversity is considered as foundational to promoting excellence, in which students learn how to productively engage with and learn from differences, in which mutual respect is a cornerstone principle and all students can reach their full potential.

References

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