

## Student Perceptions of Diversity and Campus Climate: When Students Speak

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### Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was to assess student perceptions of diversity and campus climate at a large research university in the southeast. We administered a Campus Climate for Diversity Survey and performed a factor analysis to explore ways that sub-groups (non-majority vs. majority; female vs. male) may differ. Non-majority students indicated a less than welcoming climate than majority students. Additionally, significant differences were found between male and female students.

Campus climate is the interplay among people, processes, and institutional culture and represents important aspects of an organization including perceptions, expectations, satisfactions, and dissatisfactions of the people who make up the academic community (Cress & Hart, 2002). Presently, diversity and campus climate is a major concern of colleges and universities (Hart, 2008). In the past two decades, the number of faculty and students with gender, racial, disability, and religious differences has increased (Gurin, 1999; Holley, Larson, Adelman, & Treviño, 2008; Locks, Sylvia, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Sustaining and assuring a welcome environment while incorporating a diversity of voices, knowledge, and experiences in the educational and academic process is of paramount importance to schools and universities. As they may differ, it is important to examine and understand how various factors related to diversity are experienced with non-majority

students as compared to majority students (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado et al., 2007).

A welcoming campus climate means an acceptance of faculty and students who bring varied perspectives, experiences, attitudes, and styles to campuses that positively affect teaching and research. Making students feel welcome is a key aspect of the validation process (Locks et al., 2008). A “sense of belonging,” welcoming climate, a perceived social cohesion, or peer support is paramount to social integration and experiences to diverse students (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Considerations may range from an understanding of diversity issues to a connection with students that represent different races and ethnicities. Ensuring a greater possibility of creating a welcoming environment is embedded in efforts to embrace, accept, and understand differences and realize the need for diversity.

There is also research on the educational and social value of a diverse campus as having a positive effect on students' learning as it relates to campus climate (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998; Maramba, 2008). Research supports the premise that students learn better in a diverse educational environment and exposure to diversity develops and supports a more active and engaged thinking process (Gurin, 1999; Holley et al., 2008; Locks et al., 2008). Studies by Chang (1999) and Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) sustain the idea that universities that are more

diverse create educational experiences which better prepare students for life after college. Even the 2003 U.S. Supreme Court ruling (*Graatz vs. Bollinger*, involving the University of Michigan and the diverse student population) supported the educational value of diversity while emphasizing the importance of preparing students to relate to all populations in society. The American Association of Colleges and Universities suggest that excellence in diversity is demonstrated through organizational learning through promoting social and intellectual development while attending to cultural differences. These matters have been shown to positively affect student outcomes as they relate to diversity (Locks et al., 2008).

Hamilton (2006) stated that students can be victims of an unfavorable climate and spoke of this phenomenon as producing *toxic campuses*. These types of campuses arise out of the metaphors campuses use to talk about diversity and the perceptions of having a deficit and being disadvantaged rather than different. A more positive affirmation would be the perception that diversity is wanted and that it brings tremendous value to campuses. The purpose of this investigation was to administer a campus climate survey to assess students' perceptions as it related to diversity. The researchers were not only interested in male and female perceptions but also the perceptions of majority and non-majority students as well. The investigation sought to determine if there was a significant difference between the perception of males, females, majority, and non-majority populations as related to a diversity and campus climate. The present study assessed undergraduate students' perceptions of diversity at one specific large urban research institution in the southeast. In addition, students' diversity-related experiences on campus were examined. As a precursor

pilot study, Lee (2010) surveyed 109 students at the same university, but in only one department. The researcher found that majority and non-majority undergraduate majors differed in their perceptions of faculty diversity. Non-majority students agreed more strongly than majority students that faculty diversity contributed to their educational experiences; majority students agreed more strongly that the faculty appeared to be from diverse backgrounds, and they were satisfied with the level of diversity among faculty; majority students agreed more strongly that faculty respected diversity among students. It is hoped that this study will have far-reaching value to the school's diversity initiatives, while providing information to other colleges and universities. Additionally, the present study can be used as a guide to help focus diversity and multicultural activity while providing current information related to students' perceptions and needs related to diversity and multicultural education.

### **Literature Review**

Previous studies of campus climate show a difference in the perceptions of majority and non-majority students at traditionally white institutions (TWIs). The literature review provides a glimpse of the changing landscape and difference in campus climate, and how majority versus non-majority and how male versus female students perceive campus climate.

Locks et al. (2008) studied the transition to college in relation to campus climate and diversity. They examined the sense of belonging, racial tension, and precollege experiences with diverse populations of 2,346 students from 10 TWIs. Seventy percent of the sample was from majority populations, while 30% represented non-majority populations. The 10 universities were chosen for their commitment to diversity, success in diversifying the student

body, and diversity related activities. They found that non-majority students significantly had more precollege experience with diverse populations, a greater propensity to engage in diversity related activities, had more relations with diverse peers, and perceived more racial tension than their majority counterparts.

Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) conducted a two-year, longitudinal, survey study to investigate factors that affect educational outcomes for Latinos. The purpose of the study was to assess how students' exposure to diversity, through both classroom and informal interactions, influenced their cognitive, social-cognitive, and democratic learning and development. Nine campuses and 13,520 Latinos participated in the study. The study examined students' precollege socialization experiences, sense of belonging, climate for diversity, and analytical skills. A pluralistic orientation was used to measure the effects of the institutional climate on educational outcomes. Results indicated that institutional climate had an effect on Latino students' sense of belonging and morale as a member of campus. Latino students also indicated the campuses to be an unreceptive climate for diversity. Results also indicated that a positive quality of interaction with Latino peers resulted in a higher sense of belonging.

Chang, Denson, Sáenz, and Misa (2006) conducted a study to examine students' levels and frequency of cross-racial interaction during college with 19,667 students in 227 four-year institutions. Research questions addressed the comparison of cross-racial interactions and educational outcomes on measures of openness to diversity, cognitive development, and self-confidence. Results suggested that higher individual levels of cross-racial interaction had positive effects on students' self-confidence, cognitive

development, and openness to diversity. The researchers noted that an environment where non-majority students are interacting frequently contributes to students' development gains.

Rankin and Reason (2005) conducted a survey to examine the climate for 7,347 non-majority students from 10 TWI campuses. They found that non-majority groups experienced the campus differently than majority students. Results indicated that non-majority students experienced more harassment, perceived the campus racial climate more negatively, and indicated the climate to be more unreceptive, less considerate, and less accepting of minority groups.

A survey of 597 undergraduate college students conducted by Zuniga, Williams, and Berger (2005) examined whether college students' participation in diversity-related experiences increased motivation to advocate for a diverse democracy. The two independent variables were: (a) motivation to take outward actions to promote inclusion and social justice, and (b) motivation to take self-directed actions to reduce one's own prejudices. Results indicated that diversity related curricular activities and interactions with diverse peers had the strongest effects on motivating students to actively challenge their own prejudices and take outward actions to promote inclusion and social justice in their communities.

Nine themes emerged from a TWI multi-institutional qualitative study conducted by Harper and Hurtado (2007) from 15 years of synthesized research about campus racial climates. The goal of the article was to illuminate trends that persist on many college and university campuses, especially in TWIs. The authors advocated the use of organizational change to frame their implications for institutional transformation through the use of ongoing assessment of campus racial climates. They recommended

that these measurements guide conversations and reflective examinations to overcome discomfort with race in order to achieve excellence in fostering racially inclusive learning environments.

Although there are a number of studies related to students and ethnic diversity, research related to the differences in male and female student perception is limited or outdated. Most articles relate to women and faculty climate. One vintage study, conducted at Princeton University in 1991 with 714 women revealed that female students felt significantly less welcome and were harassed more than males. Singley and Sedlacek (2009) performed a race-ethnicity and gender study determining students orientation to diversity with 2,228 incoming first year freshmen. The population surveyed was 52% female. Women and non-majority students had a significantly higher orientation toward diversity. Cress (2008) performed a study with 130 colleges and universities to determine the role of student and faculty relationships in mitigating a negative campus climate. Results revealed that non-majority students and females were more likely to be singled out or treated differently than their male or majority counterparts. Females were more worried and felt they were treated differently because most professors are male, especially in the areas of science and math.

The articles reviewed implicated that non-majority students may experience campus climate differently than their majority counterparts. Non-majority students may perceive campuses at TWIs as less receptive to diversity than majority students. Additionally, non-majority students may perceive more racial tension and have less of a sense of belonging than majority students. As expected, non-majority students had more experience with diverse populations and were more likely to engage in diversity related experiences.

However, results of studies indicated that as students began to experience diversity related activities, they tended to have better socialization and developmental gains. Researchers suggested a need for organizational change to address more diversity related activities.

Although the research is related to diversity and female faculty, diversity and the differences in male and female students is severely limited. This research will significantly increase the body of knowledge regarding diversity and gender.

Because each college and university campus differs in several nuances (i.e., size, location, percentage of diverse students and faculty, environment, etc.), it is important to examine the diversity climate of every campus and relate training and initiatives to the findings. Survey results can be used as a guide to focus additional diversity and multicultural activity on campus. For example, results can help determine student perceptions and needs related to diversity and multicultural education. Information from students can help faculty focus on student needs in the classroom and adjust their curriculum materials accordingly. For the present article, the differences in males and females, and majority and non-majority students will be examined as these variables appear to be the focus of primary research related campus climate (Cress, 2008; Hurtado et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008).

### **Method**

The university in the present study was located in a large urban setting in the southeast. The student body was 27% non-majority, 73% majority, 53% female, and 47% male. The university comprised seven professional colleges and offered 18 doctoral programs, 62 master's degree programs, and 90 bachelor's degrees. More than 900 full-time faculty comprised the university's academic departments and the

enrollment exceeded 24,700 students. The purpose of this investigation was to perform a Campus Climate for Diversity Survey for Students to assess perceptions of male and female, majority and non-majority students. The researchers wanted to determine if there were significant differences between the perceptions of males, females, majority, and non-majority populations as related to diversity and campus climate.

### **Participants**

Approximately 30% of undergraduates, excluding freshmen were sent electronic surveys asking about their personal experiences at the university. Freshmen were not surveyed because we felt they would not have had ample opportunities on which to base their responses. Participants were randomly chosen within the following strata: males, females, White/Caucasian, African American/Black, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino. Percentages of responses from the following colleges were: 5.1% Arts and Architecture; 16.4% Business; 3.8%

Computing and Informatics; 7.7% Education; 15.7% Engineering; 14.1%; Health and Human Services; and 37.1% Liberal Arts and Sciences. The distribution of student body at the time of data collection was: 7% Arts and Architecture; 18% Business; 1% Computing and Informatics; 12% Education; 2% Engineering; 15% Health and Human Services; and 45% Liberal Arts and Sciences. Of 5,860 surveys sent in the spring of the year, we received 396 (157 from males, 237 from females) that were useable. Students with diverse backgrounds were grouped together because of small numbers in each specific non-majority category. Frequencies in each category were: 280 White/Caucasian, 60 African-American/Black, 4 American Indian/Alaskan Native, 31 Asian/Pacific Islander, and 21 Hispanic/Latino. The 396 respondents used in the statistical analyses excluded those who had marked the racial/ethnic options of "Multiracial" ( $n = 8$ ) or "Other" ( $n = 6$ ), to facilitate interpretation of results. Most respondents were full-time students ( $n = 377$ ) (see Table 1 for a synopsis).

Table 1  
*Participant Demographics*

| Ethnicity       |        | Gender      |       | Disability  |       | Sexual Orientation |       |
|-----------------|--------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|--------------------|-------|
| Black           | 17 %   | Male        | 39.8% | Yes         | 95.1% | Heterosexual       | 91.5% |
| White           | 70.8 % | Female      | 60.2% | No          | 4.4%  | Gay/Lesbian        | 2.2%  |
| Asian           | 6.8%   | Transgender | 0%    | No Response | 0.5%  | Bisexual           | 4.4%  |
| Hispanic        | 4.9%   | No Response | 0%    |             |       | Other              | 1.5%  |
| Native American | .5%    |             |       |             |       | No Response        | 0.4%  |
| No Response     | 0%     |             |       |             |       |                    |       |
| Other           | 3.5 %  |             |       |             |       |                    |       |
| Majority        | 68.3%  |             |       |             |       |                    |       |
| Non-Majority    | 28.2%  |             |       |             |       |                    |       |

## **Instrument**

The researchers developed the Campus Climate Diversity Survey for Students (see Appendix) specifically for the current study to assess perceptions and experiences related to campus diversity. The questions were adapted from several other diversity surveys used by various colleges and universities including Texas A&M University, University of Colorado Boulder, University of Washington, Rutgers, North Carolina State University, Virginia Technical, and Mississippi State University. The questions were tailored and reworded to fit each campus. To strengthen content validity, the survey was sent to 10 faculty and staff members at the present university involved in services (e.g., Director of the Office of Disability Services) or research related to diversity. The final instrument incorporated some of their suggestions.

The instrument was composed of 24 diversity-related items, a comment section, and eight demographic-related items. Diversity was defined at the beginning of the survey, using the school's definition. Respondents were asked to think of diversity "as including, but not limited to ability/disability status, age, culture, ethnicity, gender, language, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status" and to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. A 5-point Likert Scale was used, and higher scores indicated more favorable diversity-related perceptions, experiences, and feelings. Except for items 6, 7, and 20a-20e, Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1. For items 6, 7, and 20a-20e choices were Strongly Agree

= 1 and Strongly Disagree = 5. All items are contained in the Appendix. The survey was prefaced with an electronic invitation to participate. The invitation explained that all responses were anonymous, as no identifying information was collected, and that only aggregate data would be reported. A link had to be clicked in order to progress to the survey, and it was explained that doing so implied consent to participate.

## **Procedures**

The researchers met with the Director of the Office of Institutional Research in the fall of the school year to explain the sample parameters and numbers of students to be surveyed. We requested 30% of undergraduates enrolled in the spring be sent electronic surveys via StudentVoice (an electronic survey instrument), with the following stipulations: (a) students with sophomore, junior, or senior class-standing; full-time or part-time; and not transfer students, and (b) a population that was 50% male, 50% female, 50% majority population, and 50% non-majority population.

## **Results**

Exploratory factor analysis was performed followed by oblique rotation. Four factors emerged accounting for 56.48% of the variance: Factor 1, Perception of Diversity Promotion (7 items; Cronbach's alpha = .81); Factor 2, Diversity-Related Experiences (7 items; Cronbach's alpha = .88); Factor 3, Perception about Diversity Importance (3 items; Cronbach's alpha = .78); Factor 4, Feelings of Acceptance (4 items; Cronbach's alpha = .76). Factor loadings are shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Factor Loadings*

| Item and Item Number   | Factor                                   |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|--|---|
|  | 1 <sup>a</sup><br>Diversity<br>Promotion | 2 <sup>b</sup><br>Diversity<br>Related | 3 <sup>c</sup><br>Attitude<br>About<br>Diversity<br>Importance | 4 <sup>d</sup><br>Feelings of<br>Acceptance |
| 17. The materials presented in my courses seem to promote diversity.               | .80                                      |  |  |   |
| 18. Syllabi for my courses seem to promote diversity.                              | .75                                      |  |  |   |
| 4. I think the campus climate is positive in terms of issues concerning diversity. | .68                                      |  |  |   |
| 5. I think the campus climate is sensitive to diversity.                           | .68                                      |  |  |   |
| 11. I think there are numerous efforts to increase diversity on this campus.       | .63                                      |  |  |   |
| 16. In my classes, if I work hard, I believe I will be rewarded.                   | .54                                      |  |  | .52   |
| 12. I would describe this campus as having a diverse student population.           | .54                                      |  |  |   |
| 20.(c) I have experienced conflict at school as a result of my sexual orientation. |  | .82                                    |  |   |
| 20.(e) I have experienced conflict at school as a result of my disability.         |  | .82                                    |  |   |
| 20.(b) I have experienced conflict at school as a result of my gender.             |  | .81                                    |  |   |
| 20.(a) I have experienced conflict at school as a result of my ethnicity.          |  | .77                                    |  |   |
| 20.(d) I have experienced conflict at school as a result of my religion.           |  | .76                                    |  |   |
| 7. My accent/language/colloquialism causes me difficulty.                          |  | .74                                    |  |   |
| 6. I have been harassed on campus.   |  | .66                                    |  |   |
| 10. Diversity among faculty is important for my educational growth.                |  |  | .88  |   |
| 8. Having diverse faculty is enriching for me.                                     |  |  | .78  |   |
| 19. I am interested in attending workshops on diversity issues.                    |  |  | .73  |   |
| 1. I feel other students on campus respect me.                                     |  |  |  | .77   |
| 2. I feel welcome on this campus.  |  |  |  | .76   |

|   |       |       |      |      |
|---|-------|-------|------|------|
| 15. I feel socially accepted in class.                            | .52   |       |      | .72  |
| 13. Teachers recognize that I have important ideas to contribute. | .55   |       |      | .55  |
| Percent Variance Explained  | 26.02 | 16.24 | 8.00 | 6.22 |

*Note.* Only loadings with absolute values greater than .50 are listed.

<sup>a</sup>1 = Perception of Diversity Promotion. <sup>b</sup>2 = Diversity-related Experiences. <sup>c</sup>3 = Attitude about Diversity Importance. <sup>d</sup>4 = Feelings of Acceptance.

Factor 1 accounted for almost half of the variance explained by the four factors, and it should be considered the most representative of students' perception of campus climate. Items 13, 15, and 16 (see Appendix) loaded on both Factor 1 (Perception of Diversity Promotion) and Factor 4 (Feelings of Acceptance), suggesting that perceptions of promotion of diversity may be related to one's feelings of acceptance. This should not be surprising, as how one is treated usually affects personal perceptions. Although Item 13 ("Teachers recognize that I have important ideas to contribute.") loaded equally well on Factors 1 and 4, and it was considered as representing Factor 4. The contents of the other items on Factor 4, as well as Item 13, refer specifically to the individual. For example, "I feel other students on campus respect me" (Item 1). In contrast, the contents of Factor 1 items refer to aspects of the environment that could affect all students, except for Item 16. For example, Item 17 refers to "materials presented in my courses." Item 16, while loading higher on Factor 1, also loaded on

Factor 4. As with Item 13, Item 16 focused on the individual, which may be the reason why it loaded on Factor 4. We considered it part of Factor 1, though, because its loading on Factor 1 was slightly higher than its loading on Factor 4.

Diversity Promotion assessed whether students agreed that diversity was promoted on campus. Diversity-Related Experiences assessed whether students experienced conflict due to their personal characteristics (i.e., ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or accent). Perceptions about Diversity Importance assessed whether students agreed that diversity among faculty was important for their educational growth. Feelings of Acceptance assessed whether students agreed that they felt accepted on campus. Three items did not load on any factor and were not included in further analyses (see Appendix).

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to test for differences by gender and race/ethnicity (majority vs. non-majority) in terms of the four factors, respectively (Tables 3-6).

Table 3  
*Factor I: Analysis of Variance Perceptions of Diversity Promotion*

| Source                   | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | $\eta^2$ | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Race/Ethnicity           | 1         | 8.95     | .02      | .00      |
| Gender                   | 1         | 2.93     | .01      | .09      |
| Race/Ethnicity by Gender | 1         | .09      | .00      | .77      |
| Error                    | 389       |          |          |          |

*Note.* Sample consisted of 157 males, 236 females, 278 majority members, and 115 non-majority members.

Table 4  
*Factor II: Analysis of Variance Diversity-Related Experiences*

| Source                   | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | $\eta^2$ | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Race/Ethnicity           | 1         | 10.22    | .03      | .00      |
| Gender                   | 1         | .05      | .01      | .82      |
| Race/Ethnicity by Gender | 1         | .00      | .00      | .97      |
| Error                    | 387       |          |          |          |

*Note.* Sample consisted of 157 males, 234 females, 277 majority members, and 114 non-majority members.

Table 5  
Factor III: Analysis of Variance Attitude about Diversity Importance

| Source                   | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | $\eta^2$ | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Race/Ethnicity           | 1         | 47.42    | .11      | .00      |
| Gender                   | 1         | 6.50     | .02      | .01      |
| Race/Ethnicity by Gender | 1         | .01      | .00      | .93      |
| Error                    | 389       |          |          |          |

*Note.* Sample consisted of 157 males, 236 females, 278 majority members, 115 non-majority members.

Table 6  
Factor IV: Analysis of Variance Feelings of Acceptance

| Source                   | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | $\eta^2$ | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Race/Ethnicity           | 1         | .49      | .00      | .48      |
| Gender                   | 1         | .14      | .00      | .71      |
| Race/Ethnicity by Gender | 1         | .32      | .00      | .57      |
| Error                    | 375       |          |          |          |

*Note.* The sample consisted of 150 males, 229 females, 270 majority members, and 109 non-majority members.

The scores on Diversity Promotion, the dependent variable, there was a significant difference ( $F(1,389) = 8.85, p < .01$ ) between majority ( $M = 3.77, SD = 0.62; n = 278$ ) and non-majority ( $M = 3.55, SD = 0.79; n = 115$ ) respondents. There was not a significant difference between females ( $M = 3.74, SD = 0.72; n = 236$ ) and males ( $M = 3.64, SD = 0.62; n = 157$ ), and interaction effects between race/ethnicity and gender were not found. Our results indicate that majority students, compared to non-majority students, agreed more strongly that diversity is promoted on campus.

The scores on Diversity-Related Experiences, the dependent variable, indicated a significant difference ( $F(1,387) = 10.22, p < .01$ ) between majority ( $M = 4.40, SD = 0.78; n = 277$ ) and non-majority ( $M = 4.11, SD = 0.87; n = 114$ ) students.

We did not find a significant difference between females ( $M = 4.31, SD = 0.79; n = 234$ ) and males ( $M = 4.32, SD = 0.85; n = 157$ ) or interaction effects between race/ethnicity and gender. Because items were reversed scored, higher scores indicated more favorable responses. Results suggest that majority students, compared to non-majority students, disagreed more strongly that they had experienced conflict.

Attitude about Diversity Importance, the dependent variable, demonstrated significant differences by race/ethnicity ( $F(1,389) = 47.42, p < .01$ ) and gender ( $F(1,389) = 6.50, p < .05$ ). Non-majority ( $M = 3.64, SD = 0.93; n = 115$ ) students agreed more strongly than majority students ( $M = 2.84, SD = 1.00; n = 278$ ) and females ( $M = 3.21, SD = 0.97; n = 236$ ) agreed more strongly than males ( $M = 2.86, SD = 1.11; n = 157$ ) that diversity

among faculty was important for their educational growth. A significant interaction effect between race/ethnicity and gender was not found.

There was no significant difference between majority ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ;  $n = 270$ ) and non-majority ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ;  $n = 109$ ) students or between females ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ;  $n = 229$ ) and males ( $M = 3.92$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ;  $n = 150$ ) on the dependent variable, Feelings of Acceptance. These results suggest that majority and non-majority students were not different from each other in terms of their feelings of acceptance on campus. In addition, males and females were not significantly different from each other in their feelings of acceptance.

Our results suggest that the different subgroups of students studied held different perceptions of the campus climate. Majority members, compared to non-majority members, indicated that diversity was sufficiently promoted on campus ( $p < .01$ ; Factor 1) and indicated that they experienced less conflict ( $p < .01$ ; Factor 2). Non-majority students ( $p < .01$ ) and females ( $p < .05$ ) significantly indicated that diversity among faculty was important for their educational growth than their respective counterparts (Factor 3). On average, majority students ( $M = 2.84$ ) and males ( $M = 2.85$ ) did not agree that diversity among the faculty was important to their educational growth. Findings with these three factors suggest that our non-majority students may have felt less welcomed at the university than students in the majority group. Although non-majority students expressed that diversity was important to them, they indicated that they experienced more conflict and were less likely to feel that diversity was promoted, compared to majority students.

A comment section was included on the survey. However, very few comments were

given, and it was difficult to conclude they were a representative sample. Consequently, qualitative analysis of them was considered inappropriate.

### Discussion

The present study sought to examine the climate experiences of students at a large research university in the southeast. The purpose of the present study was to report the differences in majority and non-majority students on a survey related to diversity and campus climate.

Studies by Chang et al. (2006), Locks et al. (2008), and Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) indicated that students with cross-racial interactions and diversity related pre-college socialization experiences were more open to diversity related activities. The results of this study indicated that students felt that diverse faculty were important and supported the diversity related activities on campus. The university identifies itself as an urban university because it is housed in a city that is 42% diverse and a state that is 32% diverse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The student population is 27% diverse. Eighty-nine percent of the student population are in-state students while about three-fourths of them reside in the greater city area. It would be safe to surmise that the majority populations at the institution have previously had the opportunity to interact with diverse populations and had some cross-racial experiences. Continued and increased majority and non-majority interactions at the university will help students experience more cross-racial interactions and challenge their own prejudices, and are more apt to promote student social action in the college community (Zuniga et al., 2005).

Despite overall opinions of a general recognition that the university is increasing diversity efforts, there remain groups on campus that have encountered negative

experiences. Specifically, members of ethnic groups report that they experience conflict due to their ethnicity. The level of conflict mentioned by these groups is of note in this study. Particularly, student related conflict within every area of diversity: sexual orientation, disability status, gender, ethnicity, and religion. As previous research indicates (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Haussmann et al., 2007; Hurtado et al., 2007; Locks et al., 2008; Rankin & Reason, 2005), diverse students have experiences quite different from those of majority groups. These experiences might affect feelings of belonging to their institution, which ultimately influences socialization. In light of this, these same groups also evidenced a need for a more positive campus climate and a greater sense of belonging, which is essential to social integration (Hausmann et al., 2007).

Recently, the trend of women outnumbering men on college campuses is occurring across the nation and is evident on the campus under study (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009) and there is a need to address the social and academic needs of women. Although there are a number of studies that emphasize the needs of female faculty, yet there are limited studies that have examined the concerns of female students on college and university campuses. Just as the students by Cress (2008) and Singley and Sedlacek (2009) noted that non-majority populations and female students had a significantly higher orientation toward diversity, felt significantly less welcome and were harassed more than males. Results of the present study revealed that females were more likely to be singled out or treated differently than their male counterparts. The study noted a greater disparity in the perceptions of females versus males. In other words, female students indicated in their responses that diversity was implied by

the number of attempts to increase awareness through workshops and other efforts, but not seemingly implemented within the structure to change the social landscape (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

The factor analysis revealed four pertinent areas of focus for future training and diversity initiatives: (a) *Diversity Promotion*, (b) *Diversity-Related Experiences* (c) *Diversity Importance*, and (d) *Feelings of Acceptance*. Although other studies have indicated a range of areas for training, this study's results indicate these factors are more significant when examining groupings of questions. In addition, these findings correlated with ANOVA test results. There is a need, however, to conduct more research to determine to what extent these findings may be generalized to other campuses in similar as well as different geographical areas.

### **Limitations**

There were two limitations in the study. First, the sample came from one university and therefore the results may not be generalizable to other TWIs. Future research should collect data at other universities to determine whether our results are consistent with findings of other institutions. In addition, factor analyses should also be performed with any new data sets to determine if the same four factors are extracted.

Secondly, the response rate was low, yet, the racial/ethnic and gender composition of our sample was quite representative of the student body. The student body consisted of 73% majority group members, 27% non-majority group members (including African-American/Black, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Hispanic/Latino), 52% females, and 47% males. Our sample was composed of 70% majority members, 29% non-majority members, 60% females, and 40% males.

We cannot explain the low response rate as the survey was administered when other academic commitments (e. g., midterm exams) and distractions (e. g., other electronic surveys) were assumed to be minimal, consequently, as they were distributed early in the spring semester. A higher response rate would increase our confidence in the generalizability of our results. Other survey techniques, such as mail surveys or face-to-face meetings, may be more successful in obtaining a higher response rate.

### **Conclusion**

The study reiterates the importance of having a positive campus climate as it increases and incorporates a multiplicity of voices in a diverse global society. As our urban schools are becoming more diverse with the influx of people from other races, cultures, and ethnicities, our institutions of higher education will need to be prepared to accommodate the changes in our society. Varied research and training experiences is paramount to welcoming climates that respects and welcomes varied perspectives. A welcoming climate invites stronger social cohesion and positive efforts to realize the need for diversity. Diverse campuses have a positive effect on learning and promote social and intellectual abilities while better preparing students for life after college.

The growing trend at colleges and universities is an increase in female students. Female students share many of the same perspectives as non-majority students as they both recognize the need for increased diversity as they are more likely to experience a less welcoming climate than male or majority students. The results of this survey should provide information to guide institutions of higher learning in addressing issues of campus diversity, especially for female students as data is sorely lacking. The discrepancies in

perceptions between subgroups indicate a need for increased awareness of issues that affect women and non-majority students. This study adds to the research base and affirms previous research on campus diversity climate which indicates a need for a more diverse faculty, diverse activities, empowerment of females, and improvement of the climate of support for students. As the educational value of ethnically diverse students has an effect on student learning, further studies related to examining student diversity and campus climate are warranted, especially for female students, since so few diversity related studies included them as a separate group for examination.

Research supports the premise that students learn better in a diverse educational environment and exposure to diversity develops and supports a more active and engaged thinking process (Gurin, 1999; Holley et al., 2008; Locks et al., 2008). For example, the results of this research help the university prepare activities for diversity training that we conduct each year on this campus. The Summer Diversity Institute was created to help faculty integrate multicultural education into their syllabi, curriculum, and research. The institute consisted of a week-long training initiative that explores not only awareness, but the mechanics of including diversity elements within the syllabus and research. Topics include (a) Conceptualization of Identity among Diverse Faculty and Students; (b) Understanding the International Student; (c) Integrating the Needs of Diverse Groups; (d) College Students with Disabilities; (e) Religious Diversity; and (f) Lesbian and Gay, Bi-Sexual, and Transgendered, among others.

Presently, on our campus, we are using qualitative approaches to examine the effects of diversity training on the students and faculty through the use of interviews with faculty and focus groups with students.

Additionally, we are gathering quantitative data on faculty and students through the use of surveys to examine the effects of infusing diversity into courses. As the educational value of ethnically diverse faculty has an effect on student learning, studies related to examining student diversity and campus climate are warranted (Ancis et al., 2000; Gurin, 1999; Gurin et al., 2002; Holley et al., 2008; Locks et al., 2008; King &

Kitchener, 1994). Studies of this sort bear witness to the need for campus specific research. Further research can help us better address the needs of diversity research and various training initiatives. The study reinforces existing literature concerning campus climate and the findings here are most useful for those who may be conducting similar studies on their own campuses.

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## Appendix

### Student Campus Climate/Diversity Survey

You are invited to participate in the Student Campus Climate/Diversity Survey which is being conducted by the Summer Diversity Institute. The survey will take less than 10 minutes to complete.

The survey is being administered electronically by a company that the University contracts with for survey administration. Your responses are confidential and no individual responses will be shared. If you participate, you will be one of approximately 5000 participants. Only aggregate data will be reported by the researchers. Periodic email reminders will be sent to encourage participation.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with the survey. Resulting survey data will be used to assess the campus climate for student and to identify student issues/concerns related to diversity.

You may contact me with any questions that you have about the survey please contact the University's Research Compliance Office if you have questions or concerns about how you are treated as a study participant.

Your consent is implied if you choose to go to the link for the survey. Again, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Directions: As you respond to the items below, please think of diversity as including, but not limited to ability/disability, age, culture, ethnicity, gender, language, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. Please select the answer that best reflects your feelings and beliefs. There are no right or wrong answers.

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|                   |          |         |       |                |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1                 | 2        | 3       | 4     | 5              |
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |

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- 1) I feel other students on campus respect me.
- 2) I feel welcome on this campus.
- 3) I feel isolated on this campus.\*
- 4) I think the campus climate is positive in terms of issues concerning diversity.
- 5) I think the campus climate is sensitive to diversity.
- 6) I have been harassed on campus.
- 7) My accent/colloquialism/language causes me difficulty.
- 8) Having diverse faculty is enriching for me.
- 9) Faculty diversity affects how comfortable I feel in my classes.\*
- 10) Diversity among faculty is important for my educational growth.
- 11) I think there are numerous efforts to increase diversity on this campus.
- 12) I would describe this campus as having a diverse student population.
- 13) Teachers recognize that I have important ideas to contribute.
- 14) I think individuals with disabilities are able to access campus facilities easily.\*
- 15) I feel socially accepted in class.

- 16) In my classes, if I work hard, I believe I will be rewarded.
- 17) The materials presented in my courses seem to promote diversity.
- 18) Syllabi for my classes seem to promote diversity.
- 19) I am interested in attending workshops on diversity issues.
- 20) I have experienced conflict at school as a result of my:
  - a. Ethnicity
  - b. Gender
  - c. Sexual orientation
  - d. Religion
  - e. Disability
- 21) Comments:

College Affiliation:

Architecture  
Liberal Arts & Sciences  
Business  
Computing & Informatics  
Education  
Engineering  
Health & Human Services

Racial/Ethnic Group:

White/Caucasian  
African American/Black  
American Indian or Alaskan Native  
Asian or Pacific Islander  
Hispanic/Latino  
Multiracial  
Other

Gender:

Male  
Female  
Transgender

Sexual Orientation:

Heterosexual  
Gay  
Lesbian  
Bisexual  
Other

Religious Affiliation:

Christian-Catholic  
Christian-Protestant  
Christian-Other

Judaism  
Islam  
Buddhism  
Hinduism  
Other

Disability:

Yes  
No

U.S. Resident:

Yes  
No

Full Time Student:

Yes  
No

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*Note.* \*These three items (numbers 3, 9, and 14) did not load on any of the four factors emerging from the factor analysis and were not used in further statistical analyses.