

Campus Climate Survey 2000: Methodology and Preliminary Findings

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INTRODUCTION

The University of Washington (UW) has a long-standing commitment to racial and cultural diversity in its student body. This commitment is expressed in the number and variety of programs to encourage preparation, enrollment and retention of minority students,¹ and underscored by formal affirmations made by the UW Board of Regents in January of 1998² and earlier.

Concerned that the passage of Initiative 200 in 1998 would negatively affect experiences of minority students at the UW, a collaborative group from several campus units carried out the [Campus Climate Survey 1999](#) in the spring of that year. Items on the survey were drawn from a variety of sources and focused on student experiences at the UW, their assessment of services provided by the University, and personal characteristics such as self-esteem, ethnic identity, and demographic information.

The present study is intended to follow up on some of this earlier information, with increased emphasis on factors directly related to campus climate and less on psychosocial characteristics. The current study also sampled an expanded pool, including UW alumni in addition to current students.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Five groups of current and previous students were selected from the files of the UW registrar. A form of stratified random sampling was used to ensure adequate representation of minority groups. Students who were less than eighteen years of age were excluded from the samples. The five groups were as follows:

- 1,419 Juniors and seniors enrolled as of the tenth day of autumn quarter 2000
- 1,166 Graduate and professional students enrolled as of the tenth day of autumn quarter
- 1,156 1998 baccalaureate degree recipients
- 1,119 1996 baccalaureate degree recipients
- 1,006 1994 baccalaureate degree recipients

The number of students sampled from each ethnic group and the final response rates are shown in Table 1 below. Students for whom study mailings were returned as undeliverable were removed from the sample prior to computation of response rates.

Table 1. Population Size*, Sample Size and Number Responding for Autumn 2000 Undergraduate and Graduate/Professional Students and 1994, 1996, and 1998 Baccalaureate Degree Recipients

	Population	Sampled	Undeliverable	Returned	Response (%)
<i>Current Students</i>					
African American	684	516	4	115	22.5
Asian & Pac. Islander	4591	600	8	152	25.7
Hispanic/Latino	886	542	0	121	22.3
American Indian	327	327	4	51	15.8
White	16,537	600	3	244	40.1
Total	23,025	2,585	19	808	31.5
<i>1994, 1996, 1998 Alumni</i>					
African American	541	541	38	83	16.5
Asian/Pac. Islander	3357	900	40	43	23.3
Hispanic/Latino	670	670	43	113	18.0
American Indian	270	270	16	38	15.0
White	12,785	900	54	289	34.2
Total	17,623	3,281	191	840	27.2

* Note. Population for current students included only those at junior level and above.

Procedures

In November 2000, a four-page scannable survey (described below) was sent to study participants. The mailing also included a [personalized cover letter](#) explaining the purpose and importance of the survey, a stamped and addressed, 9x12 return envelope, and a Husky decal. A second mailing was sent two weeks later to the entire sample ([follow-up cover letter](#)).

Instrument

Two parallel forms of the *Campus Climate Survey (CSS)* were administered to current UW students and alumni, respectively. Both were machine-readable and organized in subject-related sections of closed (multiple-choice or rating-scale) and open-ended items (*Current Students: 1, 2, 3; Alumni: 1, 2, 3*). Where possible, items were matched to facilitate comparisons across current student and alumni groups. Each version of the survey is comprised of several sections assessing various aspects of campus climate as well as selected demographic characteristics and other possible correlates. These sections are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Questionnaire sections, topics and number of items

Section	No. of Items	Content
<i>Current Students</i> questionnaire		
A	6	Demographics
B	16	General quality of UW experience and value of diversity
C	15	Campus climate
D	6	How changed personally by UW
E	12	Helpfulness of UW services
F	1	Racially-based incidents experienced
<i>Alumni</i> questionnaire		
A	6	Demographics
B	16	General quality of UW experience and value of diversity
C	15	Campus climate
D	13	Work climate
E	1	Racially-based incidents experienced

RESULTS

Following are some initial observations regarding campus climate, based on overall response frequencies and comparisons of White vs. minority and male vs. female responses. Table 3 provides links to tables of means and response frequencies, and graphs of mean ratings by student ethnicity.

Table 3. Links to response frequencies and means

Current students

[Entire sample](#)

[Minority vs. White students](#)

Alumni

[Entire sample](#)

[Minority vs. White students](#)

Ethnicity breakdowns

[Entire sample](#)

Overall, students reported a high level of satisfaction with their experiences at the UW. Current students generally agreed that their experiences at the UW had led to greater understanding of, and respect for, diversity-related issues. Both current students and alumni felt the general climate of the UW to be a positive one, and reported low levels of exposure to discriminatory behavior on the part of faculty and other students.

Although current undergraduate and graduate students gave similar ratings overall, some differences were observed. For example, undergraduates more strongly agreed that they would recommend the UW to siblings or friends, and that the UW encourages the open expression of ideas, than did graduate and professional students. Undergraduates also reported more change in personal outlook and behavior (vis-à-vis diversity) due to their UW experiences. On the other hand, graduate and professional students believed -- moreso than juniors and seniors -- that hard work led to desired grades.

Following are descriptions of specific comparisons of interest. Responses of students and alumni on parallel items were combined, except in those cases where they were explicitly contrasted.

Minority vs. White comparisons

Small but significant differences were found between White and minority students with respect to their degree of satisfaction with the UW campus climate and their exposure to racism, and these differences tended to be more pronounced among current students than among alumni. In general, minority students reported more (but still low) exposure to racism and a higher degree of interest in diversity-related matters than their majority peers.

There were several items on which certain ethnic groups responded differently from other groups. Ethnic group differences were observed on 14 of the 16 *Educational Experience* items, 11 of the 15 *Campus Climate* items, 5 of the 6 "personal changes related to diversity" items, and 3 of the 12 items related to the evaluation of campus services. For example, African American students more strongly agreed with the statements *I feel isolated on campus* and *I have been exposed to a racist environment in the classroom* than did all other ethnic groups. Likewise, Native American and African American students gave less endorsement to the sentiment that *the university encourages the open expression of ideas* but reported being *more likely to initiate contact with contact with people who are not of my culture or racial/ethnic background* because of their UW experience. African American respondents gave the highest mean rating to *sometimes I get singled out to speak on behalf of a specific racial/ethnic perspective* ($M = 3.3$); White respondents gave that item the lowest rating ($M = 1.5$); and Asian American, Native American, and Hispanic students' ratings fell between the two (combined $M = 2.5$).

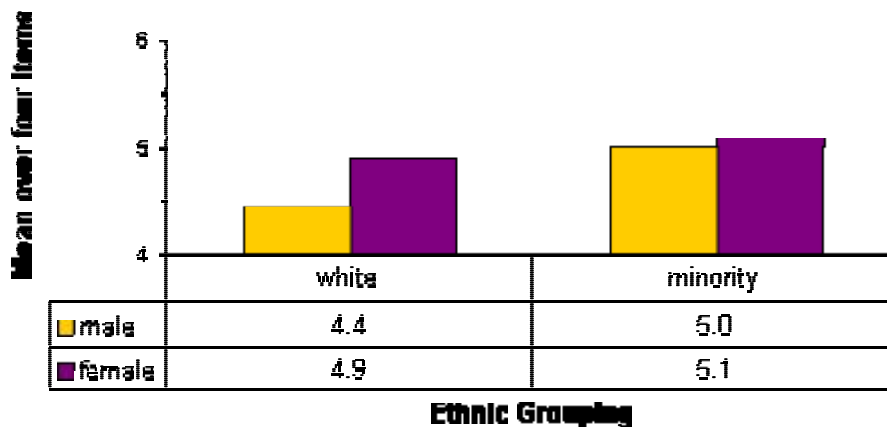
Whites and Hispanics were least likely to have been exposed to racial or ethnic conflict on campus (combined $M = 2.6$ vs. 3.3 for African- Asian- and Native Americans). However, Hispanic students and alumni responded similarly to Asian Americans and Native Americans on the comparable items *I have been exposed to a racist atmosphere in the classroom* (combined $M = 2.0$) and *I have been exposed to a racist atmosphere outside of the classroom* (combined $M = 2.4$).

There were no group differences on broad items such as: *overall, my educational experience at the UW has been a rewarding one, when I make a comment in the classroom I am usually taken seriously by the instructor, faculty members recognize that I have important ideas to contribute, most professors communicate that I am welcome in their classroom, I have a greater understanding of diversity in general,* and helpfulness ratings of campus services like academic advising, Hall Health, and Housing Services. Please see the [graphs of means by respondent ethnicity](#) for further detail.

Female vs. Male comparisons

Female-male comparisons were in some ways similar to minority-white comparisons. Females were more likely to enjoy or value thinking about different perspectives and having their own beliefs challenged than were males. Additional female-male differences were found with respect to feelings of isolation ($M_s=2.7$ vs. 2.5, respectively) and exposure to a racist environment in the classroom ($M_s=2.0$ vs. 1.8). On four items that concerned openness to new ideas, White males gave lower ratings than White females and minorities. Figure 1 represents the mean over those four items by gender and ethnic grouping. By contrast, on the item "Faculty treat me fairly," White females obtained a group mean ($M=5.1$) significantly higher than those of both White males ($M=4.8$) and minorities ($M=4.7$).

Figure 1. Mean agreement with four statements about educational experience (1=strongly disagree; 6=strongly agree)



- Items: , *The courses I enjoy most are that make me think about things from a different perspective*
 , *I enjoy taking courses that challenge my beliefs and values*
 , *Learning about people from different cultures is a very important part of college education*
 , *A real value of college education is being introduced to different values*

Current students vs. alumni comparisons

In general, alumni tended to give higher ratings on all items than did current, undergraduate students. Alumni gave a higher mean rating to the statement "I would recommend the UW...as a good place to go to college," more strongly agreed that the quality of UW programs is excellent, and were more confident that choosing the UW was the right decision. With regard to items specifically related to diversity and climate issues, alumni rated being introduced to people of diverse backgrounds and values different from their own more highly than did current undergraduates. Finally, although currently enrolled undergraduates generally did not feel isolated on campus, alumni nonetheless gave even lower ratings on that item.

There were no significant differences among the three alumni groups on ratings of the UW experience and campus climate. A few higher-order interaction effects involving survey group, gender, and ethnicity were observed, but these were unsystematic and largely uninterpretable.

Alumni campus climate vs. work climate

Alumni respondents completed several items designed to compare their experiences at UW to those at their current jobs. On the whole, alumni reported greater levels of respect on the job than they had experienced in the classroom, but they also reported greater exposure to racism on the job than at the UW. Respondents reported more leadership opportunities on the job than in the classroom, more strongly agreed that their supervisors (vs. their UW instructors) respected them and recognized their ability to contribute important ideas, and felt less isolated on the job than they remembered having felt on campus. On the other hand, alumni respondents also said they were singled out to represent a particular racial perspective, that supervisors made inappropriate jokes, and that they had been exposed to a racist atmosphere more so on the job than they had been at the UW.

It is important to keep in mind that some differences in ratings might be attributable to various biases (e.g., ratings of college could be enhanced by the "rosy glow of nostalgia"), but we have no way of exploring such a possibility. In some comparisons, UW fared better than the world of work while in others the reverse was true.

1

(1) See the President's Advisory Committee on Diversity, "Status Report on New Programs of Outreach and Recruitment," June 2, 2000 [http://www.washington.edu/diversity/status_060200.html].

2

"Regents' Statement on Diversity," passed by the Board of Regents of the University of Washington, January 16, 1998 [<http://www.washington.edu/diversity/policies/regents.html>].

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