

Campus Climate Survey 1999: Methodology and Preliminary Findings

PALIS Group ¹
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OVERVIEW

Motivated by the inclusion of I-200 on the ballot, a team of researchers at the University of Washington (UW) collected data on an ethnically diverse sample of UW students (n=1015). The researchers wanted to explore the relationships among students' perceptions of campus climate, and their academic achievement and commitment to higher education. Both groups were generally satisfied with the campus climate and they reported low levels of exposure to racism. Nonetheless, small but significant differences were found among ethnic groups such that minority students, especially African Americans, were less satisfied with the campus environment and more likely to report being exposed to a racist atmosphere.

INTRODUCTION

On November 3, 1998 citizens of the State of Washington voted in favor of Initiative 200 by a substantial margin (58% to 42%). Commonly referred to as the "anti-Affirmative Action" initiative and modeled after Proposition 209 in California, I-200 states that

The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.

Immediately following passage of the Initiative and in conformance with its requirements, the University announced it would no longer use race and sex as factors in admissions decisions to any school or college, at undergraduate, graduate or professional levels. Based on experiences within the University of California (UC) system, it can be anticipated that this change in policy will lead to a reduced number of minority admissions, and possibly to attitudinal and/or psychosocial changes among UW students.

Reduced Enrollments

Admission to the UW is determined by applicants' Academic Index (AI) scores derived from high school GPA and SAT scores. Prior to I-200, additional criteria were taken into consideration for students entering through the Equal Opportunity Program (EOP). In particular, "points" were added to the AI for "underrepresented minorities,"² thereby increasing the likelihood of admission for these applicants. As shown in Table 1, significant percentages of African American, Latino and American Indian student enrollments were through EOP during autumn quarter 1998, the last quarter in which students were admitted under pre-I-200 criteria

Table 1. Autumn 1998 Undergraduate Enrollment by EOP Status, UW Seattle Campus

	Total Enrollment	EOP Enrollment		Non-EOP Enrollment	
		No.	%	No.	%
African American	759	480	63.2	279	36.8
Asian	5,666	1,081	19.1	4,585	80.9
Latino	1,017	505	49.6	512	50.3
American Indian	376	158	42.0	218	58.0
Other	2,989	54	1.8	2,935	98.2
White	14,466	136	.9	14,330	99.1
Total	25,273	2,414	9.6	22,859	90.4

Although students similar to those entering through the EOP will surely continue to be admitted to the UW, EOP students can be viewed as a group whose admission status is "at risk," and in fact, new freshmen admissions for African American, American Indian, and Hispanic students in autumn quarter 1999 were 20-30% lower than they were in 1998, prior to implementation of I-200. The specific numbers admitted during autumn 1998 and 1999 are shown in Table 2, beginning a trend that will result in significant changes in the racial/ethnic composition of the UW student body over time.

Table 2. Autumn New Freshmen Admissions, 1998 vs. 1999, UW Seattle Campus

	1998	1999	Change	% Change
African American	124	83	-41	-31.2
American Indian	53	41	-12	-22.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	1,053	1,118	65	6.2
Hispanic/Latino	196	131	-65	-33.2
White	2,299	2,439	140	6.1
International	53	52	-1	-1.9
Other (esp. Combination	441	651	210	47.6
Total	4,219	4,515	296	7.0

Attitudinal and Psychosocial Changes

Anecdotal reports from colleagues in the UC system suggest that I-200 may heighten racial tension on campus, potentially increasing inter-ethnic hostility and conflict. Research focusing on the psychosocial adjustment and academic performance of underrepresented minority students at primarily White campuses has suggested that students' perceptions of a hostile racial climate are related to increased isolation, alienation and psychological distress, including depression.³ A negative racial climate has also been linked to lower retention and graduation rates for these students.⁴ Conversely, positive racial identity and emotional and tangible support from school peers, faculty and other university personnel are related to more positive psychosocial adjustment and higher retention of ethnic minorities.⁵ As opportunities to socialize with similar-ethnicity peers decrease, and services traditionally targeted to underrepresented minorities are expanded to serve all students, there may well follow an increase in the perceived isolation, alienation, and depression of minority students and a decrease in their retention and graduation rates.

This report describes the first of several annual surveys to assess possible changes in attitudinal and psychosocial characteristics of UW undergraduates following the implementation of policies mandated by Initiative 200, and to identify potential relationships between these characteristics and variables such as graduation and retention rates.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Study participants were selected from all undergraduate students over eighteen years of age who were enrolled at the University of Washington during spring quarter 1999. A form of stratified random sampling was used to ensure adequate representation of minority groups, and resulted in a sample size of 4384 students from all class levels. The number of students sampled from each ethnic group and the final response rates are shown in Table 3 below. Students for whom study mailings were returned as undeliverable were removed from the sample prior to computation of response rates. Those who returned questionnaires without a consent form, and who did not respond to subsequent requests for a signed form, were categorized as non-respondents but not removed from the sample.

Table 3. Spring 1999 Undergraduate Enrollment, Sample Size and Number Responding

	Enrolled	Sampled	Undeliverable	Returned	Response (%)
African American	814	800	10	168	21.3
Asian (Non-Filipino)	4,771	798	6	161	20.3
Asian (Filipino)	809	800	5	171	21.5
Latino	985	800	6	185	23.3
American Indian	386	386	1	107	27.8
White	14,963	800	5	223	28.0
Total	25,338	4,384	33	1,015	23.3

Procedures

In mid-July 1999, a six-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 [consent form](#) to be signed and returned with the completed questionnaire, and a stamped and addressed 9x12 return envelope. An entry form for a \$1000 raffle was added as the last page in the survey booklet as a response incentive. A second mailing was sent four weeks later to students who had not yet returned completed surveys ([followup cover letter](#)), and students who returned completed questionnaires without signed consent forms were sent another copy of the form ([consent cover letter](#)). Because the rate of response to the initial mailing was much lower than expected, sufficient questionnaires had not been printed to send a second copy to all non-respondents. Available questionnaires were sent to 3190 students randomly selected from the 3580 non-respondents.

Instrument

The *Campus Climate Survey (CSS)* is a six-page scannable questionnaire, with a seventh-page raffle entry form (pages [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#)). It is comprised of several sections assessing various aspects of campus climate as well as selected demographic characteristics and other possible correlates (see [Questionnaire Development](#)). These sections are listed in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Questionnaire sections, topics and number of items

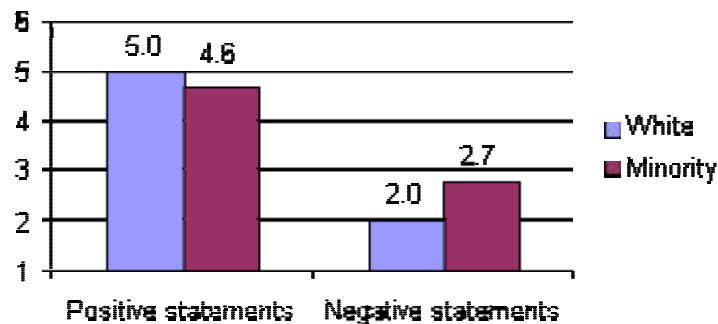
Section	No. of Items	Content
A	18	Demographics
B	5	Ethnic composition of schools and friends
C	23	Campus climate
D	5	How changed by UW
E	21	Ethnic identity
F	10	Self-esteem
G	17	Depression/anxiety
H	27	College persistence and reaction to I-200
I	12	Helpfulness of UW services
J	10	Social support
K	2	Satisfaction with support

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Subsequent reports will identify specific research hypotheses, detail responses of various ethnic groups, and relate findings to demographic information drawn from the UW student database. However, some initial observations can be made with respect to campus climate based on [overall response frequencies](#), and comparison of [White vs. minority student responses](#):

- Overall, students reported a high level of satisfaction with their experiences at the UW. For example, most students (both White and minority students) at least moderately agreed with a description of the educational experience at the UW as "a rewarding one."
- Students generally reported that they had not been exposed to a racist environment at the UW.
- Small but nevertheless significant differences were found among ethnic groups with respect to their degree of satisfaction with the UW campus climate and their exposure to racism. In general, minority students reported somewhat less agreement with positive descriptions of the climate than did White students, and somewhat more agreement with negative statements (see Figure 1 below). They also reported a greater exposure to racism. These differences were largest for African American students, as shown in [Table 5](#).

Figure 1. Agreement with statements about campus climate (1=low; 6=high)



- Minority students as a whole did not differ significantly from White students with respect to degree aspirations, current academic class, number of hours employed each week, or their perceived financial situation.
- Differences were found between minority and White students with respect to living situation (e.g., on-campus vs. off-campus), type of employment, country of citizenship and of origin, parental income and educational level, and percentage of students with a single parent.

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² "Underrepresented minorities" include African Americans, Latinos, American Indians and some Asian American groups such as Filipino Americans and Pacific Islanders.

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³ Goins, C.L. (1996) *Psychosocial and academic functioning of African-American college students: Social support, racial climate and racial identity*. Unpublished dissertation.

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Loos & Rolison (1986)

⁴ Allen, W.R. (1985). Black student, White campus: Structural, interpersonal, and psychological correlates of success. *Journal of Negro Education*, 54(2), 134-147.

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⁵ Allen, W.R. (1992). The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(1), 26-44.

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