A REVIEW OF STUDENT RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ABOUT CLIMATE AND DIVERSITY EXPERIENCES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

2013-2016
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes responses from the 2016 Student Experience in the Research University (SERU), administered in Spring 2016 to all degree-seeking students with the purpose of collecting information about how students engage with the university. This report updates the Campus Climate for Diversity report published by the Office of Assessment in Fall 2015, and presents new findings based on student responses to the 2016 survey.

In both 2013 and 2016, SERU respondents reflected the demographic profile of the undergraduate student population (figure p. 5). This report summarizes aggregate responses for the student body as a whole at these two points in time, and does not necessarily reflect the perceptions of specific individuals or demographic groups.

The report is organized according to survey question topic. Below are selected highlights:

Campus climate:

- Findings from the 2013 and 2016 administrations show that overall students continue to rate diversity as important* to the campus and themselves. When examined more specifically for Students of Color (SOC) the responses show a decrease of 7% in student perceptions of diversity and its importance to campus* (80% in 2013 to 73% in 2016). During this same time period SOC populations increased their rating of diversity as being important to themselves by 7% (87% in 2013 to 95% in 2016).
- Despite these findings SOC and Non-SOC students continue to rate their level of sense of belonging highly and in similar proportions to the 2013 SERU administration.

Level of perceived respect on campus:

- The majority of Iowa students agree* that students are respected on campus regardless of religious beliefs (90%), political beliefs (85%), sexual orientation (96%), or disability (87%).
- Sizable differences do appear when specific sub-population are examined:
  - 70% of SOC students agreed* that their ethnicity was respected compared to Non-SOC students agreed* at 96% (26% Difference)
  - 86% of female students agreed* their sex was respected compared to 97% of males (9% Difference)

Student Experiences on Campus:

- Both SOC and Non-SOC students report experiencing very few negative or stereotypical views from faculty, instructors, staff, or administrators on campus.
- Conversely both SOC and Non-SOC students reported higher levels of negative and stereotypical experiences when asked about their peers. Both groups also differed in the types and amounts of negative views they experienced.

Perspective taking and Interaction with Peers:

- When asked about where students were most likely to interact with difference the most common answer was in the classroom followed closely by general education and elective classes. The least likely place students reported interacting with students different than themselves was at campus cultural events.

* Figures aggregated for strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree responses
INTRODUCTION

Dear UI Colleague,

Thank you for giving this report the time and attention it deserves. This review of perceptions of the climate for diversity from 2013 to 2016 provides us with one way to keep our fingers on the pulse of our culture to gauge its health for our students. While the data continue to show that the majority of Iowa students experienced a positive climate over the past three years, there have been some shifts that merit follow up.

Most notably, the sentiment among students of color that their race/ethnicity is not fully respected on campus requires that we examine the spaces in which negative interactions occur and respond appropriately. Since students indicate that they confront disrespect mainly from peers, it is imperative to educate all students on civil and respectful interactions across differences. It remains important to continue providing employees with tools enabling them to promote a climate of inclusion even as we identify this nexus of opportunity. Since students indicate that they experience growth opportunities primarily in the classroom or other controlled environments, how do we envision a curriculum that supports this important aspect of human development and knowledge?

Students of color also responded that diversity was slightly less important to the university while slightly more important to them. Whether or not this is tied to the overall growth in the number of underrepresented minority students on our campus, the current divisiveness that informs our national culture, or to other factors is a question that merits further examination, providing us the opportunity to demonstrate to students that diversity and inclusion are central concerns to the University of Iowa.

It requires all of working together to create a climate of inclusion that welcomes everyone. Tools like SERU help us establish our goals and reframe questions. I hope you find this report helpful, and I look forward to working with your towards a more inclusive campus.

Sincerely,

Georgina Dodge, Ph.D.
Chief Diversity Officer and Associate Vice President
Title IX Coordinator
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THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY PROJECT AT IOWA (SERU)

OVERVIEW
The SERU survey instrument provides the University of Iowa with a systematic scan of the undergraduate student experience not easily obtained through other means. The survey is comprised of two sections, a “core” section that contains questions that all participants receive regardless of institution and the “modules” section that is distributed according to the desires of the institution. The “module” section can be comprised of either a pre-crafted module (which is benchmarked) or a wildcard section entirely made up of institution specific questions (which cannot be benchmarked).

Findings from the survey are used to inform policy, address unique institutional questions, and support research endeavors across the campus.

THE SERU CONSORTIUM
Based at the Center for Studies in Higher Education at the University of California, Berkeley, the SERU Consortium is comprised of top tier research-intensive universities interested in learning more about the student experience via a suite of surveys that are administered online.

Participation in the consortium enables the University of Iowa to:
- benchmark UI responses against a peer group of top ranked U.S. research universities
- participate in the construction, implementation, and administration of the survey instrument itself
- create powerful collaborations that shed light on policy relevant research
- participate in a forum designed to share best practices and enhance methods for evidence based management

METHODOLOGY
The SERU survey is administered at The University of Iowa during the spring semester to all degree-seeking undergraduate. After an initial back to back administration starting spring of 2013 and 2014 UI moved to an every other year model, making 2016 UI’s third administration. Participants are recruited through a variety of campus advertisements and electronic invitations. The SERU Survey employs a modular design in which all students are asked to respond to a set of core questions followed by random assignment to an additional specified module(s).

Topics include: time use, academic engagement (in class and out of class), evaluation of the major, financial concerns, overall satisfaction, student employment, perspective-taking, and perceived obstacles to academic success.
The Student Experience in the Research University Project at Iowa (SERU)

Response

The UI campus response rate for the 2016 SERU was 21.4%. When we examine the demographic profile of respondents, we find that the respondent population was generally proportional to the profile of the undergraduate population enrolled during the spring 2016 semester. Students who are identified as international or African American are somewhat underrepresented, while students identified as White are somewhat overrepresented. Also, as typically occurs in many surveys, just over 66% of respondents identified as female and 34% as male, even though they are nearly equally balanced in the undergraduate population.
Definition of selected groups for analysis:
In order to best gauge student perception of campus climate for some questions we have categorized the
responses by the responses of “Student of Color” (SOC). Due to the profile of students who attend the University
of Iowa, we feel this comparison category allows us to identify some of the key differences in how students
experience different facets of the campus while also examining the responses in aggregate.

For the purposes of this report “SOC” is defined as Hispanic or Latino(a), Asian, African American or Black, Multi-
Racial, Alaskan Native or American Indian, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. “Non-SOC” is defined as White\Caucasian students.

On average, respondents Agree* that the University of Iowa is welcoming (89%) and safe (82%), and that
they are comfortable with the climate for diversity (80%).

Though their levels of agreement are still high, Students of Color consistently indicate levels of agreement lower than those of White\Caucasian students:

- Safety 6 points lower (SOC - 80%, Non-SOC 86);
- Welcoming 7 points lower (SOC - 88%, Non-SOC 95%)
- Climate for Diversity 11 points lower (SOC-78%, Non-SOC 89%)

* Figures aggregated for strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree responses
"What is your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:"

**DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT TO THIS CAMPUS**

ALL STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>38%</td>
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**DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT TO ME**

ALL STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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**DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT TO THIS CAMPUS**

STUDENTS OF COLOR RESPONSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat agree</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT TO ME**

STUDENTS OF COLOR RESPONSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When examined collectively, the level of students who Agree* that diversity is important to the University of Iowa has decreased slightly (-2%) from 2013 to 2016, while during the same time period, there was a slight increase (+3%) in the percentage of students who Agree* that diversity is important to “me”.

When the SOC group is examined, the level of students who Agree* that diversity is important to the University of Iowa drops from 80% in 2013 to 73% in 2016 (7% difference). During this same time period, for SOC students, there was also a 7% increase in the percentage of students who Agree* that diversity is important to “me”. While response to both questions only changed moderately (7%), both questions moved in opposite directions.

It should also be noted that SOC students who said they “Strongly Agreed” that diversity was important to “me” increased by 23%. This dramatic increase from 2013 highlights some of the changing concerns of UI’s student body and continues to mirrors the changing composition of undergraduate students around the nation (NCES, 2016).

* Figures aggregated for strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree responses
In previous charts, differences in perceptions of diversity and the importance of diversity “personally” were clearly visible. However, when asked about sense of belonging, differences become much more muted (Students of Color 84% Agree* vs collective undergraduate 87% Agree*).

Over time, there has been a slight shift away from Strongly agree towards Agree or Somewhat Agree for both student groups when asked about reported sense of belonging, but the proportion of students indicating an overall positive level of agreement has remained relatively stable.

When students were asked if they would choose UI again, taking into consideration what they know now, a large percentage of both Students of Color (84% Agree*) and collective undergraduates (87% Agree*) reported agreed they would still choose UI. This too has remained relatively unchanged since the question was last asked in the 2013 administration.

These findings would suggest that student satisfaction and sense of belonging at UI have remained relatively high and consistent during the past three academic years.
PERCEIVED LEVEL OF SATISFACTION – CHANGES OVER TIME

“How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your campus experiences/education?”

When assessing the climate of an organization as large and diverse as the UI it is helpful to examine the undergraduate student body as a whole to gain greater insight into changes in broad satisfaction as they happen over time. Changes over time can be due to a host of differences including changes in student composition, policy changes, leadership changes, and changes that are exterior to the university environment.

When examined collectively, over time, UI students report that overall they are satisfied with their academic experience (-4% change), social experience (-3% change) and that they feel that the education they are receiving is worth the price they are paying (no change). These figures, while experiencing slight declines, are all positive indicators of satisfaction at UI.

Student satisfaction with GPA has dropped 7% since 2013. This moderate shift merits further investigation in order to determine if it is a growing trend or rather a product of variation in survey populations.
Undergraduate students at UI who are in the ethnic majority perceive the level of respect they receive very differently from their counterparts. Overall 96% of White/Caucasian students reported high levels of respect associated with their ethnicity whereas only 70% for Students of Color (-26%). Furthermore, in the last three years there has been a moderate shift lower in how marginalized populations feel about the respect they receive in relation to their ethnicity. In 2013, 89% of students of color Agreed* that their race was respected on campus, whereas in 2016 that number has dropped to 70% (-19%). The distributions above depict that shift to the center while no such shift exists for students who identify as White or Caucasian.

Similarly, students who identify as Female have previously reported high levels of perceived respect associated with their sex but in the most recent survey administration, that amount has dropped by 9%. In 2013 95% Agreed* that their sex was respected whereas in 2016 only 86% Agreed* (-9%).

* Figures aggregated for strongly agree, agree, or somewhat agree responses
“Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements in terms of yourself”

The SERU survey includes multiple variations of the same question regarding perceived respect at the University of Iowa. Question respondents reported relatively high levels of Agreement* that they were respected on campus in 2016.

When we compare the 2016 and 2013 responses we can see a slight moderation in the intensity of Agreement*.
When asked about encountering negative or stereotypical views on campus, both students of color and White/Caucasian students reported low levels of experiencing these types of viewpoints from faculty or staff. Political affiliation or beliefs remained the highest reported category at 10%. This is similar to our findings from the 2013 administration of SERU. When asked about their fellow students the responses became much more varied and somewhat more troubling.

The top three categories of “negative or stereotypical viewpoints” that Students of Color report encountering “Often or Very Often” were race or ethnicity (23%), sexual orientation (22%), and gender (18%). Whereas the highest categories for White/Caucasian students were also race or ethnicities (12%), gender (10%), and religion (10%)

Although levels of reported negative or stereotypical views remain low, student peers continue to be the main source of exclusion and disrespect.
STUDENT REPORTED OBSTACLES TO THEIR SUCCESS

“During this academic year, how often have each of the following been obstacles to your success at UI?”

When asked about a variety of obstacles students commonly encounter on campus all ethnic groups responded encountering relatively low levels at UI. On average, most students encounter obstacles “Rarely or Occasionally” although international and students of color expressed encountering obstacles more often than did white students. Areas where students reported higher levels include obstacles associated with anxiety about grades and testing, and speaking up in classes.
UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCES ON CAMPUS

One of the benefits that large research institutions have to offer is the ample and diverse opportunities for students to interact with other students that come from differing backgrounds. A positive side-effect of these interactions is that students have the opportunity to gain an understanding of other’s perspectives. In an effort to examine this more closely at UI the SERU survey has a panel of questions that ask about how and where these interactions happen.

What we find is that international students, on average, report less perspective taking than white students or students of color. Where students do report higher frequencies of perspective taking is with different genders, political opinions and ethnicities. Unsurprisingly, the locales where students report participating in more frequent perspective taking revolve around activities where they have limited control over whom they are around (i.e. In classrooms, working, volunteering)

“How often have you gained a deeper understanding of other perspectives through conversations with fellow students because…”

![Graph showing the frequency of perspective taking by different student groups. The graph compares the frequency of perspective taking among Nonresident Alien, Students of Color, and White or Caucasian students. The x-axis represents the scale of 6 point Likert (Never – Very Often).](image)

Scale: 6 point Likert (Never – Very Often)
"In the following situations (i.e. where), how often have you gained a deeper understanding of other people’s perspective”

A Note Concerning the Information Contained in This Report
All survey questions used in this report may be manipulated using various demographics as is possible with the responses to other questions in the survey. The Office of Assessment makes available a variety of reports and dashboards that will allow any campus partner to review the survey results for actionable data.

The SERU survey can also be used to address research questions and has already been used in multiple publications. If you have any questions or would like to review the data in more depth, please contact the Office of Assessment.

Find more information about our services online at:

http://www.uiowa.edu/assessment

References*