

Diversity Dimension Report

University of Northern Iowa

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Current Situation

UNI is currently working on enhancing its efforts regarding diversity. It was one of the President's incoming initiatives, which is currently gaining more focus. There is a new Diversity Task Force and Diversity Advisory Committee. In many ways, it is fortuitous that we are examining diversity in the context of FoE so that we can add to the overall assessment of diversity at UNI.

The task of the Diversity Dimension Committee was to examine three performance indicators related to the ways in which first-year students experience diversity at UNI.

The first performance indicator focuses on diverse ideas at UNI. PI 7.1.1 asks, "To what degree does the institution assure that first-year students experience diverse ideas and world views through initiatives based in the curriculum?"

The five courses with the highest registration by first year students are, in order: College Writing and Research, Oral Communication, Introduction to Psychology, Humanities I, and World Geography. Of these, only "World Geography" explicitly names "Appreciation for Diversity" as one of its objectives. However, it appears that diversity is addressed, though not named as such, in all these courses. One can hardly imagine learning about psychology or communication in any reputable university in a way that does not make clear that human beings are diverse and not monolithic in nature. Oral Communication names as part of its objectives: "Demonstrate an understanding of language bias/prejudice and its impact on

communication" and "Demonstrate an understanding of culture and its impact on the communication process." "Humanities I" certainly exposes students to temporally and geographically distant cultures, but since these are identified as part of "our" Western heritage one suspects it depends on the individual instructor whether the emphasis is placed on the diversity or uniformity of "the West." Similarly, "College Writing and Research" aims at a general competence in these skills, and the degree to which the course stresses that these general goals may be expressed through culturally diverse means seems up to the individual instructor.

Overall, the student survey results suggest that we are below the 3.5 benchmark set by FoE in both the interaction (3.32) and the exposure (3.19) aspects of diversity. Looking more carefully at the categories, though, the student survey suggests that we're doing satisfactorily with regard to diversity: 37% of first year students say that their exposure to different world cultures is "high" to "very high" at UNI; with the 37% of students that say their exposure is "moderate", 74% of students in their first semester report that they are being exposed to world cultures. 25% of students say that their exposure to world religions is "high" to "very high", while 38% report their exposure as "moderate" for a 63% total. With regard to different political perspectives, "moderate" (32%) to "high" and "very high" (50%) suggest that 82% of first year students report exposure to different political perspectives, but we wonder how much the fact that there was an election going on at the same time as the survey affected the response rate for this question. 36% of students believe that they are being exposed to issues related to socioeconomic class at a "high" or "very high" rate, with 38% at a "moderate" level for a total of 74%.

Faculty survey results, while below the 3.5 benchmark set by FoE at 3.17, are similar. With regard to diverse ideas and worldviews in the curriculum, 82% of faculty believe that moderate (40%) to high/very high (42%) attention is given.

PI7.1.2 asks, "To what degree does the institution assure that first-year students experience diverse ideas and world views through initiatives based in the co-curriculum (campus sponsored out-of-the-class-activities)?"

The committee found a great deal of evidence that there are numerous opportunities for students to experience diversity. We have a Center for Multicultural Education that regularly sponsors co-curricular activities. There are many student initiatives being carried out by the Northern Iowan Student Government, which has a Director of Diversity and Student Life. The first Latin Fraternity, Lambda Theta Phi, was incorporated last year. The Student Organization website offers lists of clubs and organizations (though it could be much better organized). The Residence Halls have an ongoing program for educating students on issues of diversity, including yearly Resident Assistant training, the Safe Zone Ally Program (on LGBT issues), and the Inclusive Communities Team, a diversity program for student leaders. The UNI Museum, the GBPAC, the School of Music, the Department of Theater, and the Department of Communication Studies schedule numerous performances every year, many of which expose students to

diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures. During Black History Month, Women's History Month, Diversity Week, Pride Week and many other holidays and occasions, UNI offers opportunities for learning about aspects of diversity.

In terms of the student survey, there are no specific questions related to out-of-class experiences separate from the exposure questions above. Other questions related to interaction will be highlighted in the second PI, below. With regard to the faculty survey, 77% believe that moderate (41%) to high/very high (36%) attention is given to those out of class experiences.

PI7.1.3 asks, "To what degree does the institution assure that first-year students experience diverse ideas and world views through initiatives integrated across the curriculum and co-curriculum."

The committee finds that there are very few initiatives integrated across the curriculum and co-curriculum. In this area, we find—as many other dimension committees have also found—that there are few structured and intentional programs at UNI designed to meld curricular and co-curricular experiences. This is certainly a place for improvement. At the same time, we also note that many of the primary opportunities for integrated activities--Camp Adventure, Study Abroad, Capstone courses that are fulfilled overseas, etc.--are not available to first year students. We are not too concerned with this, though we should focus more, institutionally, on making sure that students are aware of these opportunities in their first year so that they will take advantage of them later.

PI 7.2.1 asks, "to what degree does the institution structure opportunities for first-year students to interact with faculty/staff at the institution from backgrounds and cultures different from their own."

The UNI workforce consists of 9% US minority populations. In spite of the campus demographics, the faculty and student surveys revealed that 79% of students and 74% of faculty and staff felt that the university was exposing them to individuals from diverse cultures and background to a moderate degree or better. In addition to opportunities for interaction through classes and student services, a wide range of programming exists to connect faculty, staff, and students to explore aspects of diversity. From programming sponsored by academic departments, to the Center for Multicultural Education, the Department of Residence to student activities and organizations, the opportunity for interaction is present. However, there is no evidence to demonstrate how the university specifically structures opportunities to ensure interactions, particularly for students in their first year. This led the committee to believe that an intentional structure to ensure interaction of first year students with faculty/staff from diverse cultures and backgrounds does not exist. We are proud to have opportunities for interaction, particularly considering the demographics of our faculty and staff. Considering that out of 856 total faculty (2008-9 UNI Factbook, p. 59) UNI has only 77 full-time and 8 part-time faculty from US minority backgrounds, and 34 faculty with citizenship other than the US, demographics are a significant barrier to increasing interactions in this area. However, the open-door culture among faculty and staff make chance interactions a

real possibility. Taking advantage of the opportunities that exist in our human resources through creativity and coordination will be important into the future. It is also of great concern that we do an even worse job with invisible diversity (sexual orientation, religion, creed, marital or parental status, etc.), than we do with visible diversity (race, gender, ethnicity, ability, etc.).

PI 7.2.2 asks, "to what degree does the institution structure opportunities for the first-year students to interact with other students at the institution from backgrounds and cultures different from their own."

Since 90% of first-year students live on campus, the Department of Residence (DOR) plays a key role in structuring opportunities in the first year to promote interactions between individuals of differing cultures and backgrounds. The DOR structures opportunities to support minority students participating in the Jump Start Program, which assists new students from culturally, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds make a successful transition to college. Although only a small percentage of our UNI minority student population participates in Jump Start, this model certainly has benefits for minority as well as non-minority students. Jump Start participants are clustered together in groups in houses across campus. This provides an opportunity for minority students among the Jump Start participants to support and encourage one another. They attend a week-long orientation prior to the start of classes and begin to develop a network of support among their peers. In addition, their presence in the residence halls exposes the other students in the particular house to a small but diverse group of students from backgrounds different from their own. This is a mutually beneficial approach that addresses the needs of the minority students as well as the non-minority students. Due to the small numbers of minority students at UNI, this also leaves the majority of the residence hall houses without any minority students.

If students express a particular interest, the International Services Office offers language conversation partners, student organizations offer opportunities to participate in social and educational activities, and the Center for Multicultural Education, along with a multitude of academic departments, offers programming that may provide opportunity for interaction between students from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The Gaining Panther Success Mentor Program provides opportunities for interaction between students from underrepresented backgrounds and specifically encourages interaction between students from differing backgrounds. There are also spotty examples of programs that acknowledge that the racial diversity of students on campus requires some skills and training to make all students feel welcome. For example, intramurals staff, orientation staff, and Resident Assistants are required to have training in diversity issues. Training of students, faculty, and staff is one way we can ensure more meaningful interactions between students from varying backgrounds.

The committee generally rated structured opportunities for interaction with other students at this institution from differing backgrounds and cultures as low. Students, however, responded that they were moderately satisfied with their opportunity for this type of interaction with a mean of 3.48, nearly at the FoE goal

of satisfaction of 3.50. Faculty saw fewer opportunities for interaction among students of differing backgrounds and responded with a mean of 3.20.

Although the committee sees the importance of providing opportunities for interaction of students who are in the privileged category of any particular type of diversity with other students, the University must also be committed to developing the students of minority status. As we consider the role that demographics play in increasing the opportunities for structured interactions, it is important to acknowledge two things. First, the physical presence of students from diverse backgrounds is not the same as a structured opportunity for interaction. Second, students from diverse backgrounds attend UNI to learn and grow, not to educate their peers. As we consider the role that climate plays in how we structure opportunities, our commitment to the growth of all students must be at the forefront.

PI7.2.3 asks, "to what degree does the institution structure opportunities for first-year students to interact with individuals outside the institution from backgrounds and cultures different from their own."

Students, faculty, and staff ranked this question among the lowest of the performance indicators. Half of the faculty said first-year student opportunity for this type of interaction was slight to not at all, while 38% of students felt the same. Although the committee could not identify many opportunities for first year students to encounter individuals from differing backgrounds outside the institution, we did not find this to be too concerning. First, UNI offers a volunteer fair that provides multiple community connections. This could be an excellent opportunity for first year students to encounter diversity in meaningful ways. Second, there are anecdotal examples of individual faculty and staff using curricular and co-curricular opportunities to reach out to the community. This is not done in a coordinated way. However, we didn't feel that this particular PI should be our top priority for first year students. The first year involves adjustment to a new academic and personal setting, and a student who could manage their new responsibilities and reach out to the community in the first year would certainly be an exception. As UNI students continue in their careers, they are exposed to numerous opportunities to interact with individuals outside the institution in substantial and meaningful ways. (Eg. Camp Adventure, Study Abroad, increased volunteer and curricular opportunities, etc.) In the first year, we would want students to become aware of these opportunities and to develop a curiosity for these types of experiences. This could certainly be addressed in an intentional way.

PI 7.3 asks, "to what degree does the institution convey to first-year students the standards of behavior it expects for participants in a diverse, open and civil campus community."

The University expresses the importance of respect and gives examples of standards of behaviors in many places including course syllabi, student staff training and residence hall orientations. This is done so well, in fact, that a full 89% of students felt that standards of behavior were communicated in at least to a

moderate degree. The majority (63%) of students felt they were communicated to a high or very high degree. Although faculty did not feel quite as strongly as students, 68% felt that the standards of behavior were communicated at least to a moderate degree. The committee suggests that oral or written expression is only one way that standards of behavior are communicated. Standards of behavior should be modeled across the campus community; that is, they should be communicated behaviorally as well. Is the rhetoric expressed so well in writing communicated behaviorally as well? This is difficult to measure. None of the questions on the survey seemed to address whether people's behavior matched the rhetoric related to standards of behavior communicated across campus. The diversity dimension committee, which is comprised of a diverse group of individuals from a breadth of areas and disciplines, seems to have anecdotal evidence that suggests that behavior in and outside the classroom may be quite different from the standards of behavior communicated in the aforementioned media. Perhaps the climate survey will address this issue in more detail. There may also be examples of structural concerns that communicate important things to our students about standards of behavior valued at UNI.

Challenges and Opportunities

The following items are issues of concern to the Diversity Dimension Committee:

- Before focusing on the PIs, we found it necessary to explore the definitions of diversity found on campus, and their relationship to the definition proposed by FoE. *We note that there is—to our knowledge—no overarching, clearly communicated understanding of the meaning of diversity at UNI.* Is diversity primarily about numbers of minority and underrepresented members of the community? Is it about environment and climate for everyone, including less visible minorities, like LGBT faculty, staff and students or religious minorities? How we understand diversity will determine what we do to create and maintain a diverse community. What is at stake in creating and maintaining a diverse community?

Diversity makes its way into documents like the Strategic Plan, where diversity is found in the list of institutional values:

- Excellence in all its endeavors
- Intellectual vitality
- Intellectual and academic freedom, dialogue and the free exchange of ideas
- Expansive awareness of multiple perspectives characteristic of a global society
- An ethical, caring and diverse community characterized by pluralism and civility
- Personalized learning
- The well being of its students, faculty and staff
- Service to the citizens of the State of Iowa, the nation and the world
- An appreciation of people with different backgrounds with an emphasis on gender, race/ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, physical abilities, socioeconomic class, and national origin.

The Mission Statement of the Center for Multicultural Education also articulates ideals related to diversity at UNI:

To promote cross-cultural awareness and multicultural understanding by:

- Providing an opportunity for representatives from the academic community to share their ideas and incorporate the practice of diversity campus-wide.
- Providing multicultural programming to students as a tool for them to understand the value of diversity as it pertains to life in or out of college.
- Assisting with the retention of minority students through multicultural programming in an effort to provide a positive campus environment that addresses their social needs.
- Promoting diversity in the classroom and workplace which creates an environment for the university at large to examine philosophies, strategies, and initiatives as it relates to development.

Yet, the committee struggled with the definition of diversity put forward by FoE: *"Foundations Institutions ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities. Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in which students interact in an open and civil community with people from backgrounds and cultures different from their own, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others."*

The committee wrestled with what it would mean to "experience diversity." Does every academic or personal experience that is different from one already experienced constitute an "experience of diversity"? Are experiences of diversity supposed to lead to personal change, growth or development? If so, how can we measure that? If everything not already experienced can be an experience of diversity, how can we be equally attentive to challenges in the recruitment and retention of minority students, faculty and staff?

We've found it helpful to pay attention to Donna Vinton's presentation on what the NSSE data can tell us about diversity: she talks about diversity in three ways—

1. increased numbers
2. a welcoming and supportive environment
3. opportunities to develop skills, experiences and values that will assist students in living and working in a diverse community.

This definitional issue is both a challenge and an opportunity. It seems as though there is frequent focus on affirmative action categories when we think about diversity at UNI, especially the category of racial minorities, even though affirmative action applies to women and minorities, individuals with disabilities, and veterans, according to federal guidelines (<http://www.uni.edu/equity/faq.shtml>). While we recognize the demographic challenge of numbers in terms of recruitment and retention of minority faculty, staff and students, and strongly affirm a focus on enhancing those numbers, we also note that such a narrow focus on diversity may undermine broader efforts to enhance the overall campus climate with regard to diversity, and to create the welcoming, supportive and safe community that we would like to be. We maintain that it is imperative that we *simultaneously*

emphasize an understanding of diversity that is both broadly and clearly conceived, and that such an understanding be frequently articulated campus-wide. For instance, if—as we suspect—Caucasian students may tend to believe that events which occur at the CME are only for African-American students, then we have failed to articulate the importance of diversity at UNI.

- But, even a clear understanding of diversity does not entirely help us to define or assess diversity at UNI. As the above comments on PI 7.3, “Behaviors,” suggest, evaluating these PIs with regard to diversity is a challenge. *Indeed, we’ve become increasingly clear that there is a gap between what is happening on campus with regard to diversity, e.g. courses, programs, etc., and campus climate.* The co-chairs of this committee have had a number of conversations about this issue. We contend that climate may actually be the greatest challenge we face in improving the diversity experience of first year students. Because climate is experienced but is difficult to articulate, we share our personal examples, while acknowledging that the majority of the minority (less-privileged) populations at UNI could share a personal story of their own attesting to the reality of the climate.
 - Susan is a lesbian who considers herself to be “out” on campus. She regularly gives talks on campus and in the community on homosexuality and the Bible. There are pictures of her family in her office and books on LGBT issues on her bookshelves. Yet, she never “comes out” explicitly in the classroom. Although sexual orientation may not be perceived as relevant, say, to teaching about *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in a Humanities class, she also knows that being an example for LGBTQ students is important because she can be a resource for them on campus, so coming out could be tremendously important. When it comes right down to it, though, she doesn’t come out in the classroom primarily because she knows that students have varying opinions—often quite negative—about homosexuality, and that the risk of losing their attention or respect is too high in terms of the often delicate balance in classroom dynamics. And, frankly, it’s too difficult constantly to have to engage students on the issue of sexuality. Herein lies the challenge of the climate at UNI. Is the role of a faculty member with a minority status to create opportunities to serve the majority? To engage the majority in a discussion that would make it easier for them to deal with her existence? Or to ignore this aspect of her identity and focus on the content of the course? Although privilege exists in having a choice, the diversity climate at UNI seems to demand self-sacrifice from its minority members.
 - Melissa is an African American woman who is currently a graduate assistant. While working on a campus computer late one night in an on-campus library, she couldn’t help but overhear the conversation of the three undergraduate women sitting next to her. They were discussing a fight that a group of friends had with a group of Black girls over the weekend. They all agreed with the

bouncer of the bar, who expressed that he wished he could figure out a legal way to ban Black girls from coming to the bar. The young women went on to say that they wish they didn't have to deal with Black girls, and that they could have a lot more fun if they were not around. Melissa, wishing she could just stay focused on her work and ignore the conversation, looked directly at the women who were talking. They continued, unconcerned with her presence. At that point, what was her best course of action? Confront the students angrily for creating an intimidating place for her to study? Attempt to educate them on the diversity that exists among the "black girls" the students so despised? Shrink down into her chair and say nothing? Melissa finds herself in a different situation, but with options very much like Susan's. Is the role of a student to engage the majority in a discussion that would make it easier for them to deal with her existence? To ignore this aspect of her identity and focus on her own school work? As a student, Melissa asks whether the University has any obligation to teach skills to address this type of situation. To provide a formal process to get others involved? To acknowledge the inner conflict that goes into an educational experience riddled with these kinds of interactions?

These are just two examples of the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that climate works differently than providing programming and experiences of diversity. Of course, we understand that, no matter how diverse a community becomes, it cannot guarantee that individuals within that community will always speak and act in appropriate ways. Nonetheless, this distinction between campus climate and gauging diversity is, in our opinion, something to which we must be attentive. Perhaps the Climate Survey data will provide further food for thought on this issue.

- The committee affirms that there are many initiatives occurring in the curriculum and co-curriculum that focus on aspects of diversity. We note, however, that these initiatives are rarely coordinated between student affairs and academic affairs, and that sometimes they may not even be intentionally focused on diversity. (When people plan programming, is diversity a factor in programming? Or, do other issues take precedence, e.g. topic, reputation of speaker, etc., and if a diversity goal is met, is it merely coincidental?)
- The committee also affirms that, in Iowa, demographics are an issue. We also note that there are many initiatives on campus working towards creating a more diverse population at UNI.
- White students at UNI generally do not identify themselves as part of a specifiable racial or ethnic culture, and UNI does not challenge this assumption. Diversity continues to be the issue of the "diverse" people, while the vast majority of the population completes a degree without the opportunity to learn and grow in the area of racial/ethnic identity. It is a

challenge to enact one aspect of the mission, to “create world class citizens” when the issue of self-awareness is ignored.

- Programming and diversity efforts often seek to help populations of privilege (White, heterosexual, Christian, male, etc.) deal with the presence and realities of minority populations (disability, gay, Muslim, etc.). In what ways do we specifically seek to provide, programming, support, and safe spaces for those minority populations? How do we equip these students, and their allies, to challenge the climate in which they learn?
- Faculty do not receive specific training about how to handle difficult discussions in the classroom. Difficult discussions (which could possibly lead to student growth) are often discouraged or handled poorly as a result. Along the same lines, some staff members have participated in the “Campus of Difference” programming was around issues of diversity and available to the Student Affairs staff a few years ago. Although it was good, it has not been continued. Perhaps this program should be revisited, or used as a model for future diversity training.