Experiencing Diversity at UD: Findings from the Diverse Learning Environments Survey
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"What we need to do is learn to respect and embrace our differences until our differences don't make a difference in how we are treated."

- Yolanda King (Human Rights Activist)

1.   Introduction

In Fall 2015, a University of Delaware student became alarmed by what she perceived to be a noose hanging from a tree in front of Mitchell Hall. Others saw the same possibility and contacted the campus police. Although an investigation determined that the objects hanging from the tree were the remnants of lanterns from a UD festival welcoming international students, the possibility of a noose was troubling—it was a reminder of both a racist past and continuing racialized experiences on campus. The noose incident ignited conversations about campus climate. The Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey was undertaken to provide information to support ongoing efforts to document and influence climate, culture and institutional change related to student diversity at UD. The DLE survey was part of UD's ongoing Inclusive Excellence strategy for diversity [Inclusive Excellence action plan], led by the Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity (VPD), the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) and the Center for the Study of Diversity (CSD).

Diversity is important in higher education because greater student-body demographic diversity increases opportunities for informal discussions and social events that help students to become more competent members of their campus community and members of society (Glass, Glass, & Lynch, 2016; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Riccucci, 2016). In addition, these diversity-related interactions shape perceptions of campus climate, especially for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor stated that diversity in higher education is beneficial to all students, and is essential to the success of universities to deliver a curriculum that enhances marginalized students' opportunities to succeed (Grutter v. Bollinger, 2006).

The driving research aim for the analysis of the DLE survey was to examine the extent to which students of color and White students perceive and experience campus climate differently at UD. This research brief presents comparisons of responses to the DLE survey of White, Asian-American and Underrepresented Minority (URM; defined at UD as Black/African-American, Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and American Indian) students. Furthermore, we provide recommendations based on the findings for strengthening the University of Delaware's campus climate for Inclusive Excellence.

2. Method

Survey Participants

The DLE survey was distributed to all 17,575 registered undergraduate students on the Newark campus in spring 2016. A total of 3,696 students responded to the DLE survey (21.2% response rate). For the purposes of this research brief we present findings from those respondents that provided data on race and other important demographic information (n = 1951) necessary for appropriate analytics. A majority of these respondents were male (59.2%) and White (77.8%), but represented all academic classification quite equally. See Table 1 for descriptive information. Responses were weighted by gender and race to account for non-response bias.

Table 1. Demographic Descriptives

		N	%
Gender	Female	922	40.8
	Male	1336	59.2
Race	White	1757	77.8
	Asian	114	5.0
	URM	295	13.1
	Two or more	92	4.1
Academic Classification	First-year	531	24.7
	Sophomore	550	25.5
	Junior	481	22.3
	Senior	591	27.4
First-Generation in College	Yes	304	13.5
	No	1557	69.0
	Unknown	397	17.6

Survey Measure

In this research brief, campus climate refers to psychological and social characteristics of students' perceptions of and experiences at UD. The DLE survey was developed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA, and has been administered to over 200 schools across the country over the last six years. For the purposes of this brief, the DLE is organized into four sections: campus climate, institutional practices, student-learning outcomes, and DLE add-on items about experiences of inclusion, exclusion, and welcoming spaces on campus. See descriptive and correlation information on the main three DLE subscales in Table 2.

Campus Climate Campus climate consists of nine subscales assessed by multiple items.

Sense of belonging –the extent to which students feel a sense of academic and social integration ("I feel a sense of belonging to this campus.");

Academic validation—the extent to which faculty actions in class reflect concern for their academic success ("Felt that my contributions were valued in class");

General interpersonal validation--students' view of faculty and staff's attention to their development ("Faculty believe in my potential to succeed academically"); *Institutional commitment to diversity*—students' perception of UD's commitment to diversity ("[UD] has a long standing commitment to diversity");

Positive cross-racial interaction –students' level of positive interaction with diverse peers ("Had meaningful and honest discussions about race/ethnic relations outside of class");

Negative cross-racial interaction –students' level of negative interaction with diverse peers ("Felt insulted or threatened because of my race/ethnicity");

Discrimination and bias –the frequency of students' experiences with subtle forms of discrimination ("Heard insensitive or disparaging remarks from faculty");

 Harassment –the frequency that students experience threats or harassment ("Threats of physical violence");

 Conversations across difference –how frequently students engage in dialogue with diverse peers, such as, "From a socioeconomic class different from your own."

Institutional Practices The second section assesses students' perception of campus practices and their engagement in opportunities for diverse interactions. Institutional practices consists of three subscales.

Curriculum of inclusion –the number of courses a student has taken that include materials and pedagogy addressing diversity, such as, "Opportunities for intensive dialogue between students with different backgrounds and beliefs."

Co-curricular diversity activities assesses students' involvement with institutional programs focused on diversity issues (e.g., "Attended panels or debates about diversity issues."

Navigational action –how often students participate in institutional programs or engaged in activities that would help them successfully traverse the institution (e.g., "Since entering this college, how often have you utilized academic advising?")

Student Learning Outcomes Five self-reported assessments of academic learning practices and outcomes as well as other indications of active citizenship and attitudes about being a critical and ethical member within a diverse society comprised student learning outcomes.

Habits of mind –the behaviors and traits associated with academic success, such as, "Seek solutions to problems and explain them to others."

Integration of learning –student behavior that reflects integrating, connecting, and applying concepts and ideas ("How often in the past year did you apply concepts from courses to real life situations?"

Academic self-concept --student's belief about their abilities and confidence in academic environments compared to others of the same age, such as, "Drive to achieve."

Pluralistic orientation –students' self-rated strength in skills and dispositions appropriate for living and working in a diverse society, such as, "Ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues."

Civic Engagement –the extent to which students are motivated and involved in civic, electoral, and political activities. A sample of the six-item subscale is, "Since entering this college, how often have you performed community service?"

Additional Section UD added 20 extra items to the DLE survey covering topics of inclusion, exclusion, welcome spaces, and sexual misconduct knowledge. This report only focuses on the six items that describe experiences of exclusion and inclusion and the six items that describe welcome spaces. The *exclusion/inclusion* items were created by the Center for the Study of Diversity based on literature in micro-aggressions (Sue, 2010), and micro-affirmations (Rowe, 2008). The *welcome spaces* items were created by UD Residence Life. For this section of items, students first identified their most salient social identity; then they described examples of their own experiences of inclusion/exclusion based on that social identity as well as how they reacted to those experiences. Next, they described a situation where someone else felt uncomfortable because of their social identity and how they responded to that. They then rated the extent to which they felt (1) isolated, discouraged or excluded because of that social identity (*exclusion*), and (2) felt they belonged, were supported, or were validated because of that social identity (*inclusion*). Finally, they indicated how often they felt unwelcome in certain student-centered campus spaces (library, residence halls, classrooms, dining halls, the campus gym known as the Little Bob, student centers) because of that social identity (*welcome spaces*). See descriptive data on the DLE add-on items in Table 3.

Analyses

Means, standard deviations, and correlations were run to describe the various subscales of the DLE. Analyses of variance were conducted to determine how perceptions of campus climate are experienced differently by race. All statistical analyses were conducted in SPSS v 22.0.

3. Main Findings

The first major finding is that underrepresented minority (URM) and Asian-American students reported more negative experiences of the campus climate than did White students. URM and Asian-American students both reported experiencing more frequent negative cross-racial interaction than White students did. [See Table 3 for *F*-statistics and mean differences]. In addition,

URM students reported a lower level of sense of belonging and weaker beliefs in UD's commitment to diversity and experienced more discrimination & bias than White students did. Asian-American students reported lower levels of academic validation than both White and URM students. They also reported experiencing more instances of harassment and fewer conversations with diverse others than White students did.

A second finding is that URM and Asian-American students seem to be engaged in more activities that enrich curricular and co-curricular experiences [See Table 4 for *F*-statistics and mean differences]. For example, URM and Asian-American students reported engaging in more frequent co-curricular diversity activities than White, and using more institutional resources (e.g., writing center) than White students did. Furthermore, URM students reported higher levels of pluralistic orientation than White students did.

Third, URM and Asian-American students seem to have different learning and academic outcomes than their White counterparts. [See Table 5 for *F*-statistics and mean differences]. URM and Asian-American students both reported lower levels of habits of mind, or engaging in behaviors that lead to academic success. Asian-American students reported lower levels of integration of learning, such as connecting and applying ideas, than White and URM students did. Additionally, URM students rated themselves to have lower levels of academic self-concept when compared to their peers than White students did.

Fourth, race is a more salient social identity for URM and Asian American than for White students, and is the basis for feeling more excluded and less welcome on campus. [See Table 6 for *F*-statistics and mean differences]. Our added questions allowed us to distinguish between feelings

Figure 1. Racial differences in feeling welcome in UD spaces.
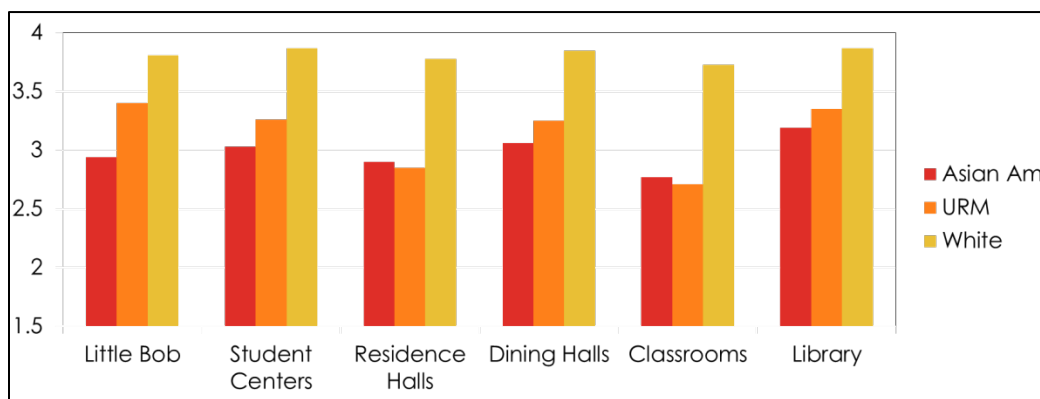
of inclusion and exclusion. Results showed no differences in feelings of inclusion based on race, but URM and Asian students both feel more excluded than White based on their race (see Figure 1). Feeling unwelcome is related to feeling excluded. The only place students did **not** feel unwelcome because of their race was the library. However, URM and mixed race students reported feeling less welcome in residence halls, student centers, and dining halls than White students did. Additionally, URM and mixed race students reported feeling less welcome in their classrooms URM and Asian-

American students both reported feeling less welcome in the Little Bob than their White counterparts did.

4. What do These Findings Mean?

As UD enhances its focus on diversity, it is important to remember that increased diversity should be beneficial to all, as opined by Justice O'Connor. Findings from the DLE survey suggest that the diversity-related experiences of students from minoritized backgrounds are different from White students. We often focus on the idea that diversity is beneficial in higher education to all students, but this approach focuses more on making White students recognize the benefits of being part of the diversity process. Our data show that students of color, compared to White students, report feeling less connected to UD, have lower levels of sense of belonging, experience more negative interactions with their peers, and more frequently feel excluded, and unwelcome in many campus spaces because of their race. When students do not feel connected to their community, it can have detrimental effects on their learning and growth as both a student and member of society (Glass, et al., 2016). Finding ways to make a more diverse campus a benefit to all students, and subsequently a benefit to society, requires that positive experiences and interactions with diverse others be a top priority of an Inclusive Excellence approach to diversity (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Gurin, et al., 2002).

One important finding is that students of color reported feeling less satisfied with their learning outcomes. Compared to White students, students of color were less likely to report habits of mind such as seeking feedback or asking questions in an academic setting, less likely to participate in integrative learning, and had lower confidence in their abilities in the context of an academic environment. When minoritized students have a weaker academic self-concept or are not engaging in necessary behaviors for academic success, they feel invalidated as a student and it underscores how they are not connected to an institution that looks vastly different from them (Hurtado, Ruiz Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015). Validation from faculty/staff through feedback and demonstration of shared values can be especially important for students of color in these instances (Wells & Horn, 2015). When students feel validated and integrated into the educational process, their sense of belonging is enhanced, and academic success is more easily attained.

Students of color at UD seem to carve a space for themselves to engage in diverse activities. Findings from the DLE survey show that non-White students report participating in more diversity activities outside the classroom and having skills appropriate for living and working in a diverse society than do their White counterparts. By preparing its students to be engaged in their communities through participation in civic and community organizations, institutions positively affect society (Gurin, et al., 2002). Campuses that are more diverse are more likely to provide opportunities where students can interact with others that are different from them (Hurtado, 2007). However, it is important to note that merely increasing demographic diversity does not guarantee diverse interactions. Institutions need to be intentional in providing opportunities in classrooms,

residence halls, through academic programing and faculty hiring that insure these interactions take place. Thus, as UD focuses on increasing student diversity, more opportunities need to be created for all students to have quality interactions with diverse others, an essential part of becoming a contributing member of an increasingly diverse society (Milem, 2003; Riccucci, 2016). Students of color generally have more negative interactions but engage in more diverse co-curricular activities; White students have generally more positive interactions, but engage in fewer diversity-related extracurricular activities. Encouraging White students to participate in these activities and reducing the negative interactions of students of color will create a balanced effect of greater diversity to the benefit of all.

5. Recommendations & Conclusions

This DLE survey provides the most comprehensive picture of the diversity and inclusion experiences of UD undergraduate students regarding race/ethnicity. Based on the findings, we provide recommendations to UD administration, faculty, staff, and stakeholders that center on how diversity at UD should be beneficial to students and society.

1. Gather data on an ongoing basis to understand how students' perceptions of diversity and campus climate change as students matriculate to college and as they prepare to graduate. Conduct campus climate surveys of students (graduate and undergraduate) every three years and pay attention to patterns over time and to differences between groups in their perceptions of campus climate.

2. Develop focused strategies for enhancing academic and interpersonal integration for all students, particularly non-White students. Examine spaces and places where negative cross-racial interactions take place and develop strategies to reduce their occurrence. Integrate findings from the storytelling project on microaggressions and microaffirmations (Rolón Dow, et al., 2017) to understand the ways that students experience negative interactions as well as to understand how to engage in interactions that affirm students. This approach has been demonstrated by Jessica Cornwell's (Complex Coordinator, Residence Life & Housing) use of stories for students in the residence halls.

3. Increase opportunities for students to have positive peer interactions and discussions across differences. Develop and implement a strategy for institutionalizing intergroup dialogues. Start with a selected cohort of students who are informally already engaged in these types of dialogue, then broaden the scope of students reached over time. Study the specific outcomes of intergroup dialogues on student experiences through small-scale surveys and interviews.

4. Expand knowledge and exposure to diversity by enhancing the multicultural requirement and providing more co-curricular opportunities centered on diversity. Assess both student participation and outcomes through entrance and exit surveys. Examine inclusion of specific minoritized groups (e.g., Latinx, LGBTQ) across university programs and curricula to develop courses about the experiences of these groups. Connect these curricula to existing campus programs, such as alternative spring break and other community engagement projects.

5. Engage students more directly in activities that build their diversity competencies. Diversity Competency (also known as the DC6) identifies six characteristics associated with motivated, effective engagement with diversity—Diversity self-awareness; Perspective–taking; Cultural literacy; Personal and social responsibility; Global understanding; and Applying diversity knowledge. DC6 has been incorporated in the criteria for courses to meet the multicultural course requirement. It has further been used in a variety of training settings, and stands as a marker for progress in meeting Inclusive Excellence goals. Continuing to expand the use of the DC6 would be a good way to contribute to transforming the campus environment.

We see these initial recommendations from this report as a complement to the *Inclusive Excellence* action goals, specifically focusing on race/ethnicity. While this report does not mention other minoritized groups, CSD does plan to examine perceptions of campus climate by gender and LGBTQ identity, this report does deserve special attention and consideration from administrators, faculty, and staff. Strategies need to be formulated for ameliorating situations that have adverse effects on campus climate and student experiences. We hope that this report will serve as a working tool to help develop interventions for student success and for promoting aspects of campus life that affirm students individually and collectively. The goal should be to make significant strides in creating an equitable campus community in which students thrive, in which diversity is considered as foundational to promoting excellence, in which students learn how to productively engage with and learn from differences, in which mutual respect is a cornerstone principle and all students can reach their full potential.

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