

## **Focus Topic: Campus Climate**

Each year the Illinois Board of Higher Education requests statewide institutions to provide commentary on topics of current relevancy in the field of higher education. The focus topic for this year is campus climate. The IBHE notified institutions of the expectation to conduct climate surveys on their campuses and encouraged them to address the topic in a way that best met campus needs and characteristics. The report guidelines, however, encouraged assessment of the following 10 areas for undergraduate students: 1) demographic information, 2) institutional attractiveness – factors influencing decision to attend, 3) institutional attractiveness – factors influencing decision to stay, 4) faculty and classroom behavior, 5) student needs and concerns, 6) institutional responsiveness, 7) student racial climate, 8) institutional racial climate, 9) student life, and 10) racial relations. (See *Guidelines for the 2001 Report on Underrepresented Groups in Higher Education*, Attachment A: Focus Topic Question.)

In lieu of conducting a new survey, institutions were given the option to report the findings of existing campus climate surveys, provided those surveys essentially addressed the areas indicated in Attachment A of the guidelines. The University of Illinois at Springfield has conducted two such surveys: 1) the Student Campus Climate Survey of the Diversity Task Force conducted in the spring of 1998 and 2) the Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey conducted in April 2001.

# Student Campus Climate Survey Report of the Diversity Task Force

## Methodology

The Diversity Task Force at the University of Illinois at Springfield, with the assistance of the Survey Research Office, conducted a mail-out survey of UIS students (both undergraduate and graduate) during the spring of 1998. A non-proportional stratified sample of 1,603 students, which included the entire population of minority and international students, was surveyed. All sample members were mailed an initial survey package consisting of a personalized cover letter, a questionnaire, a postage-paid return envelope, and a response postcard. About one week after the distribution of the survey package, a similar follow-up package was sent to non-respondents (as indicated by the non-return of the response postcard). A total of 751 completed questionnaires were returned for an overall response rate of 47%. Sampling errors (assuming random sampling and a non-biased response sample) for all students were +/- 2.7% at the 90% confidence level and +/-3.3% at the 95% confidence level.

### Diversity Task Force Climate Survey Description of Sample and Response Rates

<i>Group</i>	<i># in Original Sample</i>	<i># of Respondents</i>	<i>Response Rate</i>
Minority and International Students (full population)			
African American	305	116	38.0%
Other minority (citizens)	117	60	51.3%
International	170	81	47.6%
White Students (random samples)			
Females	503	257	51.1%
Males	508	210	41.3%

To reach conclusions about UIS students as a whole, an "analysis weight" was given to each respondent. This was necessary because of the non-proportional nature of the original sampling design (and secondarily, because of the relatively small differences in response rates). In essence, the analysis weight counts underrepresented groups more than one response and counts overrepresented groups less than one. Each group is represented in this way in its actual proportion for campuswide conclusions.

The respondent category "other minority (citizens)" combines the responses of Asian American, Native American, Hispanic American, and Alaskan native students (citizens). This approach was

taken because the number of responses for each of these groups was too small for separate meaningful reporting and analysis.

The findings report the responses of all students, responses of female students compared to male students, and responses of students by racial/ethnic group. On relevant survey questions, the responses of gay and lesbian students and students with disabilities were reported as well. Both undergraduate and graduate responses are included.

## **Findings**

The findings below were drawn from the *Student Campus Climate Survey Report* (Fall 2000). Tables including measures of variation (standard deviation) and tests of significance for differences across groups are available for further inquiry.

### ***Institutional Attractiveness***

*Factors Important in Choice of a College or University.* Students were asked how much they agreed or disagreed that 22 factors were important to them in choosing a college or university. Survey responses indicated that the following factors were important to the widest range of students:

- quality of academic programs;
- affordability of tuition and fees;
- opportunity for frequent contact with faculty;
- availability of financial aid;
- quality of placement/career services;
- availability of academic support services;
- counseling services; and
- easy access to buildings for people with disabilities.

However, female, minority students, and students with disabilities cited these additional factors as important:

- presence of women faculty, administrators, and staff;
- presence of faculty, administrators, and staff of different racial/ethnic groups;
- programs/activities that include people with disabilities;
- leadership roles for women in student government organizations;
- leadership roles for students of all races/ethnic groups in student government organizations;
- ethnic/minority studies programs or activities;
- women's studies programs or activities; and

- the presence of an ethnically diverse student body.

*Perceptions about the University of Illinois at Springfield.* Students were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with 10 statements about UIS.

- All student groups tended to agree more than disagree with the statement, "I feel comfortable at UIS and have a sense of belonging."
- All student groups tended to agree more than disagree with the statement, "If I could start over, I would still attend this institution."
- All students groups except international students (who were neutral) agreed that the institution is sensitive to the needs of female students.
- African American and other minority students were neutral about the statement, "This institution is sensitive to the needs of students of all races." All other groups were positive.
- Students with disabilities had less favorable responses than did all students on the statements concerning UIS' sensitivity to the needs of students with disabilities, students of different race, and female students. Even so, their responses were in the neutral range for these statements.

*Perceptions about Whether Certain Conditions Presently Exist on Campus.* Students were asked six questions about their perceptions of how much certain conditions exist on campus.

- Women were more likely than men to report that "a lot" or "some" discrimination exists on campus based on race/ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexual orientation.
- Thirty-nine percent of African American students, 27% of other minority students, 31% of international students, 18% of students with disabilities, and 27% of gay/lesbian students reported "a lot" or "some" discrimination exists on campus based on race/ethnicity, as compared to 8% of white students.
- More than one-third of students with disabilities and nearly half of gay/lesbian students felt that there was "a lot" or "some" discrimination against people with disabilities on campus.

*Experiences Respondents Have Had on the UIS Campus.* The questionnaire asks four questions about students' experiences on campus. The questions focused primarily on harassment and discrimination, but included questions on property destruction/defacement and physical violence.

- Men reported having experienced incidents of sexual discrimination or harassment on campus because of gender almost as frequently as women (8% and 11%, respectively).
- More than one-quarter of African American students report having been subjected to incidents of racial discrimination on campus.

- Fifteen percent of students with disabilities reported having been subjected to incidents of discrimination because of their disabilities.
- One-quarter of students with disabilities and one-half of gay/lesbian students noted negative graffiti on campus.
- Incidents of physical violence on campus and/or second-hand information about such incidents were reported by less than 10% of respondents regardless of gender and ethnicity. The percentages for students with disabilities and gay/lesbian students were 18% and 14%, respectively.

### ***Racial Climate***

The survey instrument explained that colleges can be viewed in different ways by students and that this can be described as "climate" or "campus atmosphere." Students were then asked to rate the racial climate on campus according to 12 pairs of opposites (e.g., tense vs. relaxed).

- Both female and male students had positive perceptions about the racial climate on campus. Student respondents with disabilities also had positive perceptions about the racial climate on campus, although slightly less positive than students as a whole. Gay/lesbian students reported positive perceptions at about the same level as all students.
- Responses of African American, other minority, and international students were generally positive, but were lower than the ratings of white students and all students.

### ***Social Climate***

Students were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with whether 18 social conditions exist on campus. The statements considered conditions such as interactions between minority and non-minority students and incidents due to racial conflict. Responses from racial/ethnic groups on these questions were frequently neutral and produced few patterns of agreement or disagreement.

- African American students and other minority students agreed that there is interaction between minority students and non-minority faculty on campus; however, both groups agreed more strongly that there is interaction between non-minority students and non-minority faculty.
- Student groups tended to be neutral about whether incidents due to racial conflict or sexual preference occur on campus.
- Student groups tended to be neutral about whether open discussion of racial/ethnic issues and concerns or open discussion of gender issues and concerns occurs on campus.
- Student respondents with disabilities registered about the same level of agreement as students as a whole with the notion that there is interaction between students with disabilities and other students, but less agreement with the notion that students with disabilities participate in institution-wide activities.

### ***Academic Climate***

Students were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with nine statements about whether specified conditions exist in academic programs on campus.

- All student groups agreed that their academic programs support diversity.
- All respondent groups agreed that their academic programs admit students regardless of race, gender, and disability.
- All student groups reported that they believe racial/ethnic minorities, women, students with disabilities, and non-minority males have opportunities to participate in professional activities in their academic programs.
- Students with disabilities registered neutrality, as did other respondents, with the idea that their academic programs lack interest in recruiting students with disabilities.

### ***Classroom Climate***

The questionnaire asked 10 questions about how faculty in general act in the classroom and when advising.

- All student groups agreed with the statements that faculty interact well with all students, show a personal interest in all students, and treat all students the same in class.
- All student groups agreed that faculty advise students without regard to race/ethnicity, gender, or disability.
- Although they showed more agreement than disagreement, African American students were less likely than other students groups to agree that faculty

- interacted with, treated, and advised all students the same without regard to race, gender, and disability.
- All student groups were neutral or disagreed that faculty refer appropriate students for counseling/tutoring and that faculty accept suggestions for changes in course content or teaching style from all students. African American students, however, showed more disagreement than respondents from other groups.

### ***Personal Experiences on Campus***

Students were asked to think about their experiences on campus and to indicate the frequency with which they had heard insensitive or disparaging remarks or comments about particular groups of people by other groups of people.

- Most students, female and male, indicated they seldom or never heard insensitive remarks by faculty, staff, or students toward racial/ethnic groups, women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or persons with disabilities.
- Respondents of all racial/ethnic groups indicated they seldom or never heard insensitive/disparaging remarks by faculty or staff toward racial/ethnic groups, women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or persons with disabilities. When respondents did hear disparaging remarks, the comments were by students directed toward racial/ethnic minorities and/or gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.
- Students with disabilities were only slightly more likely than other respondent groups to indicate they had heard insensitive or disparaging remarks about people with disabilities from faculty, staff, and students.
- Gay/lesbian students were much more likely than other respondent groups to indicate that they had often or sometimes heard insensitive or disparaging remarks about gays, lesbians, and bisexuals from faculty, staff, and students.

### ***Gender and Cultural Diversity***

The questionnaire made the statement, "There has been growing debate over affirmative action policies." It then asked students to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with two policy issues. First, they were asked in general whether they were supportive of "programs that aid racial/ethnic minorities and women in employment and college admissions" (affirmative action). Second, they were asked in general whether they believed "that college courses, events, and programs should include the perspectives of racial/ethnic minorities and women" (inclusiveness).

- Three-fifths of all students strongly agreed or agreed with the statement about affirmative action, while three-quarters strongly agreed or agreed with the statement about inclusiveness.
- More than 90% of African American students strongly agreed or agreed with both statements, while more than 80% of other minority students did so.

- Of male respondents, 49% strongly agreed or agreed with the affirmative action statement and 69% with the inclusiveness statement.

### ***Open-Ended Questions about Diversity on Campus***

The questionnaire asked students, "What do you think can be done at UIS to strengthen and improve the climate for diversity on campus." Frequent responses were that there isn't a problem (29 students); that UIS should offer diversity workshops, programs, and exchanges (17); that UIS should have more social events for students including diversity (17); and that UIS is doing a good job with diversity (13). On the other hand, 15 students indicated there is reverse discrimination at UIS, and seven students suggested that UIS should concentrate on academics rather than diversity.

Students were also asked, "What other ideas do you have about the issue of diversity that you would like to share with us?" The most frequent comments supportive of diversity were that UIS should focus on commonalities rather than differences (18) and that UIS is doing a good job with diversity (15). Less positively, eight respondents indicated that they had personally experienced, witnessed, or heard about discrimination on campus. Other less positive comments were that UIS should focus on academics rather than diversity (16) and that reverse discrimination exists on campus (16). Eleven respondents made negative comments about the survey, and 10 made negative comments about affirmative action.

### **Conclusions**

The *Student Campus Climate Survey Report* was forward to the provost on May 25, 2001, too late for action during FY01. UIS, however, will form a campuswide enrollment management team during FY02 that will draw on the findings of the survey in terms of overall recruitment and retention. In addition, the survey findings will be used to inform both the Diversity Task Force's agenda during AY01-02 and the associate chancellor for access and equal opportunity's review of campus policies and practices for enhancing diversity on campus. A preliminary review of the findings, however, allows the campus to conclude certain institutional strengths and areas for improvement.

#### *Strengths*

- Students, including students from protected groups, are generally content at the University of Illinois at Springfield and feel a sense of belonging here. They would choose UIS again, if they had it to do over.
- Students generally perceive academic programs at UIS as supportive of diversity.

- Students generally believe faculty are fair in their treatment of all students.
- Students perceive the racial climate on campus as generally positive.
- Faculty and staff seldom or never engage in insensitive language toward racial/ethnic groups, women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or persons with disabilities.
- The UIS campus body seems to support inclusiveness.

#### *Areas for Improvement*

- Although virtually all survey results for the various student respondent groups fell within the positive or neutral ranges, a gap is consistently apparent in the level of satisfaction expressed by African American, other minority, and international students as compared to that of white students.
- Despite the generally positive attitude toward the campus climate, a disconcerting proportion of students reported incidents of discrimination based on gender, race/ethnicity, disability, and/or sexual orientation.
- Students with disabilities and gay/lesbian students groups report hearing about or having experienced incidents of violence at a higher rate than other student groups.

## **Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory**

The Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) assesses the importance students attach to and their satisfaction with various aspects of academics, student services, and student life. The difference between the level of importance and the level of satisfaction is defined as the satisfaction gap, which institutions are encouraged to use when considering priorities for action. Noel-Levitz benchmarked the UIS results against national group means from over 200,000 students from four-year institutions.

In April 2001, more than 1200 students at UIS responded to the Student Satisfaction Survey. For the scope of this report, student responses were segregated by groups of undergraduates: female students, male students, African American students, and white students. Responses to 18 items deemed of particular importance in determining the campus climate for members of underrepresented groups were examined. *Note:* Caution should be used in interpreting African American responses or in making comparisons because of the small number of respondents (N = 32).

## Findings

*Strengths.* Noel-Levitz defines institutional strengths as items where SSI importance scores are above the median and SSI satisfaction scores are in the top quartile. *Note:* Male responses to the 18 items indicated neither campus strengths nor areas of weakness.

- Female, African American, and white student responses to the following items indicate campus strengths:

The campus staff are caring and helpful.  
Faculty care about me as an individual.  
My academic adviser is approachable.  
The campus is safe and secure for all students.

- Female student responses indicated a campus strength on the following additional item: This campus effectively serves the needs of undergraduate students.
- African American student responses indicated campus strengths on the following additional items:

My academic adviser is concerned about my success.  
Adequate financial aid is available for most students.  
My academic adviser helps me set goals to work toward.  
Students are made to feel welcome here.  
This institution shows concern for students as individuals.  
Freedom of expression is protected on campus.

*Priorities for Action.* Priorities for action are defined by Noel-Levitz as SSI importance scores above the median and SSI satisfaction scores in the lowest quartile – *or* SSI performance gap scores in the top quartile.

- Female responses to the following item suggest a priority for action: Adequate financial aid is available for most students.
- African American responses to these items suggest priorities for action:

Faculty are fair and unbiased in their treatment of individual students.  
Faculty take into consideration student differences as they teach a class.  
The campus effectively serves the needs of the undergraduate students.

## **Conclusions**

The Noel-Levitz survey lends support to the findings from the Diversity Task Force survey regarding positive perceptions of the UIS campus climate. Females and African American students report that they perceive the campus staff to be helpful and the climate safe and secure. They also believe that faculty are concerned about students as individuals on campus.

The Noel-Levitz findings, however, raise concerns about the perception of availability of financial aid among female students. Further, although findings for African American students must be interpreted cautiously because of the small number of respondents, the satisfaction gap related to fair and unbiased treatment raises concerns.

As with the findings of the Diversity Task Force survey, the new enrollment management team will follow up on the Noel-Levitz findings during the 2001-02 academic year.