

Classroom Climate Diversity Study

Executive Summary

Division of Undergraduate Affairs in collaboration with the University Planning and Analysis,

Office of Diversity and African American Affairs,

University Planning and Analysis, and Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services

North Carolina State University

Executive Summary

The Classroom Climate Diversity Study was conducted at N.C. State University during the fall of 2002. An online survey was administered to over 10,000 of undergraduate and graduate students to identify students' perceptions of the classroom climate in regards to diversity.

Definitions of Diversity

Student perceptions of factors that conceptually constitute diversity were examined among the undergraduate and graduate sample members. Three definitions emerged from the study and were used to clarify students' perceptions of classroom diversity.

1. Definition one (e.g., all factors) was derived from students choosing all thirteen bio- and socio-demographic factors, which include age, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, geographic location, intelligence, learning disability, physical disability, psychological disability, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.
2. Definition two (e.g., races, ethnicity, and/or nationality) was derived from students who selected race, ethnicity, and/or nationality or various combinations of the three.
3. Definition three (e.g., residual) comprised the residual responses. It was derived from students who selected various combinations of the thirteen bio- and socio-demographic factors, but does not include those students grouped in definitions one or two.

Principal Findings

Students' perceptions of classroom climate varied, to a certain extent, based on how they defined diversity. In addition, there were noted differences in how undergraduate students perceived the classroom climate in their general education courses compared to courses within their discipline. While the significance of these findings varies by diversity definition, students more strongly agreed that their GER courses provided experiences and information that helped them gain an understanding about diversity than did their discipline courses.

While there was a reported high level of agreement (> 90%) among undergraduate students that there are respectful interactions between faculty and students and among students in the classroom, there was a significant difference in that students reported greater agreement to having respectful interactions between students and faculty and among students themselves in their discipline courses than in their GER courses. Regardless of diversity definition, over 87% of the graduate students agreed and strongly agreed that instructors respect the knowledge capacity of students. Moreover, students' perception of how supportive the classroom environment is for various groups varied by diversity definitions.

Finally, from analysis of open-ended responses, students characterized that a positive classroom climate exists when students are provided with opportunities to have diverse interactions with peers and faculty. Students believe that classroom diversity can be improved if more opportunities for respectful interactions with diverse peers and faculty are provided and such occasions allow for the increase in knowledge of diversity, the building of respectful discourse and engagement, increased representation of diverse people, and the awareness and refinement of policies that would encourage such connections to occur.