

**Beginning to Assess the Student Climate for Diversity at Cornell:
Preliminary Findings on Student Engagement and Inclusion from Student Surveys**

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*Prepared by Institutional Research and Planning
in consultation with the University Diversity Council*

Introduction

This report highlights selected survey results relating to two dimensions of the campus climate for diversity—engagement and inclusion—as reported by Cornell undergraduate and graduate students in recent surveys. This effort supports the continuing work of the University Diversity Council to assess campus climate, and is consonant with recommendations from Cornell’s Incident Management Team and President Skorton’s February 2013 statement on bias and sexual misconduct.

This report is not intended to be an all-encompassing assessment of diversity at Cornell, but will inform a more comprehensive examination of the student climate for diversity unfolding in the 2013-14 academic year. As these data were collected as part of on-going survey efforts across the university, the information described here can serve as a baseline for measuring Cornell’s progress in achieving a diverse and inclusive campus community henceforth. Further, these results will provide important context for planning policies and practices to enhance the climate for diversity for our students.

Context

Cornell is committed to increasing the diversity of the university community and to improving the campus climate for diversity for its students, faculty and staff. The University’s diversity planning initiative, *Toward New Destinations*, emphasizes four facets of an inclusive community: composition, achievement, inclusion, and engagement. During the 2012-13 academic year, the University Diversity Council (UDC) supported the development of a dashboard¹ to monitor the first of these principles, the *composition* of Cornell’s constituencies, and initiated work on a dashboard to track *achievement*.

¹The Composition Dashboard is available at irp.dpb.cornell.edu/university-factbook/diversity

During the same period, an Incident Management Team (IMT) was convened in response to a series of sexual assault and bias incidents on campus. Included among the many recommendations of the IMT was that the UDC should develop and coordinate a sustainable plan to assess campus climate; President Skorton embraced this recommendation.² Subsequently, the office of Institutional Research and Planning (IRP) worked closely with several members of the UDC to increase the breadth and depth of survey measures relating to the climate for diversity within the framework of on-going and regularly conducted surveys administered by IRP.

We report the results of these efforts to enhance our collection of survey data on climate in this report; the data presented are all from institutional surveys of undergraduate students, and of PhD and master's degree students enrolled in the Graduate School, that were conducted during the 2013 spring semester.

While the scope and accessibility of survey data on the campus climate for students has been greatly enhanced, the analysis provided here is introductory rather than conclusive. Within its limited pages, this review can merely highlight *some* of the findings. A more comprehensive consideration of these data will take additional time and analysis.

To further our assessment efforts, the university has invited a leading scholar of diversity in higher education—Sylvia Hurtado, Professor and Director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies—to our campus to review these survey results, and to supplement these quantitative findings with data gleaned from interviews and focus groups to be conducted by Dr. Hurtado's research team later this fall. Under Dr. Hurtado's guidance and leadership, a report summarizing this qualitative research on Cornell's student climate for diversity is expected in the 2014 spring semester.

Framework

Reflecting the organizing framework of the UDC's *Towards New Destinations* document, the survey data have been organized around the concepts of *engagement* and *inclusion*:

- *Engagement* is the behavioral dimension of the climate for diversity. It refers to the form and extent of behaviors or interactions among individuals. In short, it is what individuals actually *do* on campus. For students, this includes their involvement in the academic, co-curricular, and extracurricular or social aspects of the Cornell campus experience, as well as behaviors and interactions more directly related to diversity.
- *Inclusion* is the psychological dimension of the campus climate for diversity. It refers to how individuals *feel* about their campus experiences. This encompasses students' perceptions of the quality of their interactions with peers, faculty members and administrators, including their sense of the campus as a place where they belong and are treated with respect.

² The president's statement is available at www.cornell.edu/statements/2013/20130228-sexual-misconduct.cfm

Parallel to the UDC’s presentation of data on composition and achievement (see Figure 1), results of these survey data on our students’ engagement and inclusion have been organized into dashboards. The dashboards are available here:

<http://irp.dpb.cornell.edu/university-factbook/diversity>

Figure 1. The University’s Four Diversity Dashboards

Diversity Dashboards

Cornell’s University Diversity Council has adopted an institutional diversity planning framework titled, *“Toward New Destinations.”* This framework organizes diversity initiatives around four core principles: composition, engagement, inclusion, and achievement. The following dashboards allow us to monitor progress in these four areas.



“Diversity” is often a reference to racial, ethnic, and gender identities; sometimes, it is more broadly conceived to include other domains of difference. In the dashboards and in this report, we refer broadly to “social identity groups”; that is, social groups with which individuals identify and that are a meaningful part of one’s self-definition. In the undergraduate survey used here, students were given the opportunity to identify within several different categories of social identity, including race, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, religion, political orientation and social class. The survey did not define terms (e.g. “queer”) for respondents, but merely asked them to self-identify with one of several provided options within each social category.

When summarizing climate results across multiple social identity groups, this report uses terms common in the literature on diversity and social inequality, such as “under-represented,” “majority,” and “dominant.” The intent is to distinguish the climate for students belonging to groups that have been historically under-represented or accorded lower status in higher

education from those who belonging to groups that have been traditionally over-represented or accorded higher status. While these terms are less precise than enumerating specific groups in each instance (e.g. “Black and Hispanic,” “transgendered” or “poor or low-income”), the sheer plethora of associations reported here has made some generalizations necessary.

Finally, because the dashboards allow users to select from *dozens* of survey items and to parse each survey item by multiple social identities (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation, social class), this report does not attempt to systematically represent the full breadth of findings available. Moreover, this report makes no claim to identify the “most important” climate issues. Rather, these preliminary analyses merely identify *some* of the general patterns of engagement and inclusion as reported by our student survey respondents, and describe whether and how these patterns differ across social identity groups. The report uses charts to provide a few salient illustrations of these patterns, and to demonstrate the variations in campus climate as reported by different segments of the Cornell student community. To see detailed survey results broken out by specific social identity groups, the reader is encouraged to view the web-based dashboards available here: <http://irp.dpb.cornell.edu/university-factbook/diversity>

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Key Findings

Overall, our students consistently report high levels of engagement in academically-oriented activities (e.g., interactions with faculty and advisors), and also report quite extensive involvement in behaviors more directly related to diversity (e.g., discussions of inter-group relations, awareness of opportunities to combat bias on campus). Our students evaluate their Cornell experience very favorably, and the majority of them hold very positive perceptions of their local campus environments (e.g., ability to find their own community at Cornell, interactions with students and faculty within their program or department). Students have less favorable perceptions of the broader campus climate (e.g., campus efforts to counter bias, campus engagement to build a positive environment for under-represented groups).

The climate for diversity at Cornell varies significantly for students from different backgrounds or social identities; differences are larger for measures of inclusion than engagement. In general, students who identify with historically less-represented groups are more actively involved in diversity-related behaviors and have more negative perceptions of the climate for diversity, particularly within the broader campus context, than their peers from traditionally dominant groups.

Undergraduate Student Survey Results

The PULSE (Perceptions of Undergraduate Life and Student Experiences) is a web-based survey of undergraduate students conducted every two years by Institutional Research and Planning. For spring 2013, the survey instrument was revised to include a broader slate of diversity-related questions as well as more nuanced opportunities for students to describe their social identities. A total of 6,190 students participated in the survey, for an overall response rate of 45%.

The PULSE asked students to describe themselves on the basis of their gender, sexual orientation, race/citizenship, disability status, religious affiliation, political views and social class. For the purposes of this study, students' survey responses were compared across these social identity groups, using the categories described below:

Gender: male, female, transgender/gender-variant

Sexual orientation: straight/heterosexual; gay, lesbian or bisexual; queer; questioning; not specified

Race/citizenship: White (U.S.); Asian (U.S.); Black (U.S.); Hispanic (U.S.); Other (U.S.) (this category includes U.S. students who identified as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander or American Indian, U.S. students who selected multiple races that did not include either Black or Hispanic, and U.S. students who did not report their race/ethnic identity); and international

Disability: learning disability or ADHD; physical or sensory disability (epilepsy, cerebral palsy, deaf/hard of hearing, etc.); chronic mental health condition (depression, PTSD, etc.); other disability or medical condition; multiple disabilities or medical conditions; none

Religious affiliation: Christian; Buddhist; Hindu; Jewish; Muslim; other religious, spiritual, or philosophical tradition; spiritual but not identified with a religious tradition or group; atheist; none

Political orientation: very liberal; liberal; moderate/middle-of-the-road; conservative; very conservative; something else; have not decided

Social class: low income or poor; working class; middle class; upper-middle or professional class; wealthy

This report considers findings across social identities for PULSE respondents as a whole. The dashboards available on the web also permit viewing survey results for social identity groups within class levels (first-year, sophomore, junior and senior).

Engagement

The PULSE survey asked undergraduate students about two aspects of their engagement at Cornell. Measures of *academically-oriented engagement* asked about the frequency of out-of-class interactions with faculty members, such as having intellectual discussions and working with faculty on research. Measures of *diversity-related engagement* asked about the frequency of interactions with peers from different backgrounds or social identities, such as socializing together, having meaningful discussions about inter-group relations, and feeling insulted or

threatened based on one's own social identity; and about efforts to educate oneself about diversity.

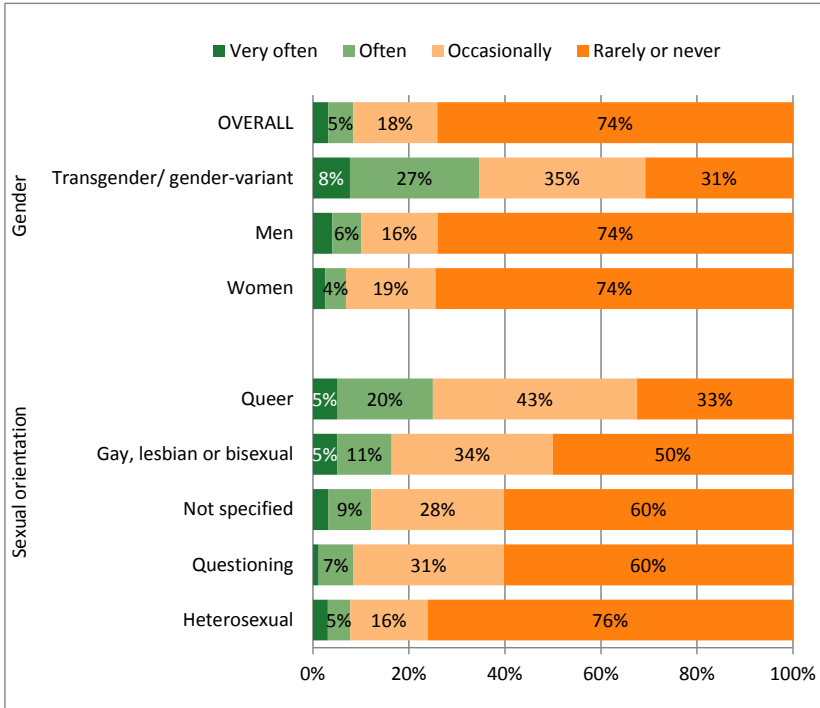
Academically-oriented engagement: Undergraduates, overall, reported fairly high rates of academically-oriented engagement. Almost two-thirds of students had discussed their post-college plans with faculty or had intellectual discussions with other students outside of class "occasionally" or more often; more than half had participated in community service; and more than one-third had conducted research with faculty or had worked with faculty on activities other than coursework or research. There were statistically significant differences in academic engagement associated with social identity, but these differences were typically not large in practical terms.

Diversity-related engagement: Undergraduates reported quite extensive engagement in diverse interactions of a positive nature: three-quarters had "very often" or "often" socialized or felt comfortable sharing their own experiences with peers from diverse backgrounds; two-thirds reported "very often" or "often" studying together; and half had "very often" or "often" had meaningful conversations about inter-group relations or made efforts to learn about diversity. Undergraduates, as a whole, were less likely to have experienced negative interactions with diverse peers: one-quarter had "occasionally" or more often felt insulted or threatened based on their own social identity, and one-third had "occasionally" or more often witnessed someone else being insulted or threatened because of that individual's social identity.

However, there were large differences, statistically and in practical terms, in the extent to which members of various social identity groups engaged in diversity-related behaviors. Compared to their majority group counterparts, students from historically less-represented groups reported more frequent interactions, both positive and negative, with peers from different backgrounds. The largest differences concerned experiencing insults or threats related to one's social identity, witnessing others being insulted or threatened, and involvement in efforts to learn about diversity. Figures 2 and 3 provide examples of these patterns.

Students were asked, "During this academic year, how often have you had the following interactions with diverse students (e.g., students differing from you in race, national origin, sexual orientation, political views) at Cornell: Felt insulted or threatened based on your social identity (e.g., sex, race, national origin, sexual orientation, or values)?" The highest incidence of experiencing such insults or threats was associated with students' gender and sexual orientation (see Figure 2 next page).

Figure 2. Experienced insults or threats related to one's social identity, undergraduate students by gender and sexual orientation



Compared to male and female peers, transgendered or gender-variant students reported significantly higher incidence of insults or threats; one-third had experienced them “often” or “very often,” and an additional third had experienced them “occasionally.”

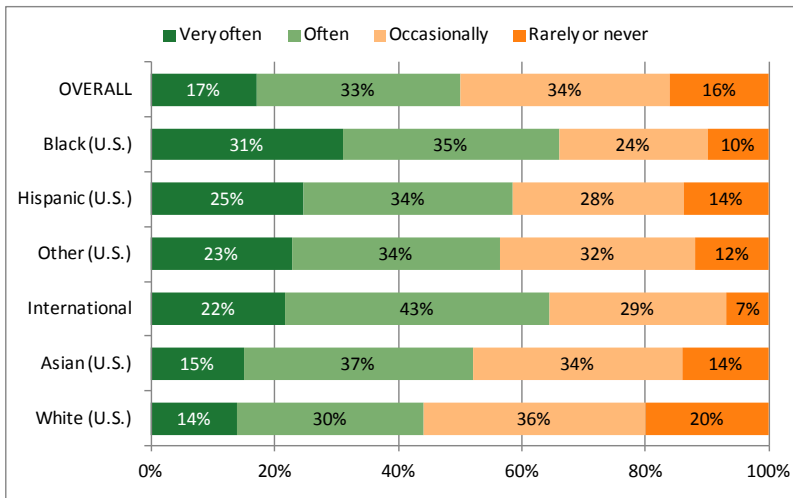
Sexual orientation was also strongly associated with experiencing such insults or threats. Students identifying as queer reported the highest incidence of feeling insulted or threatened, followed by gay, lesbian and bisexual students, while heterosexual

students reported the lowest incidence.

There were statistically significant differences in the experience of insults or threats within other social identity groups. The largest differences were associated with students’ race/citizenship, religious affiliation and political views; with Black (U.S.), Muslim, and politically “very conservative” students, respectively, reporting the highest incidence of insults and threats.

Students were asked how often they had made efforts to educate themselves about diversity during the current academic year. To illustrate variations in this form of engagement by social identity, Figure 3 (shown on next page) shows results as reported by students of different races/citizenship.

Figure 3. Made efforts to educate self about diversity, undergraduate students by race/citizenship



Half of all survey respondents said they had made such efforts “very often” or “often,” while one-third had done so “occasionally.”

These efforts varied significantly by students’ race/citizenship. Black (U.S.) and international students reported the most engagement in diversity-related education, with roughly two-thirds of both groups making such efforts

“very often” or “often.” This compares to 43% of white (U.S.) students.

Political views were strongly associated with engagement in learning about diversity. Sixty-one percent of students with “very liberal” political views had made efforts to educate themselves about diversity compared to 31% of students with “very conservative” views.

Significant differences were also associated with students’ gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation and social class. Within these social identities, the following groups of students reported the *most* frequent engagement in diversity-related learning: transgender or gender-variant; queer and gay, lesbian or bisexual; Muslim; and low income or poor students. Readers are encouraged to visit the web-based dashboards to see complete results for measures of undergraduate students’ engagement.

Inclusion

As measures of the psychological aspect of climate, the PULSE survey asked about students’ perceptions of their *academically-oriented experiences* at Cornell (evaluation of their entire educational experience, and quality of their interactions with faculty); their feelings about *community on campus* (satisfaction with social aspects of campus life, sense of community and belonging); and perceptions of the *campus climate for diverse groups* (institutional commitment, climate for students belonging to various social identity groups, and climate for students like themselves).

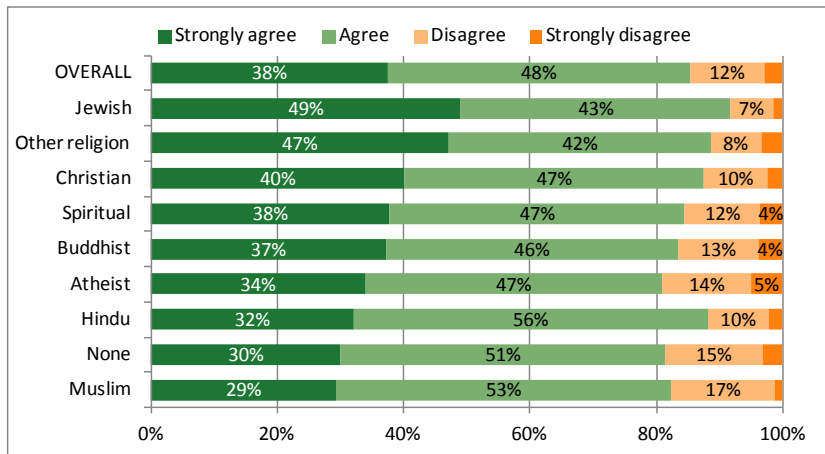
Academically-oriented experiences: Overall, respondents felt very positive about their entire educational experience at Cornell, with 89% rating their experience as “excellent” or “good,” but this evaluation differed significantly across social identity groups. The largest differences were associated with students’ disability status (students with chronic mental health conditions or multiple disabilities/medical conditions rated their experience much less positively than students without disabilities) and race/citizenship (Black and Asian American students gave substantively lower ratings than white American students).

Students also perceived their interactions with faculty members very positively. More than 90% agreed that faculty members treat them fairly and are willing to talk with them individually; eighty-one percent agreed that faculty include diverse perspectives in class discussions and assignments; and just over half (53%) felt they had to work harder than their peers to be seen as a good student. Perceptions of faculty interactions varied significantly with social identity, but these variations were also associated with class level and college affiliation, and were smaller than differences observed for other measures of the psychological climate.

Community on campus: Most students were satisfied with ethnic/racial diversity (88%) and social life (81%) on campus. They were less satisfied with administration’s responsiveness to student concerns (74%). While the majority of students (86%) agreed they had found an accepting community within Cornell, students were more tepid in their satisfaction with the sense of campus community as whole, with just three-quarters (73%) voicing satisfaction.

There were large differences, statistically and practically speaking, in perceptions of campus community across social identity groups. As a general rule, students belonging to less-represented groups held less positive perceptions than members of traditional majority groups. Some of the largest differences were associated with finding an accepting community on campus. Students were asked whether “I have found a community at Cornell where I feel like I belong.” Figure 4 shows perceptions of this aspect of campus climate for students of different religious affiliations.

Figure 4. Found a community on campus where I belong, undergraduate students by religious affiliation



Jewish students and those belonging to “other” religious, spiritual or philosophical traditions voiced the strongest agreement (92% and 89%, respectively) with this statement while Muslim students and those with no religious affiliation were significantly less likely to agree (82% and 81%, respectively) that they had

found a community on campus where they felt they belonged.

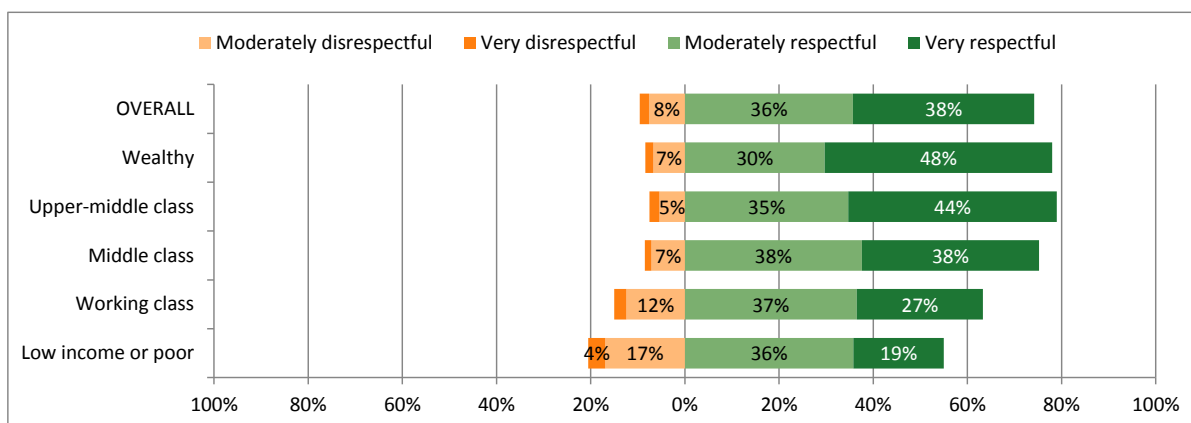
This sense of finding an accepting campus community also differed significantly for students of other social identities, most notably, by gender, race/citizenship, disability status, and social class. The following groups of students were *least* likely to have found an accepting community within Cornell: transgender or gender-variant students; students with chronic mental health conditions or multiple disabilities; and students from low income or poor backgrounds.

Campus climate for diverse groups: The majority of students (90%) agreed that Cornell has a strong institutional commitment to diversity and is a place where “students are respectful of one another when discussing controversial issues or perspectives” (88%). Three-quarters of

respondents felt the climate at Cornell was respectful for students like themselves. Two-thirds or more characterized the campus climate as respectful for students of color, women, LGBT students, international students, and students of all religious or spiritual beliefs. A smaller proportion viewed the climate as respectful for students from lower-income backgrounds (58%) and students from all political views (56%).

However, there were large and statistically significant differences in perceptions of campus climate by class level and social identity. First-year students held more positive views of campus climate than upper-division students. Members of historically less-represented groups generally viewed the campus climate less favorably than members of more dominant groups. This was most apparent in students’ perceptions of the campus climate for “students like you (e.g., students who share your race, sexual orientation, political views, religious beliefs, etc.)” Figure 5 (next page) illustrates these differences for students of different social classes; note that students who responded “neither respectful nor disrespectful” are omitted from this chart.

Figure 5. Campus climate for students “like you,” undergraduate students by social class



While still predominantly positive, students who described their social class as “low income or poor” or as “working class” had much *less* positive perceptions of campus climate than their peers from higher social classes. Just 19% of low-income students and 27% of working class students described the campus climate as “very respectful” for students like themselves compared to 44% of upper-middle class students and 48% of wealthy students.

Students identifying as queer or transgendered/gender-variant also held much less favorable perceptions of the campus climate with 40% and 30%, respectively, characterizing the climate as “very disrespectful” or “moderately disrespectful” for “students like you;” this compares to just 10% of undergraduate respondents, overall. Black (U.S.) students, students with multiple disabilities, and those holding “very conservative” political views also characterized the campus climate as being much less respectful for students like themselves than their counterparts did. Again, readers are reminded that complete survey results are available on the web-based dashboards.

Master's Degree Student Survey Results

In May and June of this year, all students enrolled in the Graduate School who were on track to graduate in Spring 2013 were invited to participate in the Graduate Student Exit survey. For this examination of student climate, our analysis was restricted to responses from master's degree candidates³. A total of 541 master's degree students participated in the survey for an overall response rate of 55%.

The Graduate Student Exit Survey asked students to describe themselves on the basis of their sex/gender, sexual orientation, and whether or not they had dependent children. Data concerning students' race and citizenship were pulled from administrative files. Students were given more nuanced response options to describe their gender identity and sexual orientation but small numbers of respondents in less-represented social identity categories necessitated creating dichotomous codes for these aspects of social identity. Master's students' experiences and perceptions concerning the climate for diversity were compared across four social identity dimensions, using the categories described below:

Sex: male, female

Sexual orientation: heterosexual, non-heterosexual

Race/citizenship: White (U.S.); Asian (U.S.); underrepresented minority [URM] (U.S.) which includes Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, as well as students with multiple racial identities that include one or more of these underrepresented groups; other (U.S.) which includes non-URM multiracial students and those who did not report a racial/ethnic identity; and international students of any race or ethnicity.

Dependent children: have dependent children, no dependent children

Engagement

We examined two aspects of students' engagement at Cornell from the Graduate Student Exit Survey. Measures of *academically-oriented engagement* asked about students' experiences with their advisors. Measures of *diversity-related engagement* asked about their awareness of and involvement in opportunities to address bias and stereotyping on campus.

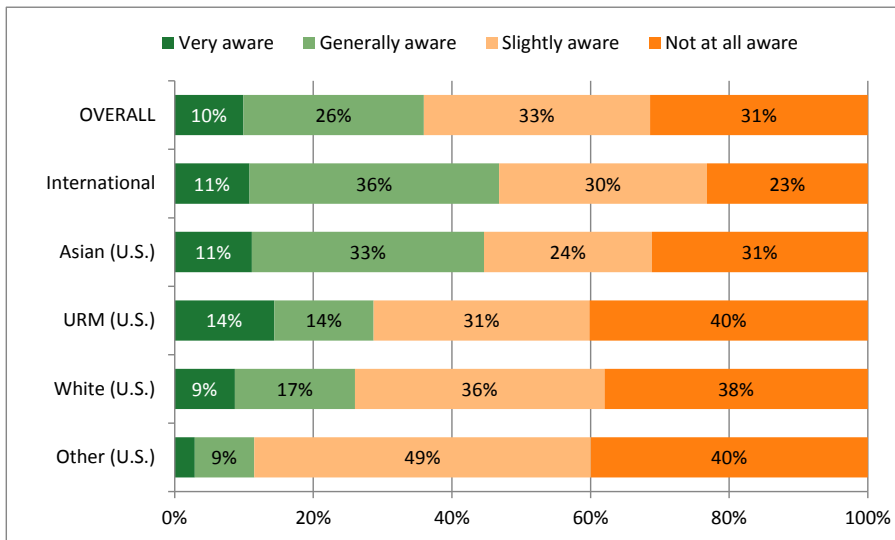
Academically-oriented engagement: On the whole, master's degree students reported positive experiences with their advisors. The majority (84%) of students "generally" or "strongly" agreed their advisor was available when needed. More than 70% agreed their advisor held expectations that were clear and reasonable, and provided them with constructive feedback on their work. Students were less likely to agree their advisor promoted their professional development (66%). There were few statistically significant or consistent patterns of differences in these measures of academic engagement associated with students' social identities.

³ Note that professional degree students enrolled in the professional schools (Johnson Graduate School of Management, Law School and College of Veterinary Medicine) were not included in the Graduate Student Exit Survey population. While PhD students were included in the Exit survey, we report on their responses to another survey, the Graduate Student Experience Survey, in the next section of this report.

Diversity-related engagement: Two-thirds of master’s degree students reported some awareness of opportunities for students to work with Cornell administrators to combat bias on campus. Just one-third reported they had been engaged “some,” “quite a bit” or “extensively” in efforts to improve understanding of bias and stereotyping on campus.

There were statistically significant differences in this engagement associated with students’ race/citizenship. Figure 6 shows race/citizenship-associated differences in students’ awareness of opportunities for students to work with Cornell administrators to combat bias on campus.

Figure 6. Awareness of opportunities to work with administrators against bias, master’s students by race/citizenship



International and Asian (U.S.) students were most aware of opportunities to address bias on campus, with 47% and 44%, respectively, being either “very aware” or “generally aware.” URM, white, and, particularly, “other” (U.S.) students were significantly less informed; just 12% of other (U.S.) students

reported being “very” or “generally” aware of such opportunities.

There were similar patterns observed regarding students’ engagement in efforts to improve understanding of bias and stereotyping on campus; international students reported the most involvement, with 21% engaged “extensively” or “quite a bit,” followed by URM (U.S.) and Asian (U.S.) students (14% and 12%, respectively), while white and “other” (U.S.) students were significantly less involved in these efforts (7% and 3%, respectively).

Inclusion

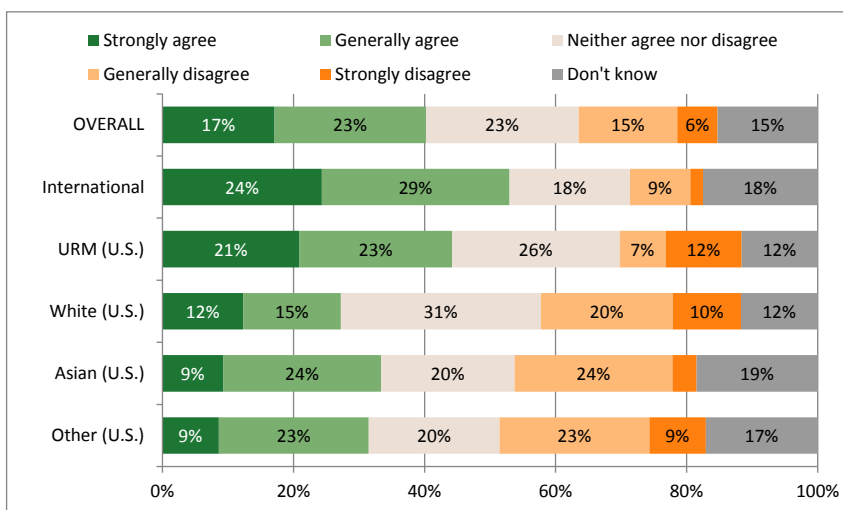
To examine the psychological aspects of climate, the Graduate Student Exit survey asked about students’ *evaluations of their Cornell experience* (academic, student life and overall experience); perceptions of the *program climate* for students (whether students are valued, included and treated fairly within their program); and perceptions of the broader *campus climate* for students (personal sense of being accepted and valued at Cornell, institutional commitment to building a positive environment for diversity).

Evaluations of Cornell experience: Master’s degree students were quite positive about their Cornell experience, with more than three-quarters rating their academic and overall experience as “excellent” or “very good,” and close to two-thirds (63%) rating their student life experience as “excellent” or “very good.” There was little variation in evaluations across social identities.

Program climate: Master’s degree students generally held positive views of their interactions with faculty and students in their program; for example, 92% agreed “strongly” or “generally” that “students in my program are treated with respect by faculty” and 84% agreed that “students in my program are collegial.” Three-quarters of respondents agreed their program’s procedures were “fair and equitable to all.” Students were less certain about support provided by faculty and department programs for students from historically underrepresented groups; one-third of respondents answered “don’t know” to these aspects of program climate.

Program climate did not differ substantively on the basis of students’ gender, sexual orientation and parental status. However, there were a few statistically significant differences in how students of different races/citizenship experienced the climate within their programs. The largest of these concerned students’ sense of legitimacy as a scholar (shown in Figure 7).

Figure 7. Have to work harder to be perceived as legitimate scholar, master’s degree students by race/citizenship



Forty percent of students agreed they had to “... work harder than some of my peers to be perceived as a legitimate scholar.” This feeling was more pronounced among international and URM (U.S.) students, with 53% and 44%, respectively, voicing agreement; this compares to one-third or less of their peers of other races.

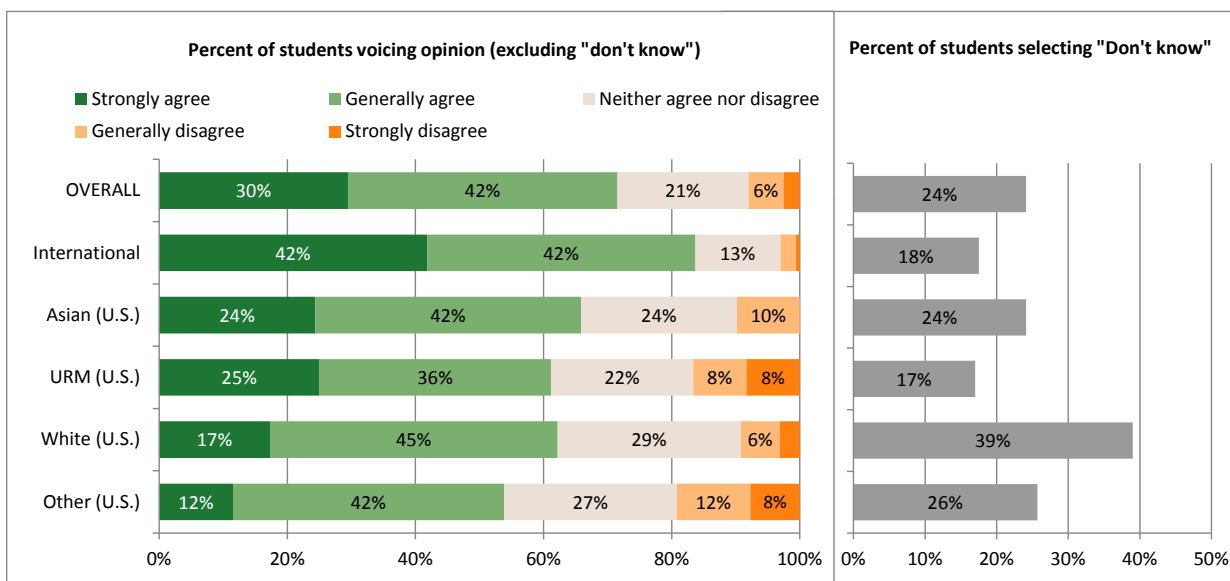
Students’ sense of inclusion within their programs also differed significantly by race/citizenship. International and Asian (U.S.) students were much more likely to agree that “I feel excluded from informal networks in my program” (39% and 32%, respectively) than white or “other” American students (18% and 17%, respectively).

Campus climate: Master’s degree students, on the whole, reported positive personal experiences at Cornell. A clear majority felt safe (94%), accepted (84%) and valued (76%) at Cornell, while just 20% felt left out. There were a few statistically significant differences in these personal perceptions associated with students’ sexual orientation and race/citizenship. For example, sixty-one percent of heterosexual students strongly agreed that “I feel safe at Cornell” compared to 48% of students with other sexual orientations. Similarly, more than one-third (36%) of heterosexual students strongly agreed that “I feel valued at Cornell” compared to just 13% of non-heterosexual students. URM (U.S.) and international students were more likely to agree that “I feel left out at Cornell” (31% and 26%, respectively) than U.S. students of other races.

When asked for their perceptions of broader campus efforts concerning diversity, students frequently selected the “don’t know” response option; among all respondents, the percent of

students reporting “don’t know” ranged from 19% when considering campus efforts to counter overt acts of bias, to 39% when considering the effectiveness of university programs intended to support historically underrepresented students. The selection of the “don’t know” response varied across social identity groups, but most significantly by race/citizenship. In general, URM (U.S.) students were most likely to venture an opinion concerning campus efforts to enhance the climate for diversity, while white (U.S.) respondents were most likely to answer “don’t know” to these statements. Figure 8 illustrates this pattern, using the statement, “Cornell faculty and staff are actively engaged in building a campus community concerned about issues regarding power and privilege.”

Figure 8. Cornell faculty and staff are building campus community concerned about power and privilege, master’s degree students by race/citizenship



As shown in the right side of this chart, white, Asian and other (U.S.) respondents were much more likely to report “don’t know” in relation to this aspect of campus climate than were international and URM (U.S.) respondents. The chart on the left shows responses *only for those respondents who selected a response other than “don’t know.”* With this restriction in place, race-based differences remain but are smaller than those associated with selecting the “don’t know” response option. International students were most likely to agree that Cornell faculty and staff members are building a campus community concerned with issues of power and privilege, while “other” (U.S.) students voiced the least agreement with this aspect of campus climate.

Similar response patterns – concerning both the selection of “don’t know” and opinions excluding “don’t know” – were observed for other measures of the broader campus climate (e.g., Cornell’s responsiveness to acts of bias and violence, commitment to creating a positive environment for underrepresented groups, and effectiveness of university-wide programs to support underrepresented students).

PhD Student Survey Results

In February and March of this year, all PhD students who had at least four semesters of enrollment and were *not* on track to graduate in Spring 2013 were invited to participate in the Graduate Student Experience survey. A total of 1,290 PhD students participated in the survey, for an overall response rate of 51%

The Graduate Student Experience Survey asked students to describe themselves on the basis of their sex/gender, sexual orientation, and whether or not they had dependent children. Data concerning students' race and citizenship were pulled from administrative files. Students were given more nuanced response options to describe their gender identity and sexual orientation but small numbers of respondents in less-represented social identity categories necessitated creating dichotomous codes for these aspects of social identity. PhD students' experiences and perceptions concerning the climate for diversity were compared across four social identity dimensions, using the categories described below:

Sex: male, female

Sexual orientation: heterosexual, non-heterosexual

Race/citizenship: White (U.S.); Asian (U.S.); underrepresented minority [URM] (U.S.) which includes Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students, as well as students with multiple racial identities that include one or more of these underrepresented groups; other (U.S.) which includes non-URM multiracial students and those who did not report a racial/ethnic identity; and international students of any race or ethnicity.

Dependent children: have dependent children, no dependent children

Engagement

The Graduate Student Experience survey asked about students' *academically-oriented engagement* (experiences with advisors, research, and assistantships) and *diversity-related engagement* (awareness of and involvement in opportunities to address bias and stereotyping on campus).

Academically-oriented engagement: Like master's degree students, PhD students reported positive experiences with their advisors and assistantships. The majority of respondents "generally" or "strongly" agreed their advisor was available when needed (88%), gave constructive feedback on their work (81%), and regularly discussed the student's research (79%). More than 70% agreed their advisor held expectations that were clear and reasonable, and promoted their professional development. Among students who had an assistantship the previous semester, fully 90% agreed the assistantship was related to their program of study, and more than three-quarters felt they were provided appropriate training and guidance for the assistantship.

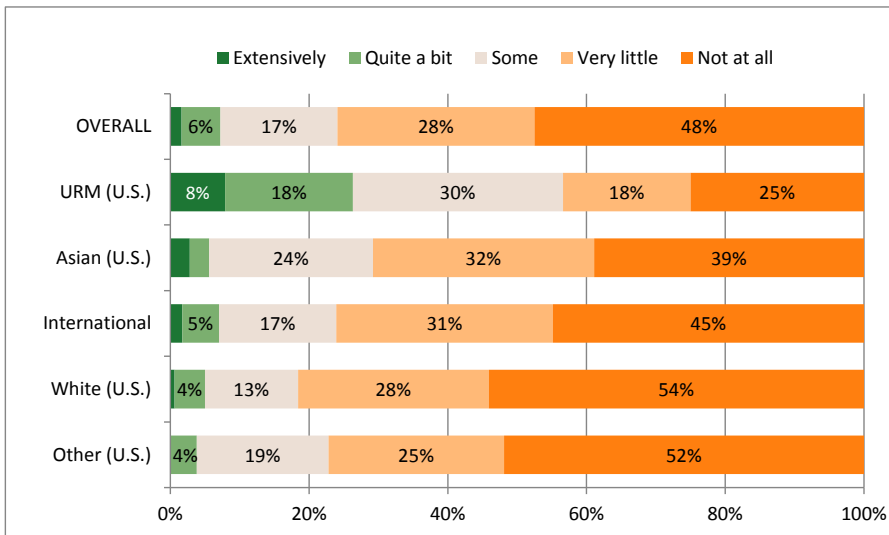
PhD students were also actively engaged in research and scholarship. Within the 24 months prior to the survey: more than two-thirds had attended or presented at a professional conference; 82% had one or more manuscripts currently under review for publication; more

than half had been involved in writing a grant proposal ; and 44% had one or more manuscripts either published or accepted for publication.

There were few statistically or practically significant differences in advising and assistantship experiences across social identity groups. However, research engagement, particularly publications, varied significantly by students’ sex and race/citizenship. A greater percentage of men than women reported submitting publications for review (58% versus 46%) and having one or more publications (50% versus 39%) in the past 24 months. About one-half of international and “other” (U.S.) students had one or more manuscripts published or accepted for publication compared to approximately two-fifths of Asian and white (U.S.) students, and one-third of URM (U.S.) students.

Diversity-related engagement: Just over half (55%) of PhD respondents were at least “slightly” aware of opportunities to work with administrators against bias on campus, while one-quarter had been engaged “some” or more in efforts to improve the understanding of bias and stereotyping on campus. Diversity-related engagement varied significantly by race/citizenship. Figure 9 shows these differences concerning the extent of students’ engagement in efforts to improve understanding of bias and stereotyping.

Figure 9. Engagement in efforts to improve understanding of bias and stereotyping on campus, PhD students by race/citizenship



URM (U.S.) students were the most engaged in efforts to improve the understanding of bias and stereotyping on campus, with just over one-quarter (26%) reporting they were engaged “extensively” or “quite a bit.” This compares to 7% or less of their peers of other races and citizenship.

There were smaller but still substantive race-associated differences in PhD students’ awareness of opportunities to work with Cornell administrators to combat bias on campus. URM and Asian (U.S.) reported the most awareness, with 33% either “very aware” or “generally aware,” followed by international students (28%), while white and “other” (U.S.) students were least aware of opportunities to be involved in these efforts (18% and 14%, respectively).

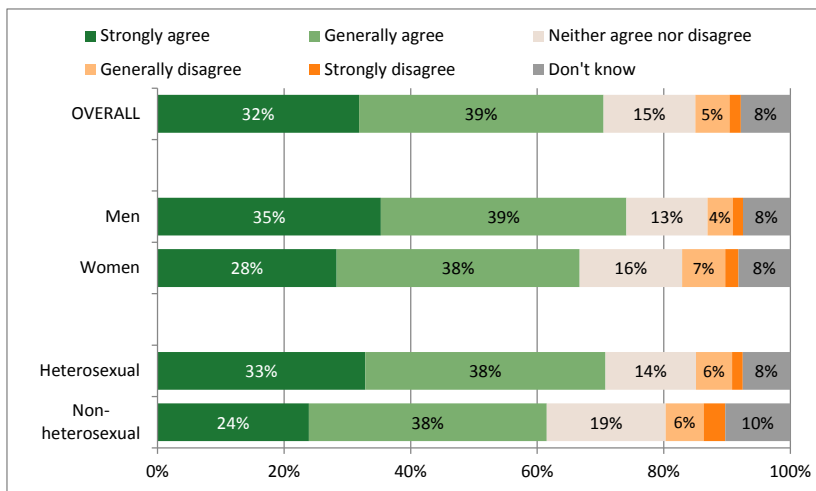
Inclusion

Like the Exit Survey, the Graduate Student Experience survey asked about PhD students’ *evaluations of their Cornell experience* (academic, student life and overall experience); perceptions of the *program climate* for students (whether students are valued, included and treated fairly within their program); and perceptions of the broader *campus climate* for students (personal sense of being accepted and valued at Cornell, institutional commitment to diversity). In addition, the survey asked students about *obstacles to academic success*.

Evaluations of Cornell experience: Roughly two-thirds of PhD respondents rated their academic and overall experience as “excellent” or “very good,” and approximately half rated their student life experience as “excellent” or “very good.” These evaluations varied significantly across social identity groups. The most substantive differences were associated with students’ gender and sexual orientation, and to a lesser extent, parental status: men rated their Cornell experiences more positively than women; heterosexual students gave more positive ratings than students of other sexual orientations; and students with dependent children gave more positive ratings than students without dependent children. The largest differences across social identity groups were related to the quality of the student life experience at Cornell.

Program climate: PhD students held positive views of interactions with faculty and students in their programs; for example, 85% agreed that program faculty treated students with respect, 88% felt their own relationships with faculty were positive, and 83% agreed students in their program were collegial. Students were both less certain and less positive about support provided by department faculty and programs to students from historically underrepresented groups. Perceptions of program climate differed significantly by gender, sexual orientation and race/citizenship. Some of the largest differences concerned students’ perceptions of whether their program’s procedures were “fair and equitable to all.” To illustrate, Figure 10 shows results by gender and sexual orientation.

Figure 10. Program procedures are fair and equitable, PhD students by gender and sexual orientation



Almost three-quarters (74%) of men perceived program procedures to be fair and equitable (“strongly agreed” or “generally agreed”); this compares to two-thirds of women.

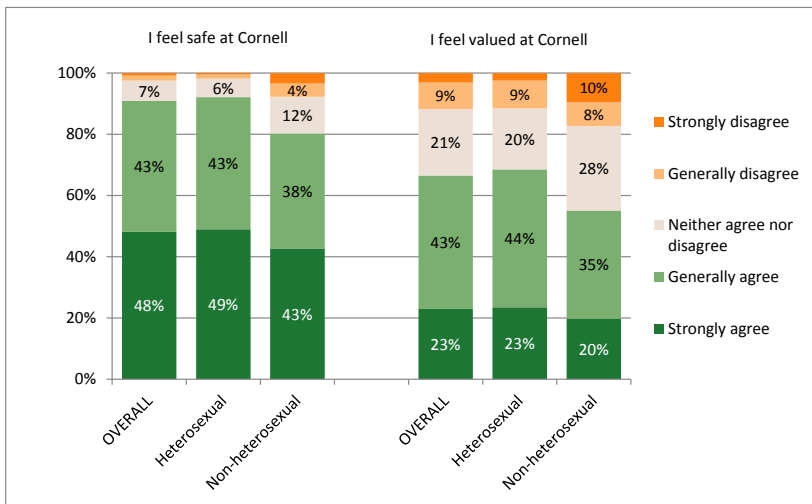
Likewise, 71% of heterosexual students felt their program’s procedures were fair and equitable compared to 62% of students with other sexual orientations.

Perceptions of program fairness also differed significantly by race/citizenship; three-quarters of Asian (U.S.) and international students felt their program’s procedures were fair to all compared to 68% of white (U.S.) students, 63% of “other” (U.S.) students, and 57% of URM (U.S.) students.

Several significant differences associated with social identity were also observed in students’ feelings of being valued and accepted within their programs. For example, women were less likely than men to agree they had the resources they needed to succeed (70% of women versus 79% of men), and were less comfortable than men about voicing their feelings and opinions to others in their programs (66% versus 73%). Non-heterosexual students were less likely than heterosexual students to view their program as responsive to student concerns (50% versus 60%), and to agree that department programs for underrepresented groups were effective (13% versus 27%). URM (U.S.) and international students were more likely to feel they had to work harder to be perceived as legitimate scholars, with 47% and 40%, respectively, voicing agreement; this compares to 36% of their Asian (U.S.) peers, 27% of white (U.S.) peers, and 25% of “other” (U.S.) peers. International students were more likely than their U.S. peers to report feeling excluded from informal networks within their programs; twenty percent of international students agreed with this statement compared to 14% of URM (U.S.) students, 12% of white (U.S.) students, 9% of Asian (U.S.) students and 8% of other (U.S.) students.

Campus climate: The majority of PhD students reported positive personal perceptions about Cornell. More than four-fifths felt safe (91%) and accepted (85%), and two-thirds felt valued (65%), while just 14% felt left out. There were statistically significant differences in these personal perceptions associated with social identity, particularly with students’ sexual orientation (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. I feel safe and valued at Cornell, PhD students by sexual orientation



Compared to heterosexual peers, students reporting other sexual orientations felt less safe and less valued at Cornell. Non-heterosexual students also felt significantly less accepted at Cornell (not shown); seventy-four percent of non-heterosexual students felt accepted versus 82% of heterosexual students.

Personal perceptions of campus climate differed

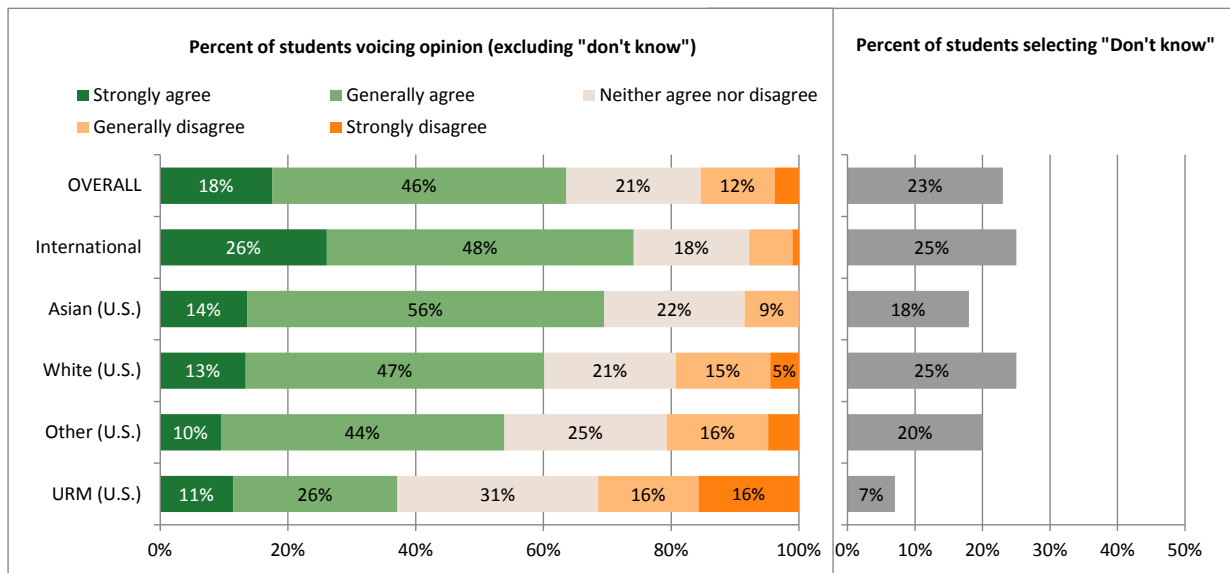
significantly by gender and race/citizenship. Women felt less safe on campus than men; just 38% of women “strongly agreed” with this aspect of campus climate versus 58% of men. URM (U.S.) students felt less accepted and valued on campus than their peers, particularly, international and white (U.S.) students; just 71% of URM (U.S.) students felt accepted at Cornell compared to 82% of international and white (U.S.) students, and just 54% of URM (U.S.) students felt compared to 71% of international students and 63% of white (U.S.) students.

As was observed for master’s degree students, PhD students were less willing or able to venture an opinion about Cornell’s broader efforts to create an inclusive and safe campus community. The percent of students reporting “don’t know” ranged from 17% when considering campus efforts to counter overt acts of bias, to 49% when considering the effectiveness of university programs intended to support historically underrepresented students.

The percent of “don’t know” responses varied across social identity groups. The largest differences in the use of “don’t know” were associated with students’ race/citizenship. In general, URM (U.S.) students were most likely to venture an opinion concerning these broader campus efforts while white (U.S) respondents were most likely to answer “don’t know” to these statements. While differences based on gender and sexual orientation tended to be smaller than those associated with race/citizenship, women were less likely than men to say “don’t know” concerning statements of campus climate efforts; and non-heterosexual students were less likely than heterosexual students to respond “don’t know” to these statements.

Significant differences in perceptions of the broader campus climate across social identities persisted after restricting our analysis to only those students who chose a response other than “don’t know” to these measures. The largest differences were associated with students’ race/citizenship and gender, although differences based on sexual orientation were also evident. In general, URM and “other” U.S. students were least positive about the broader campus climate while international students were most positive; women held less positive views of campus climate than men; and non-heterosexual students held less positive views than heterosexual students. Some of the largest differences in perceptions of the broader campus climate emerged in response to this statement, “Cornell is a community whose members seek to counter subtle forms of bias.” Figure 12 compares responses for students of different races/citizenships.

Figure 12. Cornell community seeks to counter subtle bias, PhD students by race/citizenship



As shown on the right, URM (U.S.) respondents were much less likely to report “don’t know” in relation to this aspect of campus climate than students of other races/citizenships. The chart on the left shows responses *only for those respondents who reported something other than “don’t know.”* With this restriction in place, URM (U.S.) students reported significantly less positive perceptions than their peers; just 37% of URM respondents agreed that the Cornell community sought to combat subtle forms of bias, compared to half or more of other respondents.

Likewise, after restricting the analysis to students reporting something other than “don’t know,” women were significantly less likely than men to agree that the Cornell community seeks to counter subtle bias (57% versus 71%); and non-heterosexual students were significantly less likely than heterosexual students to agree with this statement (47% versus 66%).

Similar patterns by race/citizenship, gender and sexual orientation were observed for perceptions of campus efforts to support underrepresented students, engagement in building a community concerned with power and privilege, and administrative responsiveness to bias or violence against students.

Obstacles to academic success: PhD respondents most often identified personal or interpersonal issues – such as time management difficulties, self-confidence, family obligations, academic or social isolation, and physical or mental health issues – as major obstacles to their academic progress. Programmatic aspects – such as program requirements, relationships with faculty and advisors, and insufficient financial support – were cited less often as major obstacles.

There were statistically significant differences in students’ experience of obstacles to their progress, the largest of which were associated with gender and parental status. For example, women were more likely than men to have faced major obstacles related to physical or mental health issues (15% of women versus 7% of men), self-confidence (21% versus 12%), and academic or social isolation (13% versus 9%). Compared to students without dependent children, students with dependent children had more often experienced major obstacles due to family obligations (50% of students with dependent children versus 7% of students without dependent children), insufficient financial support (18% versus 4%), and cost of housing (19% versus 8%). In addition, compared to heterosexual students, students with other sexual identities were more likely to report major obstacles due to relationships with their advisor (17% of non-heterosexual students versus 9% of heterosexual students), and self-confidence (25% versus 16%). Immigration laws and regulations posed a major obstacle for 13% of international students but for virtually no U.S. students.

What have we learned?

Our students are actively engaged

Undergraduate, master's degree and PhD students report high levels of engagement. In particular, our students are actively engaged in activities and behaviors related to their academic experiences (e.g., interactions with faculty and advisors, involvement in assistantships and research); there is limited variation associated with students' social identities in these forms of engagement. Students also report quite extensive involvement in behaviors that are more directly related to diversity (e.g., having meaningful conversations with diverse peers about inter-group relations, being aware of and involved in efforts to combat bias on campus).

Our students have positive perceptions of their Cornell experience

Undergraduate, master's degree and PhD students perceive their Cornell experience very favorably (e.g., evaluations of their academic, social and overall experience). The majority of our students hold positive perceptions of their personal interactions with faculty, advisors and students (e.g., receive fair treatment from faculty, advisors hold reasonable expectations, fellow students are collegial).

Campus climate varies significantly for students of different social identities

The climate for diversity at Cornell varies significantly for students from different backgrounds and social identities. These differences are more numerous and larger for measures of inclusion than engagement. In general, students from historically less-represented groups are more actively involved in diversity-related behaviors, both positive and negative (e.g., learning about diversity, being engaged in campus efforts to improve understanding of bias, feeling insulted or threatened) than their peers from traditionally dominant groups; they also have more negative perceptions of the psychological climate for diversity (e.g., how respectfully members of various social identity groups, including their own, are treated on campus; Cornell's commitment to creating a positive environment for historically under-represented groups).

Race is clearly a salient aspect of students' social identity in relation to campus climate; it is a significant covariate of climate across the three student constituencies – undergraduate, master's degree and PhD students – considered in this analysis. Among our undergraduate and PhD students, gender and sexual orientation are also significantly associated with differential experiences and perceptions of campus climate. The PULSE survey results illustrate the importance of considering other aspects of social identity, such as social class, religious affiliation, political views and disability status, when assessing the campus climate for students. Across all measures of social identity, the general pattern is that students who identify with historically less-represented groups (e.g., transgendered or gender-variant, sexual orientations other than heterosexual, Black, poor or low-income) have less positive experiences and perceptions of campus climate than their peers who identify with historically dominant groups.

Students perceive micro-climates on campus more positively than the broader campus climate

Undergraduate, master's degree and PhD students hold more positive perceptions of their local or "micro" climates on campus than of the broader campus climate. For example, most undergraduate students are able to find "a community on campus where I feel I belong" but fewer are satisfied with the sense of community on campus, as a whole. Master's degree and PhD students report more positive perceptions of the climates within their programs or fields of study (e.g., students in my program are collegial, students in my program are treated with respect by faculty) than of broader campus efforts concerning diversity (e.g., Cornell is a community whose members seek to counter subtle forms of bias, Cornell is actively engaged in building a campus community concerned about issues of power and privilege).

What are the gaps in our understanding?

As noted in the introduction, this report summarizes results of climate measures embedded in the regular slate of student surveys conducted by IRP and the Graduate School. The decision to enhance climate measures within our existing institutional surveys rather than employ an external climate survey was made in the interests of creating a sustainable plan to assess campus climate, and to contain the survey burden placed on our students. There are important limitations of our survey populations, content and analysis that must be acknowledged.

While the PULSE survey population includes all currently enrolled undergraduate students, the Graduate Student Experience and Graduate Student Exit surveys included only PhD and master's degree students enrolled in the Graduate School. We are not able to report here on the experiences and perceptions of professional students enrolled in the Law School, Johnson Graduate School of Management, and College of Veterinary Medicine.

The PULSE and Graduate School surveys contain few measures of students' in-class experiences or of their involvement in specific campus-facilitated programs or initiatives (e.g., diversity-related coursework, services or interventions). Our survey measures, for the most part, ask students to report on fairly broad categories of climate experiences and perceptions.

Thus far we have only conducted simple analyses of these data – that is, examining the relationship between a specific social identity and a single measure of campus climate. We have not accounted for multiple correlates of students' behaviors and perceptions. For example, we have not taken intersections of social identity membership into account – such as interactions between students' race and gender, or race and social class; nor have we conducted a multivariate analysis of correlates of students' engagement and inclusion. Our analyses have not taken students' colleges, programs or fields of study into consideration; yet it is plausible that climate issues and their relationship to students' social identities vary across these contexts.

Together, these limitations constrain our ability to report on the climate for *all* Cornell students; we are missing data on professional students enrolled in our professional schools. Further, we are not able at this point to identify the strongest correlates of campus climate or the largest differences in climate across social identity groups. Finally, we cannot speak with certainty about the dynamics underlying students' experiences of the campus climate for diversity. For example, our survey results reveal important disparities in *how* various groups of students perceive campus efforts to build an inclusive and supportive environment for all students, but we do not know what specific experiences have given rise to these different perceptions. Nor do we know what leads a student to say they “don't know” how effective such campus efforts have been. This response might reflect a lack of interest or knowledge or could reflect sensitivity – that is, an unwillingness to report on impacts for a group other than one's own.

Despite these limitations, these survey results have great value. They allow us to identify general patterns of student engagement and inclusion, and how these patterns differ across social identity groups. They can serve as baseline measures as Cornell assesses its progress in achieving a diverse and inclusive campus community. Together with other existing data and documentation about diversity efforts at Cornell, these results provide important background information to shape and supplement the next phase of our study of student climate.

Next Steps in Assessing Campus Climate

The present analysis of survey data is a first step in our assessment of the climate for diversity among our undergraduate and graduate students. The next steps planned in this study are outlined below:

Qualitative research: We are engaging an external research team, led by Professor Sylvia Hurtado, to conduct a mixed methods study of the student climate for diversity at Cornell. Dr. Hurtado is a nationally-recognized scholar on diversity and campus climate. Dr. Hurtado's research team will review our survey data and existing documentation about campus diversity efforts; and will conduct focus groups with students, and interviews with senior administrators and program directors. Active data collection will take place during the fall 2013 semester. A report that identifies major themes from this research will be shared with the Cornell community during the spring 2014 semester.

Further dissemination and discussion of research results: IRP will create more granular breakouts of student survey results in spring 2014; these results will be made available to academic leadership to provide context for planning and assessing Toward New Destinations diversity initiatives within colleges and administrative units. The UDC and senior leadership will discuss the quantitative and qualitative research results and recommendations provided in the consultant's final report. These findings will be used to inform existing and future policies, programs and/or practices that will enhance the campus climate for all students.

Assessing climate for other Cornell constituencies: We will explore the climate for diversity for Cornell faculty and staff. In the interests of establishing a sustainable assessment process, these efforts will be tied with existing timetables for institutional surveys of these constituencies. We envision undertaking a research process similar to the one employed for the assessment of student climate. For each of these constituencies, IRP, in consultation with the UDC, will review existing institutional surveys and enhance climate measures as needed, prepare dashboards and a report of survey results for release to the Cornell community, and supplement quantitative results with qualitative research.