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ISU Graduate Student Diversity Climate Report, August 2016

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Abstract

In Spring 2016, the Graduate College surveyed all students seeking graduate and professional degrees about their experiences as students and the climate at ISU. A total of 999 students responded to the survey out of 4863 graduate/professional students, a response rate of 20.5%.

- 35% of the graduate population reported negative experiences in their graduate program based on their personal characteristics. The most frequent types of negative experiences were based on gender (12%), race/ethnicity (10%), age (7%), and country of origin (6%).
- 38% of students reported personally experiencing bias/harassment/discrimination in the form of verbally offensive comments. Minoritized populations reported the following higher rates of verbally offensive comments: 75% of transgender and gender non-conforming students, 56% of LGB students, and half of the students of color: 49% of students of color (74% of Black/African American students, 50% of Asian American students, 40% of Hispanic/Latino students).
- 28% of students indicated feeling that their ideas/suggestions in an academic/research discussion were disregarded because of personal characteristics.
- 13% reported feeling threatened verbally or physically. Minoritized populations and international students reported the following higher rates of feeling threatened; 40% of transgender and gender non-conforming students, 24% of women students, 19% of international students, and 19% of LGB students.

Disciplines

Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Higher Education

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Craig Ogilvie, L. Wesley Harris Jr.

Executive Summary

In Spring 2016, the Graduate College surveyed all students seeking graduate and professional degrees about their experiences as students and the climate at ISU. A total of 999 students responded to the survey out of 4863 graduate/professional students, a response rate of 20.5%.

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- 28% of students indicated feeling that their ideas/suggestions in an academic/research discussion were disregarded because of personal characteristics.
- 13% reported feeling threatened verbally or physically. Minoritized populations and international students reported the following higher rates of feeling threatened; 40% of transgender and gender non-conforming students, 24% of women students, 19% of international students, and 19% of LGB students.

Recommendations

Senior ISU leadership, as well as department and program-level leadership, should allocate resources to improve the climate in graduate education. Two specific recommended actions are

- 1) Develop positions and hire college-level Graduate Inclusion Officers, modeled after undergraduate Multicultural Liaison Officers but with a broader scope to include gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, religion, etc.
- 2) Conduct inclusion workshops in graduate programs with separate workshops for graduate students and faculty, but during the same semester. The graduate workshops can be built around case-studies and faculty-workshops can be built around the concepts of inclusive excellence and implicit bias.

Details

The Graduate College of Iowa State University strives to increase diversity in graduate programs and departments, to support students' academic and professional success, and to ensure that access to graduate study is possible for all students. Fostering a climate that appreciates our diverse campus community is important to achieving these goals. In order to assess how well the Graduate College is doing, we surveyed all students seeking graduate and professional degrees about their experiences as students at ISU. A total of 999 students responded to the survey out of 4863 graduate/professional students (20.5%) of whom 20 opted out and 52 partially completed the survey. The analysis was run on 977 responses. The appendix provides more details on the demographics of respondents.

Below is a selection of key results. At the end of this report we make several recommendations. Note, for each result below, subentries are used to highlight responses that are different than the average response when data are disaggregated by demographic categories (race/ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status).

- 35% of the graduate population reported negative experiences in their graduate program based on their personal characteristics. The most frequent types of negative experiences were based on gender (12%), race/ethnicity (10%), age (7%), country of origin (6%), citizenship status (6%), religion (6%), other (5%), and income (4%). Open responses to "other" included major/emphasis, parental status, language, and part-time student status. Sexual orientation, veteran status, and disability were the least frequently experienced, at 1% each.

A series of questions provided more specific information on these negative experiences.

- 40% of students indicated experiencing microaggressions (subtle but offensive comments or actions directed at a minority or other non-dominant group that can be unintentional and which unconsciously reinforce a stereotype). Of students who reported experiencing microaggressions, 29% reported these occurring more frequently than once a month. When the data is disaggregated by demographic information, the following minoritized populations reported experiencing microaggressions at the following higher rates
 - 63% of LGB students.

- 60% of transgender and gender non-conforming students.
- 58% of students of color (100% of American Indian/Alaskan Native students, 88% of Black/African American students, 61% of Asian American students, 43% of Hispanic/Latino students).
- 50% of women students.
- As a point of reference, 23% of white males reported experiencing microaggressions.
- 38% of students reported personally experiencing bias/harassment/discrimination in the form of verbally offensive comments. Of students who reported verbally offensive comments, 13% reported these occurring more frequently than once a month. When the data is disaggregated by demographic information, minoritized populations reported the following higher rates of verbally offensive comments
 - 75% of transgender and gender non-conforming students.
 - 56% of LGB students.
 - Half of the students of color: 49% of students of color (74% of Black/African American students, 50% of Asian American students, 40% of Hispanic/Latino students).
 - 48% of women students.
 - As a point of reference, 22% of white males reported experiencing verbally offensive comments.
- 28% of students indicated feeling that their ideas/suggestions in an academic/research discussion were disregarded because of personal characteristics. Of students who reported being disregarded, 24% reported these occurring more frequently than once a month. When the data is disaggregated by demographic information, minoritized populations reported the following higher rates of their ideas being disregarded
 - 42% of LGB students.
 - 40% of transgender and gender non-conforming students.
 - 39% of women students.
 - 36% of students of color (61% Black/African students, 50% of American Indian/Alaskan Native students, 41% of Asian American students).
 - As a point of reference, 13% of white males reported their ideas were disregarded.
- 17% personally experiencing bias/harassment/discrimination in the form of written offensive comments. Of students who reported offensive written comments, 12% reported these occurring

more frequently than once a month. When the data is disaggregated by demographic information, minoritized populations reported the following higher rates of written offensive comments

- 30% of transgender and gender non-conforming students.
 - 23% of LGB students.
 - 23% of students of color (50% of American Indian/Alaskan Native students, 42% of Black/African American students).
 - As a point of reference, 12% of white males reported experiencing written offensive comments.
- 13% reported feeling threatened verbally or physically. Of students who reported feeling threatened, 14% reported these occurring more frequently than once a month. When the data is disaggregated by demographic information, minoritized populations and international students reported the following higher rates of feeling threatened.
 - 40% of transgender and gender non-conforming students.
 - 24% of women students.
 - 19% of international students.
 - 19% of LGB students.
 - 16% of students of color (29% of Black/African American students).
 - As a point of reference, 8% of white males reported feeling threatened.

To understand whether these problems were between graduate students and faculty or between graduate students, we asked students if they had observed bias / harassment / discrimination directed toward graduate students. This phrasing was chosen to reduce student concerns that they were being asked to describe the specific event that had happened to them. 39% reported such observations. The most frequent observation of discrimination was based on ethnicity, country of origin or gender.

	% of students who observed discrimination towards graduate students
based on their race/ethnicity	24%
based on their country of origin	23%
based on their gender	22%
based on their citizen status	14%
based on their religion	14%

based on their age	13%
based on their sexual orientation	12%
based on their disability	9%
based on their veteran status	5%

- For students who made such observations, approximately half had observed occurrences between graduate students, one-third between graduate students and faculty, and one-third between undergrad and graduate students (students could report more than one observation).
- Faculty members were observed to show bias/harassment/discrimination at larger rates for
 - gender (54% of gender reports)
 - race/ethnicity (41% of race/ethnicity reports)
 - country of origin (41% of country of origin reports)
- Graduate students members were observed to show bias/harassment/discrimination at larger rates for
 - gender (51% of gender reports)
 - race/ethnicity (45% of ethnicity reports)
 - country of origin (49% of country of origin reports)
- Undergraduate students were observed to discriminate at larger rates for
 - gender (34% of gender reports)
 - race/ethnicity (41% of ethnicity reports)
 - country of origin (36% of country of origin reports)

There is also a need to communicate where graduate students should go to for help with their concerns about inequity and to increase students' security in reaching out for assistance.

- 50% of graduate students agreed with this statement: "If I had concerns about inequity in my graduate program I know where on campus I could go to address my concerns."
- 58% of graduate students agreed with this statement: "If I had concerns about inequity in my graduate program I would feel comfortable expressing them to relevant administrators/staff on campus."

A series of questions demonstrated positive aspects of graduate education at ISU.

- 82% of students reported feeling supported by their advisor to succeed academically.
 - This was lower (74%) for students who identified as LGB
 - Different groups of students reported a similar sense of support from their advisor, ranging from 80% for male students, 83% for woman students, to 84% for students of color.
- 78% of students reported feeling supported by their program/department to succeed academically.
 - This was lower (69%) for students who identify as LGB
 - It was higher (82%) for international students
 - Different groups of students reported a similar sense of support from their program, ranging from 79% for woman students, 80% for male students, to 81% for students of color.
- 79% of students would recommend their graduate program to others of the same identity as them.
 - Different groups of students reported similar rates they would recommend their program, ranging from 78% for woman student, 81% students of color, male students, 82% and 83% for international students.

While 68% of students feel a sense of community among graduate/professional students in their program/department.

- This was lower (62%) for students who identify as LGB
- Different groups of students reported a similar sense of community, ranging from 71% for students of color, and 72% for woman students.

Recommendations

Senior ISU leadership, as well as department and program-level leadership, should allocate resources to improve the climate in graduate education. In parallel, ISU leaders should consistently communicate the importance of inclusive excellence and the unacceptability of a negative climate, let alone students feeling threatened.

Specific recommended actions include

- 1) Develop positions and hire college-level Graduate Inclusion Officers, modeled after undergraduate Multicultural Liaison Officers but with a broader scope to include gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, religion, etc.
- 2) Conduct inclusion workshops in graduate programs with separate workshops for graduate students and faculty, but during the same semester. The graduate workshops can be built around case-studies and faculty-workshops can be built around the concepts of inclusive excellence and implicit bias.
- 3) Partner with Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion to develop reporting metrics where academic deans are held accountable for improving the graduate climate.
- 4) Fund an internal competition for graduate students to propose inclusive community-building activities and commit to implementing the winning proposal.
- 5) Partner with Dean of Students Office, Women's Center, academic colleges, Office of Equal Opportunity, Ombuds Office, and others to provide support for students who experience discrimination.

Appendix: Methods and survey demographics

The Graduate Student Diversity Climate Survey was administered online in Qualtrics between April 20, 2016 and May 13, 2016. The survey was distributed via email to a total of 4863 graduate and professional students who were enrolled at ISU during the spring 2016 semester.

Quantitative Results

A total of 999 students responded to the survey out of 4863 graduate/professional students (20.5%) of whom 20 opted out and 52 partially completed the survey. The analysis was run on 977 responses.

Demographics

Of the people who did not opt out, the following are the numbers for different self-identification

Degree sought	
Masters	391
Ph.D.	549

Gender	
Man	482
Woman	462
Transgender and gender non-conforming (Transmasculine, Transfeminine, Agender, Nonbinary). Note that transgender will be undercounted as it is likely that transgender individuals would have selected man or woman.	12
Prefer not to specify	5

Sexual orientation	
Heterosexual/straight	855
Lesbian/gay	28
Bisexual/pansexual	36
Asexual	3
Other	7
Decline to state	27

Citizenship	
US	699
International	261

Ethnicity	
White	611
African American/Black	36
Hispanic / Latino/a	40
South American	0
Asian American	24
Native American	9
Pacific Islander	1
Middle Eastern	3
Other	9