

Pluralism in Action New Student Survey on Diversity & Inclusiveness at Georgetown University

Background and rationale

On August 31, 2004, the Assessment Committee of the Diversity Action Council (DAC), in collaboration with New Student Orientation (NSO), administered a brief written survey to all new first-year and transfer students attending NSO's Pluralism in Action program. The purpose of the survey was to collect qualitative responses reflecting the AY 2004-05 entering students' impressions of the climate for diversity at Georgetown. This was done during their first few days on campus in order to establish baseline data for comparison with subsequent assessments of the campus climate for diversity. While the majority of the student surveys and assessments administered by the Office of Planning and Institutional Research (OPIR) utilize closed format items (e.g. forced choice/scalar responses) designed to facilitate the collection of quantitative data for statistical analysis, the purpose of the NSO/PIA survey was to elicit the native categories and unique perspectives of the respondents. For that reason, and because it was brief (5 items), the PIA survey included both open and closed format items.

Survey instrument

The survey was comprised of a total of 5 items, and included demographic questions, asking students to "provide any of the following information that you wish: race/ethnicity, gender, national origin, religion, other information about cultural self-identification." Our rationale was to encourage students to describe themselves, using their own words or categories.

The five questions addressing diversity were:

1. Please list three words that come to your mind when you think of Georgetown University in relation to diversity and inclusion. [open-ended response]
2. I anticipate participating in cultural activities either on or off campus:
seldom once a semester monthly weekly
3. I anticipate participating in campus events related to diversity:
seldom once a semester monthly weekly
4. What are your hopes and aspirations for Georgetown campus life as it relates to diversity and inclusion? [open-ended response]
5. Based on previous life experiences and your brief experience at Georgetown University over the last few days, what would you anticipate will be most challenging in terms of diversity or inclusion? [open-ended response]

Survey population and demographics

Of the approximately 1,700 new students in attendance (1,542 incoming freshmen and about 200 transfer students), 1,019 completed and returned a survey to their Orientation Advisor (OA) during the event, for an approximate response rate of 58%. Table 1 shows the comparative demographics for the survey respondents, all new students, and the total undergraduate population at Georgetown University, for fall 2004.

Enrollment by Racial/Ethnic Category. Numbers of undergraduate students for each of the following categories as of the institution's official fall reporting date (or as of October 15, 2004). Includes international students only in the category "Nonresident aliens."

	PIA survey Respondents	Degree-Seeking First-Time First Year	Degree-Seeking Undergraduates (include first-time first-year)	Total Undergraduates (both degree- and non-degree-seeking)
Nonresident aliens	13	52	242	403
Black, non-Hispanic	44	102	423	424
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	4	4	4
Asian or Pacific Islander	69	149	606	612
Hispanic	44	101	354	360
White, non-Hispanic	542	1,058	4,356	4,375
Race/ethnicity unknown	304	76	297	344
TOTAL	1019	1,542	6,282	6,522

Table 1. Undergraduate student demographics at Georgetown, fall 2004

Survey administration and data analysis

Student workers in the Center for Minority Student Affairs input the raw data into a spreadsheet; OPIR prepared a database from which multiple reports and queries could be generated for analysis. Various cross-tabulations of responses to the two closed items (Q. 2 and Q. 3) were run by OPIR. A summary of the results is displayed in Tables 2 and 3 below. For the three open-ended items (Q. 1, Q. 4, and Q. 5), members of the DAC Assessment Committee carried out a series of qualitative analyses, including keyword searches by respondent demographics and content analyses of short-answer responses to questions on student hopes and aspirations, as well as anticipated challenges, related to diversity at Georgetown. These analyses are discussed in the following sections of this report.

Student first impressions of diversity at Georgetown

The first survey item was a completely open-ended association question: "Please list three words that come to your mind when you think of Georgetown University in relation to diversity and inclusion." Of the total of 1,019 surveys completed, approximately 900 students (87%) responded to this item. While there was of course a wide range of responses from this group, the majority of the words students nominated sorted into a fairly limited series of categories. In responding to this item, approximately 83% of the students' responses associated generally positive words with diversity and inclusion at Georgetown, while about 16% used words or phrases with negative connotations. Examples of words or phrases we categorized as 'positive' (72.8% of responses to item 1.) included: *open, welcoming, accepting, diverse, international*. Words coded as somewhat positive (10.7% of responses) included: *tolerance, needs work, color-blind*.

Towards the more negative end of the continuum were words in the somewhat negative category (7.5%), such as *white, homogeneous, challenging*. Finally, we coded as negative words such as (9.0%): *preppy, cliquish, segregated*.

Table 2 displays response frequencies by ethnic/racial category from a keyword search using the examples listed above for all words listed by 5% or more of the respondents to this item. Because these were all positive words, the frequencies for the two most commonly used somewhat negative/negative words are included for comparison.

Key words used in responses: Total N = 900 (Ethnic group N =)	Asian [69]	Black [44]	Foreign [13]	Hispanic [44]	Native Am [3]	Unknown [185]	White [542]
international (21% of respondents)	8	5	4	-	-	55	119
accepting (19% of respondents)	6	2	4	3	1	54	105
diverse (11.7% of respondents)	7	4	4	5	-	34	52
open (9.5% of respondents)	4	3	1	7	-	22	49
welcoming (8.8% of respondents)	2	2	3	3	1	26	43
white (4% of respondents)	2	-	3	1	-	6	25
preppy (2.4% of respondents)	5	-	-	-	-	3	14

Table 2. Key words describing diversity climate at Georgetown

This analysis reveals that the students nominating most of the positive words or phrases were distributed across all ethnic groups, although with proportionately higher numbers of responses in the numerically larger groups (*white, unknown*). This is an interesting finding, as it indicates an open attitude towards diversity on the part of both majority (white) and minority group (black, Latino, Asian, Native American, and international student) respondents.

Anticipated participation in cultural activities and diversity-related events

The survey included two closed-ended questions (Q. 2 and Q. 3) that asked students to choose between four response categories to estimate their anticipated frequency of participation in cultural activities or diversity-related events on campus. The OPIR analysis of the responses to these items included cross-tabulations by race/ethnicity, gender, national origin, religion, and status (first-year or transfer). Only the cross-tabulations by race/ethnicity will be discussed for the purposes of this report.

Question 2 asked students how often they would probably participate in cultural activities (on or off campus). As shown in Table 3 (displayed with Table 4 on the following page), the majority of students reported that their anticipated involvement would be about once a month. The Native American category had only 3 respondents and is thus not discussed further in this comparison due to small cell size. Of the other groups, Hispanic students reported the highest level of anticipated monthly involvement (61.4%), while Asian students reported the lowest (46.4%). The second most frequently chosen category was weekly participation; black students reported the highest anticipated weekly participation (32.6%); white students reported the lowest weekly involvement (16.0%).

Anticipate participating in cultural activities * Race/Ethnicity Crosstabulation

			Race/Ethnicity					Total	
			Asian	Black	Foreign	Hispanic	NatAmeri		White
Anticipate participating in cultural activities	Monthly	Count	32	22	7	27	1	303	392
		% within Race/Ethnicity	46.4%	51.2%	53.8%	61.4%	33.3%	56.5%	55.4%
	Once a semester	Count	10	4	2	4	0	102	122
		% within Race/Ethnicity	14.5%	9.3%	15.4%	9.1%	.0%	19.0%	17.2%
	Seldom	Count	7	3	1	0	0	45	56
		% within Race/Ethnicity	10.1%	7.0%	7.7%	.0%	.0%	8.4%	7.9%
	Weekly	Count	20	14	3	13	2	86	138
		% within Race/Ethnicity	29.0%	32.6%	23.1%	29.5%	66.7%	16.0%	19.5%
Total	Count	69	43	13	44	3	536	708	
	% within Race/Ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 3. Participation in cultural activities

Anticipate participating in campus events * Race/Ethnicity Crosstabulation

			Race/Ethnicity					Total	
			Asian	Black	Foreign	Hispanic	NatAmeri		White
Anticipate participating in campus events	Monthly	Count	33	21	6	28	3	257	348
		% within Race/Ethnicity	47.8%	48.8%	46.2%	63.6%	100.0%	47.9%	49.2%
	Once a semester	Count	15	7	3	6	0	169	200
		% within Race/Ethnicity	21.7%	16.3%	23.1%	13.6%	.0%	31.5%	28.2%
	Seldom	Count	6	1	1	1	0	71	80
		% within Race/Ethnicity	8.7%	2.3%	7.7%	2.3%	.0%	13.2%	11.3%
	Weekly	Count	15	14	3	9	0	39	80
		% within Race/Ethnicity	21.7%	32.6%	23.1%	20.5%	.0%	7.3%	11.3%
Total	Count	69	43	13	44	3	536	708	
	% within Race/Ethnicity	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 4. Attendance at campus diversity events

The other closed question asked students how often they anticipated participating in campus events related to diversity or inclusion. As shown in Table 4, student response patterns to this item according to race/ethnicity were similar to those for the previous question: the greatest number of respondents in all categories chose monthly participation.

Once again, Hispanic students reported the highest anticipated level of monthly involvement (63.6%), while Asian, black, foreign, and white students choosing monthly participation clustered between 46% and 49%. Unlike the responses to the cultural activities question, however, there was not one category that was second most frequently chosen across all groups. Students choosing weekly participation were in the 20% to 30% range for the Asian, black, foreign, and Hispanic groups, but only 7.3% of white students said they anticipated participating weekly in campus diversity events. The second highest response category for white students on this item was once a semester, at 31.5% the highest of all groups in that response category.

One possible interpretation of the response patterns to these two questions is that across all race/ethnic groups, students are more interested and willing to get involved more often in cultural activities, whether on or off campus. However, comparing across all groups, there appear to be uneven levels of interest and commitment to participation in on-campus diversity events beyond monthly or occasional attendance

Student hopes and aspirations concerning diversity at Georgetown

A content analysis of the student responses to item 4, "What are your hopes and aspirations for Georgetown campus life as it relates to diversity and inclusion?" revealed the following general categories of student expectations:

- Meeting people/making or having friends
- Getting involved with groups
- Getting involved in activities
- Personal involvement and development
- Learning
- Backgrounds (e.g. socioeconomic, gender, religion, age)
- Acceptance/inclusiveness
- Experiences different than homogeneous backgrounds
- Low racial/ethnic diversity at Georgetown
- Finding one's place while retaining identity

A more fine-grained keyword analysis yielded the following numbers of student responses using specific words and phrases in answer to this item, according to racial/ethnic groups (see Table 5.).

Total N = 823	(N =)	59	40	11	38	3	212	461
Key words in student responses:	Asian	Black	Foreign	Hispanic	Native Amer.	Unknown	White	
Awareness of/exposure to different cultures	8	1	2	2	-	12	52	
Meet new people	17	13	6	14	2	62	175	
Learn about other cultures	5	4	2	15	-	39	140	
Participate in cultural activities/events	9	2	-	3	1	14	24	
Promote/increase awareness/appreciation	11	2	1	2	1	15	18	
Accepting/acceptance	3	4	-	2	-	16	28	
Be open/open-minded/welcoming	6	2	1	5	1	14	20	
Be united despite differences/sense of community	2	5	-	6	1	8	29	
Improve/make diversity a priority/include everyone	2	-	-	-	-	14	28	
Inclusive/inclusion	2	2	-	-	-	19	27	

Table 5. Responses to *hopes and aspirations*

The student responses to this question, which like item 1 was totally open-ended, indicate that there is a high level of consistency in student hopes vis-à-vis diversity across racial/ethnic groups. Overall, students seemed eager to meet their peers of different backgrounds, to learn about other cultures and religions, and to become involved in campus events. To a slightly lesser degree, students from most groups indicated a desire to get along with culturally-different others they met on campus. One interpretation of these results is that these incoming students generally had an optimistic, open-minded view of the campus climate for diversity, and expected to learn and grow personally through positive interactions with a diverse group of students. This interpretation becomes more significant when compared with the student responses to Q. 5, anticipated challenges, discussed next.

Diversity challenges students anticipate facing at Georgetown

The final item on the survey asked students: “Based on previous life experiences and your brief experience at Georgetown University over the last few days, what would you anticipate will be most challenging in terms of diversity or inclusion?” Because student views of the challenges they face can significantly influence their perceptions of the campus climate for diversity and inclusion, we prepared a more detailed analysis of the responses to this question.

A content analysis of the responses to this item uncovered a fairly narrow range of responses that grouped into five semantic clusters of closely related keywords. Student comments included both positive and negative values around one of the terms (e.g., student comments about either their own or others’ misconceptions were coded into the *stereotypes* keyword cluster). Table 6 displays the five clusters of keywords generated by at least 10% of the respondents in one or more of the self-disclosed racial/ethnic categories.

Total N = 823	(N =) 59	40	11	38	3	212	461
Keywords in student responses:	Asian	Black	Foreign	Hispanic	Native Amer.	Unknown	White
cliques, segregation by ethnic or other groups	20%	12.5%	[2]	-	-	16.5%	20%
relating, interacting, adapting, reaching out/comfort zone	[1]	10%	[2]	-	[1]	23%	17%
"Diversity isn't a problem for me"; anticipate no difficulties	[3]	[1]	[2]	[1]	-	12%	9.8%
awareness, acceptance, understanding, tolerance	17%	10%	[2]	26%	-	11%	9.5%
stereotypes, prejudices, biases, preconceptions	10%	15%	[2]	10%	-	13.6%	8%

Table 6. Responses to *anticipated challenges*

In interpreting this table, readers should note that instead of percentages, bracketed whole numbers were used in cells of 3 or fewer responses. This was done due to the small numbers of international and Native American student respondents. *Unknown* was included as a category for students who responded to this item but did not disclose any optional demographic information related to their ethnic/racial background (see copy of the survey, attached as Appendix I); thus responses from this category may have actually more properly fallen into one of the other cells. In addition, students who self-identified as mixed race may have chosen the *Unknown* category, as well as those not wishing to categorize themselves racially.

While these results are generally unremarkable, two categories of responses do warrant further comment. First, nearly 18% (17.7) of the total responses to this question mentioned the fear that students would segregate into cliques or groups by racial or ethnic background. Only self-identified Hispanic and Native American respondents to this question did not mention cliques or ethnic segregation as a potential challenge. Interestingly, fully 20% of both the white and the Asian self-identified respondents listed cliques as a challenge, while only 12.5% of the black respondents did so. In addition, because 16.5% of the unknown category listed cliques or segregation, it is likely that the percentages in one or more of these groups was actually higher, and/or that students of undisclosed Hispanic or Native American background also shared this fear. As mentioned earlier, student perceptions have a strong influence on behavior, such that this response pattern could actually signify students' reluctance or discomfort with interacting across perceived racial/ethnic group boundaries. More research would be necessary to confirm if this were indeed the case; but if a significant percentage of new students are hesitant to mix with diverse others, this could negatively impact the campus climate for inclusion. In such an environment, it would become even more important for faculty, staff, and administrators to develop and promote opportunities for positive cross-ethnic interactions among students, especially in their first year or two on campus.

A second category of responses to this question may also be cause for concern. Nearly 10% of the self-identified white students, as well as 12% of the undisclosed category,

responded with variations of the statement that “Diversity isn’t a problem for me,” or “I don’t anticipate any difficulties.” While from some students such a response could signal that they are accustomed to living in a diverse community and have developed positive interpersonal relating skills, it is unusual that only seven students of color responded with a similar statement. In United States society, people of color generally have many more opportunities to interact in public with others who are unlike them ethnically and culturally (the dominant/majority population). Thus it is striking that so few of the self-identified Asian, black, Hispanic, or international students said “diversity isn’t a challenge.” On the other hand, the fact that approximately 10% of both white students and students of undisclosed background reported that they are not challenged by diversity leads us to hypothesize that many of these new students come from relatively homogeneous backgrounds and are not aware of the adjustments and possible discomfort some of them may experience as they live and learn in close contact with peers who are significantly different than themselves. The possibility of a lack of awareness of difference on the part of some students could result in a parallel lack of sensitivity to the diversity of communication styles, norms of interaction, and expectations of what constitutes politeness, friendship, and so on, among different cultural groups in the Georgetown student population. Coupled with the fear of group segregation reported earlier by 20% of the students responding to this question, this “no problem” attitude could well lead to a state of denial in students who are unaccustomed to, and unprepared to, encounter diversity in their classmates and dorm mates.

Summary and implications for campus climate

Based on our analysis of the results of this brief survey, then, the DAC Assessment Committee recommends the following next steps and areas for further study:

- If possible, poll this same groups of students (August 2004 incoming students) at the end of the 2004-05 academic year, or at the beginning of their second year on campus (August 2005), to see how a year’s actual experience on campus has affected their perceptions of the campus climate for diversity and inclusion.
- Use the first question (three words describing diversity at Georgetown) as an opening mini-survey at DAC’s spring 2005 faculty focus groups on diversity and inclusion. (Before the May focus groups began, as they entered the room, participating faculty were asked to respond in writing to the same prompt used as question 1 on the student survey. Results will be compared between student and faculty perceptions.)
- Develop a better survey for NSO/PIA 2005 with more close-ended items, based on the native categories suggested by student responses to the open-ended questions on the August 2004 pilot survey reported on here.
- Work with OPIR to develop closed-ended items for use on future OPIR-generated University-wide student surveys, including one or more questions that could be asked on both the 2005 NSO/PIA survey and the 2005 Senior Survey. The NSO/PIA survey would focus on student expectations for their Georgetown education with respect to diversity/inclusion, and the Senior Survey could then revisit those expectations in an attempt to measure the degree to which they had been achieved over the intervening four years.

