INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to examine the experiences of students with disabilities at Ohio State University. Specifically, data are presented regarding students’ responses to being a member of an underrepresented group; other reports focus on GLBT student and students of colors. In this report, students with disabilities were asked a series of questions specific to their group, including being asked to provide their own comments regarding the climate at OSU. By using both quantitative and qualitative data, this report explores various aspects of students’ experiences as a member of an underrepresented group on campus.

Methodology

This report is generated from the Campus Climate for Diversity Survey, a survey of the climate at OSU. The framework for the survey consisted of:

1. Individual factors including demographic characteristics, the extent of contact students had with diverse populations prior to entering the University, and personal actions and beliefs regarding issues of diversity;
2. Environmental experiences including the University as a welcoming environment, the classroom environment, curriculum content and instructional methods, campus life experiences with diversity, experiences as a member of an underrepresented group, and support services;
3. Outcome perceptions including the impact of campus diversity of student learning and development, satisfaction and general impressions of campus since enrolling, and campus climate initiatives to address diversity issues.

The survey instrument was created by reviewing similar instruments from seven other schools and adapting them to Ohio State and the comprehensive nature of this study. Various members of the campus community reviewed the possible questions and offered suggestions on which questions and formats would provide the University with the most helpful data.

With the assistance of the Office of the Registrar, a stratified random sample of 4,000 Ohio State students was selected through the student database of all students at the end of winter quarter, 2000. Students who were scheduled to graduate in March or had not scheduled classes for the spring quarter were not included. African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students were over sampled in order to be able to make comparisons across race/ethnicity. Because only 123 American Indian/Alaskan Native students attended Ohio State at the time of the survey, all were included in the sample.

The collection of the data was coordinated by the Office of the Registrar Testing Services. In this process, students selected were initially contacted during the first week of spring quarter by e-mail informing them that they had been selected to participate in the study. The first mailing of the survey occurred during the second week of April and a postcard reminder immediately followed. A second survey was sent at the end of the first week of May to students who had not yet responded and a final e-mail reminder was sent shortly after the second mailing of the survey. Bookstore gift certificates were offered as incentive for students to complete the survey.

A total of 1,223 surveys were received for a response rate of 30.6 %. Given the extensive length of the survey, the response rate is respectable.
Experiences as a Student with a Disability

Limitations

As with all survey research, this study has a number of limitations. First is the possible non-response bias and the lack of any controls for such a bias. It is possible that students who took the time to complete the survey are different from those who did not; for example, respondents may have had stronger feelings on issues surrounding diversity than non-respondents. However, the inclusion of the bookstore gift certificates may have provided the incentive for those students who otherwise would not have completed the survey to participate in the study. Second, in examining how certain groups responded to the survey, some comparisons are stronger than others. In some areas, there is low representation of certain groups. For example, students who indicated that they are gay, lesbian, or bisexual must be combined in order to make comparisons across sexual orientation. Other groups including American Indian/Alaskan Native students, international students, and students with disabilities are not highly represented. Third, all surveys are subject to potential sources of imprecision and bias which may be associated with the question wording and/or ordering and the length of the survey.

Demographics

Of the 39 students with disabilities who responded to these questions: (See the Appendix for a complete demographic profile of the survey respondents.)

- **GENDER:** 64.1% were female and 35.9% were male
- **TYPE OF DISABILITY:** (Responses not equal 100% due to a 10.2% non-response rate)
  - 20.5% (8) had visual impairment
  - 7.7% (3) had hearing impairment
  - 2.6% (1) had speech impairment
  - 12.8% (5) had mobility impairment
  - 15.4% (6) had psychiatric disability
  - 30.8% (12) had learning disability or ADHD.
- **RANK:** 71.8% were undergraduate students; 15.4% were graduate students; 10.3%, professional; and 2.6% non-degree. Among the undergraduate students, 7.7% were Rank 1; 15.4% Rank 2; 20.5% Rank 3; and 28.2% Rank 4.
- **RACE/ETHNICITY:** With regard to race/ethnicity, students responded in the following ways: (Please note that students provided multiple responses when applicable)
  - 7.7% were African American/Black
  - 5.1% were American Indian/Alaskan Native
  - 2.6% was Appalachian
  - 5.1% were Asian/Pacific Islander
  - 12.8% were Hispanic American/Latino(a)
  - 71.8% were White/Caucasian
  - 2.6% were Multi-racial
  - 5.1% responded “other”
- **GPA:** 50% had between a 2.0 and a 2.9; 47.4% had a 3.0 or above, and 2.6% did not respond.

FINDINGS

This report examines the experiences of students with disabilities as members of an underrepresented group. The quantitative questions asked students: 1) if they had experienced negative consequences as a result of their disabilities; 2) whether or not they used the Office of Disability Services; and 3) how they would rate the accessibility to certain areas at the University. In addition, students were asked to
provide their comments to an open-ended question regarding issues they have faced or experiences they have had as a member of an underrepresented group on campus.

**Experiences of students with disabilities**

**Negative Experiences**

Students were asked if they had any of the following experiences at OSU: 1) participation in a class where an instructor or TA refused to make accommodations for their disability, 2) exclusion from class participation because of their disability, 3) fear of negative consequences or discrimination from an instructor, TA, or staff member, 4) fear of their physical safety because of their disability, 5) assumption(s) that they were admitted to the University solely because they were disabled students, and/or 6) being the victim of a hate crime. (See Chart 1.0)

- Most of the students (over 88%) responded that they had not had any of the negative experiences as mentioned above, except for approximately 31% of students who revealed that they had experienced fear of negative consequences or discrimination from an instructor, TA, or staff member.
- Moreover, none of students answered that they had been a victim of a hate crime.

**Chart 1.0: Have you experienced the following at OSU?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*1</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*3</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*4</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*5</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
- *1 = Participation in a class where an instructor or TA refused to make accommodations for my disability
- *2 = Exclusion from class participation because of my disability
- *3 = Fear of negative consequences or discrimination from an instructor, TA, or staff member
- *4 = Fear of my physical safety because of my disability
- *5 = Assumption(s) that I was admitted to the University solely because I am disabled student
- *6 = Hate crime victim
Utilizing the Office of Disability Services

Students were also asked if they used the Office of Disability Services and, if they hadn’t, why not. (See Charts 1.1 & 1.2)

- Students’ responses were very dichotomous. Fifty percent of students said they used the services, whereas the other 50% said they did not.
- The reasons why students did not use the Office of Disability Services were quite diverse. However, the most frequent response (17.9%) given was that students were not in need of the office’s services.
- Almost 8% said that they were not aware of the office, and another 7.7% said needs were met elsewhere. Five percent (5.1%) of students explained that they did not consider themselves as having a disability.

Chart 1.1: Do you use the Office of Disability Services?
Accessibility of University Facilities and/or Services

Students were asked to rate the accessibility of a variety of University facilities and services. (Please note that there is a 38.5% non-response rate in this section so that responses do not equal 100%). (See Table 1.0)

- Over 40% of students responded that they did not use information in alternate formats, such as Braille, etc.
- Also, over 20% students reported that they did not use recreational sports facilities, athletic facilities, or residence halls.
- The usage rate increased to over 51% when students were asked to rate the accessibility of University classrooms, buildings, rest rooms, grounds, student services (e.g., Registrar, Fees & Deposits, etc.), and libraries.
- Of those who used the specified University facilities and/or services, a higher percentage of students (over 35%) rated the accessibility as being “good” for libraries, public transportation, and cultural events.
- Over 23% of students indicated that the accessibility of student services, such as the Registrar and Fees & Deposits, was “fair.”
- The accessibility to parking brought the most concerns with over 28% of students rating the accessibility as “poor.”
- In addition, over 15% of students rated the accessibility to grounds (e.g., snow and construction) as “poor.”
Table 1.0: How would you rate the accessibility to the University in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*Accessibility rate (%)</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Very poor</th>
<th>Don’t use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information in alternate formats</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buildings</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest rooms</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus transportation</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounds</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student services</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational Sports Facilities</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic facilities</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence halls</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transportation</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student activities</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural events</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Responses not equal 100% because of a 38.5% non-response rate

Comments on experiences/issues as a student with a disability on campus

Students with disabilities were asked to provide comments regarding their experiences as a member of an underrepresented group. While the majority of student comments describe a climate that does not fully support the needs of students with disabilities, a couple students disagree. Students’ negative comments, which illustrate the lack of support that these students experienced at OSU, were associated with instructors’ ignorance and with accessibility issues to University facilities. The positive comments illustrate that some students have not had problems at OSU because of their disabilities. However, because of the low number of students with disabilities who responded to the survey (and even fewer who provided comments to this question), the comments these students provided need further examination in order to fully understand the climate for and experiences of students with disabilities at OSU.

Two students with learning disabilities provided comments that show the differences in students’ experiences at OSU. A Hispanic, Rank 2 student expressed that he did not feel that his instructors had been supportive of his needs. He felt that his instructors were not informed about the needs of students with learning disabilities.

The main issue I have is dealing with my learning disability in the classroom. I have a severe attention disorder, a real one – not because I’m lazy or anything. I have tried very hard and am doing okay, not well by any means, but should be doing much better. I have talked to almost all of my teachers but almost all did not care. They disregarded my case as I was a freshman. I am a third year transfer student and I know where I do and do not need help. Having teachers informed of learning disabilities would significantly help myself and many others.

In contrast, unlike the first student’s comments, a white student expressed that the campus climate was supportive of her. She had never experienced negative comments from others due to her disabilities.
I have a learning disability and I feel that I am represented very well. I never have any problems with anyone saying anything to me about it either. Everyone is very understanding.

The differences in these students’ experiences may be related to differences in their academic department and/or in the level/type of accommodation they may require. In addition, in the case of the first student, he may have also experienced the interaction of race with his attention deficit disorder, and, thus, some of the reaction to his learning disability may be related to being a student of color.

Similar to the first student’s comments about a lack of accommodation from his instructors, a white, graduate student, 37 years old, with hearing disability wrote about his uneasiness.

Teachers seem to ignore and forget when you have a disability that is not really visible – also they seem to worry about not offending a particular race, culture or gender at times seem to look down on males in my field of study – *(a female-dominated area)*.

For this graduate student, he found that professors are not as sensitive to his disability as he would like them to be. He also commented on teachers being concerned with other underrepresented groups. However, in his case, in a female-dominated major, he stated than men may be discriminated against.

Moreover, a white, graduate student, 47 years old, with psychological disabilities, expressed his feelings associated with a combination of age discrimination and discrimination against psychiatric disabilities from an instructor in his department. This experience prevented him from continuing at OSU.

Age discrimination kept me from advancing in academic program – I know at least two other students with the same experience in the *(academic)* department, same professor.

My psychiatric history of depression, despite solid academic work, aroused discrimination that ended my academic career here at OSU.

While most of negative comments reveal how an instructor’s ignorance of these students’ needs or feelings may create an unwelcoming environment for these students, an African American, professional student with a mobility impairment, brought up her concerns related to the poor accessibility to University buildings.

I think that OSU could be more embracing of the diversity that some students bring. Also wheelchair accessibility sucks especially in the law school and the union.

However, another mobility-impaired student, Rank 4, who felt positive about the campus climate for students with disabilities, said, “I feel the campus does a great job accommodating the needs of the underrepresented groups.”

The negative comments from students with disabilities illustrate how ignorance from instructors and how poor accessibility to the University buildings make students with disabilities feel less supported by the University. While some students disagree, other students felt the university offers insufficient support for students with disabilities on campus. They noted that more university support is needed in order to create a welcoming campus climate for them.
Appendix A

Campus Climate for Diversity Respondent Demographics

- **GENDER**: 51% were female; and 49% male
- **RANK**: 68.6% were undergraduate students; 22.4% were graduate students; 7.4%, professional; and 1.5% non-degree. Among the undergraduate students, 10.4% were Rank 1; 16.4% Rank 2; 5.9% Rank 3; and 35.8% Rank 4.
- **RACE/ETHNICITY**: (Please note that students provided multiple responses when applicable)
  - 9.0% were African American/Black
  - 3.0% were American Indian/Alaskan Native
  - 10.4% were Asian/Pacific Islander
  - 9.0% were Hispanic American/Latino(a)
  - 61.2% were White/Caucasian
  - 3.0% were international students
  - 4.8% responded “other”
- **GPA**: Among the undergraduate students 4.7% had a GPA of less than a 2.0; 44.2% had between a 2.0 and a 2.9; and 51.2% had a 3.0 or above. Among the graduate and professional students, 7.1% had between a 2.0 and a 2.9; and 93.3% had a 3.0 or better. Other students did not provide their GPA.
- **“HOMETOWN”**: When asked where they spent most of their lives before college, 22.4% of students responded that they were from a rural area or town, 16.4% from a small city; 23.9% from a large city or metropolitan area; and 32.8% from a suburb.
- **AGE**: 
  - 7.1% were 18 or younger
  - 20.3% were 19 or 20
  - 17.2% were 21 or 22
  - 12.5% were 23 or 24
  - 7.8% were 25 or 26
  - 7.8% were 27 or 28
  - 7.8% were 29 or 30
  - 4.7% were between the ages of 31 and 35
  - 12.6% were between the ages of 36 and 40
  - 6.4% were over 40
- **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**: 11.1% of the sample responded that they had a disability (visual, hearing, speech, mobility, psychiatric, or learning)
- **RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION**: (in descending order of frequency)
  - 28.4% Non-religious
  - 17.9% Roman Catholic
  - 9.0% Protestant
  - 7.5% Pagan
  - 6.9% Baptist
  - 6.0% Agnostic
  - 4.5% Jewish
  - 4.5% Buddhist
  - 4.5% Atheist
  - 4.5% Other (including Eastern Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, Pentecostal, Jehovah Witnesses, Amish/Mennonite, Born Again Christian, Quarter, Zoroastrian, Disciples of Christ and more)
  - 3.0% Muslim
### College Enrollment Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Enrollment</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food, Agricultural, &amp; Environmental Sciences</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Ecology</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math &amp; Physics</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine and Public Health</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social &amp; Behavioral Sciences</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UVC</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>