2010-2011 Campus Climate Study
Focus Groups

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University of Minnesota Duluth
This study was requested by Dr. Jackie Millsagle, Interim Vice-Chancellor of Academic Support and Student Life and Dr. Vince Magnuson, Vice Chancellor of Academic Administration, as a follow up to the 2009-2010 campus climate survey.

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The authors wish to thank those students who were willing to share their experiences and suggestions with us.
Background

This focus group process is a continuation and follow-up of the 2009/2010 Campus Diversity Climate Study. One of the findings from that study as well as from the 2002 Diversity Climate Survey was the low response rate for underrepresented student groups, particularly African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indian, and Hispanic students. Due to the small number of ethnic minorities who responded to the survey relative to Caucasians, it was decided that statistical analyses of such a small group would not be of any statistical importance, as their responses would be overshadowed or be masked by the larger sample of Whites who responded to the survey. For example, of the 936 total responses only 17 respondents identified as African American. No more than 43 responses came from Asians and Asian Pacific Islanders, Middle Easterners, American Indians and Latinos. Input provided by Dr. Jackie Millslagle, Interim Vice-Chancellor of Academic Support and Student Life and Dr. Vince Magnuson, Vice Chancellor of Academic Administration appointed the planning group to design both an additional quantitative survey (results presented separately) and a focus group study to collect qualitative data from the underrepresented groups of students on campus.

Research Procedures

The focus groups were comprised of African American, Asian/Pacific, Latino/Chicano, American Indian, and International undergraduate and graduate students. The research primarily explored the central issue of the participants’ personal experiences at UMD. One of the questions asked was “What are your personal experiences with harassment and/or discrimination on
Questions were all designed to explore the significance of the students’ experiences with harassment and or/discrimination (see Appendix). The questions were open-ended to allow the study participants and the researchers to probe the answers of the participants for more in-depth content. This allowed for some spontaneity and follow up after each question. The interview questions were consistent in content and were asked in the same sequence with all six focus groups to ensure internal validity and comparability of the data.

Each focus group took place at UMD and a total of 54 students participated in six group interviews. In addition, a pilot focus group was conducted to help pre-test the effectiveness of the interview questions. Results of the pilot group were not included in the results. The focus group interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. Each focus group was tape recorded and transcribed. Each of the researchers analyzed the transcripts to determine emerging themes that were both important and interesting. In addition to the four core researchers (Arthur, Onchwari, Pelayo-Woodward, Riordan & Tellett) the process of analysis included staff members who had conducted one or more of the focus groups and assisted with the development of the themes (Carr, Comer, & Vang).

The data was analyzed and reduced by reading the entire text and highlighting passages that were congruent with the themes which emerged in both individual analysis as well as group analysis of the data. The researchers shared their findings with one another to determine that what they had highlighted was interpreted correctly and of interest and importance to the participants, thereby establishing validity to the data. Selected quotes were highlighted and grouped into themes that made an obvious connection. Each group transcript was then analyzed to determine the common themes. The results of the study are presented using selected quotes to
substantiate the common themes or principal findings. The data were aggregated for analysis to ensure that the identity or responses for each participant would not be revealed or made known.

**Limitations of the Study**

Because of the voluntary nature of the focus groups, participants chose to engage in the discussions. This may naturally have influenced who was willing to discuss issues of racial climate (e.g. those with more outspoken opinions, those more likely to have had personal experiences with racial incidents, etc.). Gender was another potential limitation. The researchers noticed that depending on the group, either gender was under- or over-represented. It was also observed that some focus groups were comprised of groups of acquaintances, another factor that may have affected the results. However, the researchers note the results were generally consistent across groups and that the stated limitations of the study do not necessarily limit the reliability of the results.

**Description of Findings**

Focus group participants described multiple ways they had been impacted as students of color by the climate within and outside the university community. These interactions might best be described along a continuum of encounters, from non-verbal or implied discrimination all the way to aggressive assaults. In order to frame and describe these interactions we looked to the literature, which identifies racial microaggressions as a way to describe the subtle, everyday forms of racism that occur. Microaggressions refer to “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978,
p.66)” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 272-273). “Simply stated, microaggressions are brief everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (Sue et al., p.273). Microaggressions have been further broken down into three different forms, microinvalidations, microinsults and microassaults. Microinvalidations are “communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the …thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Sue et al., p.274). These can be exemplified by comments that imply that we are all the same, such as “I don’t see color” or that reactions are not valid, such as “It’s no big deal, you’re being overly sensitive.” Microinsults are communications that express “rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. Microinsults represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color” (Sue et al., p.274). Finally, microassaults are explicit racial comments or acts that is meant to “hurt the intended victim through name calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (Sue et al., p.274).

Six themes emerged after both individual and group processing of the transcribed data from campus climate research focus groups. These themes were established based on close examination of the data from across focus groups. Broad themes were further categorized into subthemes. The themes are:

- White territory (including subthemes of intimidation and forced assimilation),
- Assumption of racial preference and lower standards for people of color,
- Isolation,
- Lack of safety in the community,
- Ignorance on the part of faculty and students, and
• Pressure to conform and the process of accommodating to a racist institution/community/society.

White territory

The theme “white territory” relates to the different forms of unwarranted aggression by white people toward students of color in hallways, classrooms and even various places in the community. Participants of color report feeling a strong sense of not belonging in the college or the community, as the message seems clear that "this is white territory." These aggressions come in different forms like stares, pushing and shoving, giggles at the students of color, and even physical assault.

Under this theme, a number of related issues surfaced. These included participants feeling oppressed by a sense of “white privilege” or a sense of entitlement on the part of white students and faculty.

Students described feeling they were uninvited visitors to white (or majority) territory, with hallways being one of these spaces. “In the hallways there are times when I feel like, in a way they’re kind of staring, like ‘well you’re different, I don’t see someone like you all the time’.” Another student shared, “When you’re in the hallway and you’re walking … they will literally make you move over for them…” In another focus group a student stated, “I was walking down the hallway … I was texting, but I was using as small a space as possible, and I was walking with my friend and we were going at a normal pace and a bunch of guys were coming towards us. I saw them so we let them go even though they were taking up the entire
space and they ran into me and pushed me to the wall. My friend saw that, and I lost my temper, but they started laughing and just walked away. And a bunch of people saw it and [asked] what’s going on? Why are they doing that? And [I said] I have no idea.”

“A lot of stories I hear involve students studying and people just won’t let them study in peace in the library, in study lounges, like somebody will be studying for a test or finals … and people just won’t let them…it’s like this mentality…black person studying , let’s go mess with them…”

One student described the following experience, “When my family comes up here, they don’t say anything; but the way they look at you, they stare [at us as we] walk down the hallway, and … I don’t know what to say so I just keep walking.”

Another student described his friend’s experience, “My friend told me that one day some white people came to him and asked him are you Chinese? He said ‘yes,’ and they hit him on the head.”

**Intimidation** was a subtheme under White Territory, with differences noted based on whether individuals or groups were involved.

“What I do notice is that white people only [go out of their way to avoid people of color] when they’re by themselves. When they’re with a group they will try to walk right through you and I do not move. I don’t like when people try to intimidate me.”

Someone in another group highlighted the differences between dealing with one person from the majority culture versus a group by saying, “… the thing is that they’re intimidated by us
but they try to intimidate us too. It feels like when they’re by themselves they’re really scared of us, but when they’re in a group they’re trying to intimidate us.”

_Forced assimilation_ was identified as another subtheme of White Territory. For example, one group described a feeling of “You need to act like us” or the student who stated, “Last week I was told that either I make myself more likeable to my [fellow students] or I’m going to get kicked out; and by likeable they mean to change my tone of voice. They don’t understand… people from my city, we have a very strong tone of voice and a lot of people think that we’re mad all the time, it’s not that we’re being mad or being rude or being mean it’s just the way we talk; and I have explained that about a thousand times, and still I was told that I need to change that or else I’ll get kicked out.”

Another aspect of this subtheme had to do with not “overreacting” to comments. “…I hear … more often than anyone should… [racist] jokes, and then people saying ‘oh, it’s no big deal, it’s just a joke…”

Many participants described feeling UMD did not accept them as part of the campus community. The general perception among the students was that some of them always have to contest what is presented to them as a White campus and territory. Several examples referred to intramural sports events to illustrate this point: “When we play football sometimes, it seems like we are discriminated against, like we were not appreciated and listened to.” Participants attributed this mainly to their racial and minority status on campus.

This form of discrimination occurs outside of intramural sport events on campus as well. Students referenced classroom situations where White students make derogatory and offensive remarks about (specific ethnic group) TA’s. One student stressed his experience as a minority
and the only (specific ethnic group) in his class thus: “And I hear the Caucasian kids again mocking her (referring to the TA) and her accent. I don’t know if the TA knows it or not, or if she does, she is just ignoring it but to me, it is really offensive and I would want to stand up for her but then I don’t know if she would want me to stand up for her or not.”

**Assumption of racial preference and lower standards for people of color**

Participants described the misconception on the part of white students and faculty that people of color are not qualified to learn and work here but get the opportunities because they are filling a quota for affirmative action. Participants also believe there is a misconception on the part of white students and faculty that people of color are here on scholarships and might not care as much about their schooling.

Focus group participants described numerous incidents involving both students and faculty members who expressed significant misconceptions about students of color and their right to be here. These included assuming students were admitted as a result of their race or are filling a quota for affirmative action: “One time I was talking to my friend and I was surprised because they said something about the multicultural centers like ‘have you seen it? I can’t believe it’s there’ and they were saying something like…the students that [are in the multicultural center] shouldn’t be here - they wouldn’t be able to get into the school if it wasn’t for their ethnicity.”

Other common assumptions are that students of color do not pay tuition or are not paying to attend UMD. One student shared her frustration about this common assumption, saying, “I hate that. I get that a lot, [comments like] - ‘you have all your school paid for’…”, and another
student mentioned, “we were in a class one day and some girl said, ‘I just don’t understand because black people get a scholarship to come attend this school’…”

This particular area of discussion drew heated responses from many participants. Participants shared their frustration with always having to educate white people. The variety of opinions about this can best be summed up by one participant who described being expected to always have to talk about race and educate white people. “You should pay me to do that!”

Other participants asserted that sometimes they sense subtle hostility and unfriendliness even in the hallways, cafeteria, and in campus residences. While no specific quotation was found to support this theme, several inferences could be made from the other comments the students made. For example, when (specific ethnic group members) “hang out” or “walk in the hallways on campus,” many of them find themselves being looked at “in funny gestures and facial expressions” by predominantly Caucasian students. From the perspectives of the students of color, this is a form of racial and ethnic contestation of their status as minorities on campus. Further, some participants shared that when they have “tried to be nice,” their overtures are rebuffed; forcing them to think that perhaps they do not belong at UMD. Feelings of being given a funny look at the cafeteria seemed common with this group. As one student said, “Actually, the people at the Food Court, there are some ladies who give you a nasty look.”

Isolation

As expressed in quotes below Isolation refers to a sense of not feeling welcomed and not being able to have authentic friendships with white students. This happens in classrooms where white students often do not welcome students of color to work with them, whether in classroom discussions or group activities.
In a number of focus groups issues related to isolation were discussed. Students mentioned, “People not wanting to be in your small group, or not inviting you to join them…” as well as “I feel a sense of not being very welcomed.” This was a common experience even for those who described going out of their way to try to be outgoing.

Students also noted that people may only act friendly in a superficial way. “…I find that American students aren’t very helpful in that way. I’ve noticed that American people are friendly but they’re not friendly at the same time. They’ll be like, ‘Hi! How are you doing?’ but when you actually need them…they’re not very helpful, let’s put it that way. …You ask them help me do this, they won’t [offer]…you have to seek for help. You have to ask them if you can join them otherwise they won’t…they’ll see you alone but they won’t ask if you want to join them.”

A student in another focus group described a common experience this way. “Everyone in this room [knows how common it is to have] people looking at you all the time or people wanting to listen to your conversation. Or you make eye contact with somebody and they look straight down and are all nervous. [And I wonder,] ‘Why are you scared?’ You get so used to going through this stuff you don’t even know what to say. I don’t know what normal is. I don’t know how it normally feels to walk down the hallway. I don’t know how white people feel when they walk down a hallway when it’s just white people. I don’t know how that feels to them because I’m not a white person.”

“There is no place on this campus for [a particular group]. No place. Not one place. So you isolate yourself. My whole first year I sat in a corner in the library and did my work and stuff, went straight home, I hated it, I hated Duluth, I was like I hate this place, this is the worst place I’ve ever been in my life, and I even lived in the cities and felt more comfortable there.”
In summary, participants reported feeling a sense of alienation/isolation from other UMD groups. This isolation/alienation is reflected back whenever they congregate with other students at the Multicultural Center. However, while feelings of isolation were generally expressed among the focus groups, some of the participants believe that the Multicultural Center can be turned into a gathering place where students from all backgrounds can come to meet and interact with other students. Currently, non-minority students appear to feel intimidated about coming to the Multicultural Center.

**Lack of safety in the community**

Focus group participants described a variety of issues related to their perception of and experience with safety in both the college community and the community at large. These experiences consisted of being victims of name-calling, being treated unfairly by their landlord(s), a sense of being taken advantage of, feelings that the police target them for criminal behavior, rather than the white students who are with them, and knowing they are being followed in stores. Students also described many examples of being stared at, or being recipients of unwanted attention.

Students reported being intensely and carefully watched even as they check out of places like Wal-Mart, Cub Foods, TJ Max and Best Buy. As students affirmed, “You can sense the intensity when you are going out. Other customers don’t experience this checking out.” Another student described it this way. “…we had been [at a store] for a while looking around, and these ladies thought we were stealing so they kept their eye on us the entire time, and they kept bothering us and asking us if we needed help and just following us around the store. Then we
were in line, at first they did not acknowledge us and they let the white people budge in front of us to pay for their stuff, they wouldn’t even acknowledge me and [ ].”

Several groups discussed the interactions they had with the community and particularly the police. As one student described it, “…I remember when [] was here, she actually went down to talk to the police chief because she got pulled over in a car with [] and the only thing was that they “looked suspicious” and that was the only reason that he gave.”

“I went to [local restaurant] one time and I ordered a drink; I used my passport and they said they can’t accept it, and I asked them, I mean this is the most legitimate document you could ask for and if this is good enough for the U.S. Customs why isn’t this good enough for you? “Well we don’t accept passports.”

Feelings of not being safe on campus were also cited. In the residence halls (particularly after the Facebook incident), several of the (specific racial group) students felt it was not a wise idea to go to the lounge as a group. As one student said, “I will study in the lounge … but after the incident, it was off-limits just in case. Just in case, there is any more discrimination.”

“One night my girlfriend and I went to the vending machine, and I don’t know if it’s because of racial issues or not, but these two white students they made mocking (specific racial group) sounds near the bookstore vending machines. We’re standing there trying to get drinks and one of them was making (alluding to specific racial group) sounds.”

“I have friends who will just be walking down the hallway or walking in the dormitories and people will just yell the n-word out the window.”

Ignorance on the part of faculty and students
This theme included a variety of behaviors and verbalizations on the part of students and faculty members, including racial or ethnic jokes, negative comments, stereotypes, labels, as well as being expected to answer on behalf of the whole racial or ethnic group. Students seemed to make a clear distinction between faculty who appeared uninformed but well intentioned and those who seemed to not care. Subthemes for this section are students, faculty, educating others and the multicultural center.

**Students** Many examples were shared of ignorance, including lack of basic knowledge and misinformation, on the part of students on campus. “I was talking with a girl and she’s a white American and when she found out I was XXXX she just stepped away and she started asking me questions like ‘have you seen Osama Bin Laden?’…”

One participant (student of color) was asked where she was from, and “I said (city in the U.S.) and she was like ‘oh, I was expecting something more exotic’.”

“Well, I haven’t had too much; I’ve only been here for three months because I’m a freshman, but nothing really too serious. Just sometimes with my roommates, I’m decent friends with them. They might joke around and say some bow-and-arrow or tipi comment, but nothing really malicious.”

And another student responded, “Yeah, it seems that most of it stems from ignorance, not really knowing, like with the [traditional] stories, so they go ‘that’s dumb.’ But they don’t really understand any of it, that’s what most racism or harassment is.”

**Faculty** Significantly, a number of participants identified a lack of accommodation on the part of faculty. The behaviors described include: an unwillingness to learn students’ names, being insensitive to ELL-related issues, and generally a lack of understanding about cultural
beliefs or practices. Further, students described examples of faculty not confronting or correcting misperceptions in the classroom.

“After a presentation on Historical Trauma another professor from the college asked, ‘What makes your [group] so special? A lot of other cultures in this world have experienced some of the things that you were talking about tonight’…”

“Or some professors…won’t call me…they can’t say my first name…” “And then you tell them how to pronounce it…”, or “sometimes I’ll have a teacher look at me and ask ‘can I just call you [modified name]?’ No, that’s not my name.”

“In class that last week we had presentations [where one group] used the word “squaw” over and over again, to describe the women and I was just like ‘nobody’s going to say anything? Like what?’ And they just didn’t. I wasn’t angry about it just because they didn’t know; they didn’t know that maybe we shouldn’t use that word, but the teacher didn’t even correct them afterwards. But maybe the teacher did after and I missed it; I just thought it was funny how acceptable it was.”

One student described the typical class activity in one of her courses; reading an article and discussing it. …when the student mentioned to the teacher that it’s difficult for her to skim an article in a couple of minutes in order to discuss with peers the teacher recommended she drop the class. “I said, I’ll do my best…I can read, it just takes a longer time.”

*Educating others* A number of groups discussed the issue of being expected to educate others about culture, with the expectation that their perceptions were universal for that racial or ethnic group. “…they’re always asking you for your perspective on….and how you feel. I can’t answer for the entire world and I hate being called out like that…I just want to be invisible…I’m
here doing the exact same thing as everybody else....” And another student explained, “I always try to (distinguish) this when I answer just because…I don’t represent an entire group…if I happen to run into a racist white person I can’t assume that every white person is a racist….”

Participants also described stereotypes about underrepresented groups being prevalent on campus. The Asian students spoke about classroom situations where they were forced by the instructor to confront their stereotypes. Usually, resistance came from the White majority students who sometimes didn’t feel comfortable being grouped or paired with minority students.

Multicultural Center Participants reported that a majority of students have bought into the belief that the Multicultural Center is off limits for them; that after all, it is the place where the Black, foreign-born students, Latin and Asian students congregate. This has caused a backlash where other non-minority students were quoted as saying, “Why don’t we have such a place?” During student orientation tours, the Multicultural Center is often pointed at rather than being the subject of information to the new students. As one (specific racial group) student attested, “I do realize that some people who give tours (people who are part of the Multicultural Center), tend to elaborate more and people who are not in the Multicultural Center kind of pass through it.” Instances were cited where faculty members simply send students to the Multicultural Center directing students to go and interview a minority person on issues of diversity.

“People don’t know about the multicultural center. They think it’s just for international students and they don’t know that they can go in there and interact with other people.”
Pressure to conform and the process of accommodating to a racist institution/community/society

Participants report using several survival strategies to function in the otherwise hostile campus and community environment. Some of the strategies reported include developing “immunity” to racist behaviors, minimizing and making excuses for racist behaviors.

“One time my friend and I were taking a cab and we were talking in (non-English language) and suddenly the driver said “you guys are in the United States, you need to talk in English.” And we’re like “we’re both (specific nationality), why do we need to talk in English?” “Because this is the United States.”

“…it feels sometimes you’re like a little immune to noticing.”

“The question (#2, regarding do you have friends who have experienced harassment or discrimination) should be how many times. How many times in a day do you feel _____?”

“I think they’re (white people) not really exposed to other cultures and so they’re scared and don’t know what to expect and I think it’s also that they don’t want to offend you by saying something that’s unrelated.”

Many participants described attempting to be unnoticed; trying not to draw unwanted attention to them. Others described a feeling that perhaps the white students didn’t mean to sound the way they did, or weren’t intentionally trying to hurt them. The researchers agreed there was a surprising amount of accommodation reported, on the part of participants, to what the researchers deemed was unacceptable behavior on the part of white students, faculty and community members.
Additional thoughts

Finally, it should be noted that a number of students wanted to qualify their responses by acknowledging that there are also positive aspects of their experiences at UMD. One student who had been on campus for three months stated, “I just want to say as an outsider, I’m actually impressed by the amount of effort and good intention put into the whole goal of integration in the university.”

Several students mentioned positive academic programs and courses where instructors created an atmosphere where diversity was discussed and respected. “In [my major] I have diverse faculty [examples given] so that to me says a lot too. We’re learning from their perspective, from a different culture’s perspective, but I think that’s one way they are addressing it here on campus. And [one instructor used her culture to teach that day’s class content], and that was really cool, and so that was one way of getting to know her culture and I thought that was really awesome. And I like that the faculty is really diverse so we have all these viewpoints.

And another said, “For my personal experience, I feel like, I may have under-evaluated the University because I can see better than what I actually thought. Like in several classes I am the only *** and the only ***, too, and we get into a group and talking to the majority of the white girls, I got to know that even though they didn’t grew up in towns or cities with minorities, they still respect me individually instead of just stereotype! So actually, I may have under-estimated the University. I have some pretty awesome professors and pretty awesome RAs, too, who see you for who you are.”
Several other students noted that there are positive programs and activities which could be expanded on. For example, “I think the university programs like Taste of Nations do a good job of bringing people together and people get a chance to look at people who are different from them and experience their culture. It’s a good effort, but there should be more. It’s not enough.” Another student added her feelings about orientation, “I just felt as an international student there was a really good orientation for us so I was wondering if American students had something like that. I know they have orientation but I don’t know how much they are aware that there are even international students on campus.” And one student specifically acknowledged the need for and value of the multi-culture center, saying “Yeah, like in the multicultural center. That’s the only place that racism stops.”

Finally, one student summarized the topic in this way. “The majority of the campus is polite and the majority of Americans are wonderful, awesome people - they would give their shirt off their back - so it’s just a select few bad [people] that make things uncomfortable for everybody else. This is what I struggle with sometimes because as [a scientist] that doesn’t make logical sense, how a little few can make it so uncomfortable for everybody. So in talking about that there’s a tendency, and I know when you do this focus group for different groups of people you might find people leaning a bit extreme like, “oh you know it’s all bad it’s so bad,” while the majority of the campus is actually wonderful, very awesome, but it’s just a select few that need to be dealt with.”
Student Recommendations from Focus Groups

One of the questions asked of the participants was: Imagine you are an administrator at UMD and that you have been charged with improving the racial climate on campus. What kinds of things could help the campus be a better place? Participants provided a great deal of feedback on this question. Due to the volume of recommendations, researchers grouped the recommendations under the following headings:

- Policy changes related to improving the racial climate
- Curriculum changes
- Faculty and student (of color) recruitment and retention
- Working with the community
- Better utilization of resources currently available

They are presented here, in no particular order.

**Policy changes related to improving the racial climate**

1. Have zero tolerance policy for racist behavior and stick to it (including behavior on the part of faculty and staff). Students with bad behavior should be made an example of through that policy; ensure if they move to another college their record of bad behavior follows them.

2. Faculty members need explicit training in order to know how to handle issues surrounding the dynamics of racism and intercultural sensitivity. Specific classroom examples were provided in which faculty members did not adequately address incidents of racism and racial insensitivity.
3. There is a sense that the Multicultural Center is a place where only people of color “hang out.” This means that for other students, this is minority territory and a “no go place.” This culture has to change. Access that is inclusive to all must be fostered if the Center is to fulfill its mission on campus. The directive should be that the Center and its activities exist to serve the student body polity of UMD. Perhaps the Statesman can be used to educate the campus community about the center.

4. Education/awareness campaign about cultural diversity (e.g. an article every week in the Statesman) in order for people to “get more used to it” and educated about the issues.

5. Additional funding to support student groups who are working on diversity related initiatives. Students provided examples of incidents in which, depending on the dean of the college, certain student groups were more highly funded (white, male).

6. Ensure the students’ of color voices are heard—that they serve on every level and in every college and department, e.g. student judiciary committee, student council, etc. Students specifically described not feeling heard or represented by the student council. The suggestion was that even if the campus over-represents students of color on these committees, councils, etc. this would be beneficial since there is a need for white students, faculty and staff to hear the non-white perspective if change is going to occur.

7. The campus should address other forms of discrimination as well, e.g. sexual orientation, religion, disability, and country of origin.

8. Work on the stereotype that people coming from different countries do not speak “good English”. Even people who have spoken English all their lives are stereotyped as not being clear. Students (and others) must be willing to train their ears to understand others’ accents. This is a problem students, TAs and faculty from other countries face.
Curriculum change

1. Include racial/diversity related issues in the freshman seminar class.

2. Offer (and require) more courses with a cultural/ethnic diversity focus. These would need to be made up of diverse students (not just white students) and be small in size in order to enhance making connections with one another. Many of the present courses get filled so fast that students can’t take them earlier in their programs, if ever.

Faculty and student recruitment and retention

1. There should be a significant and targeted increase in the number of African American faculty and staff members. While it was acknowledged there are International faculty members of color, students described two different dynamics with International faculty of color and African American, or American faculty of color, and the need for both.

2. Do NOT recruit students of color if there is not a significant change in the climate that will promote their success.

Work with the community

1. There is need for the Chancellor’s office to embark upon a vigorous public relations campaign to promote town and gown collaboration. UMD students live in a community that is larger than UMD. They bring economic value to the community. When they visit parts of the community, some of them are treated differently on account of their race, ethnicity, and national origin. Some of them are treated as if they are thieves by local merchants. This may entail working with the local police, merchants, businesses, and other stakeholders to create a robust culture where diversity is fostered, promoted, and celebrated.
2. Create more opportunities for students of color to interact with the administration (chancellor, vice chancellors, deans, etc.).

3. Increase opportunities for students in general to interact with higher administration ("tabling" outside Kirby was one suggestion). “…it would be an expression of the administration that they actually care about the students.”

4. Increase the number of social events in which students of color and white students can socialize and get to know one another. One student mentioned the Twin Cities campus’ Spring Jam (floats and parades). Another suggested a major spring concert with a culturally related/well known performer. Others suggested UMD hosting Powwows.

5. Develop opportunities and forums for small groups to speak up for themselves.

**Better utilization of resources already available**

1. Incorporate the activities of the Multicultural Center in the student orientation/advisement activities. This initiative will require the students who work as tour guides for orientation be trained and encouraged to physically walk through the Center with their students. This can serve as an affirmation of the importance UMD attaches to diversity.

2. Faculty should be trained regarding issues of understanding diversity and diverse people. Merely asking or sending students to the Multicultural Center to interview minority or underrepresented students is not the way to incorporate diversity. The Center should be encouraged to work with faculty to promote the Center’s activities, including having representatives of the Center visit classes to explain the role and importance of the Center at UMD.
3. Instructors, staff, and students who have built and encouraged diversity in all their activities should be showcased as examples worthy of emulation. Students spoke highly of a number of instructors who do a good job of infusing diversity throughout their courses; they should be encouraged and invited to share how they do this with the UMD community at-large.

4. Make students on campus aware of procedures to follow when you have been discriminated against.

**Researchers’ Recommendations**

In addition to the participants’ recommendations, there are several additional items the researchers of this study wish to put forth.

1. There appears to be a need for some public forum between UMD communities of color and the Duluth law enforcement community. The purpose of this might be to have an open dialogue about improving the climate of interactions between UMD community of color and the police and increasing awareness of the perceived hostility toward people of color in the community.

2. In order to attract diverse students and faculty UMD needs to revise their curriculum to include academic components that would respond to areas represented in the multicultural center. Such programs would also offer educational opportunities for other students. Currently the multicultural center is only service-based. Such programs should not just be minors but major programs with opportunities for graduate studies.
3. The transformational value of diversity student panels that talk in classrooms was clearly apparent in the study. A modest suggestion that came through from students who participate in these panels was that UMD compensate their educational service. We the researchers strongly support the idea of compensating these students for their invaluable contribution of educating other students as well as faculty.

4. An issue related to the student diversity panels also was surfaced. Based on some negative experiences panelists have had when sharing their stories, it will be necessary that students and particularly faculty be educated about being respectful when the panels visit their classrooms, for example, faculty members not leaving the classroom while diversity panels are presenting.

5. The face of UMD, including its administration, needs to reflect a commitment to diversity that goes beyond tokenism.

6. Commitment to inclusion needs to be clearly visible to students, faculty, staff and the community.

7. Issues in this study should be used to develop benchmarks and be incorporated into the campus strategic plan. (Specific recommendations made by the students could be made available for planning purposes.)
Conclusion

This study is a cross-sectional design and hence does not provide a longitudinal analysis of the attitudes and opinions of UMD's minority student population. Concerted efforts must be made to institutionalize a systematic ongoing collection of information about campus climate from underrepresented groups every two years. Student cohorts can be tracked along multidimensional focal issues pertaining to the academic experiences of underrepresented groups on campus. The information presented in our findings represents baseline information from which subsequent studies must be undertaken. The focus of this study was limited to students of color; however the intent was clear that additional information should be gathered in the future to assess other underrepresented groups such as students with disability, women and GLBTQ students.

The students and staff who assisted with this study clearly want UMD to be a welcoming campus for everyone. This will require a commitment from everyone on campus.


Appendix

Focus Group Study of Campus Climate for Students of Color: 2010

Questions

1. Have you personally experienced harassment and/or discrimination on campus based on your race, ethnicity, and/or place of national origin? Please describe…

2. Do you have any friends, associates or classmates who have experienced harassment and/or discrimination on campus based on their race, ethnicity, and/or place of national origin?

3. In what ways do you feel the University is addressing campus issues relating to harassment and/or discrimination race, ethnicity, and/or place of national origin? Please give examples

4. Imagine that you are an administrator and you have been charged with improving the racial climate on campus. What suggestions do you have for improving the racial climate here on campus?

5. Are there any other issues related to the racial climate on campus that you would like to raise?

Please feel free to write down anything else you may be thinking about related to the issues of racial discrimination and harassment. You may then turn your paper in so your experiences and opinions can be included in the study.

If you would like a copy of the study’s results please email jmills@umn.edu and you will receive a brief summary at the conclusion of the research study.

We thank you very much for your time and willingness to participate in this focus group study.