2012 Campus Climate Study

Focus Groups

October 2012

University of Minnesota Duluth
This study was requested by the UMD Campus Climate Leadership Team as a follow-up to the 2009-2010 campus climate survey. The Campus Climate Leadership Team includes

**Lendley Black**, Chancellor  
**Lisa Erwin**, Vice Chancellor for Student Life  
**John Hamlin**, representative of the Executive Committee of the Campus Assembly  
**Gibran Hashmi**, student representative (SCSE)  
**Judith Karon**, Director of Human Resources and Equal Opportunity  
**Lucy Kragness**, Chief of Staff of the Chancellor's Office  
**Sue Maher**, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts  
**Andrea Schokker**, Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  

**Michael Seymour**, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Operations  
**Rick Smith**, Civil Service representative (American Indian Learning Resource and Action Center)  
**John Arthur**, Faculty representative  
**Bilin Tsai**, co-chair of the Campus Change Team and Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry  
**Susana Pelayo-Woodward**, co-chair of the Campus Change Team and Director, Office of Cultural Diversity

**Researchers:**  
Dr. John Arthur, Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
Susana Pelayo-Woodward, Director, Office of Cultural Diversity

The following people were instrumental in publicizing and facilitating the focus group, as well as assisting with reviewing the data for themes:

Angie Nichols, Director, Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Services  
Penny Cragun, Director, Office of Disability Resources  
Emily Norenberg, Disability Specialist, Office of Disability Resources  
Susana Pelayo-Woodward, Director, Office of Cultural Diversity  
Paula Tracey, Graduate Student, College of Education and Human Services Professions
The authors wish to thank those students who were willing to share their experiences and suggestions with us.

Background

This focus group project is a continuation of and follow-up to 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 student members of underrepresented groups, particularly students with disabilities, female students, and GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) students. Due to the small number of underrepresented students who responded to the survey relative to the general student population, it was decided that the analyses of such a small group would not be statistically significant, as their responses would be overshadowed or be masked by the larger sample of mainstream (majority) students who responded to the survey. Data on sexual orientation, gender expression, and presence of a disability were not gathered in the earlier survey. The Campus Climate Leadership Team appointed the planning group to design both an additional quantitative survey (2010 results presented separately, http://www.d.umn.edu/chancellor/climate/focusgroups.html) and a focus group study to collect qualitative data from the underrepresented groups of students on campus.

Research Procedures

The focus groups were conducted in Spring 2012 and were composed of undergraduate students who self-identified as students with a disability, women students, and GLBT 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 campus?” Follow-up questions were designed to explore the significance of the students’ experience with harassment and/or discrimination (see Appendix). The questions were open-ended to allow the study participants and researchers to probe the answers of the participants for more in-depth content. This allowed for more spontaneity and in-depth follow-up after each question.

The interview questions were consistent in content and were asked in the same sequence with all three focus groups to ensure internal validity and comparability of the data.

Each focus group took place at UMD and a total of 32 students participated in three group interviews; these interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The comments made in each focus group were tape recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed to determine emerging themes and ideas. 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 (Nichols, Cragun, Norenberg, and Pelayo-Woodward). They reviewed the emerging themes along with the transcript to confirm an accurate description of the emerging themes and ideas.

The data were analyzed and reduced by reading the entire text and highlighting passages congruent with the themes that emerged in individual analysis and 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 the validity of the data. Selected quotes were highlighted and grouped into interconnected themes. 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.

**Limitations of the Study**

The voluntary nature of the focus groups suggests that participants chose to engage in the discussions. This may naturally have influenced who was willing to discuss issues of diversity climate (e.g. those with more outspoken opinions, those more actively involved in advocacy or likely to have had personal experiences with hate crime incidents, etc.). Gender binary was another potential limitation. The researchers noticed that depending on the group, either gender (male or female) was under- or over-represented. Typically, gender is only representative of male or female. In the case of the GLBT focus group, transgender students were only self-identified. It was also observed that some focus groups consisted 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 have been affected within and outside of the university community based on their disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity/gender expression.
Four common themes emerged after both individual and group processing of the transcribed data from all three focus groups:

- **Lack of Follow-Through with Institutional Commitment**
- **Re-victimizing the Victims**
- **Lack of Understanding by Staff, Faculty and Students of Discrimination, Harassment, Sexism, Homophobia, and Insensitivity to Differences**
- **Lack of Safety in the Community**

**Lack of Follow-Through with Institutional Commitment**

While the campus does have an inclusive policy on hate crimes, bias-motivated offensive conduct or hate incidents, harassment, discrimination, and sexual assault, there is concern that the policy is not being properly implemented. The current language of the policies is inclusive of gender, disability, and sexual orientation, including gender identity. The University’s Goal #2 of the Strategic Plan (“Create a positive and inclusive campus climate for all by advancing equity, diversity, and social justice.”) clearly asserts that fostering a climate of safety and respect is a critical campus priority. Despite having these policies, students expressed that the enforcement and the lack of proper procedure of the policy is where the University is failing to ensure a campus experience that is safe, civil and inclusive.

Several students identified the presence of a political culture within administration and the University as a whole that seems to justify policies not being enforced. Below are a series of examples that students expressed regarding a lack of institutional commitment:
• One student experienced discrimination by her roommate moving out as soon as she came out to them as a gay female or “lesbian.” Due to the fact that there was not any specific mention of the roommate moving out because this student identified as being gay, the housing department dealt with the situation as if two roommates were just not getting along. The housing department was not able to provide her with emergency housing, and the student was forced to sleep on friend’s couches.

• Students expressed concern about posters being torn down for campus events such as QASU meetings, *The Vagina Monologues*, and drag show events. Within two to three days of hanging up the posters, 90 percent of them are torn down. This impacts students’ sense of safety, as well as their operating budget as a student group.

• Several students discussed the protestors that come on campus to the bus hub to share about their religious beliefs. It is something that not only disrupts the lives of GLBT students, but everyone on campus. It is unprovoked and tolerated. There are no clear guidelines on campus that tell students the difference between violations of the conduct code, the value of freedom of speech, and infringement upon the University’s Goal #2. The campus does not feel safe for students when protestors are able to be on campus. Several students agreed that the campus is not addressing this situation that causes many to feel unsafe.

• A student shared about attending a hockey game during UMD’s parents weekend. The opposing team had purple jerseys on and a group of UMD students came up with the chant “purple faggots.” They repeated this chant three different times
during the game. The only outcome of this incident was an apology e-mail and
a threat to take away students’ season tickets if they misbehaved. This same
situation occurred at another game and there were not any season tickets taken
away. Students felt the threat was an empty threat.

• Several students commented on the Marriage Amendment debate that was hosted
on the UMD campus in the spring of 2012. Students felt the moderator of this
event did not stop people when things became unsafe or elevated, as he had
promised. The educational debate was not conducted in a way that ensured safety
and respect for all participants and attendees. The outcome of the complaints was
not made known to attendees who were offended and felt unsafe. The lack of
response by administration illustrates the lack of support felt by students and other
attendees. One of the panelists compared another panelists’ relationship to a dog.
It was described as the least safe some students had ever felt on campus despite
being surrounded by several GLBT community members and allies of the GLBT
community.

• As students enter campus during welcome week of freshman orientation, males
hold up posters that say “Drop your daughters off here” or “Thanks freshman
dads.” These are off-campus houses. The yards of these houses are full of college
men drinking and holding up signs. Because there is a back-up of cars, it takes
a while to get onto campus, and inevitably parents and incoming students are
exposed to the signs. The police are normally called but it still happens every
year, and even once the police show up these males continue to linger in the area.
They think it’s really funny and apparently not offensive to people. One student
shared about her family being with her and driving past these signs. Her mother
was offended. This student was offended that her younger siblings had to be
exposed to this act of hate as well.

- Students expressed their concern that several of the posters for the Women’s
  Studies Club have things written on them such as “LOL” (laugh out loud), “yeah
  right” or “are you studying women?”

- Posters for events from the Women’s Resource and Action Center (WRAC) office
  are often torn down. Students have also overheard people making jokes about the
  rape awareness posters.

- The current online Campus Crime Statistics report indicates that there has not
  been any sexual assault between the years of 2007 and 2009. This includes any
  reports of sexual assault, reported rapes, and any reported sexual harassment in
  three years. UMD is mandated as a part of the Clery Act to report those statistics.
  There are new changes regarding what they are required to include in the
  statistics. There is a new Title IX letter that explains that the institution is required
  to do a better job with reports and investigations by including incidents that get
  reported to the Office of Equal Opportunity or the Student Conduct Code. The
  process of tallying the final statistics is complex, but it should not be that complex
  because it likely results in under-reporting incidents. One student felt that the lack
  of reports (despite incidents occurring) shows that the University has an agenda of
  reporting low incidents of sexual assault.

- Students felt it is very likely that there are several cases that have not been
  included in these statistics, especially when national statistics indicate that one in
four women is raped or sexually assaulted in a community and one in six women on college campuses. One student pointed out that women make up over half of the student body, and she felt there is no way that only three students have been affected by sexual assault over a three-year period.

- Students shared about not being aware of what the punishment would be for someone who commits a sexual assault as a UMD student on another UMD student. One student questioned if the punishment would be academic or just legal. The consequences for violations of the Student Conduct Code are not clearly communicated.

- One student shared that she is aware of several incidents of sexual assault by male athletes that did not result in any kind of consequence. Her friends have shared things that have happened to them. She feels that the University does not address these cases because the University values the athletes. There is also concern that as a society we tend to give men the benefit of the doubt and hold their hand through any accusation of sexual assault.

- There needs to be a system of accountability (consequences) for people who harass or discriminate against women on or near campus. There is an academic consequence for students who drink alcohol, but there is not a consequence for people who verbally or physically assault each other.

- There are a lot of inappropriate sexualized chants about hockey players, mothers, and sisters that are said at UMD hockey games. One student explained there are chants about “any group that is not white male.” There also are chants about sex in general. These chants not only occur at the games, but also on the UMD buses,
which makes it hard for women to go to athletic events because the chants seem
to be acceptable behavior.

Re-victimizing the Victim

Several students provided specific examples of becoming a victim of the process
due to the lack of a victim-centered response. A victim-centered response ensures that
the incident reporting and response system operates with the needs of the victim at the
forefront. This communicates to victims that they are valued and builds trust that the
system will give them the support they need to get through a trying, complicated process.
Without such trust, victims often drop out, leaving cases unsolved.

- Several students commented on the Marriage Amendment debate that was
  hosted on the UMD campus. One student shared that the most offensive aspect
  of the event was that there were not any administrators present at a potentially
  volatile event that was likely going to be unsafe for some students. This is another
  example of victims of discrimination and harassment being re-victimized by
  having to explain what occurred to others who should have been present (in a
  situation that was likely psychologically, emotionally, and physically unsafe for
  students and other attendees) to ensure safety and respectful dialogue.

- Students expressed an overwhelming feeling that most of the time, the people
  being harassed or discriminated against on campus have to take the initiative to
  change/deal with the situation, or they are blamed for reporting the situation.
  Students felt that that the people doing the discriminating and harassing should be
  the ones to have to leave or be inconvenienced, not the victim of the harassment
  or discrimination. The students being discriminated against often have to leave
the situation and this suggests that they are the problem. They become more isolated by having to leave the environment. This is a way of re-victimizing the person being discriminated against. There was concern that the main way of reporting incidents is online and the form may be difficult for students to find. In addition, the online format does not provide support for the victim in the moment. Other options for reporting are not clearly communicated and leave victims having to search for their own resources. Students felt there should also be a person to contact. If students have a screen reader or audio challenge, they may just give up on the process.

- One student feels there are many things wrong with the current UMD system of how cases of sexual assault are handled. The University has recently changed the way reporting actions are completed. This includes who does the investigation and how the investigations are done. In this student’s opinion, the investigation process ends up re-victimizing the victim by placing most of the responsibility on the victim. There is no accountability or responsibility placed on the alleged perpetrator. The student understands that there needs to be equal resources for both the victim and the alleged perpetrator.

- Students identified that incidents of reports between students do not match up with incidents of sexual assault reported by the University. One student believes that the numbers do not match up because of the way reporting processes are set up, particularly the way “the victims” are put on the spot to explain what they were doing when they were victimized. This process cannot be tolerated and it needs to become a priority for this campus.
Lack of Understanding by Staff, Faculty and Students of Discrimination, Harassment, Sexism, Homophobia, and Insensitivity to Differences.

Students identified several examples of faculty, staff, and the general student population lacking cultural competency and awareness of micro-aggressions. Micro-aggressions are ‘brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender or sexual orientation and religious slights and insults to the target person or group” (Rankin 2010, p. 5). There is concern that the lack of understanding perpetuates subtle forms of discrimination, harassment, homophobia, and insensitivity to differences. Some of the examples include situations of people doing and saying offensive things without realizing that their behavior was offensive. Students also express concern about there being an inadequacy of dealing with micro-aggressions.

There was a lack of understanding identified for faculty and staff, the general student population, and even within underrepresented student population groups. Ultimately the following examples of micro-aggressions and unawareness hinder improvement of the diversity climate on campus.

Faculty and staff

- One student had an advisor on campus who was not familiar with the acronym GLBT and the student had to explain what this term meant to the advisor.
- One student shared about being out in most classes and on campus in general. Faculty members often assume this student is comfortable sharing and will call on this student when a queer topic is brought up in class. This is very uncomfortable for this student because the faculty members are outing the student to the entire
class without having permission. These instances also affected the student’s ability to concentrate for the remainder of those classes.

- One student shared about an incident of a student in a classroom saying that the word “gay” is a stupid word. The faculty member did not address this student or the statement and moved on to the next classroom topic. The faculty member was facilitating a discussion about the word “gay.” There were people in the classroom who identify as queer and were not sure what to do or how to respond. If they were to say anything, they would be outing themselves.

- One student explained that volunteering to educate is important for GLBT students because it may be the only way for people to learn and improve the diversity climate on campus. It was stressed, however, that it cannot always be assumed that GLBT students want to educate or should be educating.

- One student did not agree that it was okay for faculty members to ask students (either by e-mail or in person) to share their opinion on the topic of sexual orientation or gender identity. Students should not be used as a resource for educating. It should not be assumed that just because people are queer or are perceived as being queer, that they have input on the topic or can offer expert advice. Their experience and knowledge about their own culture is often varied and should not be assumed.

- One student shared about a faculty member listing homosexuality as a detrimental effect. This clearly indicates that this faculty member’s classroom is not a safe place for GLBT students. The student did not challenge the faculty member in class because the student feared getting talked down to in class or possibly graded
harder. Other students agreed that they also did not challenge the professor in similar situations.

- Sometimes faculty members make comments that they do not realize are offensive or stereotyping. One student commented that it seems like faculty members think they can make jokes about the GLBT community because they assume no one in the class will be offended.

- One student commented on faculty members using gender as a way of separating the classroom for group activities. This was acknowledged as another good topic for faculty training on diversity awareness because it is likely that this way of dividing the classroom is not intended to be offensive.

- Having a classroom discussion between males and females would be very uncomfortable for a person who identifies as a gender queer, or a transgender who is not “out” to others. Gender variance is another important topic for faculty to understand.

- Participants shared about faculty members’ lack of understanding about different types of disabilities. This includes students who do not have a disability that is physically noticeable to other people, such as a psychological disability or slight visual impairment.

- Students shared that some departments on campus use only males in classroom examples for teaching. One student took a class where the teacher used the pronoun “she.” This faculty member was really good at saying “he or she” or just the pronoun “she.” The textbook also used both pronouns, but typically in courses the textbooks and use of pronouns in lecture is male dominated in certain
departments.

- There is a pattern of faculty members not addressing instances of students making sexist comments in class. This does not occur as much in Women’s Studies courses, but in other programs or disciplines faculty members are less likely to not address the comments. If you are a student who does say something about it, other students become annoyed.

- Other students shared about experiencing increased gender discrimination once they identified as being feminist. One student shared that it seems as though once you have been identified as a feminist, people are just waiting for you to fire back at them, and as a result they will tell more jokes about women just to start an argument. Other students shared about spending hours arguing about feminism.

- A student shared about the importance of residential advisors and all staff having training on dealing with reports of sexual assault. This includes knowing how to respond and where the student can go right away for appropriate resources to deal with sexual assault. This also includes a procedure for contacting a trained advocate. One student shared about other students sometimes going to their friends rather than going to a resident advisor. The student felt it is important for students to feel they can approach a resident advisor with this kind of problem.

**General student population**

- Several students expressed that there should not be one token student in class who speaks up every time something offensive is said in the classroom. The responsibility of increasing diversity awareness should rest on the institution, not on individual students or representatives from a particular group.
• Panels of underrepresented student population groups are often used in classrooms as an educational tool. Students expressed concern that generally the same courses use the panels in their classrooms, which limits education about this topic across disciplines.

• Students expressed that there is a fear of being stigmatized for using disability services, particularly for students with a disability that is not visible. It’s important to be seen as a person first, rather than a person with a disability.

• Students expressed the need for more education about different types of disabilities. A lot of times students have a stereotypical idea of what it means to have a disability. They do not really understand there are many different types of disabilities that they have never heard of or seen before.

• One student shared about college being a time when students need be exposed to different experiences and people. It is an opportune time for students to learn about differences, as they may not have the same resources for learning again. College should be about expanding people’s minds. If students are encouraged to learn about differences in race and gender, they should also be open to understanding the wide range of disabilities that exist.

• One student felt that the First Year Experience program needs to have a greater emphasis on sexual assault during the first few weeks. There is a significant presentation on alcohol, but there was only one brief comment made about sexual assault in the training manuals for orientation leaders. This student feels it is important for incoming students to learn about sexual assault prevention right away. The student was aware of the First Year Experience program increasing
education about this topic, so it is something the University is trying to do a better job of addressing.

- One student shared about having a difficult time knowing how to explain his disability to others (particularly students).
- One student identified that it is hard to know how to respond to harassment in a way that will keep you safe. As a female, you don’t want to make harassers angry by confronting them, and you don’t want to say anything bad in case they misinterpret the conversation. One student explained that not knowing how to respond is a way of perpetuating intimidation and subordination.

Lack of Safety in the Community

Students shared about instances of feeling unsafe off campus (sometimes near campus) and in the Duluth community due to their differences. Below are examples of direct physical and verbal attacks some of the focus group students experienced. These experiences ultimately affect students’ personal stress and functioning. Given the University’s commitment to community betterment, this information is relevant to actualizing the University’s overall mission.

- One female student shared about being out in the community with another female having ice cream. Two men walked up to them and said, “[exp] lesbians” and spat at them. As they were walking down the street, the same two men drove by and yelled, “[exp] faggots!”
- One male student was out at restaurant with a same-sex partner. A woman at another table was pointing at them and talking very loudly, stating, “Oh my God, why are they here?” The student also shared about his friends being called
“faggots” out in the community and on campus.

- Another student shared about an experience of a friend who was harassed by strangers in a restaurant. A note was left at the table with a religious message implying that she was living a life of sin and to come back to Jesus.

- One student shared about walking by a house that is off-campus, but close to campus. One male from a group of males who looked like college students said, “Yeah, keep walking,” and he called the student the b-word. He then also stated, “This is going to be the last time you’re going to walk like that.” The student was uncertain what was meant by that, but it was very threatening and made her uncomfortable.

- Students reported that being yelled at by males in cars happens all the time.

**Concerns Specific to Each Focus Groups**

There also were themes and ideas that emerged that were specific to each focus group. These themes were established based on close examination of the data from within the focus groups. The groups’ specific themes were categorized into subthemes as necessary.

**Students with disabilities**

Students in this focus group had a variety of concerns to ensure the University is adaptive and responsive to their needs. This includes difficulty communicating with faculty and other staff about needed accommodations, lack of peer-supported resources, and education about disabilities across campus.

- Students shared about instances of faculty questioning a student’s disability, despite having the documentation to verify the disability. One student had a
professor question her about having a visual impairment because she wears glasses. This was after reviewing documentation to verify her disability.

- Students felt that some faculty lack understanding about the need for student accommodations. Having a disability means that a student learns differently, and the accommodation is about removing the barrier to learning.

- Several students felt it would be helpful to have a peer mentor during freshman year who has gone through a similar experience of having a disability.

- Students felt that there might be a miscommunication of what a disability service is and how people obtain accommodations. Students felt that it is often viewed by others as way for students to cheat the academic system.

- Students expressed that they feel that students with disabilities is the one group that has been forgotten about on campus. This was based on students with disabilities seeing a lot of social media about issues of race and sexual orientation. Students felt that the majority of the campus community (students, staff, and administration) is unaware of disability as an essential part of diversity.

**GLBT students**

Students within the GLBT community discussed the need for policy changes, related name changes, and gender-neutral spaces within the campus.

- One student shared about “preferred” name changes within the University system being very difficult if students have not legally changed their name. Some systems remain under the student’s chosen name and others are still under the student’s birth name. Students also cannot have a different name other than their legal name on the U-card. A name change in the payroll system is also difficult.
• Several students expressed concern about the need for gender-neutral housing as a number-one priority. Gender-neutral housing is particularly important for a transgender person, knowing there is a safe place to go.

• A student explained that MPIRG (Minnesota Public Interest Research Group) is working on trying to have gender-neutral housing and bathrooms. One student explained that because the issue is a politicized campaign, support has to be shown. This student did not feel that issues of safety such as this should have to prove adequate support. Even if students don’t express an interest, there is an obvious need. One student asked, “How do you gauge interest in a population that just wants to pass [“be unidentified?”] The University is requesting students who are typically not wanting to be identified, or those still in the closet, to give input into a policy. When the University gauges interest based on lack of input from an underrepresented group that is largely invisible, it is making a significant error in its assumption that no one wants the change or that no one will benefit.

• One student shared about the U of M Twin Cities having a floor on campus housing that is gender-neutral. The student does not understand why there needs to be separation by gender in college housing and feels there may be a need for a complete reformat. Gendered housing invites hate crime. Other students agreed with these ideas.

• Students expressed concern that a complete reformat would be a difficult process and this may be impossible. Students expressed that they feel the GLBT population group is one often not often taken seriously by administration.

Women students
Students in this focus group shared about the inequality of support for male versus female sports. Language bias was also identified as a concern throughout campus. This includes terms and classroom examples that are gender specific, in which the gender binary is enforced, not accounting for transgender spectrum. Some felt that services typically used by women were not adequately publicized. Students also identified that there is a strong misconception of feminism on campus and within the community. While there has been an increase in Women Studies courses, more courses helping students to learn about sexism and oppression are needed. Overall the focus group felt that women were not valued across campus due to these micro-aggressions.

- Students commented on feeling discriminated against as female athletes. One student was a varsity athlete and shared about feeling very inadequate as a female athlete compared to the male athletes on campus. Students also shared that the appreciation for female sports and female athleticism on campus is not equally supported. There are often comments on campus about all the players of the female hockey team being lesbians, which the focus group students feel is a way to disempowering people.

- One student explained that she believes the unequal support of women’s versus men’s sports is a value issue. It’s not just in hockey, but in all sports (soccer, tennis, softball, basketball). Male sports on campus are advertised more. Women’s volleyball and basketball are sometimes advertised, but mostly in the Recreational Sports Outdoor Program, usually only if there is a big game.
- Students shared examples of the campus newspaper, the Statesman, rarely reporting anything about women’s sports or women’s hockey. Concern was also expressed about the gender-specific name of this campus newspaper.

- The safe walk service on campus not being adequately publicized was another area of concern. It is unclear who can use the service, and it is only available from Sunday through Thursday nights and not on the weekends. The service is run by student organizations. It seems that you cannot use the service unless you are affiliated with the student organization that is offering the service.

- While there have been efforts made on campus to change gender-specific terms such as “freshman,” it still is a term that is very predominant. There is a need for all of the collegiate units to follow through by using “first-year student” instead of “freshman.”

- Students explained that the word “rape” sometimes is used as a slang term to describe something that was horrible (i.e., “That test raped me”) or to describe something that they dominated (i.e., “I raped that test”). Other students have also heard jokes about rape and reflected on the inappropriateness of the term being used as a joke.

- Students feel there needs to be more of an importance placed on valuing women in the curriculum at UMD. Women’s Studies courses have increased, but students are not encouraged enough to take these courses. The courses are not just about women and being a feminist. The courses cover many issues, such as race, class, gender, and an entire spectrum of oppression. Women Studies majors often have to defend themselves in a way that many other majors do not have to do.
Students also explained that it would be helpful to have courses in other majors take on a woman’s perspective. If students are learning about women across majors, then there are not only certain majors where people go to learn about women. It’s important that women feel like they can be successful in every discipline, not just in disciplines that are typically considered to be dominated by women.

One student shared about the misconception of what it means to be a feminist on campus and in the community. Once people identify as a feminist they are instantly associated with other things that they may or may not support. Some of the associations identified include “feminazi,” “bra burner,” and “man hater.” Other students explained that being a feminist is often considered something negative by others. Students shared about having others actively oppose the term in classes and in conversations.

Positive Experiences

Students were asked to share about ways they have felt supported and any positive experiences they have had. Students generally shared about specific services or faculty members who helped them feel safe and welcomed on campus.

Queer and Allied Student Union and Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Services

Several students commented on the Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender (GLBT) services and the Queer Allied Student Union (QASU) being good resources for GLBT students. One student shared that she had wonderful experiences with Counseling Services, but others felt that it depends who you go to. Counselors
handle personal emotional responses fairly well, but they do not provide advocacy. The First Year Experience program was also noted as becoming a supportive environment.

- Several students shared that QASU is their main reason for feeling safe on campus, not due to the support of senior administration. QASU has become well established and people on campus know about their events. Having space for them to meet is really nice to have. One student shared that having QASU makes her feel that if something happened on campus, she would have multiple people to support her and be her friend.

- One student shared about her experience of having support by QASU, her peer advisor, and the GLBT advisor when she was having difficulties with roommates. She had people support her by going back to her apartment with her. Her roommates had moved her bed, and if she had not had all that support, she would have really struggled. She feels QASU and GLBT Services are extremely important to the campus.

- One student explained that existence of QASU and GLBT Services is directly and indirectly serving students. They have an e-mail list, several people come to their cubicle for support, and people attend the weekly meetings. Even if students do not participate in their programs, there is still a safe place for them to go. They are serving students by existing. One student confirmed that she is not involved with QASU, but feels supported by their existence.

**Workshops at first-year student orientation**
The fact that there was a GLBT workshop at the first-year student orientation made one student’s transition to UMD much better. It was the deciding factor for staying at UMD because she considered dropping out. Others felt these workshops help increase awareness of this resource on campus, even if people do not join QASU.

**Diverse staff representation**

- One student shared about her experience of being at the first-year student registration for on-campus housing and seeing a staff person who the student believed likely identified as being from the GLBT community. This staff person put the student in contact with the GLBT Services director and the student connected with her almost immediately. The GLBT Services director connected the student with QASU, where the student met other GLBT students and ended up finding roommates with whom she felt comfortable living. The quick response by staff made her feel supported, like she had a voice, and reduced her fear of living with someone who would not be accepting of her lifestyle. It made her fear seem valid and something that could be easily addressed. It is important to this student that the staff who works with first-year students continues to be diverse as well.

**Increased diversity awareness**

- One student reported feeling fairly safe at UMD as a gay student, but not feeling as safe in the past. The student was happy to see more diversity awareness and feels things are getting better with the Campus Climate (Goal #2). The student hopes there will be consideration of a no-tolerance policy against discrimination and harassment with follow-through on consequences.
Other positive experiences

- One student had never experienced a faculty member in her major or minor who was not willing to give her necessary accommodations.
- One student shared about a positive experience of meeting the note taker for a course and realizing it was someone who was already in the class. This peer was very supportive and reached out to help her with anything she might need after learning about her disability. It was a nice feeling to know that the person who would be taking notes for her was open and supportive.

Student Recommendations from Focus Groups

Students in the focus group were asked the following question: “Imagine you are an administrator at UMD and that you have been charged with improving the campus climate. 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, responses were categorized under either “resources needed” or “policy and procedure changes.” They are presented here in no particular order of importance.

Resources needed

- UMD emergency housing should be made available to GLBT students who live on campus regardless of whether or not a threat is identified or perceived based on gender identity or sexual orientation.
- There should be mandatory diversity training for faculty members, residential life staff, and all UMD employees. This should include ally training, education on creating classrooms as safe spaces, and how to address students when a
classroom or other environment has become an unsafe space. The training could also include how they can recognize when a classroom is not a safe space for someone based on a certain comment in class or any other concern.

- One student suggested having more training on sexual harassment—not just training on what sexual harassment is, but training that includes real-life examples and how they were handled. There should also be some discussion about how the University can improve the reporting system of sexual harassment.

- Students felt it would be helpful to have a peer mentor program to provide them with guidance and support. This would include help with knowing how to advocate for yourself and being aware of resources on campus that are there to assist students. The suggestion was also made to provide an online chat space where students can connect anonymously and have more control over the extent to which they participate.

- Students identified that student panels can be helpful and should be used more in classrooms and in faculty trainings on diversity.

- It would also be helpful for senior and junior students with disabilities to be on a panel for orientation week as a way of teaching first-year students about making college a respectful and welcoming environment for all students.

**Policy and procedure changes**

- Some students recommended having a “GLBT Friendly” box on the housing contract. This would allow an incoming student who identifies as a GLBT student or someone who wants to live with someone who identifies as GLBT to indicate this on the form. Another student commented that the University could have a
private database for people who checked the box to ensure they would not be “outed” to their parents or others.

- Having students number off to divide the classroom into groups would be more comfortable for all students than dividing the class by gender.

- Some students felt there should be real consequences for people who are not following the Student Conduct Code. This includes being clear about different forms of discrimination and corresponding consequences. It’s not that they should pay a fine or do community service, but perhaps they should be required to attend a panel discussion to increase their awareness of discrimination, oppression, and harassment.

- It was recommended to use a students’ ID number as a way of accessing their information, rather than having to use their legal names.

- It was suggested that faculty have a deadline for having syllabi finalized and ready for student review. This would provide students the opportunity to review the course format to see if they may need to request an accommodation.

- It was recommended to have education about disabilities incorporated into UMD Seminar. Education about disabilities should also be incorporated into curriculum across disciplines.

- The suggestion was made for the Educational Policy Committee to meet and develop criteria for syllabi and course descriptions that require a complete explanation of the course and the course guide. Descriptions should provide students with enough information to know if there will be any barriers, including information on how the class is administered, clear and detailed descriptions of
the assignments, and information about technology used in the course.

- Many felt it is essential for faculty (including adjunct faculty and graduate TAs) to receive training on accommodations for students with disabilities. This should include education about the process for students to receive accommodations, resources for ensuring students have full access to their teaching, and an emphasis on accommodations as an obligation rather than a burden.

- One student shared that there have been several requests to develop a procedure that would include contacting an advocate immediately after a sexual assault is reported to a resident advisor, a conduct code person, or anyone else. Victims need to know that they are supported in their decision and not being forced to do something because they are scared. There are a lot of advocates on campus and in the community. A person who has been victimized does not have to go through the process by themselves, and this procedure would let them know they have added support.

- It was recommended to have a requirement that faculty and departments must have course textbooks written by women. This would ensure that students are getting a female perspective in academia.

- It was suggested that resident advisors have a mandatory training on responding to sexual assault disclosures and have discussions about sexual assault at dorm floor meetings. This would communicate that resident advisors are a safe resource for students.

Researchers’ Recommendations
In addition to the participants’ recommendations, there are several items the researchers of this study wish to put forth. Some of the recommendations are ongoing suggestions that have been cited in other University of Minnesota research studies but not actualized. Literature was also reviewed to ensure the recommendations are evidence-based practices that have been successful for other institutions and organizations.

To begin, it is helpful to provide a framework of achieving equity for marginalized groups. The University of Minnesota report *Equity and Diversity at the University of Minnesota: Reflections on Meaningful Change*, written by the Institute for Diversity, Equity and Advocacy in the spring of 2010, reviews the strengths and weaknesses related to equity and diversity at the University. The report concludes that “increasing equity and diversity at the University requires a shift away from grudging acceptance and reactive responses towards incidents of discrimination to practices that emphasize proactive commitments and sustained programmatic efforts.” This shift is framed as “affirmative advocacy.”

Born’s (2010) report defines affirmative advocacy as follows:

…affirmative advocacy asserts that equity within institutions requires proactive efforts and extra resources to overcome entrenched but often subtle biases that persist against marginalized groups. To do so, it promotes practices that departicularize the interests of marginalized groups, prioritizing issues that affect them, and assuming that their benefits will trickle up to all members of their constituencies and, ultimately, to society as a whole. (p. 8)

**Recommendations**
1. Issues in this study should be used to develop benchmarks and be incorporated into the campus Strategic Plan. (Specific recommendations are listed above under “Student Recommendations”). The development of benchmarks should include collaborating with other organizations, departments on campus, and policy experts that can join in efforts to address concerns expressed in the study. For example, this should include reviewing the results of the study with the Commission on Women, GLBT Commission, Diversity Commission, and the Commission on Disabilities to discuss specific ways of addressing issues in the University’s Strategic Plan.

2. Demonstrate institutional commitment to underrepresented student population groups’ issues and concerns. This includes responding visibly and expeditiously to acts of intolerance directed at underrepresented student population groups. Students cited several examples of micro-aggressions. It is important that these particular incidents are noted and used to develop actionable consequences. Students need to feel safe and supported when acts of intolerance occur.¹

3. Focus groups with underrepresented student population groups should be ongoing. These focus groups could be co-facilitated by a graduate research assistant, staff in the Office of Cultural Diversity and the Office of Disability Resources, or faculty member as a part of their work. Focus groups should be conducted every two to three years. Participants could be recruited by snowball sampling. If this sampling methodology is used, explicit efforts will need to be made to ensure the sampling is controlled. This could include hosting other focus

¹ This same recommendation was noted in Susan Rankin’s Campus Climate study (2003) involving UMD GLBT students (p. 6) and in UMD’s Campus climate focus groups in 2010.
groups with randomly selected students and comparing data. It will be important for the researchers to carefully weigh the strengths and weaknesses of sampling approaches and assess what approach best matches the research questions.

4. Faculty and UMD staff members need explicit training in understanding micro-aggressions to increase awareness. In addition, there is a need for mandatory training on how to handle issues surrounding discrimination, harassment, sexism, homophobia (including biphobia, transphobia), and sensitivity to differences. This should include information about “Universal Course Design” to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to all information in the course. Anonymous examples noted in this study may be helpful case examples of how faculty and staff members have intentionally or unintentionally addressed incidents of hate crimes, discrimination, and insensitivity to differences.

5. Increase efforts to educate the University (students, faculty, and staff) about reporting incidents that undermine and degrade campus climate. This includes well-publicized information on resources to support students during the reporting process and providing a reporting system that is not solely an online process and that reflects universal design. At present, the form for reporting incidents is difficult to locate. Having a training component on the process could address this concern. The training should involve personal contact with campus representatives who can serve as a resource in the process.

6. Develop procedures and policies to address micro-aggressions that are reported. This includes a clear indication of what types of issues the University will address and what types of issues are outside its scope. The policies and procedures should
reflect a victim-centered response and should be emphasized throughout the reporting information materials.

7. Collaborate with community organizations that are committed to equality in addressing hate crimes that occur off-campus, and include the collaboration in the University’s Strategic Plan. This could also include collaborating with community agencies to co-sponsor educational events and community organizing.

8. Seek out grants that will support efforts to educate the general student body about discrimination experienced by persons with persons with a disability, women, gender non-conforming individuals, and GLBT people. Students who are willing to participate in panels and other educational efforts should not be the only resource for providing education in classrooms and across campus. The University should use speakers and other educational resources. Funding could also be used to compensate students who are willing to be a part of panels or peer mentoring programs. The compensation would be for their time and willingness to share their knowledge and experiences. This would also include any other supportive services that are needed for their participation in educating others.

9. There should be mandatory sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, and dating violence trainings for all UMD students.

**Conclusion**

This study uses cross-sectional design and hence does not provide a longitudinal analysis of the attitudes and opinions of UMD’s underrepresented student population groups. The information presented in our findings (limited to students with disabilities,
GLBT students, and women students) represents baseline information from which subsequent studies must be undertaken. This study’s researchers and focus group members agree that concerted efforts must be made to institutionalize a systematic, ongoing collection of information about campus climate from these underrepresented groups every two years. Student cohorts can be formed and tracked along issues pertaining to the academic experiences of underrepresented groups on campus. This would provide students with a voice for expressing their concerns and ideas to create an inclusive campus climate for all who learn and work at UMD.

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.

References
the University of Minnesota: reflections on meaningful change. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota. Retrieved from https://diversity.umn.edu/idea/publications


Appendix

Focus Group Study Questions for GLBT Students, Women Students, and
Students with Disabilities, Spring 2012

Questions for Students with Disabilities

1. Have you personally experienced harassment, discrimination, and/or a lack of understanding or acceptance on campus based on your disability?

2. Do you have any friends, associates, or classmates who have experienced harassment, discrimination, and/or a lack of understanding or acceptance of their disability on campus?

3. In what ways do you feel the University is addressing campus issues relating to harassment, discrimination, and/or negative experiences for individuals with disabilities?

4. Imagine that you are an administrator and you have been charged with improving the climate for diverse students, including students with disabilities, on campus. Please keep in mind the federal or legal privacy procedures and guidelines you may have to follow. Could you come up with some specific suggestions on how to ensure that the campus is welcoming and supportive of students with disabilities?

5. Are there any other issues related to the climate for individuals with disabilities 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 swoodwar@d.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.

Questions for GLBT Students

1. What are your personal experiences with harassment and/or discrimination on campus?

2. Do you have any friends, associates, or classmates who have experienced harassment and/or discrimination on campus based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression?
3. In what ways do you feel the University is addressing campus issues relating to harassment and/or discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity or expression? Give examples.

4. Imagine that you are an administrator and you have been charged with improving the campus climate for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or non-gender conforming. Please keep in mind the federal or legal privacy procedures and guidelines you may have to follow. Could you come up with some specific suggestions on how to improve this climate?

5. Are there any other issues related to campus climate 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 swoodwar@d.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.

Questions for Women Students

1. What are your personal experiences with harassment and/or discrimination on campus?

2. Do you have any friends, associates, or classmates who have experienced harassment and/or discrimination on campus based on being a female student?

3. In what ways do you feel the University is addressing campus issues relating to harassment and/or discrimination for female students? Give examples.
4. Imagine that you are an administrator and you have been charged with improving the campus climate for female students. Please keep in mind the federal or legal privacy procedures and guidelines you may have to follow. Could you come up with some specific suggestions on how to improve this climate?

5. Are there any other issues related to campus climate 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 swooodwar@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.*