

Executive Summary

*Resistance begins with people confronting pain, whether it's theirs or somebody else's,
and wanting to do something to change it.¹*
--- bell hooks, *Yearning*

American colleges and universities are charged with creating an environment characterized by equal access for all students, faculty and staff regardless of cultural differences, where individuals are not just tolerated but valued. Institutional missions suggest that higher education values multicultural awareness and understanding within an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Institutional strategic plans advocate creating welcoming and inclusive climates that are grounded in respect, nurtured by dialogue and evidenced by a pattern of civil interaction

North Dakota State University (NDSU) believes in creating such an environment as evidenced by their support and commitment to this project. The project was commissioned by the Diversity Council² to assist the institution in identifying challenges and implementing initiatives to create this climate. To minimize internal bias, the Diversity Council contracted with an outside consultant³ to assist them in identifying challenges confronting the University community with respect to underrepresented⁴ employees and students. The project was a proactive initiative by the Diversity Council and the NDSU administration to review the climate on campus for underrepresented groups. An internal assessment was conducted and the results will be used to identify specific strategies for addressing the challenges and supporting positive diversity

¹ hooks, b. (1990), *Yearning*. Boston: South End Press.

² President Chapman created the Diversity Council in spring 2001. He charged the group with several tasks including the development of a strategic plan for diversity. After developing mission and vision statements and a definition of diversity, the Diversity Council began to focus its attention on the need to gather a variety of data and assess the climate for diversity at the University. The Council recognized that such data would provide valuable and necessary information for use in the development of the strategic plan. The Council initiated discussions with a consultant who has extensive experience conducting campus climate assessments with other universities. With financial support from the President and the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs, the University hired the consultant for a two-year period. The Council will provide background information to the contractor to ensure the contractor's acquaintance with and understanding of NDSU: its mission, background and objectives and will work closely with the contractor during the project which will cover the period September 1, 2002 - August 31, 2004.

³ Rankin & Associates, Consulting was the firm hired to conduct the project

⁴ Underrepresented groups can be based on age, ancestry, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability, national origin, religious creed, or sexual orientation.

initiatives through the development of a strategic plan to maximize equity at NDSU.

This report provides an overview of the process for maximizing equity, the findings of the internal assessment including the results of the campus-wide survey, and the content analysis of comments provided by participants in the survey. The internal assessment will help to lay the groundwork for future initiatives.

Because of the inherent complexity of the topic of diversity, it is crucial to examine the multiple dimensions of diversity in higher education. The conceptual model used as the foundation for this assessment of campus climate was developed by Smith (1999) and modified by Rankin (2002).⁵ Following the design of the model, initial focus groups representing the various constituent groups on campus were convened in November 2002. The focus groups were conducted to identify challenges confronting the University community and inform the construction of the questions that would be included in the survey instrument. The survey questions were constructed through the work of Rankin, 2003,⁶ as well as the input from the initial focus groups. The Diversity Council and the various constituent groups reviewed the drafts of the survey. The final survey contained fifty-three questions and an additional space for respondents to provide commentary regarding their experiences and was distributed to the campus community in spring semester, 2003. The sampling procedure included the entire population of NDSU students, faculty, staff, and administration. The survey was designed to have respondents provide information about their personal experiences with regard to climate issues, their perception of the climate for underrepresented members of the academic community, and their perceptions of institutional actions, including administrative policies and academic initiatives regarding climate issues and concerns on campus.

The Diversity Council, to allow constituent groups the opportunity to respond to the findings of the internal assessment and provide suggested revisions and/or further clarifications, reviewed a draft of the final report. A summary of the findings presented in bullet form below suggests that while the University has several challenges in regards

⁵ See Appendix A for a more detailed description of the Transformational Tapestry© model.

⁶ Rankin, 2003 is a national study examining the campus climate for underrepresented groups.

to diversity issues, these challenges are not unique in higher education institutions across the country (Rankin, see footnote 6).

Sample Demographics

Sixteen hundred twenty-five usable surveys were returned representing the following:

- 854 students, 242 faculty, 432 staff, and 71 administrators
- 307 people of color⁷
- 128 people who identified as having a disability
- 145 people who identified as a sexual minority
- 815 women
- 770 men
- 89 people with international status
- 400 people who identified their spiritual affiliation as other than Christian

Results

Personal Experiences with Campus Climate

- Twenty-one percent (n = 330) of individuals had personally experienced harassment (i.e., offensive, hostile, or intimidating conduct that interfered unreasonably with their ability to work or learn) at NDSU.
- Thirty-nine percent of those people harassed felt ignored, thirty-eight percent were subject to derogatory remarks, and thirty-six percent felt excluded.
- Forty-two percent of those harassed experienced the incidents while working at a University job.
- Forty-five and thirty-three percent of the respondents identified students and faculty, respectively, as the sources of the harassment.
- When reviewing these results in terms of race, a higher percentage of people of color (in all demographic categories) reported experiences of harassment than did white people.
- With respect to spirituality and levels of experienced harassment, non-Christians reported experiencing harassment more often than Christian people.
- Respondents from underrepresented groups reported that they feared for their safety due to their race/ethnicity (88%), sexual orientation/gender identity (88%), or gender (87%).
- Eighty-three percent of people from underrepresented groups experienced racial profiling and eighty-one percent reported that they were the targets of a hate crime on campus.

⁷ While recognizing the vastly different experiences of people of various racial identities (e.g. Chicano(a) versus African-American or Latino(a) versus Asian-American), and those experiences within these identity categories (e.g. Hmong versus Chinese), however due to the small numbers in the individual categories, it was necessary to collapse them for many of the analyses.

Perceptions of Campus Climate

- Thirty-three percent of the participants had observed conduct on campus that created an offensive, hostile, or intimidating working or learning environment mainly due to ethnicity (39%), race (36%), gender (35%), sexual orientation (29%), and country of origin (29%).
- People most often observed harassment in the forms of derogatory remarks (65%), racial/ethnic profiling (31%), people being stared at (31%) or deliberately ignored (30%), and written comments (24%).
- Fifty-one percent felt that the classroom climate was welcoming of people from underrepresented groups.
- Sixty-five percent thought the workplace climate was welcoming for employees from underrepresented groups.

Institutional Actions

- Respondents felt providing more awareness/sensitivity workshops would improve the University community's awareness of the issues and concerns of people based on their race and ethnicity (57%), disability status (54%), country of origin (55%), and religion (52%).
- Over one-third of the respondents thought requiring all university students to take at least one class that focuses on issues, research, and perspectives about various groups (with the exception of "age") will improve the campus climate for these groups.
- Respondents were divided as to whether they thought including diversity related activities as a criterion for faculty and staff performance evaluations would improve the climate at the University. Thirty-seven percent thought it would improve the climate, while thirty-four percent disagreed.

It is the intention of the Diversity Council that the results of this internal assessment be used to identify specific strategies for addressing the challenges facing their community and support positive initiatives on campus. The next steps include the Diversity Council and other campus constituent groups (e.g., underrepresented groups, students, faculty, staff, and administration) working in collaboration with the consultant to create a strategic plan for maximizing equity at the University based on the results of the internal

assessment and using the Transformational Tapestry Model (Appendix A). As in the previous phases of this project, the development of the plan will be in collaboration with *all* constituent groups at the University.