



Area colleges, universities say range of ethnicities on campus improves learning

By [Helmut Schmidt](#) on Jul 4, 2016 at 4:13 p.m.

Jaclynn Davis Walette is the director of multicultural programs at North Dakota State University. David Samson / The Forum

FARGO — Ask Jaclynn Davis Walette and she'll tell you that having more racial diversity at the area's college and university campuses is a goal worth pursuing

She is the director of North Dakota State University's Office of Multicultural Programs.

Walette, from the Turtle Mountain area of north-central North Dakota, identifies as American Indian; specifically, an Ojibwe.

NDSU has become more diverse as campus programs target students of a range of ethnicities for recruitment, Walette said.

But she wouldn't mind seeing more students of color on the NDSU campus, where the school reported that not quite 82 percent of students in fall 2015 were white, 7 percent from other countries, and the rest a mix of ethnicities.

NDSU has no affirmative action rules on race tied to entry into its undergraduate or graduate programs, according to Sadie Rudolph, a university spokeswoman. That includes the NDSU pharmacy program's admissions committee, which follows "standard practices to achieve a reasonably diverse pool of students."

Walette said it's good in general for colleges and universities to examine their admissions practices, but, "I think more can be done."

It's something that may happen more often in the wake of a recent Supreme Court decision upholding an affirmative action admissions policy at the University of Texas at Austin.

Abigail Fisher, who was denied admission to the UT-Austin freshman class, claimed that the school's holistic review process, which included race as one of many factors in decision-making,

put her and other Caucasian applicants at a disadvantage and violated the Constitution's equal protection clause.

The high court disagreed.

The University of Minnesota also uses a holistic review of the records of potential freshmen in the admissions process.

"We consider race as one factor among many factors in the review process," said Rachelle Hernandez, associate vice provost for enrollment management and director of admissions for the Twin Cities campus. "It isn't a deciding factor or a determining factor."

In fall 2015, the enrollment of the U of M system was 80.7 percent Caucasian and 19.3 percent students of color, the Office of Institutional Research reported.

The courts have been clear about schools not setting up quotas, but a college or university can have a goal of increasing diversity for students' overall educational development, Hernandez said.

"We believe strongly that our students benefit ... from the diversity that students bring," she said.

"We really focus on increasing diversity on campus through the recruitment process," Hernandez said.

The ruling is good for education, said Donna Brown, chief diversity officer for Minnesota State University Moorhead.

"I definitely see it as a positive thing, and I think most of my colleagues would agree," said Brown, who added that MSUM has no official policy to include race among criteria used to determine admission.

Not including international students, MSUM's student population is about 93 percent white, she said. With international students included, about 15 percent of the university's students are of various ethnic backgrounds.

A new diversity plan was written for MSUM, and departments seek to bring different perspectives into classrooms to better prepare all students for life, Brown said.

The ruling is "going to help everybody on campus to see that diversity is everybody's responsibility and that it's OK to have specific goals for diversity on campus," she said. "It actually came at a really important time, I believe."

Concordia College "can and does consider race in the admissions process," said Karl Stumo, vice president for enrollment and marketing.

But it is one factor in a wide range of considerations, he said.

In both fall 2014 and 2015, 8 percent of Concordia's students identified themselves as being of an ethnicity other than Caucasian, the school's Office of Institutional Effectiveness reports.

"We want to be able to have learning environments that reflect our country," Stumo said. "If students learn in diverse communities, they are better prepared to lead in diverse communities."

The University of North Dakota doesn't include race in its consideration for admission to either undergraduate or graduate programs, spokesman David Dodds said.

"They just want to bring in students who will be as successful as they can be," he said. "Whatever race, creed, is irrelevant."

UND's breakdown for the student body for the 2015-16 school year shows 78.8 percent of students are white, 6.8 percent are students from foreign countries and the rest are of a mix of ethnicities, including about 2.5 percent black, 3 percent Hispanic and 3 percent of more than one racial background.

Exceptions would be that there are several federally funded spots set aside in UND's medical school for American Indian students, said Jessica Sobolik, director of alumni and community relations for the School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

The school also has the RAIN Program (Recruitment-Retention of American Indians Into Nursing), designed to increase the number of American Indian nurses, she said.