

Diversity and Inclusion Questionnaire for Specific Populations

An iSchool Diversity Climate Report

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Goals of the Questionnaire

In October and November 2013, the College of Information Studies disseminated a questionnaire for specific populations in the College community as the first of a series of studies building on the College-wide Diversity Climate Assessment survey conducted in the spring semester of 2013 (the report of which can be accessed at:

http://ischool.umd.edu/sites/default/files/page_content_files/Diversity%20Climate%20Survey%20Combined%20FINAL%206.18.13.pdf).

This questionnaire was designed to help us better understand issues of diversity and inclusion in the College of Information Studies for specific populations who identified unique challenges and successes in participating in the College community in the Diversity Climate Assessment survey. It was designed, pre-tested, and reviewed by the Diversity Committee and iDiversity in August and September 2013. Appendix 1 provides the content of the questionnaire that was made available online via SurveyMonkey.

This questionnaire was open to students, staff, faculty, and alumni who are members of the African American, Latino/Hispanic, LGBTQ, and/or Persons with Disabilities populations in our community. These groups were carefully selected for one of two reasons. The former two populations are the most underrepresented in the College in comparison to the University community and to the metropolitan area around the University. Many of the African American and Latino/Hispanic respondents to the College-wide Diversity Climate Assessment survey indicated feelings of a lack of inclusion in the community. The later two populations, however, were both revealed by the College-wide Diversity Climate Assessment survey to be present in the College in numbers far beyond what are typical of higher education in general or the

University of Maryland in particular. In that survey, both the LGBTQ and Persons with Disabilities populations expressed strong feelings of inclusion within the College community.

As such, the goal of seeking more detailed information from these populations was to see what two populations felt were the barriers to inclusion in the College community and what two other populations felt were the successes in the College in making them feel included. With such knowledge, the College will hopefully be able to apply strategies from the areas of success to the areas of in which barriers are perceived. Respondents to the questionnaire were also asked if they would be willing to participate in a subsequent focus group. The goal is to conduct one focus group with members of each of the four groups early in the spring semester of 2014 to refine the findings of this questionnaire.

Participants

The survey received a total of 89 responses from students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Respondents were allowed to indicate membership in more than one population (e.g., LGBTQ and African American), an option that 9 respondents used. As the goal of this questionnaire was to learn lessons from the specific populations, the responses in which people indicated more than one population have been disaggregated, resulting in 98 analyzable responses across the four populations.

	Student	Staff	Faculty	Alumni	Did not indicate role	Total Responses by Population
African American	10	1	0	13	3	27
Latino/Hispanic	4	2	0	5	0	11
LGBTQ	13	1	1	23	6	44
Persons with Disabilities	6	0	2	6	2	16

Table 1: Total responses by group membership and role in the College community (where indicated)

The first two questions of the questionnaire provided the demographic information. Table 1 provides a breakdown of responses by group membership and role in the College community (where indicated). As is clear from Table 1, alumni and current students made up the vast majority of respondents, and responses from the LGBTQ and African American populations were far more frequent than the other two populations.

Findings

The findings from the questionnaire are discussed below by question.

3. How did you first become interested in the field of Information Studies?

Across all four populations, the answers to this question were similar in their lack of consensus. For each group, the reasons for becoming interested in Information Studies were as numerous as respondents. While the answers to this question did not reveal anything helpful in terms of promoting diversity and inclusion in the College, it certainly did point to the range of reasons that people enter this field.

4. Why did you choose to come to the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland?

Like the previous question, the responses between the four populations were parallel and not particularly revealing in the diversity context. However, in this case, virtually all of the responses from the members of all four populations fall into one of four reasons for choosing to attend the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland: the appealing location of the University, the affordable cost of the program, the strong rank and reputation of the

College and its curricular options, and the unique curricular options offered by the College, particularly the Information and Diverse Populations (IDP) specialization.

5. In what ways has the College environment – including recruitment, administrative, academic, and extracurricular activities – successfully made you feel included within the broader College community?

Unlike the two preceding questions, this question offered the insights into the diversity context of the College and demonstrated variations in perception between the four populations. The African American respondents demonstrated a shift in perspective between the long-standing alumni and the current students/recent graduates, with the former being able to see notable improvements since they were student. Key themes in the answers are represented by:

- “It did not when I went there. Now it is much better.”
- “Feel like communication has improved. It was lacking when I was a student. Also like the Diversity track offered now along with diversity related programs.”
- “I find that initiatives like iDiversity and the IDP program have fostered a better sense of diversity and inclusion in the College.”
- “The IDP makes me feel like there’s a place for me here.”

Several respondents also noted interactions with faculty and fellow students in organizations and research contexts being important avenues for inclusion in the College community. Only one respondent from this question felt not included in the College, though no reasons were given.

Among Latino/Hispanic respondents, the reactions to this question were split. Three respondents felt that they were not included in the College community, though the reasons for this feeling noted by one respondent were based on University-level issues. The remaining

respondents pointed to a range of reasons for their feeling included in the College community, from diversity related events and students organizations to networking with alumni.

Among LGBTQ respondents, all but four felt included and offered reasons for feeling included in the College. Most were highly complimentary of College efforts and the other members of the College community:

- “A general atmospheres of tolerance for diversity on the part of the faculty and administrators.”
- “Good representation of LGBT in my classes and faculty.”
- “Having events about LGBTQ community, posters, incorporating LGBTQ issues into courses.”
- “I’m only in my first semester but already LGBTQ issues have been discussed in two separate classes.”
- “My professors and fellow students always worked to be welcoming and friendly.”

For the members of the LGBTQ population, as with the members of the African American population, the IDP specialization, iDiversity, and diversity research at iPAC have had particular resonance in making the College inclusive:

- “The addition of the diversity track and iDiversity made the iSchool an intentionally inclusive environment.”
- “Involvement in iDiversity.”
- “iDiversity was an excellent group to help bring together various diverse communities.”
- “The existence of groups like iDiversity and the research happening at iPAC instantly made me feel like the iSchool is working to be an ally. Knowing that the College is aware of and addressing marginalization is a significant factor in my feeling included.”

The four respondents who did not feel the College was inclusive of the LGBTQ population were all graduates from a decade or more ago.

The respondents with disabilities – with one exception - noted feeling included in the College community and most offered strong praise for the College’s support for and inclusion of people with disabilities. Some example statements:

- “The iSchool’s curriculum, faculty, and IDP specialization made me feel included here.”
- “My activities have been widely embraced and supported by the college community.”
- “The fact that the College legitimately pursues inclusion and targets outreach efforts to specific populations in need.”
- “The professors are also great when it comes to disability accommodations. Every professor I’ve had has been willing to meet one on one to talk about them. When I meet them, they all ask very thoughtful questions and are genuine in making sure I feel comfortable in class and that my needs are met.”

The one respondent with a disability who did not feel included in the College provided reasons that were unrelated to the College itself, noting that they were simultaneously a full time student and working two full time jobs off campus.

6. In what ways could the College environment – including recruitment, administrative, academic, and extracurricular activities – be changed to make you feel included within the broader College community?

African American respondents offered several suggestions, though the most frequent was greater mentoring activities for educational success and professional development. For some respondents, this point was interrelated with the small number of African Americans in the

College faculty and administration. Many also expressed the belief that increased opportunities to interact with faculty and administration outside of the classroom would be an important improvement, as would greater consistency in the student advising and recruitment positions (“what happened to our full-time recruitment staff member?”). Two other points merit being highlighted:

- “I think the issues addressed in the IDP classes need to be more integrated into the rest of the curriculum. IDP students are not the only students who need to understand diversity and inclusion.”
- “I think it would be helpful for the administration to show a more active and support role in promoting diversity, particularly racial diversity, by speaking at diversity-related events and symposiums.”

The Latino/Hispanic respondents favored more communication, outreach, and student events directed at the Latino/Hispanic members of the College community, as well as events for students of color. The need for dealing with diversity issues beyond the IDP courses was also noted by some respondents.

The majority of LGBTQ respondents indicated the best path is to continue and expand what the College is already doing (e.g., “No change, just continuing to recognize and value diversity”). At a University noted for being one of the top LGBTQ-friendly campuses in the United States, some respondents pointed to the College as being “more queer friendly than the broader university community.” However, many LGBTQ respondents emphasized the need to extend attention to diversity issues in classes beyond the IDP program:

- “Making sure to be aware of LGBTQ issues in core courses.”
- “More courses focusing on the study of diverse populations would be great.”

- “Academically, I think the IDP program is excellent at making diverse people feel welcome, but I think that all classes need some focus on diversity somewhere in the curriculum.”
- “I think iDiversity is great and whatever we can do to increase the visibility of this organization is important.”

One respondent also expressed interest in more mentoring opportunities, particularly with faculty members.

The generally-positive attitude of respondents with disabilities about the inclusiveness of the College, with some feeling “I really can’t think of anything the college environment could truly do better than it already is.” Potential areas for improvement suggested were mainly beyond the control of the College, such as University regulations. One particularly interesting suggestion was the creation of a liaison from the College faculty or staff to help students work with the Disability Student Services Office on campus. Also, as with all of the other populations, some respondents expressed the feeling that “More courses beyond the IDP classes could engage issues of disability and diversity in depth.”

7. How has your membership in the population(s) indicated in Question 1 affected – both positively and negatively – your experiences at the College?

Unfortunately, African American respondents had the most negative experiences to report, though many date from years ago. While many reported only positive experiences or noted that the positive experiences outweighed the negative, the common current concerns noted were: the small number of African American faculty members, a sense of isolation due to the very small number of African American individuals in the College, issues with insensitive or

“tokenizing” comments related to race from some classmates, a sense of discomfort in dealing with issues related to race by some members of the College community, and the limited connections between different groups of people of color in the College.

For most Latino/Hispanic respondents, the College experiences have been primarily positive, though several pointed to a sense of isolation or even loneliness due to the very small number of Latino/Hispanic individuals in the overall College community:

- “As far as I know, I was pretty much the only Latina female in my class cohort.”
- “The realization that so few students who shared my background were entering the field.”

On the other hand, one respondent saw this situation as an educational opportunity to promote “awareness of the issues we as Latinos face in the academic community.”

The overwhelming majority of LGBTQ respondents felt that their experiences had been positive. The concerns noted were either related to the University (e.g., establishing marital status with the Graduate School) or issues from many years ago at the College (e.g., a lack of LGBTQ faculty members). The other comments were extremely positive, including several respondents who noted meeting their significant others at the College as a positive impact. “I met my fiancé at the iSchool, so that was positive. ☺”

The major of the negative experiences raised by respondents with disabilities were also University-related (“the lack of support for disability issues in broader university environment”), most prominently the major problems that the university has with employing technologies of limited accessibility for many people with disabilities. Within the College, these same issues also caused negative experiences for some students with disabilities, such as using technologies that are of limited accessibility – Skype, Google Hangout, and YouTube – for required course

materials or to conduct class meetings. Otherwise, the respondents generally indicated feeling “welcomed by professors and classmates” and “safe” within the College.

8. What steps could the College take to become a more appealing destination for members of your population(s) indicated in Question 1?

Across all populations, this question inspired the most specific suggestions from respondents. Specific recommendations from African American respondents include:

- More active recruitment of people of color and people from lower socio-economic strata;
- Promoting greater racial diversity in faculty and staff;
- Creating a College organization for people of color;
- Addressing diversity in courses beyond the IDP classes;
- Making one IDP course required for all students;
- Advising and mentoring for underrepresented populations;
- Creating a liaison for students of color; and
- Activities – field trips, films, book discussions, shared meals - to expose students to different cultures.

Several respondents acknowledged that the College is doing much better than it ever has in creating an appealing destination for African Americans, but “the profession does not have a very positive image in our communities.” Or, as another respondent summarized the situation, “Part of this is how to recruit people of color to librarianship, and I don’t know the answer to that either.”

Specific recommendations from Latino/Hispanic respondents include:

- Outreach to and recruitment of undergraduates;

- Informal meetings, such as meals, to foster a sense of inclusion;
- Support in transition to graduate school; and
- Opportunities for mentoring from faculty and interactions with professionals of color.

LGBTQ respondents most frequently suggested visible actions to emphasize that the College is an accepting and inclusive place, such as posting the “safe place” symbols in strategic spots around the College and making the inclusiveness of the College for LGBTQ students prominent in recruitment and publicity materials and the website. Several also recommended that the College participate or send representatives to relevant LGBTQ organizations. But, overall, most LGBTQ respondents felt that “I think y’all are doing all right.”

Among respondents with disabilities, most of the recommendations for improvements again related to the University, such as more accessible technologies and better parking for people with disabilities. At the College level, ending the use of inaccessible technologies in classes was once again raised. Two suggestions to improve recruiting of students with disabilities was developing a partnership with Gallaudet and highlighting the disability-friendly elements of the College and the successes of students with disabilities in College recruitment and publicity materials and the website.

Next Steps

This questionnaire has been intended from the outset as the first half of a two-part process to better understand perceived barriers to inclusion in the College community and successes in making the College inclusive. This will soon be followed by the focus groups with members of each of the four populations to refine findings from this report and ascertain underlying reasons for feelings expressed in these responses. Eight African American

respondents volunteered to participate in the focus groups, as did two Latino/Hispanic respondents, eleven LGBTQ respondents, and seven respondents with disabilities.

Unsurprisingly, the respondents from the underrepresented populations had far more challenges, negative experiences, and suggestions for improvement than the two populations that are highly represented in the College community. The African American and Latino/Hispanic responses included references to dealing with incidences of inappropriate language and feelings of isolation in the program and in the field as a whole. These statements are of great significance and point to large conceptual and cultural challenges that the College must engage. Similar statements were notably absent among the responses from the LGBTQ and persons with disabilities populations.

One of the biggest lessons from this questionnaire is that the apparent differences between the experiences of these populations revealed in the College-wide Diversity Climate Assessment survey were, in fact, completely correct. These differences of experience were even reflected in the answers to the questions in this instrument. The average responses from responses from the LGBTQ and persons with disabilities populations were far longer and more elaborate than the responses from the African American and Latino/Hispanic populations, giving the appearance of perceived differences in how much voice the respondents felt they had.

However, it is also worth reinforcing the point that the majority of the members of all the populations have positive feelings about the College community. Many of the alumni from the underrepresented populations who graduated years ago noted that they have seen significant improvements since their time in the College (“The situation is a lot better. Thank you for your efforts.”).

Regardless of their overall perceptions and experiences, the members of all populations provided good suggestions for improvements in the College environment. The two strongest unifying themes of the comments were expressed frequently in the answers to all of the questions by many members of all four populations:

1. The IDP specialization, iDiversity, and iPAC research related to diversity combine to send an extremely strong message about the centrality of diversity and inclusion in the College community.
2. Diversity and inclusion issues could given more attention in classes that are not part of the IDP specialization, particularly the core.

The former is a tremendous success for the College, while the latter is an issue that can and should be quickly addressed.

While students were not asked whether they were College Park, Shady Grove, or online students, several respondents mentioned where they take classes as part of their answers. Each of the mentions of location was positive, with students taking courses in all three places mentioning that they feel included. As two examples, one respondent described Shady Grove as feeling “like a natural community” and another noted that the high levels of demographic diversity in the online E-government specialization cohort made the member of that cohort feel that the College was a very inclusive environment.

The tension between diversity and inclusion as being central to the IDP specialization, iDiversity, and iPAC but less present in other aspects of the College reflects issues in the information field as a whole. The vast majority of students graduating from library and information science (LIS) programs – nearly 80% – do not feel that they had the chance to take

even one class related to diversity.¹ Few of the core courses offered in LIS programs address themes of diversity and inclusion; of the courses offered by LIS programs that are related to diversity, the vast majority are electives that may be offered infrequently, if at all.² Among iSchools, which include many of LIS programs with the largest enrollments and largest emphases on research, the availability of courses related to diversity is even more limited as among LIS programs as a whole.³ Against this backdrop, the College is far ahead of its peer institutions by having the IDP specialization, iDiversity, and iPAC as building blocks to promote and encourage diversity and inclusion in the College.⁴ With these already established elements, the College is well-positioned to begin incorporating diversity and inclusion across the entire curriculum.

Other suggestions from this questionnaire in the findings can be easily acted upon within the College, such as posting “safe space” signs, creating opportunities for informal mixers for members of unrepresented groups, more events to prevent cultural understanding, and requiring faculty use accessible technologies for course requirements and class meetings. The suggestion made by several respondents to place more emphasis on the diversity initiatives of the College in recruiting new students and promoting the College is an extremely important one. Additions to the College website, publicity, and recruiting materials would be a low cost way to articulate the College’s commitment to diversity, the unique programs and groups, and nature of the College as an accepting and inclusive environment (“It is a very good destination [for diverse populations], and that should be highlighted in the publicity and recruitment efforts of the College”).

¹ Mestre, L. (2010). *Librarians serving diverse populations: Challenges and opportunities*. Chicago: American Library Association Editions.

² Subramaniam, M., & Jaeger, P. T. (2011). Weaving diversity into LIS: An examination of diversity course offerings in iSchool programs. *Education for Information*, 28(1), 1-19.

³ Subramaniam, M., & Jaeger, P. T. (2010). Modeling inclusive practice?: Attracting diverse faculty and future faculty to the information workforce. *Library Trends*, 59(1/2), 109-127.

⁴ Jaeger, P. T., Bertot, J. C., & Subramaniam, M. (2013). Preparing future librarians to effectively serve their communities. *Library Quarterly*, 83, 243-248.

Other suggestions – such as creating more mentoring opportunities, creating liaison positions to help underrepresented students work with faculty and administration and students with disabilities work with DSS, and building a partnership with Gallaudet – are important and likely achievable, but will take more time. The Diversity Officer, iDiversity, and the Diversity Committee will work together on developing plans for promoting implementation of such ideas.

The most difficult issues and hardest to address issues are tied to a fundamental problem for the entire information field – the lack of representation of people of color among students, staff, faculty, and professionals. These issues of recruiting and cultural sensitivities will be explored in depth in the focus groups. The unique location of the College and the diversity of the communities in the Washington DC area offer better opportunities to bridge these gaps in representation than are available to other information science programs. It is hoped that the focus groups will reveal strategies that the College can use that implement to begin to overcome these gaps in representation.

Appendix 1: The Questionnaire

Diversity and Inclusion Questionnaire College of Information Studies Fall 2013

INSTRUCTIONS

GOALS

This questionnaire is open to *students, staff, faculty, and alumni* who are members of the African American, Latino/Hispanic, LGBTQ, and/or Persons with Disabilities populations in our community. **Please fill out these questions only if you are a member of one of the four populations identified.**

Following on the findings of the Diversity Climate Assessment from this past spring, this questionnaire is to help us better understand issues of diversity and inclusion in the College of Information Studies for specific populations who have identified unique challenges and successes in participating in the College community.

PRIVACY

This questionnaire is anonymous and data will only be reported in the aggregate to ensure no individual respondent can be identified. Participation in the questionnaire and each individual question is entirely optional. Answers to this questionnaire will in no way impact grades, promotion, perception, or anything else related to respondents.

You will only be asked to provide your name and email if you agree to participate in a follow-up focus group interview.

COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer as many questions as you feel comfortable answering. The questionnaire should take approximately 10 minutes of your time. Regardless of the role you play in the College – faculty, staff, or student – your input in this survey is extremely important in helping the College community continue to become more inclusive.

The questionnaire must be completed by October 31, 2013.

1. I am a member of the following population (please check all that apply):

- African American
- Latino/Hispanic
- LGBTQ
- Persons with Disabilities

2. My involvement in the College is primarily as a (please check one):

-Student

-Staff

-Faculty

-Alumni

3. How did you first become interested in the field of Information Studies? (open-ended text box)

4. Why did you choose to come to the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland? (open-ended text box)

5. In what ways has the College environment – including recruitment, administrative, academic, and extracurricular activities – successfully made you feel included within the broader College community? (open-ended text box)

6. In what ways could the College environment – including recruitment, administrative, academic, and extracurricular activities – be changed to make you feel included within the broader College community? (open-ended text box)

7. How has your membership in the population(s) indicated in Question 1 affected – both positively and negatively – your experiences at the College? (open-ended text box)

8. What steps could the College take to become a more appealing destination for members of your population(s) indicated in Question 1? (open-ended text box)

9. Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up focus group meeting? (please check one):

-Yes

-No

[submit button]

[appears after submission if they say yes to 9]

10. Thank you for indicating your willingness to participate in a follow-up focus group meeting, please provide your name:

And email: