

Survey on climate for diversity

College of Agricultural Sciences

Oregon State University

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Background

As part of its continuing attention to diversity and inclusiveness and the nurturing of community among its students, staff, and faculty, the College of Agricultural Sciences in 2006 undertook an opinion survey to assess the workplace climate for diversity. The survey of staff and faculty had initially been proposed by the College's Inclusiveness and Diversity Committee. With the leadership from the Department of Agricultural Education and General Agriculture, design and refinement of the on-line survey also benefited with help from the OSU Survey Research Center.

Of more than 700 on- and off-campus faculty and staff invited to participate, about half chose to do so. Participants numbered 357; another 371 individuals chose not to respond.

The survey instrument included 11 multiple-choice or true-false questions and 5 open-ended questions designed to elicit respondents' opinions and observations, based on their own experiences related to diversity. A few other questions were included to elicit demographic information about each respondent. A copy of the substantive questions accompanies this document as Appendix A. Dan Jansen, instructor, and Greg Thompson, head of the Department of Agricultural Education and General Agriculture, worked with the Survey Research Center to aggregate and sort responses and to create an initial statistical summary.

A statistical report, including question-by-question summaries, cross-tabulations with various, mostly demographic data, and responses to the open-ended questions comprises 70 pages and is available on request.¹ When these data are tabulated—and especially when they are cross-tabulated—the results are interesting but, because of the mass of data, varying statistical significance among the data, low frequency in certain cells of cross-tabulations, and lack of clarity of some questions, it is challenging to find meaning—especially “actionable” meaning that could drive thoughtful, focused diversity-related programming by the College. Because this is so, the College invited further assistance in analyzing the data and finding meaning in the results. We turned for help to Robert Mason, emeritus professor at the OSU Survey Research Center in the Department of Statistics. He proposed aggregating data within the survey using established statistical techniques employed in public opinion research. This approach has trade-offs. Some of the finer distinctions that might be informative if they were statistically significant are lost. On the other hand, aggregating data yielded results in which we could be confident of statistically significant differences. This summary document reports what was learned from using this approach.

Results

In studying the survey results, it is important to keep in mind that survey respondents are predominantly satisfied with the overall climate for diversity in their workplaces and in the University. There is a great deal of job satisfaction and a feeling that the diversity environment for students is satisfactory. Against this backdrop, then, the following information seeks to find distinctions among respondents that could be important in designing and offering programs that would positively affect the climate of diversity and inclusiveness in the College.

¹ Available from the Office of the Dean, College of Agricultural Sciences.

The results of the survey are highly intercorrelated. That is, although there are several individual questions in the survey instrument, the results would suggest that the questions are measuring closely related, similar beliefs, experiences, and observations.

The same 70-page report mentioned above and available on the Web also includes verbatim reports of responses to the open-ended questions. Although they contain valuable and insightful information, in their raw form they are not usefully organized. Dan Jansen carefully reviewed these responses and organized them thematically. His work with the open-ended questions is available at the same Web site mentioned earlier. In this more structured framework, the 18 pages of respondents' insights and observations are likely to be a valuable resource to members of the College's Inclusiveness and Diversity Committee and others who seek perspective on diversity and inclusivity in the College and in the University more broadly.

Aggregating data to "tease out" information

Aggregating data from the survey, as Robert Mason proposed, served as a tool to get at information that might help guide College administration and the Inclusiveness and Diversity Committee to see opportunities for positive, constructive action. To use this technique meant examining each of the questions in the survey, then selecting some as *independent* variables and others as *dependent* variables.² Relying on experience with other survey research and the general relevancy of certain questions, we chose three independent variables and four dependent variables.

The **independent variables** are:

- Degree of confidence in the direction the University is leading in the areas of diversity and inclusiveness (question 11),
- Adequacy of University efforts on diversity (question 12), and
- Gender of the respondent (one of the demographic variables).

The **dependent variables** are:

- Overall climate for diversity in the respondent's own unit (question 1),
- Respondent's assessment of adequacy of professional development opportunities related to diversity (question 4),
- Respondent's assessment of the "diversity climate" for students (question 5), and
- Respondent's own observations of workplace discrimination (question 7).

Each of the four questions identified as dependent variables (questions 1, 4, 5, and 7 in Appendix A) included "sub-questions" that were intended to elicit the respondent's views on several dimensions of the broader parent question. In aggregating data, scores for the scalar values of the "sub-questions" of the four dependent variables were summed to form a single, overall measure of each response variable. The next four paragraphs describe what those "sub-questions" were.

The dependent variable *Overall climate for diversity*, as characterized by the "sub-questions" in question 1, included degree of satisfaction with the overall professional climate of the respondent's own unit or organization, degree of confidence in the

² **Understanding independent and dependent variables in the context of this analysis.** For each independent variable, we are asking the customary question, "As this [independent] variable changes, how does the dependent variable change?" For example, looking at *gender* as an independent variable and *assessment of overall climate for diversity* as the dependent variable, our question becomes "How do the responses for women differ, if at all, from those for men in their assessment of overall climate for diversity?"

direction her or his unit is heading in areas of diversity, adequacy of promotion of gender equity among faculty in the respondent's own unit, and adequacy of efforts to increase the number of women faculty in the respondent's own unit.

The dependent variable *Adequacy of professional development opportunities*, as characterized by the "sub-questions" in question 4, included adequacy of opportunities available through the respondent's own unit to become more involved in issues of gender, adequacy of opportunities available through the respondent's own unit to become more involved in issues related to differences among racial-ethnic groups, availability of activities that would increase the respondent's own sensitivity to other racial-ethnic groups, and adequacy of opportunities available through the College to learn about various cultures.

The dependent variable *Assessment of the "diversity climate" for students*, as characterized by the "sub-questions" in question 5, included actions of faculty in the respondent's own unit that are supportive of female students, presence of racially and ethnically diverse students in the respondent's own unit that enhance educational experiences of all students in the department, faculty awareness in the respondent's own unit of the difficulties that students from lower socio-economic groups and from specific racial-ethnic groups may face in succeeding in college, respondent's assessment of the extent to which her or his own unit makes efforts to enhance student's knowledge of and appreciation for other racial and ethnic groups, and that the respondent's own unit places high priority on recruiting students from specific racial-ethnic groups.

The dependent variable *Observations or experience of workplace discrimination*, as characterized by the "sub-questions" in question 7, included the extent to which the respondent had witnessed or experienced unfair workplace treatment based on gender discrimination, had observed or experienced inappropriate comments, jokes, or actions within the respondent's own unit, had observed or experienced unfair workplace treatment based on socio-economic status or racial-ethnic distinctions, and whether there was racial tension in the respondent's own workplace.

A statistical analysis was completed to show the effect of each independent variable on each dependent variable. Aggregating data and conducting an analysis of the effect of independent variables on dependent variables enabled us to make statements of this sort:

"Those respondents who expressed a high degree of confidence in the direction the University is leading also [believed or said]...."

The results are presented in the next section.

Specific results

Degree of confidence in the direction the University is leading with respect to diversity and inclusiveness

Respondents who expressed confidence in the direction the University is leading in the areas of diversity (~46 percent, question 11) also tended to:

- agree that diverse values and beliefs are respected,
- be satisfied with the climate of the unit within which she or he works,
- be confident in the direction the respondent's own unit is heading with respect to diversity,
- believe efforts are adequate with respect to gender equity,

- believe that professional development opportunities related to diversity were adequate;
- be less likely to have witnessed incidents of workplace discrimination.
- believe efforts are being made to recruit women.

Conversely, those who did not express confidence in the direction the University is leading in the areas of diversity (<15 percent) also tended to:

- disagree that the overall climate for diversity in their unit was satisfactory.
- say opportunities for professional development were lacking.
- were more likely to say they had witnessed workplace discrimination and/or racial tensions where they work.

Adequacy of University efforts on diversity

Respondents who saw the University efforts on diversity as about right (~41 percent, question 12) also tended to:

- be more likely to find their own unit's climate for diversity to be satisfactory;
- felt the professional development opportunities were adequate as well;

Respondents who said the University on the whole was doing too little about diversity issues at OSU (~11 percent) also tended to:

- see the climate for diversity in their unit as less than satisfactory;
- say strongly that opportunities for professional development related to diversity were inadequate.
- be considerably more likely to report having witnessed workplace discrimination or racial tensions where they work

Respondents who felt the University on the whole is doing about the right amount about diversity issues at OSU also tended to agree that professional development opportunities were adequate as well. On the other hand, those who felt the University was doing too little about diversity issues also said strongly that opportunities for professional development related to diversity were inadequate.

Gender

Perhaps the most insightful—and actionable—survey results are those that distinguish between what women respondents said and what men respondents said.³

Women respondents were significantly more likely than men to believe that the overall climate in their units for diversity was inadequate. Responses from women tended to disagree with statements that values and beliefs are being respected in the unit where they work, that the climate of the unit with respect to diversity is satisfactory, and that efforts are adequate with respect to gender equity and recruitment of women.

Women respondents were far more likely than men to believe that professional development related to diversity were inadequate. On the other hand, men generally saw professional development opportunities related to diversity as adequate.

³ Of the 300-plus individuals who responded to the survey, 47 percent identified themselves as male, 35 percent identified as female, and 18 percent declined to identify their gender.

In one of the more striking findings, women were far more likely to report having witnessed workplace discrimination than were men. Male respondents predominately reported not having seen evidence of such workplace discrimination.

A question for faculty and staff in the College to consider might be: What can the College community do to catalyze action that, directly or indirectly, will confront and address the issues for women that this survey has identified? These are issues of climate, gender equity, workplace discrimination, and professional development. And, will addressing what are issues for women also address similar issues for minority persons that, if they exist, were not revealed in this particular survey? Finally, is the addressing of these issues a matter of identifying and empowering those with the passion to take on this issue and run with it?

This summary prepared by Gwil Evans with assistance at various stages from Dan Jansen, Robert Mason, Greg Thompson, and Liz Webb.

Appendix A: Questions in the survey

Q1. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the overall climate of your unit/department.

(Response scale: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, don't know or not sure.)

Faculty and staff respect the expression of diverse values and beliefs in my unit/ department.

I am satisfied with the overall professional climate of my unit/ department.

I am confident in the direction my unit/ department is heading in areas of diversity.

I believe efforts to promote gender equity among faculty within my unit/ department are adequate.

I believe efforts are being made to increase the number of women faculty in my unit/ department.

Q2. Thinking about the diversity climate in your department would you say that it is better, about the same, or worse compared to the overall diversity climate at OSU?

(Response scale: Worse, about the same, better.)

Q3. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following two statements concerning College of Agricultural Sciences (CAS) media. By media, we mean all publications, newspaper articles, radio and television spotlights, recruitment efforts, etc.

(Response scale: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, don't know or not sure.)

I believe materials in CAS media stereotype individuals based on their gender.

I believe materials in CAS media stereotype individuals based on their race or ethnicity.

Q4. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements concerning professional development opportunities?

(Response scale: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, don't know or not sure.)

I feel the level of opportunities available through my unit/ department to become more involved in issues of gender is adequate.

I feel the level of opportunities available through my unit/ department to become more involved in issues related to differences among racial-ethnic groups is adequate.

Campus-sponsored activities that I have participated in increased my sensitivity to other racial-ethnic groups.

I feel the level of opportunities available through CAS to learn about various cultures is adequate.

Q5. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements concerning student climate in your unit/dept.

(Response scale: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, don't know or not sure.)

Faculty in my unit/ department act as though they are supportive of female students.

A racially/ ethnically diverse student body enhances the educational experiences of all students in my unit/ department.

Faculty representing my unit/ department are aware of the difficulties that students from lower socio-economic groups may face in succeeding in college.

Faculty in my unit/ department are aware of the difficulties that students from specific racial-ethnic groups may face in succeeding in college.

My unit/ department makes efforts to enhance student's knowledge of and appreciation for other racial/ ethnic groups.

A high priority in my unit/ department in terms of students should be to enhance support for recruitment of students from specific racial-ethnic groups.

Faculty in my unit/ department act as though they are resentful of efforts to develop a student body that represents racial-ethnic groups.

Q6. Compared to other CAS faculty, would you say that faculty support in your department for a diverse student body is stronger, about the same, or weaker?
(Response scale: Weaker, about the same, stronger, don't know or not sure.)

Q7. The following statements concern discrimination issues. Thinking about your own experiences, indicate true or false for each statement.
(Response scale: True, false, don't know or not sure.)

I have witnessed unfair workplace treatment based on gender discrimination in my unit/ department.

Inappropriate comments, jokes, or actions within my unit/ department occur frequently.

I have witnessed unfair workplace treatment based on socio-economic status in my unit/ department.

I have witnessed unfair workplace treatment based on racial-ethnic discrimination in my unit/ department.

There is racial tension within my unit/ department.

Q8. Please indicate the extent to which you feel each of the following groups contributes to discrimination issues within your unit/dept.
(Response scale: Does not contribute at all, contributes very little, contributes some, highly contributes, don't know or not sure.)

The opposite gender (not my own)

People in the surrounding community

My own racial-ethnic group

My gender

Students

Racial-ethnic groups other than my own

Campus faculty

Campus personnel other than faculty

Q9. I feel that discrimination issues are overall greater, about the same, or fewer in my department compared to the CAS.

(Response scale: Fewer, about the same, greater, don't know or not sure.)

Q10. Please share any ideas you have about diversity issues in your department. (Open ended)

Q11. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with this statement: "I am confident in the direction the university is leading in areas of diversity."

(Response scale: Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, don't know or not sure.)

Q12. Do you feel the university on the whole is doing too much, about the right amount, or too little about diversity issues at OSU?

(Response scale: Too much, about the right amount, too little, don't know or not sure.)

Questions 13 through 17 dealt with job title, location of work site, department or unit affiliation, gender, and racial-ethnic identity.⁴

Q18. Please share any ideas you may have about how to make the College of Agricultural Sciences a more inclusive and welcoming community to other racial-ethnic groups. (Open ended)

Q19. Does anything prevent you from practicing, embracing, or developing diversity where you work? If yes, please elaborate. (Open ended)

Q 20. What benefits do you perceive would be achieved with greater diversity within College of Agricultural Sciences? (Open ended)

Q 21. Please use this space to say whatever you want about College of Agricultural Sciences, your unit/department, and/or diversity. (Open ended)

⁴ Other than for gender, small sample sizes and missing data preclude analysis based on data gathered in questions 13 through 17.