

Diversity Dimension Report

California State University-San Marcos

Foundations Institutions ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities. Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in which students interact in an open and civil community with people from backgrounds and cultures different from their own, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others.

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The Foundations of Excellence (FOE) guideline for accessing first-year programming defines the diversity dimension as: **ensuring all "first-year students experience diverse ideas,**

worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to

become members of pluralistic communities." It further elaborates that definition by

indicating that, "Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in

which students interact in an open and civil community with people from backgrounds and

cultures different from their own, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently

hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others."

While the committee worked with this definition, there was a shared feeling among the members that it is too narrow, and we recommend that the definition be broadened to include sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, diversity of ability, and consideration of the intersection of race, class and gender. We believe a broader definition would better reflect the diversity that students should understand in today's world.

The committee members also expressed concern over the fact that the student survey was administered at the end of the first semester, which means that the "First Year" was only half over when students were asked about their exposure to diverse ideas and people. For some dimensions a survey conducted at this time would capture the current situation well, but for a dimension that explores the content of the curriculum we believe a follow-up survey at the end of the first year would be helpful.

Despite these concerns, the committee carefully reviewed the results of the student and faculty surveys and came to the overall conclusion that the University is not performing well on this important dimension. We also discovered notable differences between the way students and faculty evaluated performance.

The Foundations of Excellence (FOE) survey of students was done in two ways: a paper instrument and an online instrument. The combined response rate at CSUSM for the two surveys was forty-two percent. The FOE identifies two elements of diversity: exposure and interaction.

Survey items 17-20 tap the exposure dimension, while items 21-23 reflect the interaction

dimension. Item 24 is also included in this dimension, although it asks about respect for differing opinions, not about diverse interactions. Items 17-20 asked students to rate their institutional opportunities for exposure to world cultures, world religions, political perspectives and issues regarding social class and economic privilege. Items 21-23 asked students to rate their institutional opportunities for interactions with students of differing backgrounds and cultures, interactions with staff of differing backgrounds and culture, and people of differing and different cultures outside the institution.

Of the four items that tapped the exposure dimension, three items showed that slightly more than one-third of students rated institutional efforts as high or very high. But another one-third reported slight or none at all. The exception to this pattern was the rating given for exposure to world religions. Only one out of five students reported institutional opportunities as high or very high with almost half responding institutional opportunities as being slight or not at all. In sum, one-third of student respondents at CSUSM rated institutional efforts to expose students to world cultures, differing political perspectives, and economic issues of social class as being high or very high, while they rated institutional efforts to expose them to world religions substantially lower.

The interaction dimension showed a monotonic decline in student responses that rated institutional opportunities to interact with students, faculty and staff, and people outside of the university with varying backgrounds and culture. Two of five student respondents rated institutional efforts to provide opportunities to meet students with differing cultural backgrounds as high or very high. The proportion responding high or very high when asked about faculty and staff interactions dropped to one of three students and to one of five when asked about

interactions with people off-campus with differing cultural backgrounds. It is of some interest that institutional efforts to help interactions between students of differing backgrounds is the mirror of student assessments of institutional efforts to help interactions between students and people of differing background who are off-campus. In sum, the university was seen by student respondents as doing a much better job of facilitating interactions between people of varying backgrounds on campus than off.

Performance on the "standards of behavior" dimension was significantly better. Fully two-thirds of the students rated the university "high" or "very high" on communicating the importance of respecting people with differing opinions.

The results of the student survey on the diversity dimension stand in sharp contrast with the results of the faculty/staff survey in some critical areas. For example, sixty-four percent of the faculty/staff scored the university "high" or "very high" on exposing first-year students to diverse ideas and world cultures, compared with only one-third of students. As we found with the results from the student sample, there is a monotonic decline from rating the institution "high" or "very high" in terms of diverse interactions with others of diverse cultural background as we move from interactions with other students, interactions with staff and faculty and with people off campus. Fifty-six percent of respondents rated institutional efforts to provide first-year students with opportunities to interact with students of differing backgrounds as high or very high. The rating for institutional efforts to provide opportunities to interact with faculty and staff of different cultural backgrounds dips to fifty percent while assessment of institutional provision of opportunities to interact with people of differing cultural backgrounds off-campus is rated as "high" or "very high" by twenty-five percent of respondents.

In short, the faculty and staff believed we are doing a much better job of exposing the first-year students to diverse cultures and promoting diverse interaction than did the first-year students themselves. These differences held up even when we limited the responses to those faculty who actually taught first-year students.

The committee further analyzed the student survey data to determine if the responses reflected any pattern among different groups of students. The results showed that White, non-Hispanic student respondents were generally more critical of CSUSM's efforts to expose students to diversity. In particular, they rated the institution lower than either Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander students in efforts to expose students to world religions and issues of class and economic status. Hispanic students were less likely to rate the institution's efforts to expose students to diverse political views lower than White, non-Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students. A general pattern is discernable, however, with respect to race and ethnic groups. White students tended to be more critical of institutional efforts to expose students to diversity, while Asian/Pacific Islander students were least critical, with Hispanic students in the middle.

Asian/Pacific Islander student respondents were substantially more likely to rate CSUSM highly in its efforts to promote interaction among students of differing cultural backgrounds. Over one-half (fifty-three percent) of these students rated the institution's efforts as "high" or "very high." This compares to forty-three percent and forty-one percent of Hispanic and White non-Hispanic students, respectively. The pattern noted above for Asian/Pacific Islander students is repeated for faculty and staff interactions of differing cultural backgrounds in a more muted form. Forty percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students rated CSUSM's efforts as "high" or "very high." This percentage compares to thirty-six percent for Hispanic students and thirty-three percent for

White, non-Hispanic students. When students were asked to rate the CSUSM's efforts to provide opportunities for interaction among people of differing cultural backgrounds off-campus, the pattern noted for the other items of this dimension reoccurred. Asian/Pacific Islander students were most likely to rate the institution's efforts higher (thirty-two percent), with Hispanic students in the middle (twenty-six percent) and White, non-Hispanic students least likely to rate the institution's efforts highly (twenty-one percent).

When the results of the faculty/staff survey were analyzed, a different pattern emerged. Seventy-five percent of White, non-Hispanic faculty and staff rated CSUSM's efforts to provide students with exposure to diverse ideas and world views as "high" or "very high." This compared to only thirty-eight percent of Hispanic faculty and staff. In short, White, non-Hispanic faculty and staff were nearly twice as likely as Hispanic faculty and staff to judge CSUSM's effort as high when it comes to the incorporation of diverse ideas and world views into the curriculum. The same appears to be true when co-curricular activities are considered. Sixty-four percent of White, non-Hispanic faculty and staff rated the institution "high" or "very high" on its co-curricular efforts to incorporate diverse ideas and world views. But only thirty-eight percent of Hispanic faculty and staff shared that opinion.

The general pattern found above with respect to curricular and co-curricular university diversity assessment, was replicated with respect to diversity interactions. While two out of three (65 percent) White, non-Hispanic faculty and staff rated the university's effort to provide first-year students with opportunities to interact with students of differing cultural background as "high" or "very high," only thirty-eight percent of Hispanic faculty and staff agreed. Similarly, while fifty-eight percent of White, non-Hispanic faculty and staff rated CSUSM highly on its efforts to

facilitate interactions between first-year students and faculty and staff of differing cultural backgrounds, only thirty-six percent of Hispanic staff and faculty agreed. Finally, thirty-two percent of White, non-Hispanic faculty and staff rated CSUSM highly in its efforts to have first-year students interact with people of differing backgrounds off-campus, only sixteen percent of Hispanic faculty and staff agreed. Finally, it is worth noting that the monotonic decline noted among students regarding these diverse interaction items, replicates with both groups of faculty and staff.

In an attempt to understand why so many first-year students did not appear to believe they were exposed to differing cultures, religions, and ideas, the committee reviewed the syllabi of every lower division general education course offered in AY 2007-08. In particular, we looked at courses like GEL, which we knew most students take in their first semester at CSUSM. Although it is difficult to determine exactly what is happening in the classroom from the syllabi, the committee found very little evidence that cultural diversity was addressed in these courses.

Discussion with faculty who teach GEL, for example, revealed that while diversity was one topic covered, it was covered in a quite superficial, brief, and spotty way. Some faculty made it a focus while others skimmed over it. The committee also felt that the treatment of diversity in the GEL text was superficial. Some instructors said they did not have sufficient time to cover diversity topics because so much time was spent on things like library use and other first-year skills.

Again, while it is difficult to determine class activity from syllabi, the committee noted that only a few of courses appeared to encourage students to participate in co-curricular events that might expose them to diverse cultures and ideas.

As a "commuter campus" San Marcos has made many efforts to encourage students to participate in campus activities beyond the classroom with mixed results. Recognizing this problem and its impact on first-year success, we have devoted our residence hall, University Village Apartments, primarily to first-year students. A report from the Director of the UVA suggested there are many activities for these students that promote diverse interactions and exposure to diversity.

Curiously, however, the results of the student survey did not reveal any real differences in the responses of students who lived on campus from those who lived off campus. For example, while forty-four percent of those living on campus rated their interactions with other students on campus as "high" or "very high," forty-two percent of those living off campus scored the university's efforts that way.

Based on this evidence, the committee gave the institution a grade of "C-" on the diversity dimension. We believe the faculty and staff, who have developed and coordinated our curricular and co-curricular activities have an inaccurate impression of the effect of those efforts on student thinking. Clearly, there is a disconnect between what we believe we are communicating about diversity and what the students tell us are learning.

Challenges and Opportunities

Although it may appear obvious to some, the first challenge will be to develop a campus consensus that exposure to diverse cultures, religions, and ideas is something we wish to emphasize in the curriculum in a broad-based, coordinated manner across the campus, and that fostering interactions between our students and those of differing backgrounds on an off-campus is a university responsibility.

With respect to the diversity dimension, the curricular impact on first-year students will come most directly in GE classes such as GEL, GEW, and GESS. Therefore, we must re-examine the learning outcomes of these courses, and whether their content can achieve those outcomes. Simply put, if we expect students to learn about diverse cultures, religions, and ideas, we must include that subject matter in appropriate GE courses. Based on our review of the lower-division GE syllabi, this will involve a wholesale revamping of many of those classes.

To those who would argue that we are already covering this material in our first-year classes, the response must be "many, if not most, of our first-year students are not getting it." So if it is not a problem of content, it may be a problem of delivery. In either case, a thorough review of these GE courses and the learning outcomes they must meet would be a major first step toward addressing this challenge.

Another challenge is that, by their very nature, these are controversial areas. Some faculty members told us they are not trained to teach about religious differences, or that when they do it stirs mixed emotions and responses among students that are difficult to channel into constructive discussions. Given the intensity of feeling about the forces of religion in today's world, this will be a difficult process; but one we cannot afford to ignore.

Similar challenges exist in addressing our co-curricular efforts and student interactions. One major challenge will be to encourage the faculty to promote participation in diversity events and to participate in those events themselves. This is especially true for full-time faculty who might otherwise have minimal interaction with first-year students. Of course, in addition to encouraging students to participate, we must assure that the events themselves are offered and are substantive. The committee has made some recommendations on how to increase the number

and quality of co-curricular activities, but the challenge, as always, will be funding for those activities.

The opportunity here is to build a vital, exciting, and meaningful campus life beyond the classroom that will make students, faculty, and staff want to participate. We must take this opportunity to align or realign our curriculum with the realities of the 21st century to assure that our students understand the diverse world in which they will live and work.

Sources of Evidence

Evidence Library Documents: 48, 49, 75-87, 145.

Interview of Brian Dawson, Director of University Village Apartments

Student Survey

Faculty/Staff Survey

Recommended Grade: C-