

Diversity Dimension Feedback
California State University-San Marcos

Dear Kimber, Peter, Mayra, Elizabeth, Rodger, Jule, Scott, Michael, Dora, Patricia, Garry, and Nancy,

Congratulations to all of you for your work on this outstanding report on the Diversity Dimension. You have raised a number of important issues for CSUSM and for the Policy Center in terms of the way we define diversity. Thank you for your suggestions on expanding the definition to include additional issues that should be part of an overall conversation on diversity. I share your frustration that the timing of the student survey is not ideal for this particular Dimension. You do have the option to repeat the survey in the spring, although there is an additional cost (\$2,500). You might consider designing a much shorter in-house survey to determine whether first-year students' perceptions have changed over the course of the year.

Responses to the faculty/staff and student surveys raise many questions that I hope you will continue to investigate. You note significant differences in faculty/staff versus student perceptions as well as differences by racial/ethnic group within each survey population. I was especially intrigued by the tendency of Asian students to give the campus higher ratings than either White or Hispanic students. Do you think this is related to a more general tendency of Asian students not to complain about institutional deficiencies or is this perception based upon some sort of different set of experiences on campus?

It is certainly not unusual for institutions to design fewer off-campus opportunities than on-campus opportunities for students to experience diversity. At some campuses where there is little to no diversity within the student body or faculty/staff ranks, this becomes especially important. My sense (without having visited CSUSM) is that you are a very diverse place and that the campus is a microcosm of the region.

I commend you for your review of syllabi. You have discovered a common problem: Diversity may be one of many topics covered in any course (especially a first-year seminar), but the treatment is, in your words, "superficial" at best. You acknowledge the disconnect between what faculty believe they are teaching and what students are actually hearing and learning. I hope your faculty and staff will spend some time thinking creatively about ways to facilitate more intellectual engagement around the multiple topics that are part of a comprehensive diversity conversation.

You are absolutely right that these areas (especially religion and politics) are ripe for controversy. Many of us (including me) need help in learning how to manage difficult conversations that can easily deteriorate into ideological battles. And yes, if you are asking students to participate in diversity events, faculty should be there as well, and the events should be well designed and worthwhile.

You have constructed a number of valuable recommended action items, and most of them are "high priority." Where would you begin? Is the current listing in priority order (if you can't do

everything)? Which of these have significant, minor, or no resource implications? Who should be responsible for taking these actions, and what timeline do you recommend? Are there some steps you could take tomorrow, are others long-term goals? I'm not suggesting that you respond to me, but talk among yourselves about these more specific questions.

Although you gave the campus a C-, I'm giving this committee an A+. This is an outstanding report – one of the best I have read. It will be valuable to the Steering Committee and to the larger University for years to come.

Don't hesitate to let me know if you have questions about any of these comments.

Best wishes,

Betsy

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