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Assessing Our Commitment to Multiculturalism: Student Perspectives

In a previous article published in the Journal of College Reading and Learning, we presented the results of a self-study of our commitment as faculty and staff members to providing a multicultural learning experience for our students. This follow-up article provides the findings of a study conducted during spring semester 2004 to explore student perceptions of their multicultural experiences within the same academic unit. In the discussion that follows, we also address differences in perceptions between educators and students, based on the results of our previous research.

Recruiting, enrolling, and retaining a diverse student body, creating welcoming educational spaces, and providing a multicultural learning experience have been central to the mission of the University of Minnesota's General College (GC; Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale, 2005). Within GC, diversity is defined broadly to include social identities related to race, ethnicity, culture, home language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social class, age, and disability. Multiculturalism is defined as how we respond to these diverse identities: "If diversity is an empirical condition—the existence of multiple group identities in a society—multiculturalism names a particular posture towards this reality" (Miksch, Bruch, Higbee, Jehangir, & Lundell, 2003, p. 6). It is the goal of GC to enhance diversity and embrace multiculturalism in all aspects of the work of the college.

Development of the Multicultural Awareness Project for Institutional Transformation (MAP IT)

In the first of a series of multicultural research projects conducted in GC, Bruch and Higbee (2002) reported in an article in the *Journal of College Reading and Learning* that further attention needed to be devoted to addressing multicultural issues both within GC and as related to the profession of learning assistance and developmental education as a whole. To this end, the GC Multicultural Concerns Committee (MCC) appointed a subcommittee to adapt for higher education James Banks and colleagues' (Banks et al., 2001) *Diversity Within Unity: Essential Principles for Teaching and Learning in a Multicultural Society*. In addition to its 12 essential principles, *Diversity Within Unity* includes an instrument to assess faculty and administrators' perceptions of educational climate in elementary through secondary (K-12) institutions. The subcommittee ultimately developed four different MAP IT assessment tools for four target populations: administrators, faculty and other instructional staff members, student support services staff, and students themselves (Miksch, Higbee, et al., 2003). During this process, the committee also realized that it would be necessary to adapt *Diversity Within Unity's* essential principles to a higher education setting. The subcommittee's "10 Guiding Principles" address (a) institutional governance, organization, and equity; (b) faculty and staff development; (c) student development; (d) intergroup relations; and (e) assessment. The MAP IT guiding principles have been widely disseminated through professional meetings (e.g., Higbee & Pettman, 2003) and publications (Higbee, Bruch, Jehangir, Lundell, & Miksch, 2003; Higbee & Siaka, 2005; Miksch, Higbee, et al.). In addition, several articles have been published to date to report the findings for faculty and staff within GC (Bruch, Jehangir, Lundell, Higbee, & Miksch, 2005; Higbee, Miksch, Jehangir, Lundell, Bruch, & Jiang, 2004; Miksch, Bruch, Higbee, Jehangir, & Lundell, 2003). This article will add to the body of knowledge by presenting the results of the administration of the MAP IT Student Questionnaire within GC.

Theoretical Framework and Guiding Principles

Although James Banks' (1994, 1997) five dimensions of multicultural education (i.e., content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and creation of empowering school cultures; Bruch, Higbee, & Lundell, 2004) are central to the theoretical framework for the MAP IT project, as we have engaged in this work we have also been influenced by the recent endeavors of others practicing and writing in higher education. They include Ball, Berkowitz, and Mzamane (1998); Bloland (2005); Gallagher (2003); Giroux (1994, 2001); Gurin, Dey,

Hurtado, and Gurin (2002); and Rhoads and Valadez (1996), to name just a few. We have also been formulating our own thoughts about theoretical perspectives (e.g., Barajas & Higbee, 2003; Bruch, Jehangir, Jabobs, & Ghare, 2004; Higbee & Barajas, in press), as have our GC colleagues (e.g., Barajas, 2005; Gray Brown, 2005). The foundation for our work is our belief that although the existence of a diverse student body can assist students from historically underrepresented populations in feeling that they are not "alone" at the institution, diversity without multiculturalism provides an empty promise. If we do not integrate multiple perspectives in our daily work, then the empirical condition of diversity alone cannot create welcoming learning environments. Thus, the primary research question that prompted this study was, "Do first-year students enrolled in the General College at the University of Minnesota believe that GC's mission, curriculum, and student services reflect a commitment on the part of its administrators, faculty, and staff to embedding multiculturalism in every aspect of the work of the college?"

In the following paragraphs we describe the site of this mixed methods research study and the rationale for the research question. Then we briefly explain the process for constructing the MAP IT Student Questionnaire and discuss the convenience sampling procedure that was used for data collection.

Method

We conducted our research in GC, which at the time of this study was one of the few large developmental education units continuing to provide access to students considered underprepared for admission to a Carnegie I public research university. GC backed up its formal commitment to a multicultural mission with almost 2 decades of concrete action in the form of college-wide retreats, training sessions, and professional development resources; research support; institutional advocacy; recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students; and support for visiting scholars. To cite just two additional areas of distinction within the college, of 12 faculty on the tenure track at the time this data was collected, 5 were women and 6 were faculty of color. In terms of students, on a campus with 11% students of color including those in GC, of 894 new students in fall 2003—the cohort involved in this research—46.5% were students of color. But, as previously stated, diversity as an empirical condition is not enough; we considered it imperative to assess students' perceptions of their multicultural learning environment to determine whether we are achieving our educational goals.

Instrumentation

The MAP IT Student Questionnaire (Miksch, Higbee, et al., 2003) used for this research was designed to assess how students evaluate multicultural aspects of their collegiate experience. An earlier iteration was pilot tested during spring semester 2003 (Higbee & Siaka, 2005), and the instrument was revised based on response rates to individual items, comparison of results for similar items (i.e., reliability), and student comments addressing the validity of the items. Items were constructed to parallel items on the three other MAP IT questionnaires (i.e., for faculty and instructional staff, student services staff, and administrators) whenever possible so that programs and institutions that administer all four questionnaires can make valid comparisons across constituent groups. Seven faculty and staff members (Miksch, Higbee, et al.) evaluated the final selection of the 69 items for the assessment. The questionnaire is available free of charge in PDF format for download from the Center for Research on Developmental Education and Urban Literacy (CRDEUL) Web site, <http://www.education.umn.edu/crdeul>.

The survey items are organized into 10 sections, with one of the MAP IT Guiding Principles introducing each set of items. When responding to the survey items, students were directed to think broadly and inclusively about such terms as “multicultural” and “diverse groups” (i.e., to include race, religion, gender, ethnicity, culture, home language, social class, sexual orientation, age, and disability). The Likert-type response scale provided options of 1 to 4, for which 1 was defined as “never or almost never,” 2 indicated “occasionally,” 3 signified “often,” and 4 represented “almost always or always.” In addition, students could select “not applicable” (NA) if they thought that the item did not apply to them or “don’t know” (DK) if they thought that they had inadequate information to choose another response. At the end of each set of items, students also had the opportunity to provide comments or clarify their answers. Thus, although the data collected was primarily quantitative in nature, the student comments also yielded qualitative data that provided further insights into the results.

Sample

The sample for this research was made up of all students enrolled in GC 1422: “Writing Laboratory: Communicating in Society” during spring semester 2004. This course was selected because it is a requirement for all GC students. Thus, the majority of students who entered GC as first-year students in fall 2003 were enrolled in GC 1422 during spring 2004. Exceptions consisted primarily of students who had not passed the prerequisite course, GC 1421: “Writing Laboratory: Basic Writing,”

and those who withdrew from the University or failed to reenroll the following fall semester. Thus, the population for the study was made up of students who had completed a full semester in GC but were unlikely to have been in college for more than one semester. Furthermore, at the time the instrument was administered, the majority of these students' courses would have been offered through GC. Most of the responding students would have taken all GC classes during their 1st semester at the University of Minnesota, and at least half of their courses in GC during their 2nd semester at the University.

Data Collection

During the first 3 weeks of the semester, the individual GC 1422 course instructors introduced the MAP IT project using a script provided by the researchers and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees the use of human subjects in research. The instructors provided students with a handout supplied by the researchers and asked students to log on to a Web site and complete the questionnaire either during class time (for some class periods the course is taught in a computer classroom) or outside of class. The Web site supplied additional information about MAP IT, including how diversity and multiculturalism have been defined for the purposes of the MAP IT project. The Web site also provided notification of implied consent, meaning that when the student submitted the completed questionnaire online, he or she was consenting to participation in this research. No incentives were provided to encourage students to respond to the questionnaire. Although seemingly a disadvantage, this practice enabled students to complete the instrument anonymously; to receive an incentive, students would have to have been required to identify themselves.

Data Analyses

"Not applicable" and "don't know" responses, which had originally been input with values of 5 and 6 respectively, were eliminated from the data set. Then item means (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) were calculated.

Results

The results of the study are presented as they relate to the *MAP IT Guiding Principles*. In the following pages we provide the demographic data for the sample. Then we present the results for each of the 10 sections of the MAP IT Student Questionnaire, for which each section pertains to one of the MAP IT Guiding Principles.

Demographic Data

Out of the 629 students registered for the course, 406 responded to the survey, for a response rate of 65%. Due to incomplete responses, only 403 of the questionnaires were used in the analysis of the results. Of the 379 students who responded to the demographic items, 195 (48% of the total sample) were female, 182 (45%) were male, and 2 (1%) identified as transgendered. To the item related to race or ethnicity, 23 (6% of the total sample) said they were Hispanic or Latina/Latino, 48 (12%) identified as African American while 17 (4%) identified themselves as African, 55 (16%) wrote that they were Asian American and 22 (6%) self-identified as Asian, 3 (1%) were Pacific Islander, 17 (4%) identified as biracial or multiracial, 169 (42%) were Caucasian, and 13 (3%) listed themselves as "other." None of the responding students self-identified as Native American. The majority of the students (301, or 75%) were native speakers of English; 6% of the students indicated that they have a disability.

Institutional Governance, Organization, and Equity

This series of items asked questions like "As you understand the mission of the General College, does that mission make a commitment to access for diverse students?" for which the mean response was 3.39 ($SD = .685$), but 66 students (16%) responded "don't know." Another item related to Principle 1 was "Is a commitment to multicultural issues central to the mission of the General College?" for which the mean was 3.15 ($SD = .745$), but 76 students (19%) answered "don't know." For the item that asked, "Does GC support higher education for students from all cultural groups?" the mean was 3.59 ($SD = .675$), and for "Does GC attempt to recruit and retain a diverse student body?" the mean was 3.47 ($SD = .762$). When asked, "Do you think that it is beneficial to be part of a multicultural learning environment?" the vast majority of students chose 3 (26% of respondents) or 4 (63%) for their answer, and the mean for this item was 3.49 ($SD = .746$).

Decision Making and Collaboration for a Supportive Environment

The means for the three items related to students' role in decision making ranged from 2.16 to 2.52, but there were relatively large proportions of students who answered, "not applicable" or "don't know." For example, 128 students (32%) answered, "don't know" to the question "Are students involved in the decisions made in the General College that affect the learning environment?"

The next four items under this guiding principle were related to the provision of a supportive learning environment, and the means were

relatively high, ranging from 3.19 to 3.35. Finally, the last two items asked very specifically about discrimination. The mean response to "At the University of Minnesota, have you been discriminated against on the basis of race, ethnicity, home language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social class, age, disability, or any other group identification?" was 1.49 ($SD = .891$), where 1 = "never or almost never" and 2 = "occasionally." Similarly, in answer to "Does discrimination hinder your opportunities to participate fully in the General College?" the mean response was 1.66 ($SD = .998$). For both of these items the median and mode were 1.

Professional Development for Faculty and Staff

This series of five items began with "Through your interactions with administrators, faculty, and staff in the General College, do you believe that they understand the ways in which factors (such as race, ethnicity, home language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, social class, age, and disability) influence all individuals and institutions?" The mean response for this item was 3.16 ($SD = .746$). Follow-up items, with very consistent means ranging from 3.11 to 3.14, queried about whether GC faculty and staff exhibited this understanding in their teaching styles and other outward demonstrations of their values and attitudes. The mean was 2.96 ($SD = .928$) for the one item that took this line of questioning to a more personal level: "Do your teachers seem interested in understanding your background as it relates to learning?"

Equal Opportunity to Learn

The next five MAP IT Guiding Principles (i.e., Principles 4-9) pertain to student development. The fourth Guiding Principle proposes that "Educational institutions should equally enable all students to learn and excel." When asked whether GC accomplishes this goal, the mean response from students was 3.45 ($SD = .688$) on the 4-point scale. Other items related to whether all students are "treated with respect by staff and faculty" ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .661$) and whether teachers provide adequate support ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .717$) had similarly high means. When a more personally oriented question was posed, "Do you have the same opportunity to achieve your academic goals as any other student here in GC?" the mean was also high, 3.52 ($SD = .684$). But when asked, "Do you have opportunities to interact with appropriate role models on campus?" the mean was only 2.87 ($SD = .944$). Finally, within this section the instruments' authors (Miksch, Higbee, et al., 2003) chose to include an item about campus safety: "Are you concerned about your safety on this campus?" The mean for this item was 1.83 ($SD = .995$);

50% of responding students answered 1 (i.e., never or almost never), 28% chose 2 (occasionally), 12% answered 3 (often), and 10% chose 4 (almost always or always) for their response.

Ways of Knowing

The fifth Guiding Principle states, "Educational institutions should help students understand how knowledge and personal experiences are shaped by contexts (social, political, economic, historical, etc.) in which we live and work, and how their voices and ways of knowing can shape the academy." The means for the 12 items corresponding to this principle were surprisingly consistent, ranging from 2.94 to 3.21, except for the item that asked whether courses have "provided opportunities for civic engagement (community involvement), such as service learning?" for which the mean was 2.36 ($SD = 1.022$), and 28 students (7%) responded "not applicable" and 40 students (10%) answered "don't know." Items pertaining to students' personal background and experiences in the classroom, such as "Have you had the opportunity in your classes to share your experiences and perspectives?" ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .844$) and "Has your cultural group been portrayed accurately and respectfully in the courses you have taken?" ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .849$) had results comparable to the more generalized questions like "Are the references or examples presented in your classes drawn from different cultural groups?" ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .750$).

The more surprising finding within this set of items was the number of "don't know" responses. For example, 155 students (38%) did not know that "a course that explores multicultural perspectives [is] a degree requirement at the University of Minnesota," and 40 (10%) could not answer whether "opportunities [are] available...to study in diverse cultural environments, whether within or outside the U.S.," while 101 (25%) did not know that "scholarships [are] available to enable low-income students to participate in cross-cultural learning experiences such as international programs." And it is difficult to interpret results like 30 students (7%) responding, "not applicable," and 37 (9%) answering, "don't know," to a question like "Has your cultural group been portrayed accurately and respectfully in the courses you have taken?"

Development of Social Skills

The sixth MAP IT Guiding Principle focuses on developing in students the skills to communicate in a multicultural world: "Educational institutions should help students acquire the social skills needed to interact effectively within a multicultural educational community." The 10 items and means and standard deviations for this set of questions are

provided in Figure 1. This set of items may be the most important in informing faculty about aspects of the results that might shape their teaching in the future. As indicated in Figure 1, the item means for items 6.2, 6.5, 6.6, 6.8, 6.9, and 6.10 cluster around 3, which denotes "often." Thus, it appears that on a regular basis GC faculty and staff put into practice their commitment to create welcoming learning environments that support the exchange of ideas and to integrate multicultural content in their teaching as well as in interactions and activities that occur outside the classroom but not to the extent that students would respond, "almost always or always." Meanwhile, the lower mean (2.57, $SD = 1.046$) for item 6.7 sends the message that more can be done to use creative pedagogy to facilitate learning about stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

Figure 1

Items Pertaining to Guiding Principle 6: Development of Social Skills

Guiding Principle 6: Educational institutions should help students acquire the social skills needed to interact effectively within a multicultural educational community.

	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	<i>n</i>
6.1 Have your experiences in GC increased your ability or comfort in interacting with people from different cultures or groups?	3.06	3	3	.898	336
6.2 Do administrators, faculty, and staff such as counselors and advisors talk openly and constructively with you about multicultural issues?	2.80	3	3	.923	325
6.3 Whether within or outside of class, have you had the opportunity to interact with people from diverse backgrounds?	3.23	3	4	.814	347
6.4 Have they provided you with factual information that contradicts misconceptions and stereotypes?	2.83	3	3	.932	327

6.5 Has the importance of communication skills been presented in the courses you have taken?	3.08	3	3	.808	342
6.6 In the courses you have taken, have safe ground rules been set for engaging in meaningful discussions about multicultural issues?	3.04	3	3	.871	334
6.7 Have you had the opportunity to participate in simulations, role playing, writing as though you experienced something from another person's perspective, or other activities that enable you to gain insights into the impact of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination?	2.57	3	3	1.046	340
6.8 Have your courses required you to discuss cultural differences?	2.91	3	3	.890	342
6.9 Has developing an understanding between people of different cultures been a goal in the courses you have taken?	2.80	3	3	.910	334
6.10 Have your courses in GC included learning that "normal" is defined differently for different groups of people?	3.02	3	3	.877	319

Extracurricular and Co-curricular Activities

For the most part, the responses to this series of six items were relatively consistent. For example, the mean for "Do you have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities that enable you to develop positive relationships with people from diverse backgrounds?" was 2.88 ($SD = .986$), while the mean for "In the courses you have taken, have there been opportunities to work collaboratively with other students outside the classroom?" was 2.78 ($SD = .923$), and the mean for "Do you have opportunity to interact with faculty members outside the classroom?"

was 2.88 ($SD = .902$). However, when asked, "Are there undergraduate professional or honor societies or career-related activities that provide multicultural opportunities?" ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .841$), 91 students (23%) responded, "don't know." Meanwhile, 43 students (11%) answered, "don't know" to "Are activities or organizations available that encourage students' expression of identity and cultural differences (e.g., African American Student Association, Gay and Lesbian Alliance)?" ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .879$). The mean for "Have you participated in university activities outside of class that promote multicultural understanding?" was only 2.26 ($SD = 1.117$), and 24 students (6%) responded, "not applicable," another finding that is difficult to interpret.

Educational Support Services

The eighth MAP IT Guiding Principle encourages educational institutions to "provide support services that promote all students' intellectual and interpersonal development." The responses to these items, which asked specifically about GC, rather than about the University of Minnesota as a whole, were quite positive. The mean for the item that asked, "Are support services such as counseling, advising, career planning and placement, tutoring, and computer labs equally accessible to all students?" was 3.37 ($SD = .804$). For "Within the General College, are you able to get the help you need outside of class to be successful at the University of Minnesota?" the mean was 3.22 ($SD = .841$), and for "Are support services available at times that accommodate diverse student needs?" the mean was 3.15 ($SD = .805$). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the mean for "Are you comfortable asking a faculty member or staff person for help when you need it?" was 3.27 ($SD = .804$), and both the median and mode were 4.

Values Shared by Many Cultures

The first item in this set reflects what the ninth MAP IT Guiding Principle considers important for all members of the educational community to learn: "...the ways that ideas like justice, equality, freedom, peace, compassion, and charity are valued by many cultures." When students were asked whether the courses they have taken in GC have taught them about these shared values, the mean was 2.97 ($SD = .852$). When GC students were asked whether they "have the opportunity to interact with people from diverse backgrounds," the mean was 3.26 ($SD = .724$), and for "Have you interacted with people from different cultures who share these values?" the mean was 3.09 ($SD = .830$), while for the item that asked, "Do faculty use teaching strategies, such as collaborative groups, to model these values?" the mean was 3.00 ($SD = .802$). But perhaps the

most important item in this set asked, "Do you find that you are less likely to stereotype a group of people once you get to know individual members of that group?" For this item the mean was 3.23 ($SD = .807$), and although the median was 3, the mode was 4.

Culturally-Sensitive Assessment

The final set of three items addressed assessment—specifically the types of assessments used to determine course grades. For the first item, "In the courses you have taken in GC, have you had the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge in multiple ways, such as through discussion, oral presentations, essays, creative projects, and portfolios, as well as quizzes and tests?" the mean was 3.26 ($SD = .782$); and for the second item, "In the courses you have taken, have a variety of types (e.g., multiple choice, essay) of tests and quizzes been offered?" the mean was 3.20 ($SD = .817$). The final question on the survey was one of the few to be posed negatively (i.e., a higher mean meant a less positive result). In response to "Have the tests that you have taken included culturally-specific references that were unfamiliar to you and were not taught as part of the course content?" the mean was 2.45 ($SD = 1.047$), the median was 2 (i.e., occasionally), and the mode was 3 (often), indicating that students perceived cultural bias in some exam situations.

Discussion and Implications

In general we were pleased with the results of this assessment of our multicultural teaching and learning environment, which demonstrate students' perceptions that, in general, GC's mission, curriculum, and student services reflect a commitment on the part of its administrators, faculty, and staff to embedding multiculturalism in the work of the college. However, some findings were worrisome and merit additional investigation. Before examining these items further, we wanted to explore how these findings compare to the results from our study of faculty and staff perceptions.

Patterns in Student and Faculty and Staff Results

Although in many cases comparable questions were asked of both students in this study and faculty and staff in previous research (Higbee et al., 2004), statistical comparisons are not possible because in the pilot study of faculty and staff a 5-point Likert-type scale was used. However, for the purposes of discussion some interpretation of the two sets of data is reasonable.

Institutional governance, organization, and equity. On both surveys respondents were asked, "Is commitment to multicultural issues central

to the mission of the General College?" For faculty and staff the mean for this item was 4.60 on a 5-point scale (Higbee et al., 2004), while for students the mean was 3.15 on a 4-point scale. Although faculty and staff members clearly perceive that they are committed to this mission, it appears that they have more work to do to convince students of this commitment.

Another critical question pertaining to this principle on the faculty and staff survey asked, "Are successful efforts being made to recruit a diverse administrative, teaching, student support services, and clerical staff?" For this item the mean was 3.93 (Higbee et al., 2004). Faculty and staff were also asked, "Do admissions policies allow for enrollment of students from diverse backgrounds?" ($M = 4.70$). Meanwhile, students were asked, "Does GC attempt to recruit and retain a diverse student body?" The mean for this item was 3.47, and both the median and mode were 4. Students, faculty, and staff seem in agreement that GC strives for equity in recruitment, admissions, and retention.

Comparing perceptions about the role of students in decision making in the faculty and staff study, which included 92 items, the lowest overall mean ($M = 2.52$ on the 5-point scale) was for the item that asked whether students have a role in decision making within GC (Higbee et al., 2004). Similarly, the mean for student responses to the questions about their role in decision making was among the lowest in the student study. GC provides limited opportunities for students to have a direct impact, including through student seats on all college standing committees, except the one that deals with confidential student appeals of decisions like academic suspension. GC also has a Student Board that governs student activities and works in collaboration with faculty and staff to plan college-wide events and make policy recommendations. During the discussion that followed the administration of the faculty and staff questionnaire, numerous questions arose regarding the extent of decision-making authority that students should have, as well as broader conversations about appropriate roles for students in college governance.

Faculty and staff development. In the area of professional development, faculty and staff in GC recognized that they had frequent opportunities for professional development related to multiculturalism in higher education, with pertinent item means ranging from 3.58 to 3.82 on the 5-point scale. But from the student perspective, faculty and staff need to do more to familiarize themselves with students' cultural backgrounds and to show a greater interest in individual student's social identities. And although students believed that faculty "often" know how to be effective in teaching students from diverse backgrounds, this is an

area in which it would appear that further professional development is warranted.

Student development. For this series of items, trends in student responses mirrored those for faculty and staff, whose mean for “Does the General College ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and met high standards?” was 4.30 on the 5-point scale (Higbee et al., 2004). But faculty and staff means on the items related to the availability of appropriate role models ($M = 3.50$) and the use of “teaching strategies [to] accommodate diverse student interests and learning styles” ($M = 3.80$) were considerably lower, just as they were from the perspective of the students. Student responses related to ways of knowing also seemed to follow the same trends as the faculty and staff responses, except for the item about opportunities for civic engagement. Faculty and staff consider these opportunities more readily available ($M = 4.00$ out of 5) than students do ($M = 2.36$ out of 4).

In terms of the development of social skills, the faculty and staff mean for the item that asked, “Are students given opportunities to have meaningful contact with students from diverse groups?” was 4.21 on the 5-point scale (Higbee et al., 2004), compared to the student mean of 3.23 on the 4-point scale. Responses to the items regarding extracurricular activities were also comparable.

Faculty and staff believed that students are taught about values shared by many cultures ($M = 4.05$ on a 5-point scale), and that they “implement these values in their interactions with students ($M = 3.93$)” and “use teaching strategies...to model these values ($M = 4.07$)” (Higbee et al., 2004, p. 67). These findings are not inconsistent with the students' ratings.

Assessment. If anything, students were generally more positive about assessment practices than the faculty and staff. When asked, “Do [institutional] policies encourage the use of multiple ways of assessing student learning that are culturally sensitive and that measure complex cognitive and social skills?” the faculty and staff mean was 2.82 (Higbee et al., 2004). However, the faculty and staff were not asked a question comparable to the item about cultural bias on the student questionnaire.

Areas of Concern

Thus, in many instances, to the extent that comparisons were possible, student perspectives seem very similar to those of faculty and staff. But, whether in agreement with faculty and staff perceptions or not, there are some student responses that are cause for concern. Although many of the students (mode = 4) considered themselves valued members of the GC community, for those students who did not, remaining moti-

vated must have been difficult. Similarly, many students had “never or almost never” experienced discrimination in GC (mode = 1) or at the University of Minnesota (mode = 1), but for those who had, this was definitely *not* a welcoming learning environment. For these three items the standard deviation ranged from .891 to .998, or almost a full point on the 4-point scale. The variance in student responses indicates the extent to which students can experience GC differently. *No student* should experience discrimination in an institution of higher education. Similarly, we must wonder what campus life is like for the 22% of the students who were concerned about their own safety “often” or “almost always or always.”

A different kind of concern is generated by students' responses of “don't know” and “not applicable.” For example, 19% of the responding students answered that they did not know whether a commitment to multiculturalism is central to the GC mission. If this large a proportion of the student body does not know, then it is either unlikely that we are doing an adequate job of disseminating our mission, or perhaps that we are communicating multiculturalism as a priority but our students are not sure that the commitment exists beyond the mission statement—that is, our students are not convinced that our commitment is real. Do we “walk the walk” or merely “talk the talk”?

Finally, why would students answer “not applicable” to an item about whether their cultural group has been portrayed accurately in their classes? Our hypothesis is that some students do not consider themselves members of a “cultural group,” just as some students do not consider being Caucasian as having a racial identity. And what does it mean when students do not believe that participating in multicultural experiences is applicable to them? In some cases, students' open-ended comments at the end of each section of the questionnaire provided insights. In our separate analysis of those comments (Bruch, Higbee, & Siaka, 2006), we concluded that multiculturalism means different things to different people. We also discovered an interaction between what might seem to be opposing or mutually-exclusive perspectives:

This finding reflects the compromises among different perspectives reflected in our programs and students' experiences. The mixing of views takes place when multiple popular discourses—such as the discourses surrounding affirmative action or declining standards or the dream of pluralism—serve as lenses through which students represent their perceptions of multiculturalism...

This is especially true for the majority who are unperceptive of how privileged identities (e.g., White, male, middle-class, able bodied) take on an air of neutrality against which difference is measured as

deficiency. In keeping with this, many student comments seemed contradictorily to combine the view that institutional diversity is good with the view that affirmative action is incompatible with, and should not be prioritized over, the “neutral” standards that would otherwise govern access. In a comment that compliments the diversity in the college, one student made explicit the subtext—that at least some students perceive multiculturalism as choosing preferences for minorities over preferences for no one. (Bruch, Higbee, & Siaka, pp. 8-10)

Thus, although some student comments provided insights, they also created additional reasons for concern.

Conclusion

It takes courage for an academic unit such as GC to open itself up to the kind of scrutiny involved in administering the MAP IT Student Questionnaire to its student body. It requires even more courage to share the results publicly. But for a program to claim a multicultural mission without making an effort to determine whether it is meeting its goals, particularly from the perspective of the students it serves, is hypocritical. We see this study as merely the beginning. We consider it imperative to reassess student perceptions, as well as those of faculty and staff, on a regular basis in order to continue to gauge our progress. Future research will include parallel items for all groups, with all research using the 4-point Likert-type scale that prevents respondents from being able to choose a “middle of the road” option. We are also curious about how former students would evaluate their multicultural experiences in GC after taking more courses in other colleges of the University. However, although comparisons across departments, colleges, or institutions might prove interesting, each academic unit must hold itself accountable for providing learning experiences that welcome and value all students. The comparisons that will be most worthwhile are those that enable us to monitor our progress in achieving our goals.

We are proud of our multicultural mission, but we recognize our weaknesses as well as our strengths in achieving that mission. Some of the problem areas uncovered by this study should be an “easy fix.” For example, it should not be difficult to provide further information to students about the institution’s diversity course requirement or about opportunities for financial aid to support studying abroad. Solving other problems, such as campus safety issues, will require an institutional commitment that must be sustained over a long period of time. But there are also areas for which improvement will require each of us to reflect on our own attitudes and daily practices and then work intentionally to strive to create welcoming spaces for all students.

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