Diversity, Equity and Inclusion within Loyola University's School of Environmental Sustainability: Pilot Climate Survey

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Introduction

Compositional diversity, or increasing the diversity of the student population only in numbers, is not enough to provide an inclusive environment conducive to the success of all students (Hurtado 2008). Inclusive excellence (Williams 2005), a model where higher education leaders consider how their campus environments can meet the needs of today's highly diverse population, leads to the academic excellence of all students and success in a diverse, intercultural society.

This research aims to understand the experiences of all undergraduate majors and graduate students with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) at the School of Environmental Sustainability (SES). The project analyzes how students' perceptions of SES's diversity climate and experiences of discrimination or inclusion vary across different social identities including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, political beliefs, religion, and socioeconomic status. The results will inform SES in its efforts to foster a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment where all students thrive.

Methods

We conducted a literature review on diversity climate and inclusive excellence in higher education. Then we created a survey for SES students including comprehensive identity questions (Fig. 1), perceptions of the diversity climate, and experiences of validation, belonging, inclusion, discrimination and bias. We adapted survey items from the Higher Education Research Institute and Loyola PhD student Moriah Johnson. The survey was piloted with 13 student volunteers in January 2021. The results and students' feedback were used to modify the survey and demonstrate analyses that can be conducted when administered with the wider student body. T tests and Mann-Whitney U tests were used to test if race and ethnicity (N=12), gender (N=13), and sexual orientation (N =13) could predict General Sense of Belonging, Co-Curricular Participation, General Interpersonal Validation or Inclusion in the Curriculum.
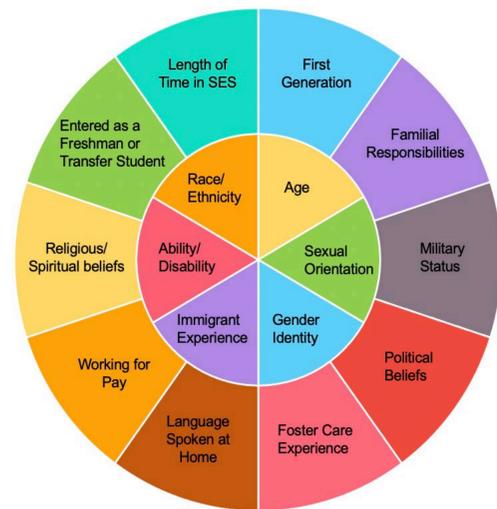
Framework and Pilot Results

Figure 1. Predictor Variables. Facets of Students Identity asked about in DEI Climate Survey.

Response Variables (Multi-item Constructs)

- **Co-Curricular Participation:** Participation in SES activities beyond classroom.
  Very Often (1) - Never (5)
- **Inclusion in Curriculum:** Number of classes that included focus on diversity.
  None (1) - 5 or More (4)
- **Sense of Belonging:** Measure of how included a student feels
  Agree (1) - Disagree (5)
- **General Interpersonal Validation:** Measure of how students perceive faculty and staff are invested in their development
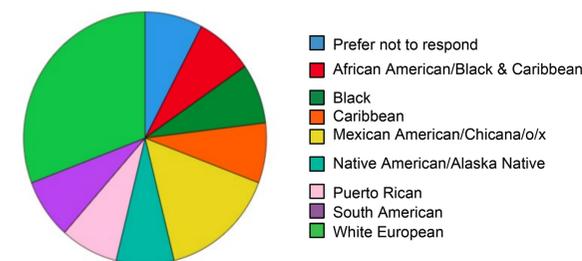 Agree (1) - Disagree (5)
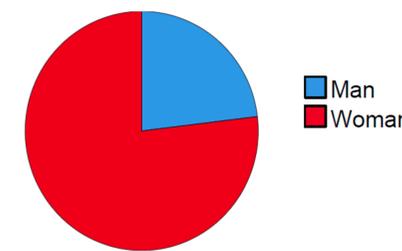

Figure 2. Race of pilot respondents.

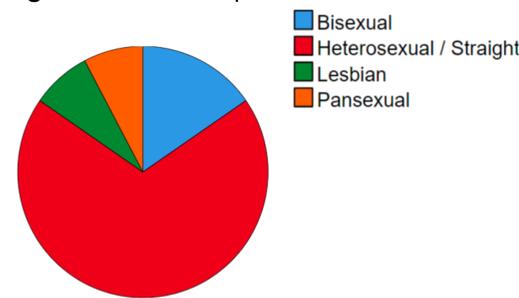**Figure 3.** Gender of pilot respondents.

Figure 4. Sexual orientation of pilot respondents.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of Constructs (N=13)

| Constructs and Definitions	Descriptive Statistics	Interpretation
General Interpersonal Validation	Mean = 1.76 SD = .75	On average students agree or somewhat agree that they are interpersonally validated
Sense of Belonging	Mean = 2.08 SD = .72	On average students somewhat agree to feeling a sense of belonging
Co-curricular Participation	Mean = 3.65 SD = .71	On average students sometimes or seldom participate in co-curricular activities
Inclusion in Curriculum	Mean = 2.72 SD = .64	On average students have had 2-4 courses that offer a focus on diversity
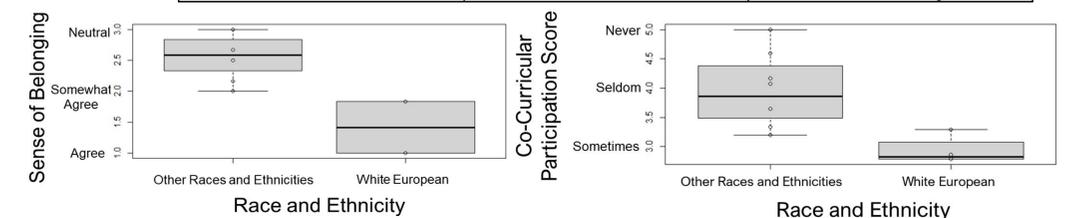
Figure 5. Box plots showing difference in response to Race and Ethnicity: a) Sense of Belonging (N=12; p-value < 0.05), and b) Co-Curricular Participation (N=13; p-value < 0.05).

Interpretation: The Mann-Whitney U showed that White European participants agree to feeling a sense of belonging ($\bar{x}$ = 1.41 ± 0.48), and participants with Other Race and Ethnic identities somewhat agreed or were neutral to feelings of sense of belonging ($\bar{x}$ = 2.56 ± 0.35). White European participants sometimes participate in co-curricular activities ($\bar{x}$ = 2.92 ± 0.24), and participants with Other Race and Ethnic identities seldom participate in co-curricular activities ($\bar{x}$ = 3.95 ± 0.62). Gender and Sexual Orientation did not predict differences in student's responses to constructs.

Literature Cited

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Johnson, M. 2020. Racism and Discrimination at Loyola: A Report on the Experiences of Students of Color at Loyola University Chicago in 2020. Department of Sociology, Loyola University Chicago.

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Future Directions

The DEI Climate Survey will be distributed to all 394 undergraduate majors and 88 graduate students in the School of Environmental Sustainability. We will then analyze this data to produce more accurate findings that are representative of the student body. The results will then be reported to the DEI committee to develop future steps to increase inclusivity and promote diversity and equity within the school.

Acknowledgments

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