



Classroom Impact on Diversity Learning

January 2004

Purpose

The focus of this survey is to determine how well students feel their classes are preparing them to interact and work with others from different lifestyles, backgrounds, and cultures. The following findings are based on responses from University Park, Altoona, DuBois, Erie-Behrend, and McKeesport¹ undergraduate students.

Implications/Highlights

Almost 80% of Penn State students were satisfied with their overall learning experience. Overall, the majority of students indicated that they had increased their understanding of difference since coming to Penn State. Most frequently these changes occurred through informal socialization with others from different backgrounds and through instructors' respect for multicultural perspectives. Approximately 40% of students reported having personally experienced or observed a student who was marginalized in the classroom.

Participation Rate

Total: n = 1,406
Phone: n = 693 of 1,344 contacted (51.5%)
Web: n = 713 of 3,600 contacted (19.8%)

Margin of Error: +/-2.6%

Findings

Overall

An overwhelming majority (78.6%) of respondents were satisfied with their overall learning experience at Penn State. At UP, first-year students and sophomores were more satisfied than were juniors and seniors.²

Two-thirds of students (66.5%) agreed that learning how to interact and work with others from different lifestyles, backgrounds, or cultures is important.

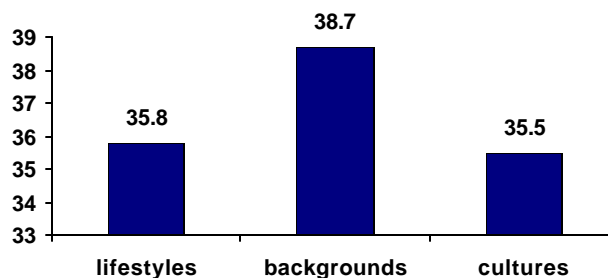
¹ These four campuses were selected by the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence and Education Technology Services, who requested the survey.

² Significantly different at the .01 level.

Learning Outcomes

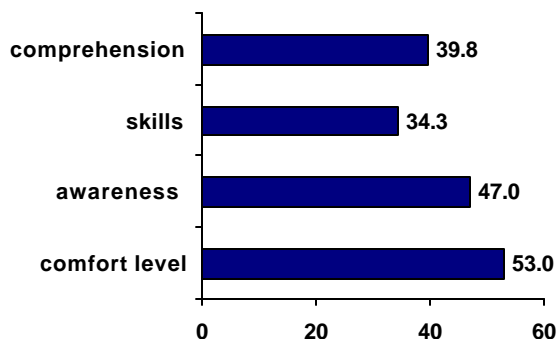
Students were also asked the extent to which their classes helped them prepare to interact with others who have lifestyles, backgrounds, and cultures different than their own (see Figure 1)³. Almost half (47.5%) indicated that their classes helped them interact with others who were different from them in at least one of the three ways.

Figure 1. Students who felt their classes helped prepare them to interact with others who have different... (by percent)



Students were also asked to what extent they have increased their understanding of difference since coming to Penn State (see Figure 2). In addition 78.5% indicated that they had at least a moderate increase in one of the four learning outcomes.

Figure 2. Students who increased their understanding of difference since coming to PSU (by percent)



³ The percentages provided are of students who responded with a "4" or a "5" (to a great extent) on a scale of 1 through 5.

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Learning Experiences

For students who reported that they had increased their understanding of difference, they responded to a series of questions regarding the sources or experiences (both in class and out of class⁴) to which they attributed their learning. In Tables 1 and 2, the percentages of students who responded positively (either “somewhat” or “to a great extent”) are displayed.

When asked what suggestions students have for class activities or approaches that would contribute to student understanding of difference, students most frequently recommended requiring diversity classes or incorporating broader world and cultural views throughout the curriculum. In addition, students added that opportunities for interaction and discussion through classroom activities and assignments also facilitate learning.

Table 1. Classroom Learning Experiences

Source/Experience	%
Instructor respect for multicultural perspectives	89.4
Class discussions in “Gen Ed” courses	79.2
Class readings, research, or exercises	78.4
Team projects for courses	71.7
Class discussions in courses in your major	68.0

Table 2. Cocurricular Learning Experiences

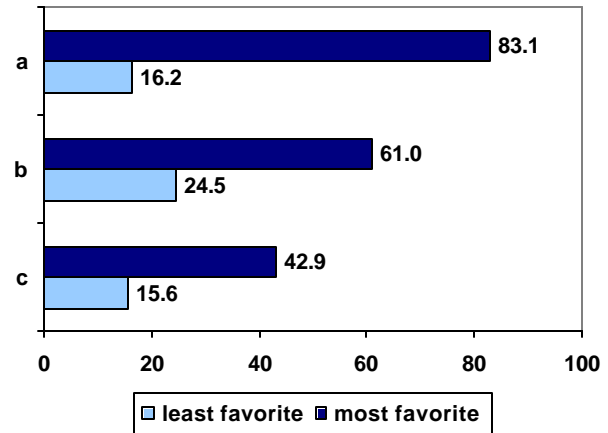
Source/Experience	%
Informal socialization with others from different backgrounds	91.7
Attending special programs/activities outside of class	73.0
Participation in student clubs and organizations	71.8
Experiences with movies, museums, art galleries	64.7
Other students with whom you have roomed	58.6
Volunteer activities within the community	52.9

Instructors

Students were also asked to rate the instructors of their most and least favorite fall semester courses on the extent to which the instructors made them feel engaged in the course, demonstrated sensitivity to diversity issues, and included multicultural materials.

⁴ For some of these sources, a lower rating may be indicative of a lack of participation in these experiences.

Figure 4. The extent to which instructors of the most & least favorite fall semester course... (by percent)



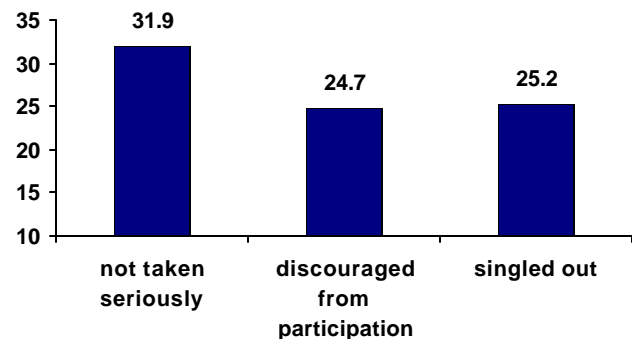
a = make you feel engaged in the course content & activities;
 b = demonstrate that they were sensitive to diversity issues within the class setting;
 c = include multicultural materials in their class discussions or assignments

Marginalization in the Classroom

In gauging the classroom climate, students were asked the frequency in which they experienced or observed a student who was not taken seriously, was discouraged from taking part in class discussions, or was singled out in class because of his/her age, race, ethnic, cultural, or religious background, gender, or sexual orientation (see Figure 5). A total of 40.3% of students reported having experienced at least one of these situations.

Among UP respondents, minority students reported having these experiences at a significantly higher rate than non-minority students.⁵

Figure 5. Percent who experienced or observed the following situations in the classroom



⁵ Significantly different at the .01 level.