

Students' Attitudes and Actions Related to Diversity

KEY FINDINGS

The following key findings focus on students' attitudes and actions related to diversity and are derived from the responses of the aggregate sample rather than from examining differences across subgroups.

When studying the attitudes and actions of students toward diversity and toward peoples of different backgrounds, it was considered important to assess the extent of contact students had with diverse populations before coming to the university. The dimensions of diversity included race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, non-native English speakers, religious backgrounds, and socio-economic backgrounds different from their own.

- Among the racial and ethnic minorities, students were most likely to have had “frequent” or “very frequent” contact with African Americans (46.1%) and Asian Americans (30.4%) prior to attending the university and to have the least contact with American Indian/Native Alaskan persons (4.1%). Only 23.2% of students responded having “frequent” or “very frequent” contact with Hispanic/Latino persons before coming to OSU.
- When looking at other aspects of diversity, students reported having the least contact with gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT) persons (24.8% reporting “none”) prior to attending the university. This lower percentage may be a reflection of a reticence on the part of GLBT persons to openly identify their sexual orientation.

Students were also asked their opinions about special university programs and policies that are designed to improve campus diversity.

- The majority of students agreed that special programs and policies are necessary to attract a more diverse student body and to provide educational opportunities for students who have potential for college but do not meet specific admission standards. Students were divided in their opinion that such strategies lead to admission of under-prepared students (38.6% disagreeing and 35.5% agreeing).
- Students were evenly split on whether these types of programs and policies lead to resentment among students (35.7% disagreeing and 36.7% agreeing). Students, however, agreed (53%) that these practices help create a positive campus environment and overwhelmingly agreed (72%) that such policies do not reduce the prestige of the campus.

If diversity is to be fully realized, then it must be reflected in all aspects of life – including personal relationships. To address personal relationships survey participants were asked to express their views on relating with people of diverse populations.

Different aspects of relating are reflected in the questions posed to students about: being close friends, being roommates, or dating a person of a different race/ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or lower socioeconomic status.

- Over 95% of students expressed that they are comfortable being close friends with members of all racial/ethnic groups. When asked about closer relationships such as being roommates or dating, all students reported a decrease in comfort level as the closeness of the relationship increases.
- When considering all of these groups (various racial/ethnic groups, international students, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or students who are of a lower socioeconomic status) students expressed that they are most likely to be uncomfortable being friends with or living with GLBT persons. There is also considerable discomfort among students with respect to dating students who have a disability. The socioeconomic status of students has the least impact on students' comfort level in being close friends, being roommates, or dating.

An important measure of climate for diversity is a description of behaviors that represent both positive and negative responses to situations of diversity. Survey participants were asked if they had ever exhibited various behaviors (e.g. challenging others on racial/ethnic derogatory comments) related to issues of diversity. Responses indicated various levels of insensitivity on the part of students toward others.

- Over 67% of students indicated that they have challenged others on racial/ethnic derogatory comments. A similar number of students (almost 64%) have challenged others on sexually derogatory comments.
- Over 72% of students have refused to participate in comments or jokes that are derogatory to any group, culture, or gender. However, over 70% report that they have repeated a derogatory comment or joke about those different from them.
- Most students (96.3%) have gotten to know people from different cultures and groups on a personal basis.