

## Diversity Dimension Report Stony Brook University

*Foundations Institutions ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities.* Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in which students interact in an open and civil community with people from backgrounds and cultures different from their own, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others.

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### Current Situation

The level of understanding that Stony Brook students, in particular freshman, have concerning diversity issues and inclusion is not well known. Most of the information discussed is largely anecdotal, based on a small number individual case experiences, and based on assumptions related to the diversity demographics of the Stony Brook student population. Critical analysis of the results of this survey could be utilized to create a viable, more informed plan for insuring that students from diverse backgrounds, e.g., cultural, intellectual, racial, ethnic, sexual preference, would feel both welcome and comfortable at Stony Brook upon arrival and during their tenure at the University thereafter.

The existence of a diverse student body and campus faculty/administration does not make for a multicultural university. It is essential that meaningful interactions at all levels of the institution occur.

When examining campus programs and traditions that promote diversity and how they are connected with in-the-classroom learning, we must first consider the types of classes that a first-year student enrolls in. Such "typical" classes include Writing, Math, Science, and Introductory Classes for the Major, FYS 101, FYS 102, and DECs. It is easier for some courses to incorporate campus programs into their curriculum than it is for others. However, due to the large size of these classes, many times there is not an opportunity for discussion or reflection as a class. Courses that typically *do not* promote or encourage attendance at programs include Math and Sciences courses that freshmen take.

A Diversity Peer Education Class exists and it is facilitated by the Division of Campus Residences. It is an academic class about diversity that is taught by Student Affairs professionals. However, first-semester freshmen do not enroll in this class and a very limited number of second-semester freshmen take it.

The Undergraduate College First Year Seminars (FYS) 101 and 102 consist of an average of 20 students per class. These seminars provide fertile ground for helping students 1) connect in-the-classroom learning with existing campus programs and traditions and 2) make connections with their out-of-the-classroom experiences to their formal learning.

Many other academic courses about human diversity are one-dimensional (or monocultural), reflecting a single aspect of diversity. Examples include academic courses about a particular ethnic group, a single religion, or a specific gender. There should be more course offerings about intersections of the dimensions of human diversity (e.g., age and gender; ethnicity, religion, and gender; class and ethnicity). This would help students make connections between multiple aspects of the human experience.

The existence of many like, but distinct student clubs and organizations supports identity development, but is also a challenge to achieving multiculturalism where there is cross-cultural engagement and learning.

### Opportunities and Challenges

#### Challenges

- Numerous campus programming opportunities exist; however there is no one, central, consistent way to advertise and promote these opportunities to faculty, staff, and students.
- Given the size and content of classes for first year students (many large-size classes exist), class discussion is at times logistically challenging.
- Programming is a part of the Undergraduate Colleges curriculum. For many of the FYS 101 classes, students are required to attend a certain number of programs. Some of these programs are UGC specific, and some are campus programs. However, the quantity of programs that promote cultural diversity and the content of these programs vary between each UGC. Since students usually have a list of programs to choose from, going to the program that incorporates cultural diversity is not guaranteed.
- Other than a mandatory Diversity lesson in the FYS 101 class, and although the Colleges all offer various programming, the topic of Diversity is not purposefully implemented by intentional design across all of the Undergraduate Colleges.
- The comfort level and knowledge of diversity issues varies amongst instructors.
- Some faculty members do not value the Undergraduate Colleges, and the FYS 101 and FYS 102 Seminars. Many are not aware of the existence of these initiatives for our first-year students.
- At present, there is no commitment to fund and support the implementation of a comprehensive assessment of students concerning diversity issues (at all class levels).
- It is not clear where diversity stands in the minds of faculty and staff among the many competing priorities at the University.
- There is a lack of an ongoing communication forum among entities in the University that deal with, or are impacted by, diversity issues.

## Opportunities

- For the first time in the U.S., a majority of freshman students nationwide (52.3%) reported an interest in improving their understanding of other countries and cultures and more than a third of freshman (36.7%) listed helping promote racial understanding as a personal goal (64% at Black colleges). By providing more intentional giving more attention to first year students, Stony Brook University has an opportunity to positively impact their perceptions about cultural differences and subsequently help increase retention rates.
- Attendance at certain cultural programs may be encouraged through a class or even a part of the class's curriculum. Beyond simply attending these events, instructors need to do a better job offering a venue for students to process, discuss, reflect, and connect that program to their in-the-classroom learning.
- There is an opportunity to provide interdisciplinary initiatives that promote a campus climate for students that views diversity in a positive light, both in and out of the classroom.
- There is a cadre of faculty, staff and students on campus who are interested in issues of diversity and would work to respond to recommendations proffered as a result of a comprehensive assessment survey concerning diversity issues. There are existing undergraduate offices and programs at the University that would benefit from the information gathered through such a survey.
- The administration, analysis, and recommendations of a comprehensive diversity assessment survey have many potential ramifications, not the least of which could be increased retention.

## Sources of Evidence

List of Programs offered by the Undergraduate Colleges (campus-wide and Undergraduate College-specific). Many of the FYS 101 classes require students to attend or participate in these programs. However, the programming options are not limited to diversity. Students can access a complete list of upcoming programs by visiting: <http://ws.cc.stonybrook.edu/sb/colleges>:

- *Our Way* Exhibition Presentation- 1<sup>st</sup> North American Exhibition of work of young Aboriginal artists from Australia's Northeast. (ACH, GLS)
- Film Series at Tabler- included a series on immigrants in the USA. Films included: *House of Sand and Fog*; *El Norte*; and *In America*. (ACH)
- Trip to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island (GLS)
- They Too Shall Remember- a lecture and discussion about the Holocaust. (GLS)
- The Color Purple Broadway Trip (GLS)
- Invisible Children- showed documentary about children of war in Northern Uganda and representatives from the documentary came to campus for a program and discussion. (HDV & GLS)
- Women's History Month Game Show (HDV)
- ERQ Around the World (GLS)
- Lessons from Oaxaca: Teacher Organizing in Latin America and New York (GLS)
- The Best of all Worlds- The lecture will link healthcare for Americans (particularly Hispanic Americans), cultural proficiency, transnationalism, and the environment. (GLS)
- Muslim-Christian Relations in the 21st Century- The lecture will discuss tension, conflict, and reconciliation in Christian-Muslim relations. (GLS)
- GLS Holiday Celebration (GLS)
- Study Abroad Informational Program (LDS, GLS)
- Annual Black History Month Trivia Bowl (ITS)
- The Year of the Rat Celebration (ITS)
- Transhumanism- How technology is transforming what it means to be human. (ITS)
- Breaking Down Stereotypes (SSO)
- You're in America, Now Speak English (SSO)
- The Unique Art of Mendhi (SSO)

The following experiences provide opportunities for first-year students to learn about the University's behavioral standards that promote an open and civil campus community:

- New Student Orientation - Community standards of behavior are discussed with students and their parents.
- New Student Convocation - Community values about valuing human diversity and behavioral expectations are addressed. Stony Brook's Community Statement is printed in the Convocation program booklet and recited during this event.
- Residence Hall Meetings - Resident Hall staff (including Resident Assistants) address behavioral expectations at meetings for new students.
- Experience Stony Brook (Program for New Students) includes a presentation by the Campus Judiciary and University Police
- Stony Brook Welcome Center (website) contains links to important policies and procedures: Student Conduct Code, Residence Hall Conduct Code, The Student Handbook, and an overview of Student Responsibilities in the classroom and when interacting with faculty, instructors, staff, and other students.

In-person interviews were conducted with several Undergraduate College Advisors for an informal conversation. Many of them said we do a good job promoting these programs and/or incorporating them into our class curriculum, but many acknowledged that there is no formal or intentional processing that takes place. It may be informal depending on the individual instructor.

The Evidence Library contains very little in-depth information about aspects of human diversity. Those documents that contain relevant information include Stony Brook University's *Mission Statement*, *Undergraduate Bulletin*, *HSC Undergraduate Bulletin*, and the *Undergraduate Student Handbook*.

FOETec's Student Surveys and the Faculty/Staff. Survey responses support the points identified.

A survey of a randomly-selected group of faculty, students, and staff (Main Campus). They were asked to candidly respond to questions about how well Stony Brook promotes diversity and student learning (both inside and outside of the classroom).

Individual interviews with Stony Brook University students and faculty (Health Sciences Center).

The Diversity Dimension Committee. Most committee members have first-hand experience working to promote diversity and address diversity issues. The experiences and perceptions of the committee members were also considered.

*2007-2008 American Freshman Survey*, Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), UCLA

*Campus Climate Survey*, Stony Brook University (2007)

Recommended Grade: B-

Recommended Action Items:

- Provide more opportunities for students to learn about and share their diversity and world views. (*High priority*)

To augment the current Undergraduate College's FYS 101 curriculum, it is recommended that all first-year students (residents and commuters alike) be required to participate in a two-part diversity awareness program as described: Part A consisting of several vignettes modeled after our current "Swallow This" performances that focus on how college students experience diversity and students' responsibility to maintain community values that promote the fair and equal treatment of all members of our campus community and

Part B consisting of small group discussions and interactions facilitated by individuals from our campus who are equipped to provide diversity training (e.g., Diversity Peer Educators, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Diversity Fellows, volunteer faculty/staff, and student interns).

These activities would allow our first-year students to process what the vignettes depict, share their perspectives and cultural backgrounds, and learn how they can apply what they have learned to life at Stony Brook. It is recommended that these programs be held in the residence halls setting so that students can readily apply what they learn to their living/learning environment. This approach would also help solidify the relationship between first-year commuters and their respective Undergraduate Colleges.

Recommended key coordinators of this initiative: Office of Diversity and Affirmative Action, Diversity Peer Education Program/Residential Programs, Office of Multicultural Affairs.

- Identify and implement ways to attract, retain, and promote a more diverse faculty and staff. (*High priority*)

An institution's diversity should be evident by the composition of its faculty, staff, and students. However, Stony Brook is far less diverse within its faculty and at the mid-management and upper administrative levels. It makes a big statement to all students (including first-year students) when they can see that our faculty, administrators, and staff reflect the ethnic, cultural, and social diversity that also exists within our student body.

- As part of the curriculum, faculty should relate Human Diversity to academic disciplines. (*High priority*)

Discussions about Human Diversity and its implications for academic disciplines should be included in the formal curriculum so that Stony Brook can provide a more integrated learning experience for first-year students. It is recommended that faculty explore the connections between aspects of human diversity (cultural and social dimensions) and the evolution of their disciplines. For example, even in the hard sciences like physics, Nobel Prize winner C. N. Yang has noted the existence of cultural influences on the scientific discovery he has made with T. D. Lee in nuclear physics.

- Examine existing campus diversity programs/traditions and connect them with academic experiences. (*High priority*)

Strategic cultural (diversity) programming combined with academic courses can raise critical questions in ways that open up dialogue that goes beyond polite cultural celebrations that typically characterize many of Stony Brook's cultural programs. It is recommended that existing campus programs and traditions that promote diversity be examined and connected with in-the-classroom learning for first-year students. This will help students to better process their out-of-the-classroom experiences and make connections to their formal learning.

- Administer a comprehensive assessment survey concerning diversity issues at all class levels. (*High priority*)

This would be as a first step toward more informed planning in this area. The survey should be administered in the Fall Semester so that the results can be analyzed in the Spring semester and programs/changes implemented in the following year. The level of understanding that Stony Brook students, in particular freshman, have concerning diversity issues and inclusion is not well known. Most of the information discussed is largely anecdotal, based on a small number individual case experiences, and based on assumptions related to the diversity demographics of the Stony Brook student population. Critical analysis of the results of this survey could be utilized to create a viable, more informed plan for insuring that students from diverse backgrounds, e.g., cultural, intellectual, racial, ethnic, sexual preference, would feel both welcome and comfortable at Stony Brook upon arrival and during their tenure at the University thereafter. This would be as a first step toward more informed planning in this area.

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programs/changes implemented in the following year.

- Create greater on-going campus-wide awareness about community behavioral standards (marketing). (*Medium priority*)

First year students learn about Stony Brook's commitment to maintaining an open campus community and standards for acceptable behavior on several occasions within the first month of the Fall semester (i.e., New Student Orientation, New Student Convocation, and a Residence Hall Meetings). These standards need to be highlighted and reinforced throughout the first year and not just at the beginning of the Fall semester. Although Stony Brook's Community Statement is printed in the Convocation program booklet and recited during the New Student Convocation, and first-year students attend related Experience Stony Brook programs, they could benefit from more verbal information from their peers about what it means to be a "citizen" of the Stony Brook community.