



Climate for Graduate and Professional Students: Variation by Race and Ethnicity

The Student Affairs Information and Research Office (SAIRO) is the research and assessment office within UCLA's Student Affairs organization. The mission of SAIRO is to support the learning and development of the whole student by providing reliable, timely and useful information about students and their experiences; by developing the capacity of Student Affairs and other stakeholders to collect, interpret, and utilize data to enhance the quality of students' educational experience and environment; and by helping Student Affairs units assess and document the effectiveness of their programs and practices.

**For more information or to submit a data request, please contact the Student Affairs Information and Research Office (SAIRO) at:
(310) 206-8470 or sairo@saonet.ucla.edu.**

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes findings on university and department climate, including perceptions of respect for students, support from program and faculty, level of career support, and relationships both in and outside the department, from the 2010 Student Affairs Graduate and Professional Student Survey. Aspects of climate related to perceived progress are also discussed. Key differences by race/ethnicity are highlighted.

General Climate Findings

Respect for Students – Overall, graduate and professional students agreed that students in their program were respected regardless of race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and political opinions. White students were more likely than graduate students as a whole to agree that they were respected, whereas Black and Latino students were less likely to agree.

Program and Faculty Support – In general, graduate and professional students agreed that they felt supported by their program and faculty. However, Black students were less likely to agree that they felt supported.

Relationships in Department – As a group, graduate and professional students agreed that they had the opportunity make connections with people in their departments and rated them positively. Differences were found for White and Black students; White students were more likely to report opportunities to make connections in their departments and rate them positively, whereas Black students were less likely to report making similar connections.

Connections Outside Department – Overall, graduate and professional students did not agree that they had the opportunity to interact with people outside their department at UCLA. White students were less likely than graduate students as a whole to agree that they had sufficient opportunities to make these connections.

Career Support –As a group, graduate and professional students disagreed that they had received sufficient guidance and assistance on obtaining career related information and support at UCLA. There were no significant differences across the race and ethnicity

categories.

Impact on Progress Findings

Attitudes on Diversity – Most students expressed that others’ attitudes on diversity did not impact their progress. Black and Latino students were more likely than graduate students as a whole to express that others’ attitudes on diversity slowed their progress.

Program Structure –Most students indicated that the program structure did not impact their progress.

Survey Administration & Overall Respondent Demographics

Survey Administration

The 2010 Student Affairs Graduate and Professional Student Survey was administered online in Spring 2010 to all graduate and professional students at UCLA. The survey was designed with a Student Affairs focus and included items related to: perceptions of progress, mental health/wellness, use of time, financial concerns/resources, interactions with others, campus climate, self-ratings of skills, ethics in academia, international student issues, post-graduation plans, sense of community, and improvement of graduate/professional experience. For more information about the survey instrument see: http://www.sairo.ucla.edu/data/efforts_gradsurvey.html.

Overall Respondents

A total of 4,067 students responded to the survey (41% response rate). The sample was generally representative of the overall graduate and professional student population. Female respondents were slightly over-represented compared to the overall graduate and professional student population (53% vs. 48%), as were Asian students (24% vs. 19%). The sample was representative in terms of degree objective and major field. Additional information about the survey results can be found at: http://www.sairo.ucla.edu/data/efforts_gradsurvey.html.

Introduction

The 2010 Student Affairs Graduate and Professional Student Survey is the first campus-wide survey administered by SAIRO targeting graduate and professional students. Climate was chosen as the focus of this report because of its direct relationship with students’ educational experience, learning environment, and progress. The goal of the summary is to provide a “snapshot” and broad perspective of graduate and professional students’ perceptions of the climate at the university and within their departments. We hope that the report serves as a tool to foster discussions on climate and diversity in various departments and graduate serving organizations.

The survey included 26 items addressing various aspects of climate. The items were grouped into scales using factor analysis. The scales included five measures of general climate: 1) respect for students, 2) program and faculty support, 3) relationships with others in the department/program, 4) connections outside the department and 5) career support, as well as two scales measuring the perceived impact of climate on academic progress: 1) others’ attitudes on diversity, and 2) program structure. This report summarizes the results of analysis comparing perceptions of climate across major race/ethnic groupings. The racial and ethnic groups included in the analyses were: Asian American/Pacific Islander, White, American Indian/Alaskan, Black, and Latino. Approximately 4,067 graduate and professional students across all of the departments and divisions responded. Race/Ethnicity data was not provided for some respondents, and not all respondents answered each question, so overall numbers seen in the following charts do not sum to the overall total. The results presented in the text and charts highlight areas of significant difference ($p < .01$). See Table I for a graphical representation of significant findings.

Table 1: Comparison of Mean Differences on Climate and Progress Scales by Racial/Ethnic Groups

Scale	Asian/Pacific Islander	White	American Indian/Alaskan	Black	Latino
General Climate					
Respect for Students		+		-	-
Program and Faculty Support				-	-
Relationships in Department		+		-	
Connections Outside Dept.		-			
Career Support					
Impact on Progress					
Attitudes on Diversity				-	-
Program Structure		-			-

+ = Agreement score above the overall mean on agreement scale

- = Agreement score below the overall mean on agreement scale

Blank = No significant difference from the overall mean on agreement scale

General Climate Findings

This section summarizes the comparisons for the five overall climate items: 1) respect for students, 2) program and faculty support, 3) relationships with others in the department/program, 4) connections outside the department and 5) career support.

Respect for Students

The Respect for Students scale assessed students' perceptions of whether students in their program are respected regardless of their race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and political opinions.

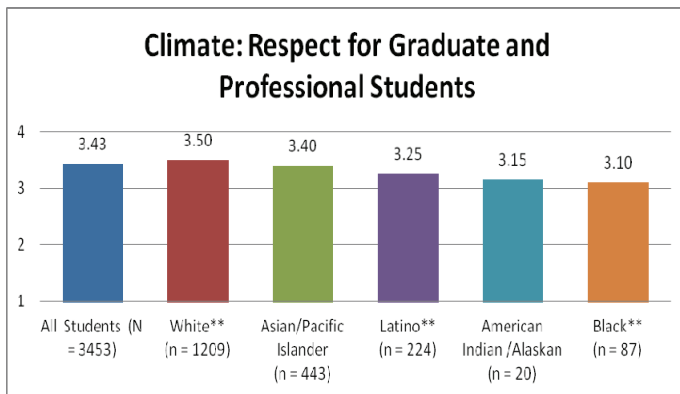
The mean score for all groups fell on the "agree" end of the spectrum (see Figure 1). White students had significantly higher mean scores on the scale

compared to the average of all graduate students; indicating that they were more likely to agree that students in their division/school were respected regardless of race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, and political opinions. Whereas, Black and Latino students had significantly lower mean scores; indicating that they were less likely to agree that students were respected.

Respect for Students Scale:

- Composed of five items
An example item is: "Graduate/professional students in my program are respected regardless of their race, ethnicity, or citizenship."
- Four-point scale ranging from one being "Strongly disagree" to four being "Strongly agree."
- Reliability: $\alpha = .88$

Figure 1. Mean Scores by Race/Ethnicity on Respect for Students Scale



Scale: 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree

** Significantly different from the mean for all students ($p < .01$)

Program and Faculty Support

The Program and Faculty Support scale assessed students' perceptions of faculty support for research and career goals, equity, and rapport between students and faculty.

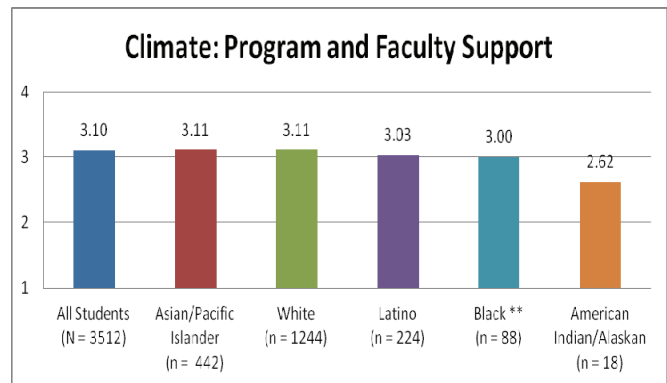
Program and Faculty Support Scale:

- Composed of five items.
- An example item is: "My graduate/professional program supports my research/professional goals."
- Four-point scale ranging from one being "Strongly disagree" to four being "Strongly agree."
- Reliability: $\alpha = .81$

All mean scores across the different groups were in the "Agree" category on the scale assessing perceptions of faculty support, with the exception of American Indian/Alaskan students whose scores were in the "Disagree" category (see Figure 2).

Black students had significantly lower mean scores on the scale compared to the average of all graduate students, indicating that they perceived lower levels of support for research and career goals, equity, and rapport between students and faculty than all other groups.

Figure 2. Mean Scores by Race/Ethnicity on Program and Faculty Support Scale



Scale: 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree

** Significantly different from the mean for all students ($p < .01$)

Relationships in Department

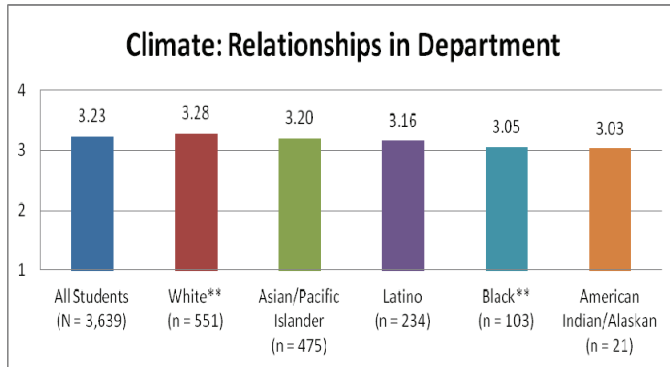
The Relationships in Department scale assessed students' opportunities for connections and interactions with others in their department/program, and the quality of those interactions.

All of the scores across the different racial/ethnic groups fell into the category of "Agree" on the scale (see Figure 3). White students had significantly higher mean scores than the average of other graduate students, indicating that they perceived more opportunities to connect and interact with others in their department, and rated these interactions as positive more so than their counterparts across all other ethnic groups. Black students were less likely than graduate students as a whole to agree that they had opportunities to make connections in their departments/programs and rate them positively.

Relationships in Department Scale:

- Composed of four-items.
- An example item is: "My relationships and interactions with other graduate/professional students in my program are positive."
- Four-point scale ranging from one being "Strongly disagree" to four being "Strongly agree."
- Reliability: $\alpha = .80$

Figure 3. Mean Scores by Race/Ethnicity on Relationships in Department Scale



Scale: 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree

** Significantly different from the mean for all students ($p < .01$)

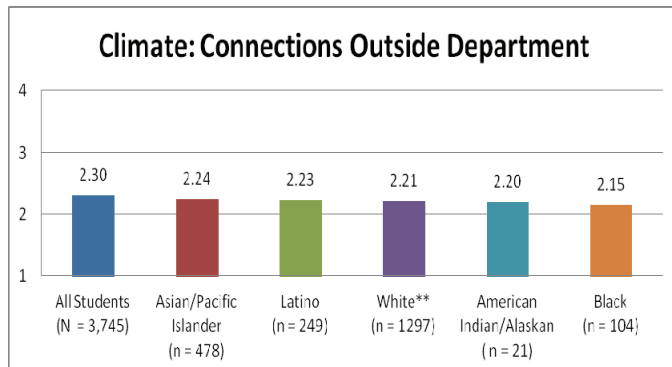
Connections Outside Department

The aim of the Connections Outside Department scale was to assess students' perceived opportunities to interact with people outside of their department at UCLA.

Connections Outside Department Scale:

- Composed of two items.
An example item is: "I have sufficient opportunity to interact socially and make connections with people at UCLA outside my department/program."
- Scale ranged from one being "Strongly disagree" to four being "Strongly agree."
- Reliability: $\alpha = .88$

Figure 4. Mean Scores by Race/Ethnicity on Connections Outside Department Scale



Scale: 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree

** Significantly different from the mean for all students ($p < .01$)

All of the mean scores for connections outside department fell in the "Disagree" end of the spectrum (see Figure 4).

White students were statistically less likely than graduate students as a whole to agree that they had sufficient opportunities to make connections and interact with people outside of their departments at UCLA.

Career Support

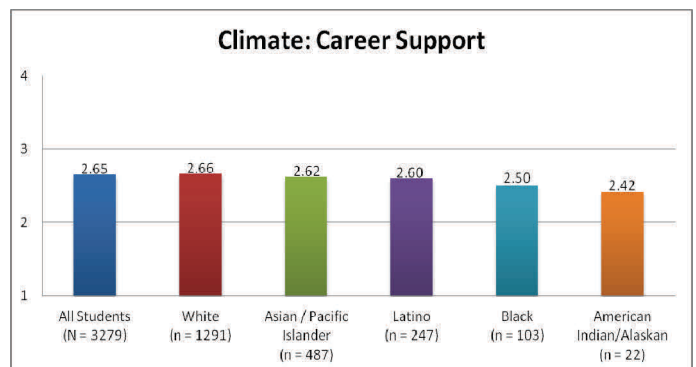
The Career Support scale assessed students' perceptions of having received sufficient guidance and assistance on obtaining career related information and support at UCLA.

Career Support Scale:

- Composed of three items.
An example item is: "At UCLA, I have received sufficient guidance/assistance with obtaining information on how to pursue professional development opportunities."
- Scale ranged from one being "Strongly disagree" to four being "Strongly agree."
- Reliability: $\alpha = .88$

The average response in all groups fell slightly below the category "Agree," indicating that students generally did not feel they received sufficient guidance and assistance on obtaining career related information and support at UCLA (see Figure 5). There were no significant differences between students' mean scores across the different race and ethnicity groups at $p < .01$.

Figure 5. Mean Scores by Race/Ethnicity on Career Support Scale



Scale: 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree

Perceived Impact on Degree Progress

The following section discusses how others' attitudes on diversity, as well as program structure affect students' perceptions of their academic progress.

Attitudes on Diversity

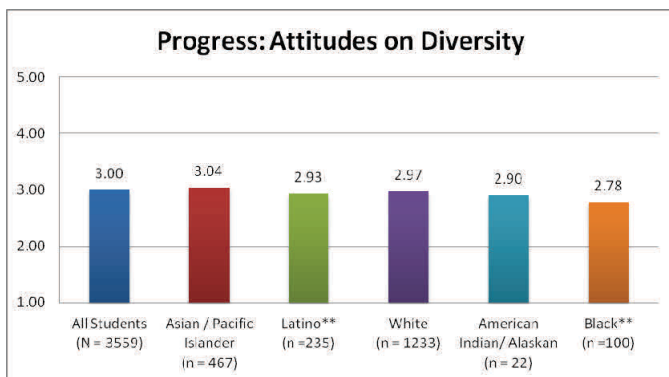
The Attitudes on Diversity scale assessed perceptions of how others' attitudes on race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion, and sexual orientation have affected students' academic progress during the last year.

Attitudes on Diversity Scale:

- Composed of four items.
An example item is: "To what extent have others' attitudes your race/ethnicity/nationality affected your progress during the past year (i.e. previous 12 months)?"
- Scale ranged from one being "significantly slowed my progress," to five being "significantly improved my progress."
- Reliability: $\alpha = .88$

The average response by students across all areas on the scale was that others' attitudes toward diversity did not impact their progress (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Mean Scores by Race/Ethnicity on Attitudes on Diversity Scale



Scale: 1=significantly slowed progress to 5=significantly improved progress

**Significantly different from the mean for all students ($p < .01$)

However, Black and Latino students had significantly lower mean scores than the average of all students, indicating that they perceived their academic progress was somewhat slowed due to others' attitudes on diversity.

Program Structure

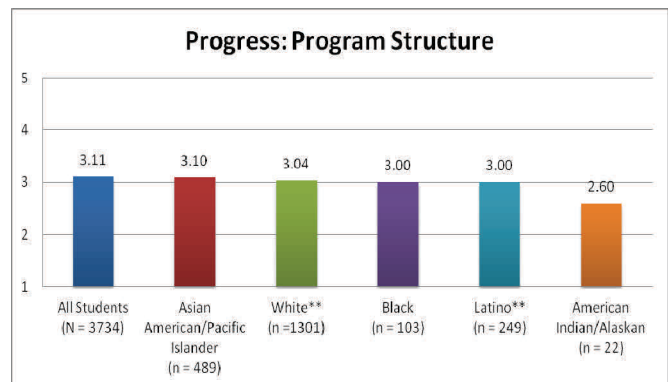
The Program Structure scale assessed perceptions of how faculty availability, program requirements and structures, and course scheduling affected students' academic progress during the last year.

Program Structure Scale:

- Composed of three items.
An example item is "To what extent has availability by faculty affected your progress during the past year (i.e. previous twelve months)?"
- Scale ranged from one being "significantly slowed my progress," to five being "significantly improved my progress."
- Reliability: $\alpha = .70$

While the average responses fell into the "no impact on my progress" category for students across all of the different racial/ethnic groups, White and Latino students had a statistically lower mean score from all graduate students, implying that the program structure may be perceived as more salient for these groups than others (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Mean Scores by Race/Ethnicity on Program Structure Scale



Scale: 1=significantly slowed progress to 5=significantly improved progress

**Significantly different from the mean for all students ($p < .01$)

Conclusion

The findings illustrate that in general graduate and professional students across the different ethnic groups had positive perceptions about the climate in their department and at UCLA. While there were significant differences, the differences were usually in the degrees of agreement within one category. For example, while the average response on the Respect scale fell under the category “Agree,” Black and Latino students were less likely to agree. However, as a group their average response still fell under the category “Agree.”

Taken together, the findings illustrate that as a group ethnic minority students experience a “cooler” climate (i.e., less likely to experience a supportive climate). Black and Latino students were less likely than their peers to agree that students were respected regardless of affiliated social groups (e.g. race and religion), perceive support by their program and faculty, and have opportunities to build relationships with people in their department. While often not statistically significant (likely due to a small sample size), Native American student scores suggest that they also experience this “cooler” climate.

Black and Latino students were also more likely to perceive that attitudes on diversity have slowed their progress. While the relationship between perceived climate and academic progress was not directly assessed, the data demonstrate that there is a possibility that diversity issues could be hindering the academic progress of Black and Latino students.

In contrast, White students were more likely to agree that students were respected regardless of affiliated social groups, perceive opportunities to build relationships with people in their department. Interestingly, they are less likely to perceive opportunities to build relationships with people outside the department.