Views and Perspectives on Diversity and Inclusion: Voices of Students, Faculty, and Staff

Diversity and Inclusion Study Working Group
President’s Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

The Graduate Center
The City University of New York

Fall 2020
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Project Background

The Graduate Center is committed to “promoting a vital and supportive climate that removes barriers, affords opportunity, and celebrates differences across race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, age, ability, and socioeconomic status.” To add to this ongoing effort, an in-depth inquiry of student, faculty, and staff perceptions and experiences of the climate for diversity and inclusion at The Graduate Center is being conducted.

This study, developed by the Diversity and Inclusion Study Working Group on behalf of the President’s Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion (see Appendix), employed a combination of focus groups and individual interviews to examine how graduate students, staff, and faculty view the institutional climate for diversity, which refers to the experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and feelings that define the institution as seen from the perspective of individuals from different backgrounds or groups. Diversity is less a characteristic of heterogeneity and more a representation of “a powerful change in the environment … an imperative that must be engaged if institutions are to be successful in a society that is ever more pluralistic” (Smith, 2009, p. 55). Such a transformational change requires a “concerted effort that involves the integration of ideas of faculty, staff, students and administrators in creating a climate that is conducive to learning” (Williams, Conyers & Garcia, 2018) and which serves to promote equity, social justice, and respect for all institutional members.

Contemporary studies of the institutional climate for diversity have investigated the behavioral and psychological dimensions. The behavioral dimension of the institutional climate for diversity consists of the extent of interactions or contact experiences between and among members of different groups (Hurtado, Carter & Kardia, 1998; Williams, 2013). The psychological dimension of the institutional climate for diversity refers to the degree to which individuals perceive discrimination or conflict in the institution or perceive institutional support for and commitment to diversity (Hurtado et al., 1998; Williams, 2013). Institutions need to understand the evolving definition and implications of diversity, how different groups understand issues of diversity, and how institutional practices align with values to protect or change inequity (Williams, 2013). In the current study we focus on the psychological dimension by providing a critical qualitative examination of faculty, staff, and graduate students’ perceptions of The Graduate Center’s climate for diversity and inclusion.

Methodological Approach

We employed a qualitative design using focus groups and one-on-one (individual) interviews to explore the views of key stakeholders representing Graduate Center staff, faculty, and graduate students from the following social identity groups: i) race/ethnicity, ii) gender identity, iii) immigration status, iv) ability, v) sexual identity/orientation, vi) religious affiliation, vii) age,

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1 Social identity refers to those aspects of a person that are defined in terms of their membership in a group based on a shared category (Deaux, 1994). As Deaux suggested, “We believe that we share numerous features with other members of the category and that, to some degree, events that are relevant to the group as a whole also have significance for the individual member.”
Participants were asked the following three questions in both focus groups and individual interviews:
1. With respect to diversity and inclusion at The Graduate Center, what are the things that we are doing well?
2. With respect to diversity and inclusion at The Graduate Center, what are the things we could do better?
3. Have you had any positive or negative experiences during you time at The Graduate Center related to issues of diversity and inclusion?

Recruitment

We utilized a non-probability sampling technique to recruit a convenience sample of Graduate Center students, faculty, and staff. Potential participants were recruited through flyers posted throughout the GC, digital signs, publishing on the GC website, emails to EOs and APOs, an all-student email blast, and posting on Facebook and Twitter accounts run by The Graduate Center.

Data Collection

A research team of three graduate students from diverse backgrounds and trained in qualitative research methodology conducted focus groups and individual interviews.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted separately for students, faculty, and staff at The Graduate Center April 23rd–27th, 2018. Five staff members, seven faculty members, and 13 students participated in eight 90-minute focus groups.

Interviews

We conducted in-depth individual interviews with those who had expressed an interest in participating in the study but were not able to join one of the focus groups. As many faculty members and students are away during the summer, we paused data collection over the summer and resumed conducting a second round of individual interviews in fall 2018. In total, 10 interviews with staff, four with faculty, and seven with students were conducted.

Sample

After conducting focus groups and interviews, we collected data from 46 participants. Of the study participants, 15 were staff members, 11 faculty members, and 20 graduate students. Below are the tallies and percentages of participants by race, gender, impairment/disability,

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2 As a proxy of interest in the study, the link to sign up to participate in a focus group for staff was clicked 178 times, the link for faculty was clicked 149 times, and the link for students was clicked 400 times. Through these links, nine staff members, 12 faculty, and 63 students expressed interest in participating in the study by signing up for a focus group.
sexual identity, and religious affiliation as self-identified by study participants. Note that several participants identified more than one disability/impairment, while some chose to leave this survey question blank; all impairments reported by participants were included in the tally, but blank responses are not included in the corresponding graph. Lastly, all but three study participants were U.S. citizens, two were documented non-resident aliens (visa holder), and one a permanent resident alien (“Green Card” holder).

Demographic Information of Participants

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<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
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* Includes 10 blank responses.
**Sexual Identity**

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<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
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**Religious Affiliation**

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<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
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**Data Analysis**

Through focus groups and individual interviews, we collected over 30 hours of audio recordings. The audio recordings of the focus group and interview sessions were transcribed, and supplementary notes were organized by participant groups. We used the software program Transana to aid in the analysis of the transcripts.

The research team conducted qualitative analysis using grounded theory to identify prevalent and meaningful themes. The transcripts of the focus groups and interviews were divided amongst the research team to read and re-read for common or repeated themes that emerged from the questions posed during data collection.

**Snapshot of the Findings**

Below we provide a snapshot of the findings with regard to the three target questions. However, it is important that readers keep in mind that the excerpts presented below reflect the fact that the sample was predominately white, cisgender, and heterosexual. Despite this, we have attempted to present a range of voices and perspectives. We will revisit this as well as other issues in the discussion.
**WITH RESPECT TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT THE GRADUATE CENTER WHAT ARE THE THINGS THAT WE ARE DOING WELL?**

In some respects, respondents felt that The Graduate Center is demonstrating its commitment to promoting a climate that is supportive of diversity and inclusion. The efforts that The Graduate Center makes to highlight issues of diversity and inclusion is important to the community:

*Having a conversation about diversity is very important because it opens doors to lots of other conversations ... starting this study. That’s actually a good thing.* –Staff member, white, heterosexual, ciswoman

Respondents also noted how The Graduate Center works to draw attention to issues of diversity and inclusion in various ways:

*I’ve noticed some attention to matters of diversity and inclusion, both in terms of the identity of people involved and subject matter in public programming ... I know that different extracurricular type groups like the Futures Initiative and the Teaching and Learning Center and things like that have used their platforms to bring issues of diversity and equity to the floor. So those public programming opportunities have been used effectively.* –Staff member, Asian/Pacific Islander, heterosexual, ciswoman

This attention to diversity extends beyond the identities of those who work at The Graduate Center to include intellectual diversity:

*It does seem like there are a lot of different programs that not only represent special interests, but also steps into different academic interests and I have been able to find the classes or course works that have delved into areas that they can be pretty specific and narrow, but are sufficiently eclectic that I think that the school has definitely supported intellectual diversity to some extent, at least with regards to diversity of subjects of interest.* –Doctoral student, Black/African American, gay, cisman

A faculty member reflected on the long history of The Graduate Center, noting that the school has diversified and is moving in the right direction. Respondents felt that The Graduate Center is actively working to diversify the student body:

*In my life, there wasn’t even a word for being gay. And I mean, a long time ago. Being openly gay as a faculty person, I find it isn’t like everybody’s supporting me. It’s that I’m really able to connect with, and interact with, and do scholarship with people on a level that I if I were in a place ... what it means is that there’s a whole level of openness that wouldn’t otherwise exist ... I don’t think the Graduate Center did a lot in that area, but The Graduate Center did some in that area. You know, fairly early on the gay and lesbian studies program and so on. So, it’s not like The Graduate Center hasn’t been there. But I think the thing that I appreciate is not the direct, you know, “It’s OK, I’m gay.” It’s not that at all. It’s that I can work with students in a way that I think is way deeper and richer than I can imagine what it would be like if it weren’t otherwise. So, I mean, I think*
that’s, which is also why I think it’s important to open that up further. –Faculty member, white, gay, gender nonconforming

There’s been emphasis placed on admitting people of color into our programs, and that being part of the discussion. –Doctoral student, white, heterosexual, ciswoman

Although some respondents have misgivings about the diversity of the faculty to teach a diverse student body (discussed in greater detail below), recent efforts to diversify the faculty have been noticed:

The most positive thing I can say is that the current set of hires that they’ve made that were fairly diverse. I think part of that had to do with the loosening up the practice so that they can hire people who weren’t full professors in other places. –Faculty member, Black/African American, lesbian, ciswoman

In particular, respondents appreciated the efforts individuals undertook to support diverse students:

The female faculty are very good … They take a great interest in their students and the females that they get into, that they advise; I can tell they’re taking care of them. Through my discussions with the students themselves and my interaction with the female faculty, they take them under their wing and they’re pretty outspoken … They take the advisement of a student at a very personal level, to many degrees. –Staff member, Asian American/Pacific Islander, heterosexual, cisman

I have been to two universities as a student, and later as an adjunct … this is the first time that I’ve been able to take my first course with a faculty member who is woman of color. The content of that course is relevant to that, and her approach is relevant to that. And when I look back at these other experiences, it’s very different. –Master’s student, white, heterosexual, ciswoman

Respondents made note of programs, services, and accommodations made to attend to the needs of The Graduate Center’s diverse population. Specifically, respondents mentioned the lactation room, meditation room, the parental leave policy, and the Emergency Fund for students who unexpectedly face adverse circumstances. However, while these initiatives are valuable to The Graduate Center’s faculty, staff, and students, many respondents were unaware of them and spoke of the need to advertise these resources.

** WITH respect to diversity and inclusion at the Graduate Center what could we do better? **

A number of respondents mentioned that discussion about diversity and inclusion remains at a superficial level:

Well where I truly believe that we are doing well is making a good presentation … We definitely say the right things and we know what we should be doing, whether that
actually gets done or not, that’s the thing … Like when they have the community board meetings, and the higher-ups find delight in telling people that we are on target and we’ve definitely increased our diversity protocol and everything is hunky dory … I’m not impressed with the progress overall. Coming to CUNY, I thought maybe, it would be here. I tried private industry, I tried nonprofit, so I gave education an opportunity. And I thought maybe I would see it. Again, based on my experiences in life, I just wanted to see it before I left here. You know? But I don’t think that’s ever going to happen like that.

–Staff member, Native American/American Indian, heterosexual, cisman

When I walk into the building, I think what’s most noticeable is that it’s the brown people are the ones working. They’re around. This building is not all white. Right? But they’re the ones that are serving us lunch. They’re the ones that are, you know … literally the first face you see … OK, there’s one white security guard, but the rest are all Black or are brown. I don’t know if there’s any Latinos, right? But you see that, and then you come into the building, and then you go see your APO. I think a lot of them are POC [people of color] … I think that for me, that’s just really startling. That the class and colors are really obvious when you walk in the building. –Doctoral student, Hispanic, gay, cisman

I think in my personal opinion, to talk about addressing the historic marginality and oppression through the lens of diversity is really just a way of making the conversation more palatable. So I can say, “I am addressing diversity,” instead of having to say, “Oh, our society has oppressed you, so I am actually addressing that.” –Doctoral student, white, gay, cisman

In several focus groups, participants raised the potential of implementing trainings to educate community members on how their words and actions affect the climate of inclusion at the Graduate Center, in the way that sexual harassment trainings are now required for almost everyone working at the GC. Some participants relayed their perception that those who need this kind of training are often older and disinterested in altering their behavior, and the prevailing attitude that older people cannot change.

Just in general, like, I don’t think anyone who is transgender here at the Grad Center is comfortable, not just me. And again, I just expect transphobia. I did my dissertation on LGBTQ people, and some at the Grad Center, and many have been trans. They have horror stories upon horror stories of how they’ve been treated in their departments, in this space, here. They have done complaints and they have done whatever. No one should have to go through the harassment that they’ve gone through … They’ll say things like, “Oh, it’s just a math department.” … They’ll be like, “You know, they’re just from other countries. And so, they just don’t know this trans stuff or whatever.” But it’s really one of those categories that I think people think is new, diversity-wise, and where I think we have no traction here at the Grad Center … They’ve been resistant. It’s just scoffing it off as this absent-minded foolishness. But It’s not. They know exactly what kind of effect that has … It is a kind of routine violence that accumulates that then ends up in people dropping out or feeling inferior or whatever. The reason they focus on the domestic violence issue in the training is because those are the things that are rare and extreme. They don’t want to talk about the things that are daily and that are gnawing at you. Because then that would be actually addressing something that everyone goes through …
daily, whether it’s ableism or racism affecting them or whatever. It’s so enormous of a problem. –Doctoral student, white, lesbian, agender

Several study participants pointed out how The Graduate Center does not seem to be aware that by not taking its duty to accommodate people with disabilities seriously, it communicates that it is not an inclusive institution.

I had a class with a student who had a hard time reading because of a degenerative eye condition ... and the faculty member made it clear that there were theoretically places to go that they could get all of the readings, but certainly didn’t make a very big effort to make it easy for the student to have those readings. It was all on that person. –Staff member, white, heterosexual, cisman

Well the entire second floor of the library is not accessible. That stupid elevator breaks down all the time ... I mean, talking about architecture and class and ability, I feel like this entire building and institution is setup assuming a certain type of student, right?... Upper middle-class, typically white, typically male student, able-bodied. –Doctoral student, Asian/Pacific Islander, queer, cisman

Faculty, staff, and students all noted the lack of diversity amongst faculty at The Graduate Center. Although efforts to hire a more diverse faculty has yielded results, one participant articulates clearly that more still needs to be done:

I am recalling some numbers that I was looking at a month or two ago, I was looking back at the Diversity Task Force report from few years ago, that Robert was the chair of. And I was looking at the response from [sic. the Chancellor]$, who was telling the percentage of racially diverse faculty had increased from something like 7% to 14% or maybe 8% to 16%, but it was like double, double in very small number, something like 7, 14% over 20 years, from like 1995 to 2015 ... But it is pathetic, I feel like it was a very sad number to champion. –Doctoral student, Asian/Pacific Islander, queer, cisman

Study participants repeatedly brought up the need to attend to the diversity and inclusivity of The Graduate Center throughout a student’s tenure from matriculation through graduation. Participants pointed out that beyond the desire to see a more diverse faculty, there is a need for a sense of connection and support between faculty and students in order to address the retention of diverse students:

So, one of the things that we have talked about and I brought up even to our diversity committee is the social distance between individuals of different races. So, I don’t certainly speak for all of African Americans but I may walk into a room with someone who is not Black, particularly someone who is White and older, and I immediately have my guard up. I want to do like all these ... like I am coming in, I need to demonstrate to you how smart I am, like you should actually work with me, and I already sense that you’re disinclined to work with me, so I’m going to be super friendly ... I don’t know if I can trust you, there are all these different dynamics that are happening and I feel like  

$ It was the GC president who responded.
that same thing may be happening with the professor. Like, “Oh, am I going to say something that’s going to offend this guy?” ... These different dynamics are plain, and I think we need faculty that understand that: Look, we live in a world, we have these different prejudices, or notions, or whatever. As a faculty member, it is going to be my job—not the student’s—my job, to break through that. Say, “OK, I told you that I have an open-door policy, and you came by, my door was shut. You didn’t knock.” I am like, since you should have knocked, since you didn’t, I am going to open up my door, walk out and grab you and be like, “Hey, what’s happening?” I, as a faculty member, I am going to make that effort to say that I want to draw you in as students, I want to retain diverse students. —Doctoral student, African American/Black, gay, cisman

Not every student of color that walks through the door is able to leave in a reasonable amount of time, right? Because they don’t have the resources. I think that there has to be a push within each program that focuses on how do we not only retain students, you know like the recruitment process is more transparent and we’re able to bring in more students of color, and then how do we retain them? So this idea of retention and truly following through, whether it’s creating a mentorship program that doesn’t necessarily target them so it can be for all students. But you have these mechanisms in place to address what students will experience along the way in order to make sure that you don’t have a ridiculous attrition rate and aside from that, just having people fall by the wayside and end up being, you know, non-matriculating because of finance. —Faculty member, Black/African American, heterosexual, ciswoman

It’s less that I want to see people like myself, because that’s OK, you can’t see that all the time. It’s the perspective of the professor that matters. If they’re very vocal and verbal about their pedagogy and why it’s radical and why it’s inclusive, you can deal with the fact that not everyone’s got your particular intersection, but that the idea is just to approximate some kind of validation for everybody. —Doctoral student, white, lesbian, agender

Beyond the need for mentoring, students expressed their desire for faculty to be attuned to the impact of their behaviors on people other than themselves:

Faculty are human beings and there is just a resistance to examining white privilege here. Even people who should have a critical consciousness around these issues; there’s a disconnect between their work and then the way they actually mentor students ... So there’ll be faculty who published like race work that’s sometimes, that’s a critical lens, but then they don’t translate that into their interactions with students. I don’t know if this is that they don’t have the experience, they don’t know it or they’re just lacking reflexivity or what. I don’t know what exactly it is. But I think whenever you don’t see yourself represented among the faculty, it becomes challenging to therefore consider yourself a scholar and that it’s a feasible track for you. So there’s a little bit of modeling in that way and a little bit of shared experience that I think needs to be part of the mentoring relationship. —Doctoral student, white, queer, ciswoman
I’ve also seen students just destroyed by faculty comments and it takes them years to recover … Like being told that you’re a horrible writer and you don’t have the ability to communicate intellectual ideas in writing … like for that particular student [of color], that was coming from a faculty member who’s very traditional and has a very limited way of understanding how you be a scholar … that particular student was then able to go find a faculty of color and the faculty of color is able to re-contextualize the comments in terms of racism, like not being able to understand different ways of using language. But that student, they still carry those comments around with them. So I mean graduate school is hard enough without having faculty be the ones that are actively undermining you. I happen to see it more with students of color. In our program, the people who are sailing through and who are getting tenure-track jobs are all straight white men.

—Doctoral student, white, queer, ciswoman

Respondents also noted that more actions that lead to concrete, institutional and cultural changes need to be implemented in order to respond to and cultivate a diverse and inclusive Graduate Center.

HAVE YOU HAD ANY POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES DURING YOUR TIME AT THE GRADUATE CENTER RELATED TO ISSUES OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?

One respondent described how the library has cultivated a warm space for her to study:

When I go to sit, if people look up I say hello and they respond hello, which is always nice because we’re in a place where people just turn their head when they see you. And that is kind of—it makes you feel a little welcoming even though you’re not necessarily having a conversation. Just a smile makes a really big difference in people’s lives, which a lot of people don’t even realize. —Master’s student, Black/African American, heterosexual, ciswoman

Although one study participant shared her positive experiences, this was juxtaposed with her negative experiences:

I feel really lucky that our program has a lot of really amazing and brilliant women, and I think the leadership of women has drawn a lot of women into our program in other ways as well. Most of the time, that has been really positive. It has been a really supportive environment. And when I go into different professional spaces at The Graduate Center where that gender balance is not the norm, there are cases when I notice an immediate difference. I feel less looked to in meetings as an expert, as a contributor, and a collaborator, more likely to be expected to do feminized work, note-taking and things like that. Some of those things are very minor in most cases. I would not say I’ve experienced any flagrant gender bias. But because it’s not the norm in my daily workspace, I notice it more. And I hear of it more from women-identified colleagues in other spaces. —Staff member, Asian/Pacific Islander, heterosexual, ciswoman

The experience of those with intersecting identities provides a glimpse at how layered and complex inclusion can feel:
A positive thing that I don't usually ... that I didn't think about before is that this building actually, for me, feels like a safe place to be a lesbian. It feels very unsafe to be Black, because everyone notices because they're not enough Black people. I'm noticed when I'm not there, I hate that. –Faculty member, Black/African American, lesbian, ciswoman

Some respondents mentioned negative incidences that were the result of stereotypes attributed to an entire group:

I've heard from other colleagues in my department about women of color who are thinking about having babies are ... punished even more than other women. Especially if they're Black because of specific stereotypes. They're punished by their mentors, and their mentors actually say those stereotypes out loud to them so it just gets worse I think. –Doctoral student, Asian/Pacific Islander, queer, cisman

People are still prejudiced against people with disabilities. I know someone that did a master’s long ago and applied for the PhD program but he has a learning disability and was just kind of told [by the program], “You would never finish; you would never make it.” I think if they want to encourage more diversity on that front, they have to seriously think through some policies that prevent that kind of discrimination. –Doctoral student, white, heterosexual, ciswoman

I feel like there’s many different forms anti-Blackness takes ... But part of what made me think of this is some of the ways that liberal racism shows up here ... It feels like what’s at play is a fetishization of Blackness and people ... which sometimes then extends to some of the students. But then it becomes this high stakes, like you’re kind of the magical negro for the department and you’re our mascot ... I think what I was trying get at, that’s also a very terrible position to be in, and that you’re very quickly pushed off the pedestal ... Part of why it is important is that I think, what I have experienced in this building, is that faculty and students who have a ... professed commitment to social justice need help just as much help as all the other people. –Doctoral student, Asian/Pacific Islander, queer, cisman

A number of respondents spoke about having a sense of The Graduate Center not being an inclusive and welcoming space:

Well, I haven’t had big incidents. It’s just very subtle ... I think it’s the hijab. Not by everyone. I haven’t felt that way by everyone. Most people have been very welcoming, very friendly. Yeah, but like, there have been a few cases where I would get into the elevator and see a person, and usually I’d say, “Good morning,” or “Hi,” even if I don’t know the person. Or if I have seen someone in a meeting, I would try to initiate something and say, “How are you?” but they wouldn’t respond. I just thought that was strange. It immediately makes me think it’s this [gesturing towards her hijab] ... For the most part, every faculty member that I have interacted with who have been welcoming, most of them have been minorities and a few white. But then, the problems that I’ve had have been with white faculty and staff. ... People may not know how to approach people of a different identity. There are not a lot of people who are visibly Muslim in The
Graduate Center so I feel like maybe people might not be intentionally doing things, but they might not know how to approach or they might just be socially awkward and not have talked with another person ... I don’t know... – Staff member, Asian/Pacific Islander, heterosexual, ciswoman

But I think one thing that struck me when I came here was that I felt like I was invisible, like I felt I had to hide everything about like my background ... It feels like it’s a space within which you just can’t include that as a part of who you are and who you are as you walk around. Granted, I know that this is like, maybe, you know, this is part of being white passing, that I can move in these spaces and it’s not visible. But even socioeconomically ... I was thinking about the fact that like, you know, being homeless at some point when I was like in high school, and then after high school. That really informs a lot of the way that I do things in my household, as much as I do to get extra work. And there’s these aspects that, we don’t talk about ourselves. Nobody’s saying don’t talk about your Mexicanness. Nobody is saying don’t talk about how hard it is as a first-generation college student. Don’t talk about being working-class. Like, nobody is ever saying any of those things. But it feels like it’s a space that is just not welcoming.
– Doctoral student, Hispanic, gay, cisman

There is a toxic culture here, that if you do speak up and push back, you’re often silenced, when there are repercussions because of your actions in terms of mentorship opportunities. Or when you do overcome those obstacles of lack of support, I would hear things like, “Oh, I’m so surprised.” Or, you know, “Wow! Congratulations. What are you working on?” Or, here’s another thing, they don’t even know your name. We walk in the hallways, they don’t acknowledge you or they say, “Oh, you’re the other one,” meaning there’re so few students of color, they can’t see your individuality. It’s like, “Oh, yeah, you’re the other one.” – Doctoral student, Black/African American, sexual identity “something not listed,” cisman

Finally, one respondent remarked how the program’s misunderstanding of student’s socioeconomic realities and background is at odds with The Graduate Center’s objectives to nurture a diverse and inclusive institution:

I came to the GC with my little stipend that I got, it was like, “Oh, I don’t know how I am going to survive here in New York from South Carolina.” And I went to my program, I was like, “Oh, I need a place to live. Is there a place that I can afford to live?” And they sent me a ton of apartments and were like, “Oh, this one is only $2,500 a month.” Well, I don’t know what you think, but I don’t have independent benefactors that are going to somehow pay for a $2,500-a-month apartment. I remember distinctly my EO saying, “You can have someone who can co-sign with you.” I come from a working-class family. There is no one who can co-sign for me, for a $2,500-a-month apartment. In fact, at that point, I was pretty much the family co-signer. These types of things are instances like, you want students that bring a certain diversity of background. Do you have the personal, or even other institutional networks to really sustain students once you actually recruit them into your program—assuming that you even do that? – Doctoral student, Black/African American, gay, cisman
Conclusions, Limitations and Next Steps

This brief report offers an initial glimpse of the behavioral and psychological dimensions of the institutional climate for diversity by examining the perspectives and experiences of a diverse group of students, staff, and faculty at The Graduate Center with regard to whether they perceive discrimination and prejudice or institutional support and a commitment to diversity (Hurtado et al., 1998; Williams, 2013). The issues participants across race/ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, ability, sexual identity/orientation, religious affiliation, age, and socioeconomic status identified as salient thus far included:

- The lack of diversity among The Graduate Center faculty
- Assumptions and privileges that entrench traditional notions of the academy
- Admissions policies and procedures that often limit student diversity
- Issues related to racism and sexism
- Persistent acts of micro- and macro-aggressions towards students of color
- The challenge of calling out interpersonal behaviors that are problematic
- Curriculum that often overlooks or dismisses the work of marginalized students
- Socioeconomic assumptions and hurdles that become quagmires for student success
- The distribution of resources, such as funding, to meet the needs of a diverse community
- Perceived resistance of administration to implement comprehensive reforms
- The perception of incongruence between The Graduate Center’s public-facing projection of diversity and the actualization of a diverse and inclusive institution

What the current findings suggest is that despite the institutions’ commitment to diversity and inclusion it is clear that while some members of The Graduate Center community feel welcomed and supported others do not. With regard to such feelings of exclusion, which extended across the various social identity categories, the findings of this study align with the available literature and scholarship on perceptions of diversity and inclusion at predominately white higher education institutions, which has revealed the systemic prejudice and discrimination that underrepresented and marginalized students face (Capan & Ford, 2014; Ellis, 2008; Hurtado, 1992; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Wei, Ku, & Liao, 2011). The findings from this brief report while instructive are nevertheless limited, due to the small sample size, with regard to providing a full picture of the views and experiences of diversity and inclusion for faculty, staff, and students at The Graduate Center. Additionally, the breadth and depth of diversity within the specific social identity groups (for example, a single Muslim student’s perspective compared to several African American/Black perspectives) was also limited due to the sampling method employed. Future research must also take into account the various intersections of social identity and the unique dynamics—such as between race and sexual identification or between social class, race, and disability status—that may be created.

Many of our graduate students are also engaged in scholarly activities across the various CUNY campuses either teaching, engaged in research, or both. This begs the question as to how our graduate students navigate issues of diversity and inclusion at the various campuses. In 2016 CUNY established a University-wide working group and a year later retained the services of a professional research company to conduct focus groups of students, faculty, and administrators
to assess the climate for diversity and inclusion on each campus. However, as of yet these findings have not been released to the wider CUNY community.

Another limitation concerns the fact that participants were responding to three general target questions presented via focus groups and individual interviews. In addition to the focus groups and interviews employed in this current investigation, future research would benefit from including a more detailed online survey with a representative sample of Graduate Center students, staff, and faculty. This would allow us to more closely examine participants’ views on the various issues and topics identified as salient in this investigation. This work should also be supplemented by a review of current CUNY and Graduate Center policies, institutional data, and related reports. Findings will benefit current and future diversity initiatives by providing important information for policies and practices to better facilitate a climate of diversity and inclusion.

Finally, it should be noted that this study was conceptualized and conducted prior to the COVID-19 spring shutdown and the recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. These murders have sparked both national and global protests for racial justice and reform. There is now increased urgency by academic institutions to respond to racial injustice on their campuses. Studies such as this may serve as one way for faculty, staff and students to have their voices and concerns heard and taken seriously. However, it is essential that once heard it leads to racial justice and long-term institutional change at The Graduate Center.

**IRB Approval, Acknowledgements and Correspondence**

This study received IRB Approval from The Graduate School and University Center, IRB File #2017-1264. We are grateful to the graduate students, staff, and faculty who participated in this research. Correspondence concerning this research should be directed to Martin D. Ruck, Senior Advisor for Diversity and Inclusion and Chair, President’s Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion. Email: mruck@gc.cuny.edu.
References


Appendix

2016-2018  Presidential Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

Colin P. Ashley (Graduate Student, Sociology)
Juan Battle (Professor of Sociology, Public Health, and Urban Education)
Herman Bennett (Professor of History)
José del Valle (Professor of Latin America, Iberian, and Latino Cultures)
Michelle Fine (Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Urban Education)
Jenny Furlong (Director of Career Planning and Professional Development)
Ofelia García (Professor Emerita of Urban Education and Latin American, Iberian, and Latino Cultures)
Brian Gibney (Executive Officer and Professor of Chemistry)
Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Professor of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences)
Allison Guess (Graduate Student, Earth and Environmental Sciences)
Jennifer Kobrin (Director of Institutional Research & Effectiveness)
James Oakes (Distinguished Professor of History)
Edith Rivera (Chief Diversity Officer/Title IX Coordinator)
Donald Robotham (Professor of Anthropology)
Martin D. Ruck (Advisory Committee Chair, Senior Advisor for Diversity and Inclusion, Professor of Psychology and Urban Education)
Matthew Schoengood (Vice President for Student Affairs)
Tellisia Williams (Graduate Student, Psychology)

2017-2019  Diversity and Inclusion Study Working Group

Juan Battle (Professor of Sociology, Public Health, and Urban Education)
José del Valle (Professor of Latin America, Iberian and Latino Cultures)
Michelle Fine (Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Urban Education)
Jennifer Kobrin (Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness)
Martin D. Ruck (Study Principal Investigator, Advisory Committee Chair, Senior Advisor for Diversity and Inclusion, Professor of Psychology and Urban Education)
Tellisia Williams (Graduate Student, Psychology)
2019-2021 Presidential Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion

Justin Brown (Executive Director of CLAGS, the Center for LGBTQ Studies)
Elizabeth Che (Graduate Student, Educational Psychology)
Kandice Chuh (Professor of English)
Dána-Ain Davis (Professor of Anthropology and Urban Studies, Director M.A. Program in Women’s and Gender Studies)
Brian Gibney (Professor of Chemistry)
Annette C. Gray (Associate Dean for the Sciences and Executive Director, Advanced Science Research Center)
Allison Guess (Graduate Student, Earth and Environmental Sciences)
Sara Mazes (Office and Building Services Coordinator and Human Resources Liaison, Macaulay Honors College College)
Pinar Ozgu (Executive Director of Institutional Equity and Chief Diversity Officer/Title IX Coordinator)
Shawn Rhea (Media Relations Manager, Communications and Marketing)
Martin D. Ruck (Advisory Committee Chair, Senior Advisor for Diversity and Inclusion, Professor of Psychology and Urban Education)
Matthew Schoengood (Vice President for Student Affairs)
Victoria Stone-Cadena (Associate Director, Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies)
Jennifer Tang (Graduate Student, Psychology)