Diverse Learning Environments Survey Analysis: Initial Findings

Introduction

The Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey (IRB approved) was collected online through the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California Los Angeles in March and April of 2021 with 76.8% (1465/1908) of Berry College undergraduate students participating. This survey was conducted at the request of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion ad hoc committee chaired by Dr. Sarah Allred, as well as by other Culture of Belonging committees. The purpose of this survey was to offer students an opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences of Berry College's climate, campus practices, and student learning outcomes. Questions asked in the survey focused on the topics of sexual assault, COVID-19, discrimination, intergroup relations, classroom climate, spirituality and basic demographic factors. This work was viewed as essential given the Culture of Belonging initiative and the overall institutional goals aimed at increasing faculty, staff and student diversity on campus, as well as equity and inclusion. Committee members include: Sarah Allred, Associate Professor of Sociology; Gabriel Barreneche, Dean of the Evans School; Susan Conradsen, Associate Professor of Psychology; Casey Dexter; Assistant Provost for Faculty Development; Bryce Durbin, Registrar and Director of Institutional Research; Lauren Heller, Associate Professor of Economics; Eliana Hirano, Associate Professor of Teacher Education; Thema Monroe-White, Assistant Professor of Technology, Entrepreneurship, and Data Analytics; Samantha Nazione, Associate Professor of Business Communication; and Anna Sharpe, Associate Dean for Student Success.

For this analysis, the committee divided into two groups, the first focusing on the survey responses (the "quantitative subcommittee") and the second on the student responses to the open-ended question (the "qualitative subcommittee"). Both groups summarized findings by race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Overview of Quantitative Findings

The quantitative subcommittee (Drs. Dexter, Heller, Monroe-White, & Nazione) was tasked with identifying key take-aways from the DLE data based on participant gender, race and sexual orientation. Table 1 contains notable areas of accolade for the college, while Table 2 contains notable areas of need for improvement by the college. Questions within Table 1 were selected based on the majority of students reporting a positive perception or behavior. For questions asked on scales with 4 or 5 points, percentages in these tables are representative of the share of student respondents who selected the top two answer options equating to agreement with the statement (such as strongly agree/agree, frequently/often). For questions asked on scales with 3 points, percentages are representative of the share of student respondents who selected the top answer option equating to agreement with the statement. The community service question, and all discrimination questions were dichotomized into have/have not experienced. Survey items written in reverse format (where higher reported percentages represent a negative instead of positive experience) are in italic font. Note that significance tests were not run regarding differences between groups (such as male versus female) as to not highlight statistically significant differences as necessarily being meaningful.

Questions in Table 1 were chosen because the data indicated an area where students perceived the college in a positive light regarding the topic at hand. The following key take-aways can be made from Table 1:

- Regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation, the majority of students:
    - feel at least one staff member and at least one faculty member took an interest in them.
    - considered their ability to work cooperatively with a diverse group of people, and to see the world from someone else's perspective to be a personal strength.
    - have participated in community service.
    - the majority/close to the majority of students report frequently interacting with students from different religions, SES backgrounds, and sexual orientations, than their own.

Questions within Table 2 were selected to represent categories based on noticeable differences between participant race, gender or sexual orientation categories in the data. These are areas in which the college could seek improvement. The following key-takeaways can be made from Table 2:

- Regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation close to a third of students reported:
    - being dissatisfied with the racial make-up of staff, faculty and students. It should be noted there is a relatively even split between those satisfied, dissatisfied, and those who are neutral on these topics.
    - being dissatisfied with the outcome of administrative responses to incidents of discrimination and sexual harassment on campus. It should be noted there is a relatively even split between those satisfied, dissatisfied, and those who are neutral on this topic.

- Close to half (46.3%) of students of color have been discriminated based on their race while at Berry College.

- Over a third of students (37.5%) in the LGBTQ community have been discriminated based on their sexual orientation while at Berry College.

- A higher percentage of women, students of color and students in the LGBTQ community report
    - feeling unsafe on campus, in comparison to men.
    - having experienced unwanted sexual contact since entering Berry College, in comparison to men.
    - having experienced depression, being overwhelmed, or being anxious, in comparison to men.

- Regardless of race, the most experienced forms of discrimination (for any reason including one's race) at Berry College are in the form of verbal comments and exclusion.
    - More than half of all students identifying as Black have been discriminated against in the form of verbal comments.

- A higher percentage of students of color and students in the LGBTQ community report discrimination in the form of verbal bullying, cyberbullying, exclusion and offensive images, in comparison to men.

Table 1: Accolades- Percent of students who affirm the following by gender, race, and sexual orientation															
		Gender			Race						Sexual Orientation				
Item	Total	Male	Female	Gender-queer	Black	Two or more Races	Hispanic	Asian	White	Students of Color	Asexual, pansexual, queer, other	Bi-sexual	Gay/ Lesbian	Hetero-sexual	Students in the LGBTQ community
	N = 1465	n = 460	n = 966	n = 25	n = 103	n = 126	n = 77	n = 42	n = 1092	n = 348	n = 64	n = 139	n = 37	n = 1194	n = 240
At least one staff member has taken an interest in my development here*	89.4	87.8	91.0	84.0	82.5	89.7	83.1	88.1	91.1	85.9	81.3	85.6	89.2	90.9	85.0
At least one faculty member has taken an interest in my development here*	90.9	90.9	92.1	84.0	89.3	92.9	79.2	92.9	92.2	88.8	85.9	86.3	89.2	92.4	86.7
Faculty believe in my potential to succeed*	94.3	94.3	95.0	92.0	88.3	92.9	87.0	100.0	96.0	91.1	96.9	87.8	94.6	95.4	91.3
The ability to work cooperatively with diverse people is a personal strength of mine +	93.6	92.0	95.1	100.0	92.2	96.0	94.8	100.0	93.8	95.1	98.4	92.8	97.3	94.1	95.0
The ability to see the world from someone else's perspective is a personal strength of mine+	85.7	85.2	86.7	92.0	95.1	90.5	90.9	90.5	84.2	92.0	96.9	84.9	86.5	85.8	88.3
I have participated in community service since I entered college~	80.3	78.0	82.3	76.0	73.8	79.4	84.4	73.8	81.7	78.2	85.9	73.4	70.3	81.7	76.3
I interact frequently with individuals of a different:^															
Religion	58.4	58.3	58.4	80.0	44.7	64.3	62.3	61.9	58.9	57.8	70.3	66.9	62.2	56.9	67.1
Socioeconomic status	66.4	66.1	66.9	76.0	64.1	65.9	71.4	71.4	66.7	67.2	64.1	76.3	59.5	65.8	70.4
Sexual orientation	54.0	45.2	57.8	92.0	60.2	54.8	59.7	57.1	53.0	57.8	89.1	83.5	91.9	47.6	86.3

*This question was asked on a 4 point scale
+This question was asked on a 5 point scale
^This question was asked on a 3 point scale
~This question was on a 5 point scale that was dichotomized into whether they had or had not participated in community service

		Gender			Race						Sexual Orientation				
Table 2: Areas for Improvement- Percent of students who affirm the following by gender, race, and sexual orientation															
Item	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Gender-queer**	**Black**	**Two or more Races**	**Hispanic**	**Asian**	**White**	**Students of Color**	**Asexual, pansexual, queer, other**	**Bi-sexual**	**Gay/ Lesbian**	**Hetero-sexual**	**Students in the LGBTQ community**
	N = 1465	n = 460	n = 966	n = 25	n = 103	n = 126	n = 77	n = 42	n = 1092	n = 348	n = 64	n = 139	n = 37	n = 1194	n = 240
I am satisfied with the racial diversity of the staff+	30.5	35.7	28.8	16.0	8.7	30.2	22.1	33.3	33.3	22.4	20.3	19.4	21.6	33.2	20.0
I am satisfied with the racial diversity of the faculty+	27.7	35.2	24.8	12.0	7.8	25.4	19.5	26.2	30.7	19.0	17.2	16.5	16.2	30.4	16.7
I am satisfied with the racial diversity of the student body+	30.7	36.7	28.6	16.0	7.8	22.2	24.7	33.3	34.6	19.8	21.9	16.5	18.9	33.8	18.3
At this college, I have been discriminated against or excluded because of my: + — Race	22.9	26.1	21.3	24.0	58.3	37.3	44.2	47.6	15.2	46.3	14.1	15.8	16.2	24.6	15.4
At this college, I have been discriminated against or excluded because of my: + — Sexual Orientation	12.8	14.3	11.2	52.0	15.5	11.9	18.2	7.1	12.5	13.8	31.3	37.4	48.6	7.9	37.5
*I feel unsafe on this campus **	8.5	7.8	8.5	24.0	21.4	12.7	18.2	7.1	6.2	15.8	15.6	16.5	16.2	7.0	16.3
I have been satisfied with the outcome of administrative responses to incidents of discrimination+	27.8	32.4	26.3	16.0	12.6	30.6	19.0	31.0	31.6	19.5	21.9	15.1	13.5	30.7	16.7
I have been satisfied with the outcome of administrative responses to incidents of sexual assault+	25.6	31.5	23.2	12.0	15.5	18.3	27.3	31.0	27.2	21.0	20.3	13.7	13.5	28.2	15.4
Since you entered this college have you been subjected to unwanted sexual contact?#	13.9	5.2	18.0	24.0	7.8	16.7	11.7	2.4	14.8	11.2	23.4	30.2	13.5	11.7	25.8
Since you entered this college, I have frequently been: ^ — *Depressed*	34.9	25.2	38.9	80.0	44.7	42.1	40.3	35.7	33.1	41.7	56.3	63.3	54.1	29.8	60.0
Since you entered this college, I have frequently been: ^ — *Overwhelmed by all you had to do*	63.8	43.3	73.6	88.0	62.1	63.5	61.0	59.5	64.7	62.1	78.1	74.8	62.2	62.0	73.8
Since you entered this college, I have frequently been: ^ — *Anxious*	59.9	37.4	70.8	80.0	55.3	59.5	66.2	57.1	60.4	59.5	78.1	79.1	78.4	56.4	78.8
I have experienced the following forms of discrimination at this college?~ — *Verbal comments*	40.0	36.3	41.6	60.0	54.4	51.6	33.8	45.2	37.5	47.7	42.2	54.0	48.6	38.1	50.0
I have experienced the following forms of discrimination at this college?~ — *Cyberbullying*	13.4	13.5	13.3	20.0	17.5	13.5	10.4	19.0	12.8	14.7	14.1	16.5	21.6	12.8	16.7
I have experienced the following forms of discrimination at this college?~ — *Exclusion*	25.9	23.0	27.0	44.0	35.9	22.2	32.5	31.0	24.7	29.6	23.4	33.8	37.8	24.8	31.7
I have experienced the following forms of discrimination at this college?~ — *Offensive images*	13.9	14.6	13.4	24.0	27.2	21.4	14.3	14.3	11.6	20.7	15.6	21.6	16.2	13.1	19.2

*This question was asked on a 4 point scale
+This question was asked on a 5 point scale
^This question was asked on a 3 point scale
~This question was on a 5 pt. scale that was dichotomized into whether they had or had not experienced the following forms of discrimination
This was a yes or no question

<u>Overview of Qualitative Results</u>

The last question of the Diverse Learning Environment (DLE) survey was an open-ended question: *Reflecting on your social identity groups (e.g., ability/disability status, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, spiritual or religious affiliation), how would you describe your Berry experience?* The qualitative subcommittee (Drs. Allred, Barreneche, Conradsen, Hirano, and Sharpe) met several times to discuss their strategy for analyzing student responses to this question. Analyses began with each subcommittee member reading all the comments. This initial reading was an inductive activity, involving no pre-conceived assumptions, expectations, or hypotheses. Their second reading involved notetaking for broad themes. Afterward, they met to discuss and share broad themes identified from the full set of responses. Subcommittee members were then assigned the responsibility of analyzing responses from specific student groups distinguished by race and gender category: black or African American males, black or African American females, Asian females, white females, etc. Each subcommittee member focused on their assigned student group(s) and documented the type and frequency of broad themes per student subgroup as well as exemplar quotes per theme.

The qualitative subcommittee found the following main results. The qualitative findings deepen our understanding of some quantitative findings, reflect a multi-dimensional college life experience, raise questions requiring further information, and suggest some areas of actionable response. Regarding consistency with quantitative findings, open-ended responses included input on topics, observations, or firsthand experiences viewed as positive aspects of the Berry community. Berry College is a welcoming, diverse, enriching learning and living context offering students a backdrop of staff, faculty, peers, and resources supportive of students' personal growth pursuits. Also consistent with quantitative data, the responses to the open-ended questions included mention of topics, observations, or firsthand experiences which taken together were indicative of a diminished college experience because of how these thwarted access to expected and deserved experiences or left students feeling unwelcome, isolated, frustrated, angry, and more. Such experiences included, but were not limited, to prejudice or discrimination related to sex, gender, race, social class, and/or political ideology.

Equally important, the qualitative findings communicate that identity groups (students who identified as female, black, white, etc.) did not experience their time at Berry in homogeneous ways despite emergent patterns. In this sense, the data suggest that there is a multitude of 'Berry experiences' within any particular social identity group. For example, within the largest social identity group (white females, overall, with an *n* of 743 and largest group providing comments with an *n* of 444) the comments from white females run the gamut. Concerning how they felt about living in the Berry community, some white women expressed feeling in the margins and others in the mainstream of college life. Some said they felt unwelcome, disconnected, self-conscious, or othered for reasons related to being agnostic, Catholic, conservative, lesbian, or from a lower social class background. Still others said they felt they belonged and felt safe at Berry overall, despite firsthand encounters with prejudicial or discriminatory encounters with sexism.

Four patterns stood out among many others that are also important. One, a higher percentage of students at the intersections of selected minority groups (e.g., women with a disability, women who identified as LGBTQ, male and female racial minorities) reported firsthand problems related to their minority status: discrimination, insufficient resources, lack of community. They long for an expanded community of students, faculty, staff, and administration who resembles them in terms of race and ethnicity. Two, students at the intersections of majority groups (e.g., white females, white males) characterized their identity as 'privileged' and attributed their relative lack of firsthand problems at

college with this. Like their minority peers, they shared a desire for greater campus diversity as well as concerns about problems (with prejudice, discrimination, insufficient resources, insufficient diversity) for their friends and acquaintances who are in racial and ethnic minority groups. Three, students in majority identity groups (e.g., white male, white female) experienced problems attributed to these variables, but mostly due to other identity dimensions: disability, political affiliation, mental illness, lower social class. Four, students encounter relational difficulties due to ideological, religious, or faith affiliations. Regarding ideological, the most common comment came from students self-described as conservative. They felt silenced. Regarding religious and faith affiliations, Christian, non-Christian, agnostic, atheist students alike felt othered for aspects of their beliefs.

Conclusion

To conclude, students provided many positive comments praising the college's efforts during COVID-19, noting students feel welcome at the college, or expressing gratitude for the opportunities they have discovered at the college, most students used the opportunity of the DLE survey to provide information regarding areas in which the college could improve. Qualitative statements echoed the quantitative data with students expressing a strong desire for a more diverse staff, faculty, and student body. Students told us that their experiences at Berry College were shaped by identity characteristics. We found that within student subgroups there was variability in terms of the type and scope of perceived problems due to social identity(ies). While some students at the intersections of majority social identities expressed problems with prejudice and/or discrimination (based on social class, sexual orientation, religious affiliation), students with more marginalized identities in their social identity set (e.g., gender queer POC students as compared to white cisgender straight male students) reported more negative experiences. These negative experiences included incidents in classes, such as being 'singled out' as the only member of a given identity group. These student comments also remind us of additional social identities to include in future analyses such as ability status, class, religion, and political views.