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Creating inclusive learning communities: the role of student–faculty relationships in mitigating negative campus climate

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Abstract This study examined student perceptions of their learning environments at 130 American colleges and universities. Results indicate that students of color, women students, and gay/lesbian students are the most likely to observe and experience prejudice and discrimination within and outside of their classrooms. Fortunately, the development of strong student–faculty relationships significantly mitigate negative campus climate and support the formation of inclusive learning communities. Institutional implications are discussed.

Keywords Campus climate · Student–faculty relationships · Higher education · Students of color · Women students · Gay/lesbian students · Students with disabilities

Over the last decade, higher education affirmative action programs have continued to come under question. Despite legal battles to curb diversity initiatives, most Americans support efforts to bring different perspectives to campus in creating inclusive learning communities. Two-thirds of survey respondents (of which 75% identified themselves as white) said that it is very important for colleges and universities to prepare students to function in a diverse society and 55% said these students should be required to study different cultures as a graduation requirement. Another 71% said that diversity education on college campuses is bringing Americans together (Estrin 1998). Moreover, multiple U.S. Fortune 500 companies filed Amicus Briefs in support of the University of Michigan's Law School policy (and subsequent court case) to include the consideration of race/ethnicity as a part of applicants' admissions materials.

Despite a U.S. Supreme Court opinion affirming the importance of a diverse student body in achieving educational gains, higher education students report that women and students of color still face stereotypes (Bresciani 2003), incidents of racial harassment persist (Kotori and Malaney 2003) causing increased stress for students of color (Johnson

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and Arbona 2006), and chilly campus climates perpetuate fears for personal safety (Cress 1999; Kelly and Torres 2006).

Thus, it appears that while many Americans recognize the importance of educating college students in ways that facilitate cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding, campuses are struggling with how to make their educational environments hospitable settings for a wide variety of learners. In order to enhance the role of higher education institutions in providing students with the opportunities to learn how to live and work in a complex, diverse society, it is essential that campuses assess the campus climate.

Not to be confused with campus culture, campus climate is the metaphorical temperature gauge by which we measure a welcoming and receptive, versus a cool and alienating learning environment. Indeed, Bernice Sandler and her colleagues were the first to coin the term "chilly climate" to describe the pervasiveness of inhospitable classrooms for women (Sandler 1986; Sandler et al. 1996).

Studying campus climate is an attempt to describe how students, faculty, and staff experience interactions with one another which are laden with individual values and meaning. In other words, it is a way of discerning how the environmental complexities of a campus affect the overall functioning of both its members and the organization. Essentially, if we can understand the elements that create campus climate then we may be in a position to change campus climate in ways that support the learning and working efforts of all its members.

Other researchers (Cress and Ikeda 2003; Hurtado et al. 1996; Kuh and Whitt 1988; Moran and Volkwein 1988; Tierney 1993) have argued that understanding institutional culture and climate are necessary for establishing and furthering a sense of community on campus. Hence, if colleges can model living and learning communities of difference, they can expand students' knowledge and skills for developing harmonious societal communities in the future. Conversely, disingenuous and discriminatory campuses undermine the potential for facilitating individual student development and thereby undermine their potential contributions toward the building of just and equitable societies.

Purpose of the study

While a number of American higher education institutions have assessed their own campus climates (Arnold 1995; Jing 1995; Takahata and Armstrong 1996), few studies have assessed campus climate issues across institutions from a national perspective. Utilizing data from a longitudinal and national sample of college and university students, this study examines differences in student perceptions of campus climate and the impact of student–faculty relationships on creating inclusive learning communities.

Theoretical perspectives

Learning environments

Since "our surroundings have a great deal to do with the development of our intellectual powers and personality patterns" (Walsh 1978, p. 1), students' personal as well as academic development appears to be intricately linked both with how they perceive and how they interact with their learning environments. Ponterotto (1990) has suggested that higher dropout rates for racial/ethnic minority students are a result of inhospitable campus

climates at most of the predominately white college campuses. Confirming this perspective, Jing (1995) found that 39% of students reported being discriminated against at least once at college because of their race, gender, age, or disability even though students gave high ratings to instructors' skill level and level of preparedness in the classroom. Similarly, Arnold (1995) found that 40% of the students indicated that the college was not a hospitable place for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.

In other words, it appears quite clear that certain subgroups of students are plagued on college campuses by various forms of discrimination, and racial/ethnic minority students are often made to feel as "outsiders" or "the other" (Solorzano 1997). This can result in undermining the creation of learning communities and causing students' to feel personally invalidated, the effects of which can have detrimental educational consequences.

Sense of self and educational outcomes

The kind of integration (Tinto 1987) and engagement (Astin 1993b; Pace 1984) that students experience with their academic community can affect both their sense of self as well as their educational development. Previous research has noted a clear relationship between students' emotional health and self-concept (Goldman and Wong 1997). For example, students' positive affect and self-concept has been shown to be predictive of college academic achievement (Blustein and Palladino 1991; Coleman 1968; Epps 1969; Reynolds 1988; Trent 1970), including issues related to retention (Biddle et al. 1987; Brockner 1985; Hoffman 1984). Moreover, students who perform well in their courses tend to report close relationships with peers and high levels of interaction with faculty members (Spring et al. 1994); variables known to be correlated with academic success (Astin 1993a).

Previous research points to clear differences among institutions in their willingness and ability to support the academic and personal development of students. For instance, studies have indicated that some campus environments are hostile to lesbian/gay/bisexual students and tolerate rather explicit racial and gender discrimination (Cook 1995; Eliason 1996; Evans and D'Augelli 1996; Fisher and Hartmann 1995; Marcus 1996). Other research indicates that most college students are able to discern learning environments that may detrimentally affect the personal and academic progress of women students, students of color, and/or lesbian/gay/bisexual students (Astin et al. 1991; Sax 1994; Sax and Chun 1991).

Methodology

Data source

This study utilized a longitudinal American sample of students ($n = 8{,}490$) surveyed at the time of college entry and four years after matriculation. Data on the students were collected by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program at the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Variables and method of analysis

The Senior Survey asked students to indicate their agreement with each of the following sets of statements: (1) I have been singled out in class or treated differently than other

students because of my gender or race/ethnicity; (2) Many students on campus are prejudiced against women or racial/ethnic minorities; (3) Instructors treat students the same regardless of the students' gender or race/ethnicity; and (4) I have observed discriminatory words, behaviors, or gestures directed toward students who are women, ethnic/racial minorities, gays or lesbians, or people with disabilities.

In order to measure students' perceptions of campus climate, the campus climate survey items were treated as a single aggregate variable. This was determined since the campus climate survey items based on individual student scores are highly inter-correlated and an exploratory factor analysis on the items did not reveal any distinct composite factors. The scale yielded a strong reliability score ($\alpha = .8591$). Therefore, for the purposes of the study, campus climate was defined as the total set of responses to the campus climate questions, with two of the variables (instructors treat students the same regardless of gender or instructors treat students the same regardless of race) recoded in the same direction as the other survey items so that the final composite variable of campus climate reflects a negative or discriminatory climate.

Results

Descriptive analyses

Campus climate perceptions

Average (mean) scores of campus climate perceptions by gender and racial/ethnic background were computed and tested for significant differences utilizing independent sample *t*-tests (see Table 1). Campus climate scores could range from a low of 10 (no perceived discrimination) to a high of 40 (strong agreement that discrimination exists on campus). Based on all student responses, the average "negative" climate score was 20.46, with women significantly more likely than men to perceive a negative campus climate.

Not surprisingly, students of color were significantly more likely than white students to report that they perceived negative behaviors and hostile attitudes directed toward women and ethnic/racial minorities on their campus. African-American/Blacks reported the

Table 1 Mean campus climate (negative climate) by sex and race/ethnicity

Variable	Mean score	S.D.	*n*
Total sample	20.46	6.39	8,490
Women**	20.73	6.56	4,699
Men	20.13	6.16	3,754
African-American/Black*	24.45	7.02	316
Puerto Rican American*	23.04	7.44	113
Asian American/Asian*	22.18	6.60	510
Chicano/Mexican American*	21.56	7.27	216
American Indian*	21.19	6.57	188
Other Latino	20.92	6.27	200
White	19.96	6.13	6,642

Scoring range: 10–40, ** $p < .01$ comparing women and men, * $p < .05$ compared with white students

highest negative campus climate, followed by Puerto Rican Americans, Asian-American/Asians, Chicano/Mexican Americans, and American Indians.

These findings maintained their consistency even when individual racial/ethnic minority student groups were compared against white students across gender ($p < .05$). In other words, African-American/Black male students reported higher perceptions of a negative campus climate than did white male students. Concomitant, African-American/Black female students reported higher perceptions of levels of negative campus climate than did white female students. The only exception for both genders were "other Latino" students who were not significantly different from whites in their reporting of perceptions of campus climate. (Since the specific socio-cultural backgrounds of "other Latino" students are not known, their response percentages are reported in the various descriptive analyses but not further discussed. Presumably, these students are from the Caribbean or Central or South America.)

Given the amount of variation that appears within students' perceptions of their institutions, it seemed prudent as well as interesting to examine more closely the variation that exists within each of the racial/ethnic groups when negative campus climate is examined by gender. Previous studies have indicated that attitudes, values, and behaviors are at times significantly different for male as compared to female students (Astin 1993a; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991).

As differentiated from the total aggregate where women were more likely to perceive a negative campus climate as compared to men (refer back to Table 1), African-American/Black and Puerto Rican American men are more likely than their female counterparts to report perceptions of discrimination and prejudice on their campuses (see Table 2). In fact, African-American/Black men have the highest average (mean) score on the negative campus climate measure of any group.

Thus, students of color, particularly male students of color, report that learning environments at their campuses are unjust climates for women and racial/ethnic minorities. Certainly, the terms "discriminatory" and "prejudice" are laden with values and interpretations that may be entirely different for students of color than for white students. However, as Rychlak (1968) has noted, there is no consensus about whether the environment is "objective"—transcending any one individual's perceptions, or "subjective"—private and impossible to generalize beyond one's own self. Therefore, the impact of an experience on an individual is how the experience is interpreted (Dusek and Flaherty 1981). If students of color are interpreting their environments as hostile, it is quite likely

Table 2 Mean campus climate (negative climate) by gender and race/ethnicity

Variable	Mean score		S.D.		*n*	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
African-American/Black	25.31	24.04	7.02	7.29	118	195
Puerto Rican American	23.43	22.71	6.99	7.93	53	59
Asian American/Asian	21.91	22.36	6.54	6.65	226	282
Chicano/Mexican Am.	21.31	21.71	6.76	7.65	109	151
American Indian	20.31	21.97	5.90	7.09	90	97
Other Latino	20.51	21.33	6.12	6.45	89	108
White	19.62	20.23	5.85	6.33	2,938	3,680

Scoring range: 10–40

Table 3 Campus climate by gender and race/ethnicity: observed discrimination against lesbian/gay students

Race/Ethnicity	Percent agreeing	
	Men	Women
African-American/Black	79.5	68.6
Puerto Rican American	76.4	66.7
American Indian	71.1	65.3
Chicano/Mexican American	69.6	65.4
Asian American/Asian	68.9	68.0
Other Latino	67.7	61.7
White	66.3	63.2

Note: 1—Disagree strongly, 2—Disagree somewhat, 3—Agree somewhat, 4—Agree strongly

Table 4 Campus climate by gender and race/ethnicity: observed discrimination against students with disabilities

Race/Ethnicity	Percent agreeing	
	Men	Women
African-American/Black	47.6	27.3
Puerto Rican American	38.2	26.7
American Indian	28.9	28.0
Asian American/Asian	26.1	32.2
Chicano/Mexican American	26.1	31.3
Other Latino	25.9	23.7
White	25.9	26.2

Note: 1—Disagree strongly, 2—Disagree somewhat, 3—Agree somewhat, 4—Agree strongly

that the psychological and emotional energy needed to address such negative perceptions will distract from their participation in the learning community thereby potentially hindering their academic and personal development.

Students of color are also more likely than white students to report observing discrimination directed against lesbian and gay students (see Table 3), and against students with disabilities (see Table 4). In fact, two-thirds or more of all students report observing discrimination directed toward lesbian and gay students, the highest reporting of discrimination directed against any group. In this case, men from every racial/ethnic group are more likely to report observing such discrimination than their female counterparts.

Unfortunately, other studies seem to confirm that harassment and victimization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students is a relatively common occurrence on college campuses, including verbal insults and threats of violence, having personal property vandalized, and being chased, followed, spat on, punched, kicked, or beaten (Baier et al. 1991; D'Augelli 1989; Herek 1993). While these types of incidents may not be everyday occurrences, the fear of such possibilities keeps many students "closeted" and takes a detrimental psychological toll (Bieschke et al. 1998; Garnets and Kimmel 1993).

Regarding student observations of discrimination directed against students with disabilities, anywhere from one-fourth to almost one-half (48% of African-American/Black men) of students report such observations. This is quite surprising in light of the Americans with Disabilities Act that is specifically designed to guarantee accommodations for individuals with disabilities. While this does not ensure lack of discrimination, a substantial body of literature is focused on identifying strategies and/or successful accommodations for college students with disabilities (Bates 1997; Friehe et al. 1996; Hodge and Preston-

Sabin 1997; Jarvis 1997; Ragosta 1991; Smith 1995; Walling 1996). Nonetheless, an earlier study (Stovall and Sedlacek 1981) indicated that college students had negative attitudes toward people who were blind or in wheelchairs in situations where close personal contact was required, such as in study groups or group projects.

Whether students' observations of discrimination directed against students with disabilities were perpetrated by classmates or other members of the campus community, the fact still remains that students with disabilities may have to overcome more than their own physical challenges in becoming an integral member of their learning community.

Victims of discrimination

While the former survey responses were concerned with general perceptions and observations of discrimination against groups of students, the next two questions identify self-reports of being a victim of discrimination and as such also reveal wide variation in response across gender and racial/ethnic categories.

American Indian women report the highest frequency of feeling singled out in a class or treated differently than others because of their gender (see Table 5). Congruent with this finding, women students in each of the racial/ethnic subgroups are much more likely to report such incidents than are male students.

Hence, while some women students are not as likely as their male counterparts to report observations of discrimination directed against women in general, they are, however, far more likely to report actual personal incidents within the classroom.

Given the studies that have focused on the "chilly climate" for women (Parson 1991; Sandler 1986; Sandler et al. 1996), these findings are not too surprising, albeit still disappointing. Even after two decades of attention to such issues, it appears that faculty continue to interact with female students quite differently than they do with male students.

However, it should also be noted that one out of five African-American/Black and Puerto Rican American men (20%), and 13% of white men consider themselves as being a victim of gender discrimination in the classroom. Are male students feeling victimized and alienated as a result of feminist perspectives in courses where they may perceive some discourse as "male-bashing"(Cassara 1991)? Or, are male students simply feeling defensive when the power and structural forces that produce inequalities are brought to their attention (Moore 1997)?

Regarding being a victim of discrimination based on race/ethnicity, African-American/Black, Puerto Rican American, and Chicano/Mexican American men are more likely than their female counterparts to report such incidents (see Table 6). In fact, African-American/

Table 5 Campus climate by gender and race/ethnicity: singled out in class or treated differently than others because of my gender

Race/Ethnicity	Percent agreeing	
	Men	Women
American Indian	13.3	37.0
Puerto Rican American	21.8	33.9
Asian American/Asian	17.5	29.8
African-American/Black	21.5	28.5
White	13.0	24.7
Chicano/Mexican American	9.8	23.8
Other Latino	10.9	16.1

Note: 1—Disagree strongly, 2—Disagree somewhat, 3—Agree somewhat, 4—Agree strongly

Table 6 Campus climate by gender and race/ethnicity: singled out in class or treated differently because of my race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Percent agreeing	
	Men	Women
African-American/Black	59.4	50.0
Puerto Rican American	38.2	36.1
Chicano/Mexican American	28.4	25.8
Asian American/Asian	27.6	31.1
Other Latino	20.4	25.9
American Indian	15.6	26.5
White	6.2	6.0

Note: 1—Disagree strongly, 2—Disagree somewhat, 3—Agree somewhat, 4—Agree strongly

Black men are nearly 10 times more likely than white men to report being treated differently or singled out in class based on race/ethnicity. While gains have been made during the last two decades in terms of the absolute numbers of students of color enrolled in higher education, the percentage of racial/ethnic minority students on most campuses is still relatively small. Certainly, the lone African-American/Black student in a lecture hall of predominately white students is likely to feel visibly singled out even if never verbally singled out. Moreover, they may be called upon as the primary spokespersons for Black issues (Johnson-Newman and Exum 1998). Further complicating the matter, these students may never have the opportunity to interact with an African-American faculty member and the course material may not include the contributions of African-Americans and other people of color (Mitchell 1991).

Perceptions of faculty attitudes

While the previous two tables examine students' self-reports of being singled out or treated differently in class because of gender or race/ethnicity, the questions do not define with whom they were interacting——with other students or with the instructors/faculty. The last two tables specifically address students' perceptions of faculty attitudes toward students.

As might be expected based on the previous results, white students are the most likely to agree that instructors treat students the *same* regardless of students' gender (see Table 7) or students' race/ethnicity (see Table 8). Interestingly, nearly half of all students of color also affirm these statements, as compared to the questions regarding student treatment of one another that resulted in much lower percentages. It appears that while a majority of individual faculty are perceived as treating students relatively equally, student-to-student interactions are more likely to include prejudicial behaviors and attitudes. These findings confirm earlier research indicating that faculty are less likely to be perceived as discriminating against students than are the students themselves (Arnold 1995; Astin et al. 1991; Jing 1995).

Data summary

Therefore, no matter how the data are examined, whether as an aggregate of campus climate perceptions (all items combined) or as individual campus climate questions, a number of findings emerge. First, some degree of prejudice and discrimination based on gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability are prominently reported by all

Table 7 Campus climate by gender and race/ethnicity: instructors treat students the same regardless of the students' gender

Race/Ethnicity	Percent agreeing	
	Men	Women
White	70.1	66.3
American Indian	67.8	57.0
Other Latino	67.4	59.1
Asian American/Asian	63.6	61.0
African-American/Black	57.5	54.8
Chicano/Mexican American	57.9	60.5
Puerto Rican American	54.5	52.5

Note: 1—Disagree strongly, 2—Disagree somewhat, 3—Agree somewhat, 4—Agree strongly

Table 8 Campus climate by gender and race/ethnicity: instructors treat students the same regardless of the students' race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Percent agreeing	
	Men	Women
White	73.0	67.1
American Indian	71.1	61.4
Chicano/Mexican American	64.1	57.0
Other Latino	63.4	54.8
Asian American/Asian	61.4	64.4
Puerto Rican American	58.2	47.5
African-American/Black	46.1	46.6

Note: 1—Disagree strongly, 2—Disagree somewhat, 3—Agree somewhat, 4—Agree strongly

groups of students at all types of American institutions. In other words, colleges and universities do not seem to have equivocal academic playing fields for all students. Subgroups of students must overcome the behaviors and attitudes of others that can inhibit their ability to fully participate in their learning communities.

Second, students of color and women are far more likely to report witnessing and experiencing discrimination than are white students and male students, respectively. Indeed, significant variation in perceptions exists not only between racial/ethnic subgroups, but also across gender. In addition, students who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual appear to be the most at risk for having discrimination and hostility directed against them.

Finally, students are more likely than are faculty to be perceived as the culprits of creating discriminatory learning environments. However, this does not absolve faculty from their responsibility in creating positive and supportive learning communities since a significant percentage of women and students of color still reported feeling singled out in classrooms.

Multivariate analysis

The descriptive analyses provide insight into the existence of perceptions of a negative campus climate and how these perceptions vary depending on gender or race/ethnicity. However, what may account for these perceptions? Are there specific kinds of experiences that students have during their college years (such as positive student–faculty interactions) that influence student perceptions and participation in their learning communities?

Hierarchical stepwise regression analyses were conducted with campus climate as the dependent variable in order to account for what might affect students' perceptions of campus climate. Of the 69 independent variables that were tested, 19 were found to be statistically significant. In particular, a negative campus climate is associated with student depression, substance use, and academic disengagement. As might be expected, each of these constructs are correlated with lower grade point average (GPA), lower ratings of academic knowledge and skills, and lower ratings of academic and social self-concepts. These findings mirror other research indicating a direct correlation between a negative campus climate and lack of student success (e.g., lower gpa, student drop-out, lower degree completion) (Cress and Ikeda 2003). It could be argued that one of the reasons students do not complete their homework is due to the distress they experience if they felt singled out in class, treated unequally by instructors, or, as Takaki (1993) has asserted, because they do not see their cultural experiences represented in the coursework.

Rather than focus, however, on the negative impact of campus climate, this particular inquiry was concerned with investigating how to alleviate those effects. Most noteworthy and encouraging is the finding that positive student–faculty relationships have a strong mitigating effect on campus climate. The final equation of this variable (positive student–faculty relationships) accounted for predicting 25% of the variance ($R^2 = .2501$).

Indeed, Astin (1996) suggests faculty contact plays a central role in the student development process. Previous research has indicated that student–faculty interaction is linked with students' persistence in college (Nagda et al. 1998), intellectual development (Astin 1993a; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Terenzini and Pascarella 1994), academic success (Anderson et al. 1995), and moral development and personal identity awareness (Bowen 1977).

The variable representing student–faculty relationships was made up of eight dimensions of student–faculty interactions: (1) respected (treated like a peer); (2) intellectually challenged; (3) given honest feedback about abilities; (4) discussed coursework; (5) given advice about educational program; (6) provided emotional support/development; (7) encouraged for graduate/professional school; and (8) given letter of recommendation.

Students who had positive interpersonal relationships as described above with faculty are less inclined to report observations and experiences of campus prejudice. Restated, students who feel that faculty treat them with respect, give them honest feedback about their abilities, and provide them with emotional support are less likely to perceive that there is a negative campus climate. Indeed, the strength of the relationship of this variable increased over the course of the regression analysis as additional variables entered the equation even when institutional diversity and multicultural involvement variables entered. In sum, the significance of student–faculty interactions is even more important at institutions with a lower degree of diversity in the student body and where there are fewer opportunities for involvement with multicultural activities (e.g., ethnic studies courses, participation in a racial/ethnic student organization).

This is an especially important finding in light of the earlier results that students tend to be the primary culprits of creating hostile climates. If faculty interact with students in ways that make them feel valued and affirmed both within and outside the classroom, the effect is to moderate a negative learning environment and ultimately facilitate positive learning communities for all students.

Obviously, this has important implications for institutional policy and programs. In essence, students who have frequent contact with faculty members in and out of class are more satisfied with their educational experiences, are less likely to drop out, and perceive

themselves to have learned more than students who have less faculty contact (Astin 1993a; Chickering and Gamson 1987; Nagda et al. 1998).

Additional, statistical analyses performed in this study indicated that students who feel there are opportunities for strong student–faculty interpersonal relationships are likely to earn a higher GPA and tend to feel more self-confident about their academic ability. In fact, it appears that even students who may enter college under-prepared academically and less confident about their intellectual capabilities can expect to evidence gains in their overall GPA if they connect positively and actively with their instructors.

As confirmation of these findings, earlier research indicated that student–faculty contact was independent of student ability upon college entrance and significantly reduced the advantages of those students who enter college with high aptitudes (Blau 1994). Therefore, the kind of effect that faculty can have on students, at least in terms of academic development, should not be underestimated.

Of course, variations may occur with respect to how approachable students find faculty. For instance, Sax (1993) found that although women in math-intensive majors tend to make gains in their math self-concept during the college years, for these women their interactions with faculty were actually associated with declines in math self-confidence. Hence, we cannot always assume that student–faculty interactions have a positive effect on all students.

In general, these findings fit well with Moos' work (1984) on stressful life circumstances and adaptation. Assuming that a negative campus climate is relatively stress-producing, according to Moos, stress may be buffered (or prevented) through social network resources that are a result of the cognitive appraisal of the environmental situation. That is, students who assess a learning climate as stress-producing, but who engage in positive interpersonal relationships are more likely to adapt to and cope with that environment. They come to recognize the negative campus climate, but are not detrimentally impacted in terms of gains in academic knowledge and skills. This view is congruent with other work that indicated that student–faculty research partnerships positively affect students' academic development and success (Nagda et al. 1998).

Discussion

These findings affirm previous research that student perceptions of the campus vary across race/ethnicity (D'Augelli and Hershberger 1993; DeCesare et al. 1972), including differences in sensitivity to varying forms of prejudice and discrimination (Cabrera and Nora 1994; Thomas 1997). While the majority of white students thought their campuses were generally supportive of minority students, far fewer students of color expressed the same opinion (Loo and Rolison 1986; Patterson et al. 1984). Smith (1987), Hartsock (1983), and Fine (1980) argued that those who are most oppressed are more sensitive than are non-victims or victimizers to the nuances of injustice, and are more likely to be aware of institutional elements that sanction forms of injustice. In keeping with these assertions, the data in this study reveal that students of color are less likely than white students to feel that faculty treat students the same regardless of race/ethnicity or gender.

Another salient finding that emerged from the data is that while there are differences between white students and students of color concerning their perception levels of negative campus climate, the responses indicate that nearly half to three-quarters of all students believe that many students on their campus are prejudiced against racial/ethnic minorities. Given such strongly shared sentiments, it is no wonder that African-American/Black

students are 10 times more likely than are white students to report feeling singled out in class or treated differently because of their race/ethnicity.

Whether these incidents are initiated by faculty or whether by classmates cannot be definitively ascertained. However, earlier research has indicated that students report hearing faculty and staff only occasionally making disparaging remarks toward racial/ethnic minorities, while much higher percentages of students indicated hearing students make such remarks (Astin et al. 1991; Arnold 1995; San Diego Community College District 1994). In addition, Cabrera and Nora (1994) found that racial/ethnic minority students were more likely to perceive a discriminatory campus climate, experienced more prejudice on the part of faculty and staff, and were more prone to report negative in-class experiences than were white students. To re-emphasize, both faculty and students need to be held accountable for creating inhospitable learning and living environments (Hurtado et al. 1998).

In most cases, while relatively overt racial incidents are usually accompanied with a lot of media attention and decisive reactions from college and university administrators (Sudarkasa 1988; Vellela 1989), subtle forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia are more difficult to counter in and out of the classroom. Many institutions have civility codes and offer integrated multicultural tolerance programs on their campuses (Neiger et al. 1998). However, what seems clear from students at these 130 American institutions is that students of color are still feeling marginalized because of their race/ethnicity and such feelings of "not belonging" have been associated with a number of negative consequences including the departure of students of color from the institution (Hurtado et al. 1998).

Equally significant, is that women were far more likely than male students to report being singled out in class or treated differently than others because of their gender. Consistent with this finding, a study by Howard and Henney (1998) reports that female students in male-taught classes "worry" about their interactions with the faculty member. Since the majority of courses at colleges and universities are taught by male instructors, this "worry" factor may reflect female students' reports in the current study of feeling that they are treated differently because of their gender.

These findings call for instructors and higher education administrators to attend to strategies that support all students. Perhaps the single most telling fact to this statement is that although levels of perceived discrimination vary, students report the very highest levels of hostility directed against gay and lesbian students. More than two-thirds of all students report observing discrimination directed toward lesbian and gay students. While the effects of campus climate on lesbian and gay students could not be directly studied because the surveys do not inquire about sexual orientation, since lesbian and gay students include both genders and all racial/ethnic groups, the possibility of students experiencing double or triple layers of discrimination (sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender) should not be overlooked. Similarly, Arnold (1995) found that while 90% of students felt welcomed at their institution and 88% agreed that their instructors treated students of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds with equal respect, 40% of the students indicated that the college was not a hospitable place for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Further, a study by Astin et al. (1991) found that 78% of students reported hearing disparaging remarks from other students directed toward gays and lesbians and 10% reported hearing such remarks made by faculty and staff. More recently, one study reported that 60% of students confirmed hearing derogatory comments directed at gays and lesbians (Maleny et al. 1997).

Significantly, a strategy for mediating the effects of a negative campus climate is supporting the development of student–faculty interpersonal relationships. The relative lack of discrimination and prejudice is more likely where students interact with faculty in

terms of discussing coursework and developing relationships that are characterized as intellectually challenging and mutually respectful. Further, student–faculty relationships are positively associated with a number of academic outcomes. This includes students' persistence in college (Nagda et al. 1998), intellectual development (Astin 1993a; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991; Terenzini and Pascarella 1994), academic success (Anderson et al. 1995), and moral development and personal identity awareness (Bowen 1977).

Therefore, encouraging and providing opportunities for student–faculty interactions is critical to students' educational success and to moderating the effects of a negative campus climate, especially for students of color. In spite of the fact that many students of color exceed the academic accomplishments of white students, it behooves faculty to reach out to students of color to develop interpersonal relationships in an effort to level the academic playing field. In addition, these findings point to the importance of institutions hiring more instructors of color to serve as role models and mentors for all students.

Implications for change

In light of the findings, faculty should question how much learning and how much growth and development are being stifled by negative campus climate? Indeed, how much more academic talent could be developed in students if everyone on campus felt valued as an individual learner? As Bowen (1977) asserted over two decades ago, instruction must transcend mere intellectual development and interrelate the affective side of human personality with academic learning. To *not* do so, allows for individual tendencies to maintain prejudices, thereby creating hostile and discriminatory communities.

This century will continue to see a richer and even more complex array of diverse learners at higher education institutions across the globe. As individuals, they present amazing opportunities for creative and heretofore unknown insights about solving medical, technological, and social problems. As a group, the diversity of such learners challenges institutions to develop learning environments that transmit the best of what is known, and to develop skills for discovering the unknown in ways that respect and appreciate each of the contributors in the teaching–learning process. In the United States, the last three decades have witnessed the civil rights movement (and accompanying affirmative action programs), the women's movement, the gay and lesbian civil rights movement, and the recognition of support for Americans with disabilities. Yet, according to this study, American college and university campuses still appear to be places that tolerate prejudice and discrimination. The unfortunate extension of such a situation is to build a disingenuous society which continues to pay lip service to equality, but insidiously maintains a sense of distrust (and even hatred) for those different from ourselves–differences which reside in a multiplicity of dimensions be they religious, political, racial/ethnic, gender, or sexual orientation.

While a formidable task, creating positive campus climates for students (and for faculty and staff) means making two fundamental shifts: (1) changing behaviors; and (2) changing attitudes, at both the individual level and the organizational level. Palmer (1998) refers to these dimensions as the "inner and outer landscapes" of teaching and learning. He suggests that we will fail to transform education if we focus merely on appropriations and structures, and forget to connect with the hearts and souls of the individual teachers and learners.

Moreover, Tanaka (1996) asserts that such educational change requires coordinated strategies across academic departments rather than piecemeal approaches, and needs to

involve white students directly in taking responsibility for enhancing learning environments. This perspective is similar to that of Duster (1993), who believes that for most white students, diversity is conceptualized in one of three ways: competitive, optional, or mutually enhancing. Both researchers declare that institutions must be intentional in creating "intercultural" learning environments that facilitate healthy individual identity development (including that of white students), while facilitating understanding and unity across racial/ethnic groups.

Even large institutions have the potential for developing strong student–faculty interpersonal relationships if they dedicate themselves to becoming student-centered (i.e., making it easy to see faculty outside of class). Institutions that provide students with the opportunities to work on group projects and discuss course content are also laying the groundwork for developing learners that are more likely to have relationships with faculty. If students are respected as individuals, rather than "treated like numbers," students' connections with faculty will be enhanced and ultimately so will their educational development.

In conclusion, the higher education institution that is characterized by a just and equitable campus environment will facilitate student development in bringing to fruition students' full potential as learners and as human beings. Colleges wishing to fulfill democratic hopes and ideals of social justice need to create learning communities that are characterized by equality of opportunity as well as by equality of treatment. The creation of positive student–faculty relationships is a key determinant in realizing this vision.

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