

Scrapping the Status Quo: Setting a New Standard for Diversity Minority Student Caucus

Introduction

The "Scrapping the Status Quo: Setting a New Standard for Diversity" Survey was a powerful attempt made by the Education Committee of the Minority Student Caucus and interested public health students from a variety of departments to address issues of diversity, or lack thereof, within our School of Public Health. The survey was distributed in the spring of 2004 and was responded to by 195 students. Questions asked related to academic experience, school environment, and quality of student life.

The following is a sample of the findings:

- ❖ 56% were satisfied or very satisfied with the breadth of course offering.
 - 26% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
 - 18% were neutral
- ❖ 44% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the competency in covering issues regarding race, ethnicity, and culture
 - 30% were neutral
 - 25% were satisfied or very satisfied
- ❖ 44% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the diversity of perspectives in class discussions.
 - 31% were satisfied or very satisfied
 - 23% were neutral
- ❖ 58% agreed or strongly agreed that there is ethnic diversity among SPH students; 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 10% were neutral. (n=192)
- ❖ 36% agreed or strongly agreed that there is ethnic diversity among the students in their department; 46% disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 18% were neutral. (n=192)

Follow-Up Meeting

A follow-up meeting was conducted with interested parties to discuss the findings of the survey and what can be done with the results. The following issues were discussed at the meeting:

- Current efforts to improve diversity
- Action Steps
 - Internal outreach
- Resources
- Timeline
- General Concerns

This year...

This year, the Caucus intends to use the results of the survey to continue its efforts toward helping make the School of Public Health a better environment for students of diverse backgrounds and for students interested in issues of diversity. After the first General Body meeting on September 13, 2004, we held a mini-forum to let new students voice their opinions on what they expect out of the Minority Student Caucus. An overwhelming majority stated that they wanted to assist in recruitment efforts for students and faculty.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE SPH DIVERSITY SURVEY

Gender

195 students responded to the diversity survey - 161 were female and 34 were male.

Age

The average age of the respondents was 27.8 years old. Ages ranged from 19-58 years old.

Sexual Orientation

Over 85% of the respondents indicated that they were straight or heterosexual. Approximately 10% reported that they were gay, bisexual, lesbian, or queer. 5% of the respondents either left that section blank or actively declined to respond to the question.

Race/Ethnicity

123 respondents identified as White/Caucasian.
35 respondents identified as African/African American/Black.
19 respondents identified as Asian/Asian American.
2 respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino.
2 respondents identified as First Nation/American Indian/Native American.
8 respondents identified as biracial.
3 respondents identified as multiracial.
3 respondents identified as other.

Citizenship/Residence

95% of the respondents were U.S. citizens or permanent residents.
6% identified as international students.
Approximately 60% of the respondents were North Carolina residents.

Degree Programs

5 – BSPH
121 – MHA/MPH/MSPH/MSEE (majority were MPH students)
68 – DrPH/PhD

Departments

67 – Health Behavior & Health Education
33 – Epidemiology
28 – Health Policy & Administration

- 20 – Maternal and Child Health
- 20 – Environmental Science & Engineering
- 10 – Public Health Leadership
- 7 – Biostatistics
- 7 – Nutrition

Academic Experience

- ❖ 75% were satisfied or very satisfied with the relevance of courses to their interests
 - 14% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
 - 12% were neutral
- ❖ 56% were satisfied or very satisfied with the breadth of course offering
 - 26% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
 - 18% were neutral
- ❖ 64% were satisfied or very satisfied with opportunities for class discussion
 - 19% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
 - 17% were neutral
- ❖ 62% were satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunities for creative/independent thought
 - 24% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
 - 12% were neutral
- ❖ 52% were satisfied or very satisfied with the number of opportunities for mentorship/guidance
 - 27% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
 - 21% were neutral
- ❖ 44% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the competency in covering issues regarding race, ethnicity, and culture
 - 30% were neutral
 - 25% were satisfied or very satisfied
- ❖ 43% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the competency in covering politically, methodologically and ethically controversial issues.
 - 28% were satisfied or very satisfied
 - 27% were neutral
- ❖ 44% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the diversity of perspectives in class discussions.
 - 31% were satisfied or very satisfied
 - 23% were neutral
- ❖ 72% were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of assistance from departmental staff
 - 15% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied

- 11% were neutral
- ❖ 31% were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of assistance from the Office of Student Affairs
 - 31% thought this question was not applicable
 - 28% were neutral
 - 8% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied
- ❖ 58% agreed or strongly agreed that there is ethnic diversity among SPH students
 - 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed
 - 10% were neutral

School Environment

58% agreed or strongly agreed that there is ethnic diversity among SPH students; 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 10% were neutral. (n=192)

36% agreed or strongly agreed that there is ethnic diversity among the students in their department; 46% disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 18% were neutral. (n=192)

11% agreed or strongly agreed that there is ethnic diversity in the SPH faculty; 61% disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 28% were neutral. (n=192)

8% agreed or strongly agreed that there is ethnic diversity among the faculty in their department; 77% disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 15% were neutral. (n=192)

28% agreed or strongly agreed that there is socioeconomic diversity among the students in their department; 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed; and 31% were neutral. (n=193)

129 of 193 respondents (67%) strongly agreed that it is important to have ethnic diversity in the SPH.

112 of 193 respondents (58%) strongly agreed that it is important to have socioeconomic diversity in the SPH.

113 of 191 respondents (59%) strongly agreed that it is important to have gender diversity in the SPH.

72 of 192 respondents (37%) strongly agreed that it is important to have sexual orientation diversity in the SPH.

Quality of Student Life

Of the 72 students of color who responded:

- 30 reported often or occasionally experiencing alienation from SPH faculty as a result of their race

- 20 reported often or occasionally experiencing marginalization of their ideas by SPH faculty as a result of their race
- 16 reported often or occasionally experiencing discrimination from SPH faculty as a result of their race.

Of the 16 students who reported non-heterosexual orientation:

- 6 reported often or occasionally experiencing alienation from SPH faculty as a result of their sexual orientation
- 3 reported often or occasionally experiencing marginalization of their ideas by SPH faculty as a result of their sexual orientation
- 1 reported often or occasionally experiencing discrimination from SPH faculty as a result of their sexual orientation.

Of the 16 respondents who reported non-heterosexual orientation:

- 13 reported often or occasionally experiencing alienation from SPH students as a result of their sexual orientation
- 7 reported often or occasionally experiencing marginalization of their ideas by SPH faculty as a result of their sexual orientation
- 2 reported often or occasionally experiencing discrimination from SPH faculty as a result of their race.

Of the 72 students of color who responded:

- 38 reported often or occasionally experiencing alienation from SPH students as a result of their race
- 28 reported often or occasionally experiencing marginalization of their ideas by SPH students as a result of their race
- 16 reported often or occasionally experiencing discrimination from SPH students as a result of their race.

Very few respondents reported experiencing alienation, marginalization or discrimination from SPH staff.

REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES FROM QUALITATIVE DATA

"The problem in my eye is the content of the information that I receive in class. I feel like our classes continue to perpetuate the cycle of health disparities, teaching us very little to combat these issues. The only classes that I feel comfortable in are the classes offered through ECHO for the health disparities certificate."

"I think the SPH can do a much better job of actively supporting diversity within the School. Ethnic diversity is sorely lacking, and I think that lack of diversity hurts not just the learning experience here, but ultimately hurts the field of public health by continuing to graduate professionals into the field who do not exemplify the diversity of our nation or the world."

"Improved recruiting efforts should be the first way to accomplish a diverse student body, followed by an emphasis on the importance of diversity of thought and open discussion in classrooms."

"In the initial questions that asks, 'Is there ethnic diversity in your department?' - Yes, there is. If there is just one person who is different from the rest of the group on an issue there is diversity. For me the question is whether there is sufficient or adequate diversity on these different issues. My class is in no ways balanced or representative. We are not enough like the people we are hoping to serve."

"Very difficult to build academic knowledge required in field of public health when faculty and course-work do not include what comprises the public. Our studies and methods focus on what impacts or is feasible for a typical Caucasian middle-class American. This is a very limited view of the world let alone the United States."

"I'd also like to comment on the lack of consideration for sexual orientation concerns in the HBHE department and in the entire school. Professors consistently use examples in class and language that promotes heterosexual norms (like being married). I have also noticed that married students gain higher status in some professor's eyes, which is problematic."

"While I haven't been discriminated because of my sexual orientation, I have been cautioned about and perhaps marginalized because of my research interests related to sexual orientation."

"I feel that in general it is difficult to go against the grain on political issues, especially in the HBHE department. The department is very liberal, and although I agree a majority of the time, I would not feel comfortable voicing an opposing opinion to fellow classmates."

"I am overall satisfied with my department's efforts to *not* discriminate against students on the basis of gender, age, race, sexual orientation, etc. Beyond the absence of negatives, I would appreciate a more proactive stance from the department in addressing health policy research issues as they relate to minorities. Some faculty members specialize in minority health research. That is a step in the right direction. I have seen, though, that other faculty members and students sometimes look down on minority health research because it tends to use alternate research methods (qualitative or participatory)."

"I do see a greater diversity in students representing other countries (different nationalities), but less representation of non-white Americans, with the exception of African Americans. The distinction between diversity based on ethnicity vs. nationality needs to be recognized."

"The PHLP staff and faculty are amazingly helpful and supportive! I have never been made to feel anything but supported and encouraged. My only concern with SPH in general is the lack of ethnic minorities and the lack of diversity in terms of socioeconomic backgrounds."

"There appears to be a great deal of diversity at AID. Perhaps we need to focus on attracting students of color with scholarships or other incentives."

"I feel that I learn as much from my fellow students as from faculty. For this reason, it is very important to have a very diverse school so we can all learn from each other's knowledge, experiences, and background, and we can all be better practitioners."

"Strangely enough, the strongest negative interaction I've had with other SPH students seems to be related to differing socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds. An example would be those who think that their own cultural, travel, and living experiences (such as in foreign cities) makes their opinions superior to those that have lived in the rural U.S."

"Given the growing importance of LGBT health issues, it is crucial that the SPH cultivate faculty and graduate students with interest and competence in this area. I have been extremely disappointed at the total lack of coursework or even faculty guidance available on LGBT health concerns."

"As a student of color, I do not feel that I have established a mentor/mentee relationship with any of the faculty in my department. It is important that faculty members are doing research that students of color are interested in."

"I believe that the administration has not done enough to address diversity issues in the School of Public Health since 1998. The former Dean outlined initiatives to address diversity in the student body, faculty core, and curriculum, but little progress has been made in those three areas. The ECHO program was established which addresses research and curriculum concerned with health disparities, populations of color, and underrepresented groups. This is one of the few successes of the administration since 1998. However, there has been minimal progress made in diversifying the curriculum or addressing minority health research priorities of the School outside of ECHO."

"I fail to see how worrying about whether there is enough diversity (assuming you can even define that) advances our mission to improve public health. As long as my classmates are committed to practicing their disciplines to the highest professional and ethical standards, their gender, race, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation is COMPLETELY irrelevant."

"I don't feel that students should be given highly preferential treatment in the admissions process due to their race/ethnicity or sexual orientation. I think there is a lot of diversity in the SPH. The admissions process should strive to recruit the most qualified applicants, not the most diverse for diversity sake."

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April 28, 2004

Meeting Notes

(35 students, faculty, and administrators were in attendance!!)

➤ Introduction of new Minority Student Caucus officers

- Dara Hall and Myra Alvarez – Co-Chairs
- Kristal Vardaman – Secretary
- Margaret Hall and Badriyyah Al-Islam – Education Committee Co-Chairs
- Chris Heaney – Minority Health Conference Co-Chair
- Danielle Spurlock – Minority Health Conference Co-Chair
- Ashley Beard – Treasurer

➤ Presentation of major findings from SPH diversity survey (See handout)

➤ Current efforts to improve diversity

- Identifying core courses (i.e., EPI 160, ENVR 101, HBHE 131) and requesting a larger focus on diversity issues – *MSC-education committee*
- Article generating task force to identify important articles that address diversity issues in HBHE - 'The Meeting'
- Evaluating the top eight schools of public health for diversity – *Cultural Competency Lab in the MCH Child Development Course*
- Applying for pipeline grants for the REACH Program - *MSC and ECHO*
- Partnering with AHEC in Greensboro to develop summer internship program – *MSC*
- Developing workshops to attract undergraduate students into public health
- Tapping into existing organizations including the Minority Behavioral Science group for targeted recruitment of undergraduates
- Minority Health Conference web cast – *Minority Health Project site* (www.minority.unc.edu)
- Developing graduate assistant position to work on recruitment and diversity in HBHE – 'The Meeting'
- Recruiting McNair Scholars at the Southern Regional Educational Board Conference – *Suchi Ayala*
- Project SEED and RAP are summer mentorship programs for high school students that provide an opportunity to expose young people to public health – *Lisa Casanova*

➤ Action Steps

- Support efforts to recruit a **more diverse faculty** by talking to Department chairs, ensuring broad distribution of position announcements, nominating scholars of color to search committees, and advocating for more recruitment funds
- Call on the University for stronger financial support of SPH student organizations, including MSC and the SPH LGBT group
- Solicit alumni funds earmarked for diversity (student recruitment as well as creating new courses and programs)
- Connect resources to Office of Minority Affairs to send SPH students to conferences to recruit

- Take greater advantage of **Minority Health Project website** (include student articles, descriptions of student activities around diversity, etc.) – *Vic Schoenbach is the contact person*
- Get a direct link to the **Minority Health Project site** on the SPH front page – *Jaime Jenett and Rebecca Mead*
- Work to improve **web visibility** of minority students and minority health issues (related to race and sexual orientation) at the SPH: *Jaime Jenett, Ashley Hammarth, Kristal Vardaman, Tasseli McKay*
- Creating an **MSC advisory board** that would include community members, faculty from each department and students – *Chris Heaney, Danielle Spurlock, Ashley Beard, Sacoby Wilson, Theresa Chapple, Badriyyah Al-Islam, Tasseli McKay, and Nina Yamanis.*
- **Publicize survey findings** via MHC website, fall Dean's Council presentation, and possibly formal publication
- **Internal outreach**
 - Increase **collaborations among student organizations** – movie nights and guest speakers – *Global Health Council/MSC/SUB*
 - Celebrating diversity and acknowledge cultural contributions through monthly events (Black History month, Hispanic Heritage month, Women's History month, etc.)
 - Cultivate broader student participation in MSC
 - Create a newsletter to keep people informed of diversity related events and issues (perhaps to be posted on the Minority Health Project site) – *Danielle Spurlock and Ashley Beard*
 - Making brief presentations in core course during the fall semester to increase student interest in diversity-related activities

➤ Resources

- The Provost and Dean's offices have pots of money set aside for faculty recruitment
- New programs such as Latino/Latina Studies and Native American Studies might bring in new and diverse faculty

➤ Timeline

- *Summer:* Recruit board members for MSC Advisory Board; Develop E-newsletter
- *Fall:* Core course presentations; Send out E-newsletter

➤ General Concerns

- Pipeline issues and competition with other schools pose the greatest obstacles to faculty recruitment
- The SPH needs to develop an infrastructure for diversity that won't be subject to change year to year – creating institutional memory and knowledge on diversity issues
- We have to ensure that through all of our efforts we acknowledge all forms of diversity (including sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic and political perspectives) and not solely racial/ethnic diversity