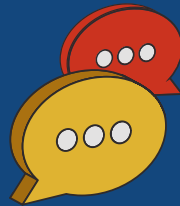# BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CAMPUS COMMUNITY FOR UNDERGRADUATES AT AU

•AMERICAN UNIVERSITY SURVEY RESEARCH IN PERSPECTIVE •

PREPARED BY:

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/surveys.cfm

INTRODUCTION

Every year, American University asks students about their experiences inside and outside the classroom. We do this through surveys, focus groups, and meetings with students. The goals of these efforts are straightforward: first, to gather information that can help us understand the degree to which the university is meeting its goals and then to use this information to improve the student experience.

AU's Office of Institutional Research and Assessments collects data on any one issue in many ways. For this reason, the office is launching a series of topic papers designed to bring together data from diverse sources in order to shine light on issues of importance to the university community. This topic paper provides selected results from the Freshmen Census (administered before students step foot in a classroom), the Campus Climate Survey (an AU developed survey) and the National Survey of Student Engagement. Because most of our sources survey undergraduates, this report focuses on the undergraduate experience.

At the end of this report, we offer some ways to get involved in the topic. For more information about the surveys used to inform this report, please visit the following website: http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/surveys.cfm

Background: Diversity & Inclusion on Campus

American University has a long history of commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion. One of the Strategic Plan's transformative goals is "Reflect and Value Diversity". It states:

> *… American University embraces diversity in its broadest sense, including diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, nationality, disability, socioeconomic standing, and intellectual viewpoint. The university views diversity as an essential component of the educational experience of our students and an important indicator of our success in adapting to the dramatic demographic shifts that will occur in the decades ahead. We will dedicate the necessary resources to recruiting, welcoming, supporting, and retaining outstanding students, faculty, staff, and leadership who will significantly improve the diversity of our community, with particular attention to the inclusion of underrepresented domestic minority students.*

We continue to advance this goal using the following definitions from the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U):[1]

- Diversity is defined as "individual differences (e.g., personality, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations)."

- Inclusion is defined as "the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might

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[1] For more information on AU's actions to advance the goal, including the latest efforts by the President's Council on Diversity and Inclusion, see the last section of this report called, "American University Actions".

connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions."

How well does AU reflect these values? To answer this, we look at the question from four different perspectives: 1) diversity and inclusion as a value; 2) experiencing diverse perspectives, 2) diversity in the classroom; 3) AU as an inclusive, supportive environment; and 4) AU responses and actions.

Reflecting Our Values

Diversity and Inclusion as a Value

Entering first year students come to AU with a strong propensity to value diverse perspectives. The results of the Higher Education Research Institute Freshmen Survey, a national survey of first year students from across the nation, finds that:

- First year students come to AU with a strong sense of their own ability to engage with diverse perspectives. Almost 89% of AU first-time freshmen regard the "ability to see the world from someone else's perspective" as a 'somewhat strong' or 'major' strength. Almost 86% of students rate the trait "tolerance of others with different beliefs" as a 'somewhat strong' or a 'major' strength. Only 69% say that they are open to having their own views challenged.
- AU students place a high value on racial understanding. The Freshman Survey results find that AU freshmen are consistently more likely than their peers at other selective private universities to say that "promoting racial understanding" is 'very important' or 'essential':

Goals and Values Rated as "Very Important" or Essential: Promoting Racial Understanding

	2014	2015	2016	2017
American University	59.5%	63.5%	65.1%	73.4%
Select Private Universities	42.5%	47.5%	53.2%	n/a*

*Not available until January 2018

Experiencing Diverse Perspectives

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a survey that looks at different aspects of the student experience, surveys first year students and graduating seniors. The survey provides AU with a sense of how AU is similar or different from other higher education institutions. In the area of "Discussions with Diverse Others", AU does well. For example, the table below demonstrates that AU students are more likely than students at other institutions to say that they have discussions with people from different races, ethnicities, economic backgrounds, and religious beliefs. However, students are less likely to experience discussions with people of different political views.

Discussions with Diverse Others

		First Year Students		Seniors	
	AU	**NSSE 2015 & 2016**		**AU**	**NSSE 2015 & 2016**
Percent of students who responded that they "Very often" or "Often" had discussions with…					
People from a race or ethnicity other than your own	82	+11		80	+7
People from an economic background other than your own	83	+11		79	+5
People with religious beliefs other than your own	82	+15		79	+10
People with political views other than your own	64	-4		59	-11

The bars in blue reflect how many percentage points greater AU's response is compared to other NSSE participants
Yellow bars reflect how many percentage points lower AU's response is compared to other NSSE participants

Diversity in the Classroom

- 2016 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results find that AU students are more likely than students at other institutions to "examine the strengths and weaknesses of their own views on a topic or issue". They are more likely to try to "better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective."
- AU students are much more likely than students at other institutions to say that they "very often" or "often" included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments.
  - For first year students, 72% experienced such diverse perspectives, compared to only 51% of their peers. This is a 22 percentage point difference.

- o For seniors, 70% experienced such diverse perspectives, compared to only 55% of their peers, a 15 percentage point difference.
- The 2017 Campus Climate Survey found that black students are least likely to say that they experience diversity in the classroom.

% almost always or most of the time
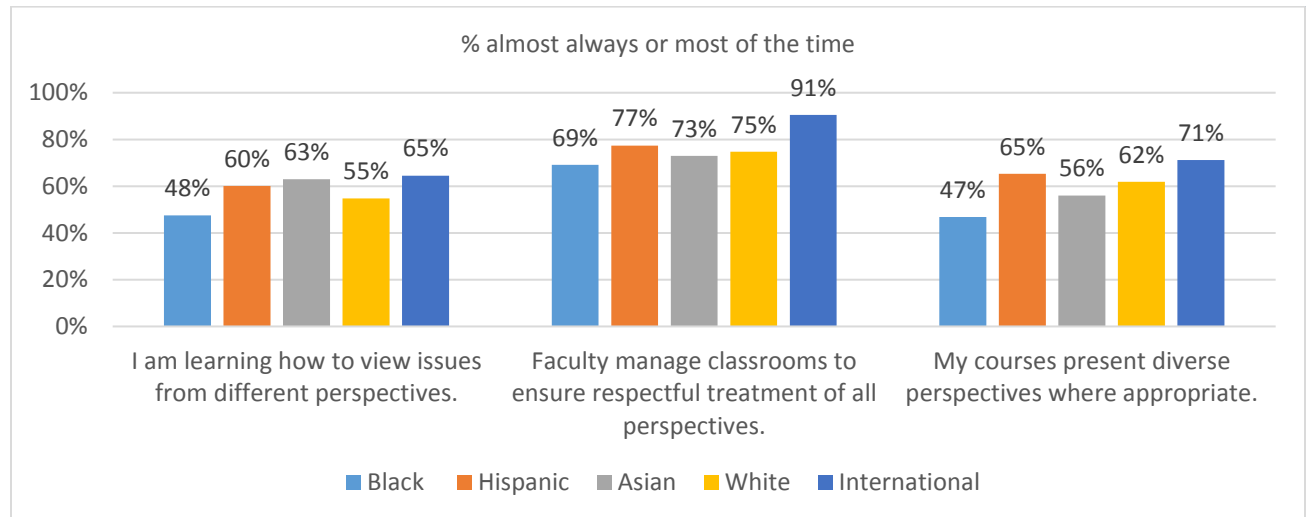
- Conservative students also say that diversity in the classroom is a challenge. Only 54% of students who describe themselves as 'conservative' say that "faculty manage classrooms to ensure respectful treatment of all perspectives", compared to 80% of liberal students. Only 45% of conservative students agree that "my courses present diverse perspectives where appropriate" compared to 64% of liberals.

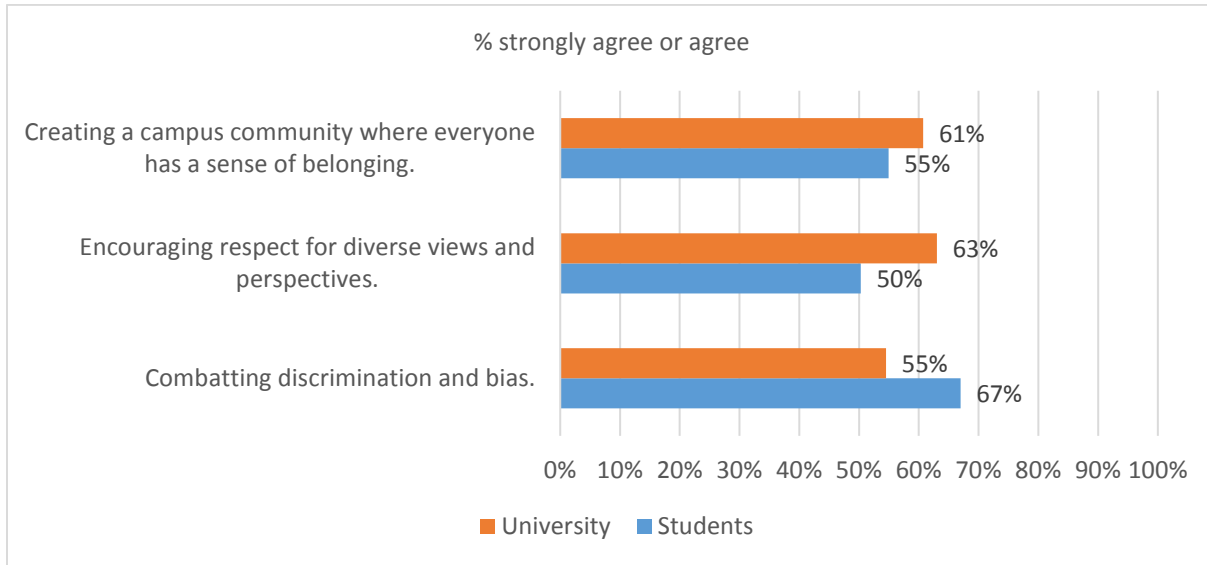# AU as an Inclusive, Supportive Environment

AU's Campus Climate Survey is designed to capture the degree to which students feel welcome, included and a part of the campus community. The 2017 survey results demonstrate that AU does not live up to its full potential. Many students still do not feel "included" on campus. For example:

- 33% of black students and 59% of Hispanic students 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that "I feel included on campus" versus 71% of white students.
- 47% of conservative students 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that "I feel included on campus" versus 70% of liberal students.
- Only 34% of black student feel that students are committed to creating a campus environment where everyone has a sense of belonging. 42% of black students feel that the university is committed to creating a sense of belonging.
- The level of "inclusion" varies little by gender, sexual orientation and disability. First year students are more likely than their peers in other classes to feel "included".

The Campus Climate Survey asked students to indicate whether their fellow students are committed to fundamental principles related to inclusion. The findings show:

AU and Student Commitments

To what extent do you agree or disagree that AU students are/the university is committed to:

% strongly agree or agree

Creating a campus community where everyone has a sense of belonging.
University: 61%
Students: 55%

Encouraging respect for diverse views and perspectives.
University: 63%
Students: 50%

Combatting discrimination and bias.
University: 55%
Students: 67%

■ University ■ Students

- The Campus Climate Survey results on student commitments point to challenges with student relations. Only half of students agree that their fellow students encourage respect for diverse views and perspectives (see above) and only 65% of students say that "other students care about me as a person." This result might be in line with a NSSE finding, in which only 50% of first year students, and 45% of seniors rated their interactions with students as a "6" or "7" on a seven point scale. This result is 6 percentage points below that of peers for first year students, and 17% points below for seniors.
- Too few students feel emotionally safe on campus. Overall, 69% of women feel emotionally safe versus 81% of men. Only 49% of black students feel emotionally safe, versus 75% of whites.
- The Freshman Census provides an early indication of a student's experience at AU. The survey, which asks the question, "I feel welcome on campus" finds the following:

AU Responses and Actions

How well does AU respond to "troubling" situations that relate to discrimination or bias? The Campus Climate Survey attempts to track this. It finds the following results by race/ethnicity:
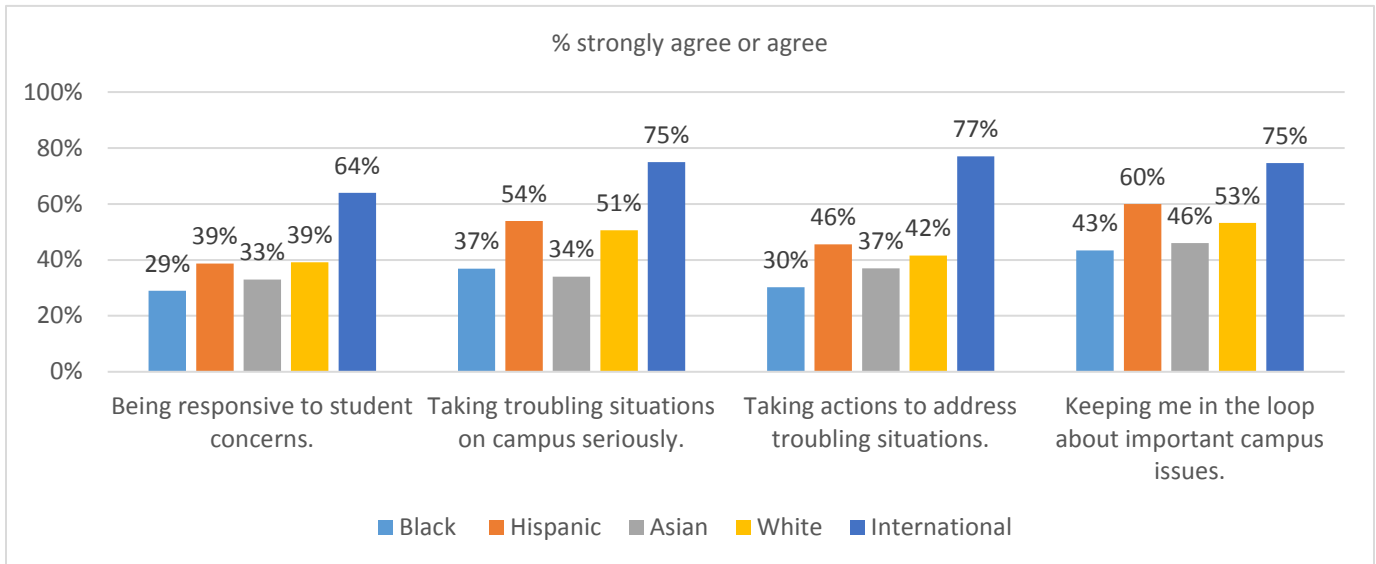
American University Actions[2]

AU has been working to improve the campus climate for quite some time:

- The work of Reinventing the Student Experience (RiSE) found significant challenges for students of different cultural backgrounds and continues to work to find innovative solutions to help improve the student experience.

- Under the leadership of President Neil Kerwin and the President's Council on Diversity and Inclusion (PCDI), AU responded to incidents of racism in past years through memos, town hall forums, courageous conversations, as well as engagement with external civic organizations. In 2016, the university put forth a five-point diversity and inclusion plan, part of a proactive effort to turn the goals the community articulated into actions.

- In summer and fall 2017 AU took a close look at the scale and scope of that plan to understand what more we needed to do. We've received extensive input on the additional measures we need to take from stakeholders across the community—we've met with student leadership groups, faculty and staff leadership groups, alumni leaders, university leaders, and external partners. We have carefully studied institutional climate reports, meeting minutes, surveys, and focus group summaries.

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[2] This section was updated in January 2018 to reflect the latest information about the AU Plan for Inclusive Excellence.

- In January 2018, President Burwell announced the development of the university's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan.[3] The plan reaffirms AU's commitment to equity and equal access, and an appreciation of diverse cultures and viewpoints and is guided by a widely-used model known as "Inclusive Excellence" framework.[4] This framework embraces an integrated approach to institutional excellence. The plan, when adopted, will guide the actions of administrative units, schools, colleges, and academic departments. Examples of recent progress and priorities in the plan include:

Training, Learning and Development

Progress	Moving Forward
• Over 100 training courses and/or diversity and inclusion programs offered for faculty, staff and students were delivered by HR, CTRL, CDI within the past year. • 89% of incoming first year students participated in unconscious bias training during Orientation.	Members of the AU community will demonstrate cultural competency by learning key concepts that will reduce bias and foster diversity, equity and inclusion, and equip them to lead change in a complex world.

Campus Climate, Culture and Community

Progress	Moving Forward
• The Office of Campus Life created additional spaces for multi-cultural organizations and students to gather and meet. • The Office of Human Resources worked with employees to create and launch the Black Faculty and Staff Affinity Group (BFSAG).	AU will develop a campus climate and culture where all community members feel safe, experience a sense of belonging and satisfaction – and their overall well-being is supported through respectful, authentic, and engaged relationships with each other.

Systems, Policies, and Procedures

Progress	Moving Forward
• AU has begun review of policies and procedures and has already developed procedures for tracking progress on the Plan for Inclusive Excellence.	AU's systems, policies and procedures will facilitate diversity, inclusion, transparency and accountability. We will evaluate revise and communicate changes in policies and protocols that will facilitate reports of bias

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[3] http://www.american.edu/president/diversity/index.cfm
[4] To learn more about the framework, go to: https://www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive

Progress	Moving Forward
and discrimination, improve clarity, provide transparency, promote fairness and enhance accountability.

Access and Equity

Progress	Moving Forward
• A plan for diversifying and retaining diverse faculty — Target of Opportunity Program (TOP) — was developed and will continue. • Human Resources examined every phase of staff hiring process with the goal of increasing diversity and inclusion. Search Committee training will be streamlined across the university.	We will transform the way we recruit, hire, train, develop, evaluate and recognize AU faculty, staff, and administrators to encourage the achievement of our diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

Curriculum and Instruction

Progress	Moving Forward
• The first pilot of AUx1, which launched last year, had a retention rate of 98% • The creation of the Anti-Racist Center for Research and Policy to conduct cutting-edge, intersectional, and interdisciplinary research of racial inequality and discrimination of a national and international scope	We will offer an inclusive core curriculum that advances a holistic learning experience and demonstrates AU's values of critical inquiry, intellectual engagement and respectful discourse across diverse perspectives.

Ways to Get Involved

- Complete a feedback form to provide us with your recommendations:
  https://www.cvent.com/d/3tqzss/3B

- Stay informed. The president's website on diversity offers comprehensive information on AU and its efforts to support diversity and inclusion.
  http://www.american.edu/president/diversity/

- Students: Consider being a peer educator. More information is available here:
  http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/EAGLE-Peer-Educators.cfm

- Faculty and Staff: Attend Human Resources and Center for Teaching, Research and Learning workshops and courses. The following is a link to training courses: http://www.american.edu/training/Profdev/upload/TD-Courses-090617-Booklet_508C.pdf

- All: Take advantage of the services offered by the Center for Diversity and Inclusion. Examples of trainings are here: http://www.american.edu/ocl/cdi/trainings.cfm

Details:

Want more information on the surveys, including response rates?

Visit: http://www.american.edu/provost/oira/Surveys.cfm