

*If we are the ones making up the community in the University, shouldn't they listen to some of our voices that we are trying to make them hear?*



*I made those friends and I feel protected by them, like a little circle or something.*

## CAMPUS ASSESSMENT WORKING GROUP

*I think one of the best features of this school is how diverse it is.*

*This school fosters different races but it doesn't do anything to promote getting groups to work more together.*

*I would say that there is no campus community, but there are many small campus communities.*

# ***Campus Climate and Community: What Students Say***

*I don't have a lot of faith in the people at UM to respect who I am and what I try to do.*

*UM emphasizes so much that they are a diverse school, maybe they should build it in more so students are required to experience it more.*

*A lot of people feel uncomfortable going to the programs, events, and parties of other cultural groups.*

*I feel that once you get here, community is something you have to look for. Once you look for community, you will find it.*

*Before I came to Maryland, most of my friends were Caucasian.*

**A focus group report by members of the  
Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG)  
Assessment of Campus Experiences Subgroup  
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## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2000, the President's Cabinet asked the Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) to conduct a study of the campus climate for diversity in regard to gender, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation. The goal of this study was to investigate the campus climate for University of Maryland community members of various gender, racial/ethnic and sexual identities, focusing specifically on their feelings of belonging, engagement, and equity. The intended outcome of this investigation was to gather practical information and recommendations from students that could be used by campus decision makers in their planning. See Appendix A for a list of the people involved in all aspects of this project. See Appendix B for a list of campus and external publications that formed the basis for this project.

Initially the proposed method for this study was to develop a survey that would fit the charge given by the cabinet and adequately assess the campus climate. A pilot study, including six different versions of a survey, was administered in late spring 2001 as the first step in this effort. The findings from the pilot study indicated that a survey was not the best assessment tool for the study's goals. Although a survey can provide valuable information and descriptions about the general experience of students, it was not deemed the most effective method for exploring possibilities and developing ideas for possible changes and improvements. The Cabinet preferred an approach that would reveal possible solutions to the climate concerns on campus. Therefore, focus groups were selected as a method that would better capture students' specific experiences, perspectives and suggestions.

Focus groups can help in obtaining background information about a topic, generating research hypotheses that can then be tested using quantitative approaches, and learning how respondents talk about a phenomenon of interest.<sup>1</sup> In this design, focus groups allowed the research team to explore the experiences with community and diversity of a variety of students at the University of Maryland. The focus group setting allowed the students to express their thoughts, opinions and experiences in their own words. Through asking questions and having students answer these questions, the researchers were able to learn what campus climate issues were salient to students. See Appendix C for the project's methodology and stated limitations, and Appendix D for the questions that were asked in these focus groups.

The following sections of the report are a summary of students' recommendations, descriptions and comments. *Again, the purpose of a focus group project is to explore a topic, and not to come to conclusions about what most students believe.* Thus, the full spectrum of responses on various topics is shared in an organized fashion in this report. Where we were able to, we made general statements, with examples, if students tended to agree on issues, and provided examples of opposing statements where appropriate. The most important questions we asked students were those centered around how the UM climate could be improved. Immediately following are either direct suggestions from students, or suggestions inferred by their comments about how they describe the current climate. They are presented in categories that represent topics that emerged across multiple focus groups. Following the recommendations are the results that led to those recommendations. These results fall in two broad categories. First, general descriptions of the climate and community are presented, through the eyes of certain groups and as a whole. The second grouping of results is the perceptions of climate. Included here are students' assumptions, understandings, and conclusions about what community is and how it is formed and impacted.

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart, D. W., & Shamadasani, P. N. (1990). Focus groups: Theory and practice. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

## **STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING CAMPUS CLIMATE**

In general, most students were not as willing (or able) to brainstorm recommendations as they were to describe how things are on campus now. Included here are the recommendations they came up with, either directly or indirectly, when pressed to focus on issues of diversity, grouped into topic areas.

### **1. The campus climate is everyone's responsibility.**

- Everyone, including students, should make an attempt to greet each other across campus.
- Students should acknowledge that the climate is a result of everyone's actions, not just students of color. Everyone should be involved in making this a better place.
- We should acknowledge that UM is a big place, and community among everyone might be ambitious; community among smaller groups also contributes to the whole.
- We should try to respect groups spending time together, and also make efforts to join groups where we are the minority to try to break down perceived barriers.
- Students should get involved on campus, in identity-specific organizations and/or otherwise.

### **2. Establish more campus-wide celebrations and opportunities for interaction.**

- Campus wide events, where no one group is singled out, are engaging; for example, the celebration after the NCAA championship game.
- Have campus sponsored events rather than individual cultural group sponsored events, which would be less intimidating to non-members of specific groups.
- On that same note, more universal events could appeal to everyone, such as Art Attack, Maryland Day and First Look Fair. Bigger events reach more people.
- Good concerts bring lots of people together with different interests.
- Pep rallies before and after games would direct the student enthusiasm.
- Hold big coordinated events rather than numerous smaller ones.
- Allocate more small public spaces (lounges) in buildings for people to hang out.
- In general, people should try to interact with others more often, and more sponsored opportunities for interaction should be established.

### **3. Faculty and academics have a role.**

- Hire more female professors, and professors of color.
- Faculty should focus on students, and developing relationships with them.
- Faculty and staff should attend diversity training so they are better able to interact with all kinds of students.
- Faculty should choose the groups (with diversity in mind) when assigning group projects in class.
- Faculty should encourage the participation of all students in class, but should not look to minority students to represent or speak for their group.
- The problem of faculty and teaching assistants whose English speaking ability is limited should be addressed.

### **4. Increase attention and services to Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) issues.**

- Expand the use and visibility of the Safe Space stickers on campus; include faculty and anyone with student contact.
- Allocate a place for LGB students to hang out and congregate.

- Offer more classes that address sexuality.
  - Treat sexual diversity the same as racial diversity, with money, attention, and assistance to help LGB students get organized.
  - LGB students need ways to find and connect with other LGB students.
  - Establish more student groups available for LGB students.
  - Increase LGB awareness with events sponsored by the campus as a whole.
- 5. The administration should help to make sure that events are advertised and policies explained.**
- Administrators should attend more student-organized events.
  - Provide a resource list for incoming students of the available organizations/clubs.
  - Expand the daily events page in the Diamondback.
  - Post fliers on the doors of bathroom stalls announcing upcoming events.
  - Invest in the campus radio station to build listener base.
  - Allocate more space in high traffic areas for organizations/clubs to post fliers about what is happening: e.g., libraries, dining halls.
  - Terpidiot's was a great source of information because it was student-run.
  - Recruitment policies for programs and campus jobs should be explained.
- 6. Establish more classes and other kinds of support for specific groups (especially Latino and Native American students).**
- Make sure CORE and diversity classes are actually substantive.
  - A full-time staff person dedicated to Asian Pacific American issues would provide stability and consistency, would help the organizations get things done, and would provide a link to the administration.
  - If administrators are doing work on behalf of specific groups, allow that work to be reflected in their titles.
- 7. Provide and encourage sensitivity training and diversity training.**
- Have students experience being a minority, and other kinds of sensitivity training.
  - Promote sensitivity and diversity training opportunities for faculty and staff.
  - Provide lectures on diversity topics.
  - Organize diversity-related field trips, group projects and conferences – perhaps within majors.
  - Organize small dialogues for students to discuss related issues.
- 8. Pay more attention to current students, less focus on recruiting new students.**
- Hold town hall type meetings with open conversations and representatives from various offices: president's office, student affairs, financial aid, registrar.
  - Open communication lines between students and administration would help.
  - Allow more demonstrations.
- 9. Expand programs that seem to work.**
- The living-learning programs work in developing community.
  - The dialogues program through Human Resources helps to get conversations going.
- 10. Work with the city of College Park to make it more appealing to students.**
- Students should feel more comfortable and welcome in College Park.
  - Partner with College Park to have more to do in the area within walking distance.
  - Improve relationships with the College Park community.
  - UM should help build the Purple Line to better connect UM to DC.

## FURTHER RESULTS

### Students' General Description of the Current Campus Climate

Students described their view of the UM campus through the course of sharing their perspectives and experiences. The information they provided was about themselves and their experiences, as well as how they believed the campus experience was for other students. It is important to note that not all students agreed with each other, in general or on specific issues. This report should be read with an understanding that a range of perspectives were heard, and are shared accordingly.

*"There is so much diversity here and it seems that nobody feels different at this school because there is a place for everyone."*

The descriptors of UM were varied and ranged along a full continuum from "I love this campus" and "It is nice here. I don't see any classism or anything like that at all, no racism here that I can tell," or, "There is so much diversity here and it seems that nobody feels different at this school because there is a place for everyone," to "I don't have a lot of faith in the people at UM to respect who I am and what I try to do," and "Nobody I know thinks of University of Maryland as such a diverse school. They think of it as a White school." Overall, however, most of the comments indicated a positive description of the UM campus and a belief that the campus climate is accepting with regard to diversity.

*"I don't have a lot of faith in the people at UM to respect who I am and what I try to do."*

Student descriptions of the campus were often positive and conveyed a sense of satisfaction with UM. Their comments often included statements such as, "I think one of the best features of this school is how diverse it is," or "When you come into a classroom and see all these different faces, it makes you feel good to be in a diverse setting rather than just one race. That is the way I feel coming on this campus." Many students chose UM because they wanted to expand their knowledge of diverse cultures and find opportunities to learn by being involved.

*"I think one of the best features of this school is how diverse it is."*

Many students described the campus community as diverse by reason of the diverse population of students; thus the perception was that any student could find acceptance somewhere among some group here at UM. "I think anyone can find an association or group that they can kind of claim and feel a part of, whether it be your race or sexual orientation or women's association." Multiple students' comments focused on finding acceptance at a smaller level and indicated the belief that this was available for all students. "I think there are smaller communities rather than an entire campus community. There are communities for everyone to go and join and be a part of." However, students also pointed out that although diversity is present this does not necessarily equate to a unified campus. "I think the school values diversity in a sense. I don't think they bring people together, necessarily, but they do have groups for different races, different genders, and different sexual orientations."

*"If you don't feel you belong here your time will be almost wasted. You will not have the motivation or desire to do things because you feel you don't belong."*

### Descriptions of Specific Groups

For the purposes of this study the questions were designed to focus discussion on issues of diversity in terms of students' gender, race/ethnicity and or sexual orientation. Much of the variety in students' responses and descriptions related to



different experiences based upon who the student was or the aspect of diversity in question. The particular focus of a group's discussion was usually linked with the makeup of the group: homogeneous or heterogeneous. The homogeneous groups, composed of students who all identified as similar on an aspect of their identity, offered a unique insight into their experiences. In groups of people who share similar experiences, students seemed very willing to be open and honest. Homogeneous groups generally spent most of their discussions focusing on that aspect of identity and their experiences. Heterogeneous groups were asked to share personal experiences and or perspectives about all of the aspects of identity: gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation. The students' descriptions of the UM campus and climate also varied based upon what aspect of the campus was being discussed. Many students noted that their experience differed across academic departments. "I think certain departments just have a certain air about them as far as being more comfortable to talk about certain issues." During each focus group a variety of topics or conversations occurred. Some of these were unique; others emerged from multiple groups. The following paragraphs describe the points raised around the primary issues related to gender, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation.

*"I think there are smaller communities rather than an entire campus community."*

*"I think certain departments just have a certain air about them as far as being more comfortable to talk about certain issues."*

## **Gender**

In response to inquiries about students' experiences based upon gender, few issues or concerns emerged. Most focus groups spent very little time discussing gender related issues. The most frequently raised topic related to gender was campus safety. Students expressed concern about safety, or the lack of a feeling of safety, particularly at night. Although the concern was expressed by both sexes, most of the discussions focused on the impact on female students. As one female student described, "A lot of girls don't walk alone outside at night. And guys don't really have a problem with that. I know I call some of my guy friends when I go out at night because I didn't want to walk by myself and they'll walk over to my dorm, like no problem, all by themselves."

*"A lot of girls don't walk alone outside at night."*

Regarding other concerns, students generally expressed a feeling that treatment was relatively equal across genders; noticed differences were described as varying by department or area. Students spoke of certain departments having more male students (e.g., Engineering, Computer Science) and others as having more female students (e.g., Psychology, English). An area on campus where gender related differences were considered more obvious was the Campus Recreation Center. A female student shared that, "I do notice a difference in the gym. When I go in, I may be the only girl or one of two or three girls." Similarly male students stated, "You don't see many girls there," and "[it is] a male jungle gym. We go there to play."

*"I was the only Black person in my Environmental Studies college program, so you definitely notice those things."*

## **Race/Ethnicity**

Students from the African American groups shared that they noticed when they were one of a few, or the only, students of color in a situation on campus (e.g., class, residence hall, program). "My freshman year I was the only African American student on my floor. There was one guy on the floor below me, mind you I still live in

Centerville Hall, so there were like forty people on your floor. I was the only Black person in my Environmental Studies college program, so you definitely notice those things.” However, several students expressed a positive view regarding the University’s efforts for students of color. “I think there are a lot of good experiences; like the BSU, the Black Student Union, and I think the campus does a good job to try to reach out and help, like OMSE [Office of Multi-Ethnic Student Education] to help tutor you, and I think the campus does a good job helping Black students out.” The NAACP office was also mentioned. Some students shared their belief that African American and White students have separate social circles and activities. “I know what White kids are doing, but it’s all about going to frats and drinking, whatever, but I would love to know what some of the Black kids are doing on campus socially over the weekend when there is not like a specific thing that someone has organized for us, cause I’d like to do it.” A few students shared frustration with the Diamondback and its representation of minority issues.

Asian students spoke of the strong community they found in the campus’s Asian population and student groups/organizations, and how for many this was their primary social group and support. While students spoke positively of the strength of the campus’s Asian community, they also expressed a feeling that there is a sense of separation and obligation. Some students felt their involvement in the Asian campus community separates them from the greater campus community. “Before I came to Maryland, most of my friends were Caucasian. This was like a big change after I came to Maryland because the Asian organizations here are very high. I feel lucky, and I got involved and the friends I started to make were in the Asian American community. Sometimes I feel weird if I am sitting at a table with a whole bunch of Asian people. Sometimes I wonder what people think of me, do they think of me as someone who only associates with Asian people. Sometimes I run into a problem because I don’t want people to think that I am trying to seclude myself. But because of the University and the way that I got involved, these people that I got to know are all part of the Asian community.” Students did express frustration that non-Asian students didn’t seem to understand the differences among the different Asian backgrounds.

Students in the Hispanic/Latino students’ focus group expressed a more negative experience compared to other groups. “I do hear a lot of people say really racist comments around me. When we are in the Dining Hall and there are predominantly Black and Hispanic people working behind the counter, you hear a lot of people say the rudest things.” Also the students expressed the feeling that they are a small minority presence on campus and so their interests and desires are not a priority. “I don’t think that will be much of a factor until we get more Hispanic students in the college. Right now, everyone knows that there are a lot of Black people in the college. So now there is this general effort, in which to become aware of things that are of African or African American nature. But since we Hispanics are a fairly small minority, there are not the classes, there is not everything you talked about. It is because we don’t have enough of us here yet.” Many students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of Hispanic/Latino related courses offered at UM. The

*“The most comfortable I feel would be with the Latino organizations that I am in, just because those people can relate to me. I just feel more comfortable with them because I don’t have to explain myself.”*

*“Before I came to Maryland, most of my friends were Caucasian.”*

*“I don’t think that will be much of a factor until we get more Hispanic students in the college.”*

*“I actually took the [tribe membership] card with me to class in case they questioned me.”*

students did note the support of Carolina Bahr in OMSE, and a few were disturbed that her work with Hispanic/Latino students is not reflected in her title.

*"You don't want to fake diversity."*

The Native American students reported being an invisible minority, both in terms of numbers on campus as well as individual treatment. "Even the multi-ethnic association has never specifically contacted me about being Native American or given me resources to find anything that is going on that is particularly Native American." Students commented that what communication they did receive did not seem timely. They also feel a responsibility to represent their culture, and a need to be recognized. "I actually took the [tribe membership] card with me to class in case they questioned me. I could tell them I am Native American and am in the right place."

*"I don't think there is so much of a chance for them [LGB students] to fit in as there is really between races."*

A number of White students who participated in the focus groups felt that they were treated differently due to their race. The idea of reverse racism was mentioned as having a negative effect on the ability of White students to get scholarships and to be selected for jobs. There wasn't consensus around this issue as some White students challenged this notion. Some of the White students felt that the campus environment was "forcing" diversity and seemed to have some stress and anxiety about the effects of affirmative action on their educational and professional opportunities. The concerns about affirmative action and admissions were couched in altruistic terms: "You don't want to fake diversity. You don't want to let in people that don't qualify because when they get to the real world it just sets them up to fail. It is bending the rules for the wrong reasons and it is a slippery slope down a way you don't want to go."

*"I'd be interested to know the other gay people on campus. It's just that there aren't places where they hang out all the time."*

### **Sexual Orientation**

The topic of gay, lesbian and bisexual students elicited the greatest variety of perceptions and experiences both among students who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) and among non-LGB students. More students held the perception that the campus was less accepting of issues associated with homosexuality than with issues related to other aspects of identity. "It has been my observation on campus, I don't think there is so much of a chance for them [LGB students] to fit in as there is really between races."

The experiences shared by self-identified LGB students were mixed as to whether they felt accepted and supported, as related to sexual orientation. One student shared, "I've felt really accepted as who I am. I made a lot of friends through classes and I'm out to them . . . I really don't feel any hatred or weirdness being gay on campus." On the other hand, other students felt that "There's internal homophobia on campus," and "If you're heterosexual you get more respect." Several students shared that they felt very separate from UM in terms of their LGB identity. Reasons given for this included because they do not openly identify, and also an inability to develop a community here at UM with other LGB students. Many LGB students spoke of feeling a lack of opportunity to get to know other LGB students or not having a common area/way to meet one another. "I'd be interested to know the other gay

*"Treat sexual diversity the way they do racial diversity."*

people on campus. It's just that there aren't places where they hang out all the time." For many students this contributed to a absence of a sense of support or community.

Other students have found a LGB linked community at UM through available organizations and resources. As one student said, "I think the one cool thing about walking into the Women's Studies Department or the Pride Alliance office or the LGBT Resource Room is that it provides a physical space – it's very inviting, and you know you're at home. You know you are accepted there and expanding this space in a way that is less fragmented and more accessible." Students noted a handful of student-run organizations as their primary support structure, including the Pride Alliance, Safe Space, and Woman-to-Woman. They believe the Counseling Center and Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equity, directed by Luke Jensen, are the only offices on campus that provide them with support, and the latter seems understaffed and under funded. "Like Luke Jensen's office.... Yeah it's great that we have it, but he is one man. It is small and limited." Many students mentioned taking and enjoying the courses offered through the LGBT Studies certificate program. In contrast, some students expressed frustration that their issues do not receive the same attention and resources as other types of diversity. "Treat sexual diversity the way they do racial diversity. They raise racial diversity up to a different level – it's the be-all and end-all of all diversities at this school. That's where the money goes, that's where the attention goes, that's where everything goes." Students for the most part were very complimentary of Resident Life staff regarding LGB issues. "They have been very gay friendly and I think that is very important because that is where you live."

Similarly the perception of the LGB student experience by non-LGB students is mixed. Some students feel that UM is an accepting environment for LGB students and spoke of their LGB friends as seeming to have a fine experience here, or the presence of campus events/organizations and incorporation of LGB topics into classes as evidence of campus acceptance. Other students expressed a perception that the experience of the LGB student is different than for other groups of students and probably more difficult. They pointed to factors such as: the presence of homophobic students on campus; reports of negative emails, incidents, attacks and destruction of LGB related fliers; and a lack of organizations available for LGB students, which makes it difficult to identify and connect with other LGB students. "I think it would be a little bit harder for a gay or bisexual group to be organized. They are considered more of a phantom group, you can't really tell. If you are Black, there is a group on campus. But if you are gay, you are not sure if other people on campus are gay, and you are not necessarily sure. Because of that, it may be hard to form organizations and to come out." Additionally, they shared their knowledge of the experiences of their LGB friends and their hesitation and lack of comfort about being open with their sexual orientation.

### **Description of Academic Domains**

Students' descriptions of the climate in academics vary from program to program. In discussing their academic related experiences, students mentioned

*"But if you are gay, you are not sure if other people on campus are gay, and you are not necessarily sure. Because of that, it may be hard to form organizations and to come out."*

*"In an academic setting it is so much easier to be around diverse people, people from different religions and races, because you have to be in that classroom, whereas outside you get to pick your friends."*

*"I definitely had classes where I felt that anyone of color at all in your class was definitely marginalized."*

relations with faculty and staff, events in the classroom, and interactions with classmates. Some students reported that their faculty seem disinterested in them, and not willing to attempt to build a community. Others reported a strong sense of community in their departments. Students within some of the living learning programs expressed appreciation for their faculty's interest in them and the opportunities those smaller programs afford. "It's partially the teachers themselves, whether they want to put forth the effort to get to know students and secondly whether it's feasible. It's all well and good to try to learn your students' names, but especially in those lower level classes, there's no way to even come close to learning one tenth of those people."

*"The problem with big colleges like this is that it becomes a business – it's all about the bottom line and it becomes less about the students."*

Students described faculty as having a significant impact on their sense of community and acceptance. In the classroom environment professors guide the tone and whether or how discussions are fostered or conducted. "I definitely had classes where I felt that anyone of color at all in your class were definitely marginalized, the professor did not seem to acknowledge that there are cultural differences in discussions of certain topics, as well as having teachers be really good about that." On the other side, another student shared how a professor created an environment that supported and encouraged openness. Additionally, several students expressed frustration at the misrepresentation of, and general lack of discussion of, parts of their identity in class. "If I heard any talk about Native Americans in my class, it is usually negative." Several minority students also expressed frustration at being asked questions as if they represented their whole racial or ethnic group in class or feeling that they were assumed to be speaking for or representing the whole group. "When you are one of the few Black students in your class, whatever you say, you're the spokesperson for your race and you are always angry." Moreover some students expressed the feeling of being "lumped together" with all other members of the same race or ethnicity or of a need to "prove myself" as a minority in the classroom.

*"I think just by the University having me required to take certain CORE classes, I think that's good."*

Students across several focus groups raised the matter of communication with their professors and teaching assistants. Specifically, they spoke of the presence of a language barrier between themselves and their foreign professors and teaching assistants. It was generally felt by most participants that interactions with diverse others is beneficial. However students raised concerns and frustrations about communication problems with professors and teaching assistants for whom English was not their first language, and finding them difficult to understand. The primary concern expressed by students associated with this issue was over the impact on their learning and grades. "She writes the test the way she speaks. I guess we could question ourselves, like we want diversity, but to what point are we willing to sacrifice students' education for diverse teachers?"

*"She writes the test the way she speaks."*

## Students' Perceptions of Climate

### Creating Community on Campus

Students shared varied thoughts, beliefs, perspectives and experiences about the campus climate and community during the focus group discussions. Despite this variety, there were some common ideas and feelings about community that emerged across many of the focus groups. The students that participated in this project generally considered the UM campus to be a diverse environment with a diverse student body. Although there were different views regarding the level of acceptance on campus for various students and identities and the existence of a campus wide community, there were some common thoughts on what contributes to a sense of community. The themes that emerged spoke to two major components for community developing: when members share an involvement or commonalities and that building community is a shared responsibility. This formation of community can occur on a large or a small scale, campus wide or small sub-groupings within the campus. Along with identifying two components of community, students also expressed their conceptualizations of what is a community. Students generally acknowledged that the UM campus includes a variety of different communities that have different perspectives and concerns. While many students saw these differences as natural, inevitable and even necessary for some, they were also considered to be a factor that hindered the development of a large cohesive UM community.

### Community Built Through Involvement

Students indicated a belief that involvement or a shared experience fosters and supports a sense of community. "It's an opportunity for a shared experience. This is what makes groups strong. The shared experiences that are common to the group and usually not outside of the group. That is what bonds people." Most students' description of community revolved around their involvements on campus and linked their sense of community directly to involvement. In general, these involvements were student organizations or planned programs (e.g., major campus-wide events) where students shared a common purpose, focus, or bond. As one student stated, "What made me feel part of the campus community was getting involved in student organizations. The involvement made the campus and community more accessible to the student. This is where I made the majority of my friends, so that's where I felt most comfortable." Another student specifically mentioned that, "being in this program [College Park Scholars] made the whole campus smaller. I was always around a certain group of people, and it kind of shrunk the campus down a little. It is more of a close knit community." For students who did not find their niche on campus, there was a greater tendency to be apathetic toward contributing to a sense of overall community; "I feel that it was necessary for me to be involved, just because otherwise I would just consider it was something else that other people do and it's not my responsibility or something that I need to be concerned about, I'm not related to it."

*"It is a huge school and you can get easily lost and if you don't jump on somewhere, see 'ya – you're done; you get filtered out."*

*"I noticed that with myself, when I got involved, I was like 'how could I not have been involved?' I think once people realize how good it is, how beneficial and gratifying it is, they would like it."*

*"If you go to the Rec Center, which is a beautiful place, everyone is doing the same thing – sweating. They are all of different races and backgrounds."*

*"Civicus is like one big family."*

## Specific Examples of Involvement

In the process of sharing these sources of community some students referred to their campus involvements generically while others mentioned specific campus programs and communities where they found a sense of community. Involvements in the Greek community, or a living-learning program were mentioned most frequently. Both were credited with helping students find a connection and making the campus seem like a smaller place. Students described their Greek involvement as making “the University of Maryland a whole lot smaller,” “like another family,” and “really engage[ing] you in interacting with people not only in that community but also different groups.” Students expressed similar sentiments about their involvement with programs such as Honors or College Park Scholars. “I’m part of the Gemstone Honors program... You see the same people in and out of class and it builds community.” Another student described that, “I came in as a College Park Scholar. Since that is a living-learning community it helped tremendously. These two [College Park Scholars and sorority involvement] helped the most with feeling part of the community and helping me deal and feel like I have a place on campus.” Living with others who share a common experience and sharing space with them, as well as going to class and seeing them on a regular and frequent basis, contributed heavily to the development of a sense of community among the students. In addition to organizations, students engaged in activities such as intramural sports or other activities through the Campus Recreation Center, which they identified as contributing to their community. Also, students cited the First Look Fair as a way that they learned about the opportunities on campus.

*“After 9-11, when everyone was feeling very similar things, it was a community feeling.”*

*“The vigil on the mall during the day was amazing. It was very diverse – different communities, religious leaders. I felt a great sense of community that day.”*

*“There are instances like the basketball games where I feel a part of that big ‘We are the University of Maryland.’”*

## Participating in Campus Wide Events

In addition to the worth students placed on connecting with sub-communities at UM, students also mentioned the value of large-scale connection through campus wide events. Among those mentioned were Art Attack, Maryland Day, First Look Fair, sporting events and the shared experience of September 11<sup>th</sup>, the tornado and memorials. One student shared, “After 9-11, when everyone was feeling very similar things, it was a community feeling.” One student said, “The closest thing I’ve felt as a Maryland community would have been Maryland Day.” Other examples were the pledge that students signed, ribbons worn in the Sociology Department, and the student who started a fund for children of the victims of 9-11. Many students felt that a large-scale event when the community comes together was a good thing. Even the riots after the NCAA basketball championship game were pointed to as an example of a time when students felt a sense of community. “The riots too, I suppose. It sounds bad, but when you are out there with everyone else in the school it just feels kind of nice.”

*“I didn’t like going to the basketball game at all. I felt ostracized from the UM community, because the people around me were screaming homophobic things at the opposite team.”*

Sports more than anything else were seen as a campus-wide community builder. Students expressed a shared bond from supporting the Maryland teams by attending games, watching games on television, celebrating after games, being a “Terp” and feeling school spirit. As one student said, “When we had the celebration at Cole Field House right after the [NCAA men’s basketball championship] game,

everyone went. No one felt that they would be alone or a minority.... It was something that you knew there would be tons of students from all different backgrounds, races, gender and it was a huge thing.” Or other students who described the experiences of, “I guess for me the biggest thing has been going to sporting events. You don’t get to meet everyone, but you’re all cheering for the team, you feel a sense of community that way.” “Everyone gets together and wears red, cheers for the team.” Although students for the most part considered the large sporting events as a community-building event, this was not a completely universal opinion. An example of the opposite view was articulated by one student, “I didn’t like going to the basketball game at all. I felt ostracized from the UM community, because the people around me were screaming homophobic things at the opposite team.”

*“The fact that people around you are actively involved gets you involved.”*

## **Campus Programs, Policies and Practices**

The overarching objective of University policies is to support student success at the university. Policies are institutionalized in programs and routine practices that affect the entire campus population. However, there are often many translations that emerge as policies develop from theory to practice. Students’ comments indicated that UM’s programs, policies, and practices impact the students and communities in ways that have both intended and unintended effects.

*“I think the school values diversity in a sense. I don’t think they bring people together necessarily but they have groups for different races, different genders, and different sexual orientations.”*

### **Programs**

The institutional programs that were most frequently mentioned – both in positive and negative terms – were the special academic programs and the large “all-campus” events. As previously mentioned, most students who are or have been part of the College Park Scholars, Gemstone, or Civicus programs remarked on the benefits of such programs in terms of building community. Students mentioned aspects such as living together and taking classes together as positives, while other students who were not a part of these programs felt ignored by the University. “I’m not trying to sound too bitter, but I think the University does not care about kids who are not [University] Honors or [College Park] Scholars.” Another impact of some of these programs was on living arrangements. Some students acknowledged that living with the students in their program made it easier to talk about class and assignments when everyone knew the issues, while others noted that they felt they are losing something by living with people who are all studying the same thing. “It was really cool to be with people from all different majors and all doing different things.... I think the University, in a sense, is sort of taking that away, by grouping people by major and academic level. They are almost like pulling away from that diversity and grouping them off.” Similarly another student commented, “You have to be in a particular program to get good housing. It really bothered us.”

*“I think one of the best features of this school is how diverse it is.”*

Moreover, many students seemed to enjoy the sense of community fostered by campus wide events, which were described as positive institutional programs that helped students to feel a part of the UM community. The vigil after September 11 was considered by many to have been an excellent community builder as well as recognizing the diversity of the campus. It brought together campus residents,

*“I’m not trying to sound too bitter, but I think the University does not care about kids who are not Honors or Scholars.”*



commuters, and diverse religious leaders. Planned programs or major campus-wide events that cut across diverse interests seemed to foster a real sense of community. As one student described, “Events like Art Attack. You see events like the comedy thing and you look around and see all the different people there.”

Students of color appeared ambivalent about the University efforts towards diversity. While agreeing that programming efforts are made, these students felt their communities were not consulted in terms of what they would like to see included; that there was a big push for various cultures during their designated month and the rest of the year nothing happened. Some members of student groups also mentioned that when asked to participate in a university-wide event/program, they were not given a choice of what they would like to contribute, but rather were asked to contribute ‘stereotyped’ efforts, like step shows from the African American community.

Multiple students described the University as doing a good job in diversity efforts and fostering diversity education. However, one student described feeling that although the university was very good at taking reactive measures it should do a better job of being proactive/preventive, by providing training and other opportunities. Students felt that the curriculum addressed various diversity issues but could focus on more specific issues or offer courses in particular areas such as Latin American History or African American History, Queer Studies, etc. Students felt that the information is out there but it is also the student’s responsibility to get it and to take advantage of the various opportunities available.

A positive campus program brought up by students was the Safe Space stickers/cards. The LGB students commented on the presence and display of these cards. Seeing the cards displayed on a faculty or staff office was considered highly effective. One student described, “I definitely think in terms of support, Safe Space stickers are huge.”

### **Perceptions of Policies and Practices**

“Bureaucracy or ‘administrative klunkiness’ is a barrier to community.” As one student put it, “who is a resource and who is a listening ear. There’s a big difference. You talk a lot, but then that person isn’t a resource. Because they are referring to someone else.” Students perceived little connection between the university administration and the student body. “The lines of communication are either clouded or there is animosity.” Several students thought the Student Government Association (SGA) was the only voice that students have right now, given that the President’s Student Advisory Committee was disbanded, “...when they try to get the job done they get dissolved.” Unfortunately, the SGA was perceived as ineffective, “...they have no real power,” “...they need to be allowed to have a stronger voice.”

Although appreciative of opportunities to voice concerns, students want to feel that they will see outcomes based on their input/suggestions. For example, some

*“It was really cool to be with people from all different majors and all doing different things.... I think the University, in a sense, is sort of taking that away, by grouping people by major and academic level.”*

*“UM emphasizes so much that they are a diverse school, maybe they should build it in more so students are required to experience it more.”*

*“People see them [Safe Person Safe Place cards] everywhere and they know what that means and it is something that becomes part of the culture.”*

*“If we are the ones making up the community in the University, shouldn’t they listen to some of our voices that we are trying to make them hear?”*

students expressed frustration with University administration and their assumption that it does not listen to or care about students. “I just feel kind of bad. If we are the ones making up the community in the University, shouldn’t they listen to some of our voices that we are trying to make them hear?” Many students reported feeling as though UM cares too much about image and the bottom line, at the expense of students. As one student said, “They are promoting image, we are number one – one of the best state colleges out there. But to the students here, we’re having a bad time. We’d like to have a better time. And the school could do more.” Maryland Day and the ZOOM campaign were noted as examples of UM attempting to please people other than current students. “They are trying to recruit better students, but are overlooking the people who are here now. We are the ones that make the University what it is.” Another point suggested that the University’s decisions regarding change are motivated by money rather than student needs, “It is so evident at the university that money is the bottom line. It is who brings the money. We don’t care about students’ happiness. We care about the people who graduate and let them give us money.”

*“I feel they pour so much money into sports that are popular here, which is understandable from a financial viewpoint but I think they often forget the little people.”*

Students shared interesting perspectives on the University’s ability to provide equitable support to all communities and its response to race related issues. As previously mentioned, some LGB students expressed feeling that their issues and needs were not given as much attention by the University compared to race related issues. Assumptions through language, including disparaging comments, are alienating for the LGB students. Clearly, “Language makes a big difference” about whether they feel a part of the community. Meanwhile, skepticism toward UM administration and frustration about perceived apathy in acting on concerns voiced by students came out in several of the minority groups. As expressed by one person, “I just hope that by us voicing our opinions and perspectives on what is happening in minority communities and in the campus climate in general, actually makes an impact, and does not become a desk pamphlet for some to read or to put to the side. I enjoy being here [in the focus group] and sharing my perspective and I just hope it counts for something this time.” Students also expressed a desire for faculty and advisors they can identify with, and shared positive comments on instances when they had this experience and felt represented. LGB, Latino and African American students specifically voiced these comments. As one student suggested, “Perhaps, start bringing more Hispanic teachers and representatives, kind of normalize that the Hispanics do exist on campus.” Students are also aware of the unevenness of diversity in the courses that are offered. Some Native American and some Latino students spoke of a lack of available courses related to their ethnicity. Again the lack of availability contributed to the students’ sense of invisibility or unimportance.

*“The lines of communication are either clouded or there is animosity.”*

*“I enjoy being here and sharing my perspective and I just hope it counts for something this time.”*

A number of White students had perceptions that centered on “reverse racism” and affirmative action. The feeling was that everyone should be treated fairly and that programs and processes at the University did not create a “level playing field.” Specific perceptions were focused on scholarships, academic program admission (University Honors and College Park Scholars), and employment as a Resident Assistant. A few of the students felt frustrated when looking at announcements for scholarships and how “Women and minorities are encouraged to apply.” While they acknowledged that this did not mean that the scholarship would go to a woman or a

*“Perhaps, start bringing more Hispanic teachers and representatives, kind of normalize that the Hispanics do exist on campus.”*

minority, the perception was that this was the implied outcome. With regard to admission into academic programs, one student said, “Some of my friends from high school are in the [College Park] Scholars and [University] Honors Programs. I know that other friends of mine that are White, Caucasian; they don’t get accepted into these programs despite the fact that they had higher qualifications. I don’t know if the University looks at that...like they are filling quotas. I thought about it and it has crossed my mind too. I hope it’s not true.” The feeling that White students were on the receiving end of discrimination also occurred in campus jobs; specifically mentioned was the position of Resident Assistant. One student commented, “Yeah, when I applied to be an RA in the Commons, it was pretty competitive, everyone wanted to be in the Commons. Eighty-one people applied, they took nine. Of those nine there were like three Whites, three Blacks, an Asian, an Arab, and a Hispanic. It is too perfect for it not to have been done intentionally.” In addition, one student suggested that Resident Life must racially segregate room assignments in the dorms. “I think the Department of Res[ident] Life throws all the African Americans and segregates them into that one building.”

*“Women and minorities are encouraged to apply.”*

*“If you have administration involved, you feel it is more formal, more required, and more mandatory and you take more effort.”*

Student opinions about the CORE diversity requirements were mixed. Some students expressed that the CORE requirements serve no greater purpose while others felt that they learned a lot about different groups of people through CORE courses. Some noted the tendency for students to choose CORE classes based on topics they are already comfortable with, and suggested that the requirement should include a stipulation that choices should go outside of those boundaries.

*“I feel that in a lot of major things that Maryland tries to do, they don’t incorporate what our community wants. They incorporate what they think our community wants.”*

### **Community is a Shared Responsibility**

In addition to characteristics associated with how and where students find community, there is also the matter of who contributes to its creation and maintenance. The majority of the students agreed that building or feeling a part of the campus community is the shared responsibility of the administration, faculty and students. They expressed the importance of UM providing support for community efforts both as an entity and as individuals. “If they came out and showed their faces at these events, it would make a difference. As a student leader, as a president, I would feel ‘Wow, Dr. Mote is here, and he cares.’ It would make a difference to me.” Many felt that UM was doing a good job and that there was much offered in terms of diverse and community building organizations and programs, and that students could or should take advantage of these many choices and opportunities. Students expressed an interest in being part of UM’s community when they felt valued, or that their contribution was important. Considering UM as a single entity, students made comments about UM’s efforts regarding diversity. One student noted, regarding African-American students, that, “Over the years, I think the University did make a conscious effort somehow to promote different activities for us.” Similarly, “I think the University is doing a good job, you know there are a lot of events out there for different cultures and races...The University does a good job keeping everyone on an even ground.”

*“It seems once a day that I have a teacher tell me of some function going on, or some guest speaker or something they would like us to do after class.”*

Students also recognized their own role and responsibility in the campus community. “I think the University does a pretty good job of trying to give this information to the large student groups. It’s just whether the student picks it up or not.” Many acknowledged that their sense of community was a result of their own efforts toward involvement and forming connections with the campus and people. To some extent, it is the students’ responsibility to take risks, get involved, and express their ideas. Students could take initiative just by trying to be outgoing and meet other people. Students felt that their peers needed to get motivated and take advantage of the diverse community and opportunities on campus. One participant expressed that it is not all the University’s responsibility and that “it is up to the students...to break down the barriers and make an effort.” Some students felt that a minority of students speaks up about issues on campus, while the mindset of the majority is apathetic. In terms of overcoming this apathetic stance toward community several students commented that something as easy as acknowledging each other, saying “Hi” to people that you pass during the day, would add to a sense of community. Students recognized that everyone must accept responsibility and that finding a community takes personal initiative. “There are so many people involved in different aspects of campus with different groups, and then there are people who aren’t involved at all. It’s your choice, what you want to do.”

*“I would say that there is no campus community, but there are many small campus communities.”*

*“Everywhere you go, it will not be one big happy community. That is just reality.”*

### **Understanding of Community**

In addition to the differing expectations of community, students expressed different understandings of community. There seemed to be no common or overarching understanding about what constituted a community. “I would say that there is no campus community, but there are many small campus communities.” Several students noted that the campus community is a reflection of society. “I see the community on this campus very much a microcosm of the real world.” Other students questioned the use of the term “community.” “When I think of the term ‘community’ we use it really loosely. I don’t really feel there is a campus community. There is a campus – there is a physical space that people come and take classes at. But it is a city, there are 34,000 people here and I don’t think of it as a community. When I think of community, I think of the small thing I’m a part of ....” “Everywhere you go, it will not be one big happy community. That is just reality.”

*“I think it [UM] is so big that people rush into their little groups because it is so overwhelming.”*

*“I think some of the colleges make a world of difference.”*

Although many students agreed that student organizations or planned programs were a good thing and that students should make the effort to attend, there were students who felt that the campus is too large to expect a feeling of community. As one student put it, “What did they want for community? I don’t ever think you can make a community of 30,000 people, it is not possible.” Or, other students, “I think the big problem for this school as far as community goes is that there are so many people here,” and, “There are a lot of people who are inactive, who are like, ‘I go home. I study.’... They go about doing their own things.” On an individual level, some students were only interested in finding community on a smaller level and did not feel the need for a unified campus wide community feeling.

*“Everybody sticks with their own kind.”*

## Personal Experiences and Needs

Participants seemed to be very aware of their own groups as a community, almost exclusively as a means to making the campus feel smaller and more manageable. Several participants noted feeling most comfortable in their academic departments or colleges because they see the same students all the time, and can get to know their professors/teaching assistants, especially in smaller departments. “I think some of the colleges make a world of difference.” “It makes you feel comfortable and you can talk to anyone there.” Another student mentioned that the peer-mentoring program in ARHU [College of Arts and Humanities] helps to make that college smaller because it “...helps to have a point person when the person has the odd questions about campus stuff.” Most students viewed this behavior as positive. As previously mentioned, most students perceived and spoke about their community as their involvement within a specific niche of the campus rather than as part of the campus as a whole. These involvements were where they found a sense of belonging. “I like the smaller groups because I get to meet people personally and talk to them; it’s not a huge group. That also makes me feel like I am part of my own little niche or group or something.”

Students’ understandings of community often reflected their personal needs and how these were met. Several students made comments indicating that they do not feel the need to assimilate into one single community. They want to maintain individuality and support of their community while also being a part of the larger community, as in the analogy of America as a salad bowl rather than a melting pot. Students spoke of coming to UM and immediately seeking out a community that represented an aspect of their identity as a source of support, specifically African American, Asian and LGB students. “When I first came to campus, I did not search for many different groups to join, I just went straight to the LGBT community and joined that. I knew that was what I wanted to be a part of and would feel comfortable in. I made those friends and I feel protected by them, like a little circle or something.” Students in minority groups noted that being among those with whom they shared a common racial/ethnic identity or sexual orientation gave them a feeling of safety. To say we must rid ourselves of the separation among groups would go against the sense of safety felt by some students of color and LGB students who created their own communities within the greater campus community. Some students feel intimidated when around others who “don’t look like them,” i.e., in a situation when they felt like they were different from the group. They feel it is difficult to be the “only one” in a group of “others.”

## Separation of Groups

It was very common to hear comments about students’ observations of the act of social separation that occurs in common areas of the University and among student groups. Students often noted that groups of students with similar characteristics tend to gather together in public places. For example, one student said “You can definitely see it in the cafeterias, especially in the freshman cafeterias. Like dinnertime, all the Asians sit together, the Blacks together, the Whites together.” Another said, “If you

*“It [CORE class] opened my eyes and definitely made me realize that – since I am Black and I lump all Black people in one category – how can I expect the rest of the world not to lump all Black people into one category.”*

*“I made those friends and I feel protected by them, like a little circle or something.”*

*“A lot of people feel uncomfortable going to the programs, events, and parties of other cultural groups.”*

*“It is not that they don’t like each other, but they find more common ground within their own race.”*

go into the Union, it's like there is segregation going on. Everyone pretty much sits with their same race in a certain area." "People at the Student Union of different ethnicities tend to congregate." There seemed to be mixed feelings about this phenomenon – some students saw this as a necessary and natural occurrence that allowed students to feel comfortable with those similar to them, while others thought the campus would be better off if more people mixed together in social settings. "It is kind of funny because everyone talks about putting everyone together and naturally they just separate. It is not that they don't like each other, but they find more common ground within their own race." Some students felt it was problematic that racial/ethnic groups tend to stay separate from one another; feeling that in order to have community there needs to be "mixing" among these groups. A student described, "I see the Pakistan Indian people together, I see the Asian people together. I see the African Americans together. I don't see a lot of intermingling."

Some students expressed concerns about being typecast into certain categories as something that prevents community. For example, one student said, "...it makes me feel that I am identified for only one characteristic and in one group I am a lesbian and in the other I may be Russian, so I never feel like I am accepted." Others felt isolated if they were not a part of a certain community on campus. However, a different sentiment was also expressed – that people shouldn't feel pressure to leave their "cultural communities" and mix together because people may feel they lose their individuality. Other students expressed that there may be a "happy medium" of separateness and being together. Some students expressed that it can be uncomfortable and intimidating going to programs or events held by other cultural groups. One student even expressed that she "...would not mind going to the groups and learning something about a different culture...[I]t's all about intimidation for me..."

### **Developing Identity and Bridging Differences**

Students' comments indicate that their perceptions of others' experiences are largely based upon their own background. There may also be an inability to embrace difference due to a lack of awareness. However, for others the development is apparent as they discover their own culture, recognize and appreciate the existence of other cultures, and learn how to bridge the differences between them. Students spoke of the difficulty and awkwardness of bridging the differences. There is the intimidation of exposing oneself, as well as the intimidation of embracing one's own self and heritage while managing the opinions of others in their own group regarding bridging those differences. "So the mere fact that there are separate opportunities and different ways to organize, we will forever have division in that way. Until we learn how to dialogue those differences towards a different kind of goal, we will always probably experience that."

It seemed that students were acutely aware of the issues facing students like them, but less informed about the issues of other groups. While students may not be aware of issues for other groups, there was a polite sense that everyone should have a place at the table. A few White students explained that they do not often think about

*"I think there should be more small dialogues sponsored by the University, like small groups where people can feel safe to say, 'Hey, I don't know anything about Black people or Asian people, but I am willing to learn.'"*

*"Learning to interact with different cultures and different people – I guess as a whole the University has shaped my identity and in some ways made me realize I was Black."*

*"When you walk across the campus and you see people you know and people you don't know but you still feel comfortable: That's a sense of community."*

issues of diversity and did not have much concern about racial issues. One student stated, "Being White has no affect on me at all," while another explained, "I think it's in a lot of people's heads...I don't think most people think about this, they do not care...We are all Maryland students on the same boat trying to do the same thing. I don't think people feel they are at a disadvantage." Another student acknowledged, "You cannot force someone to stop saying what they say, but just to widen their horizons and inform them there are people in the world who are not like them may be helpful. Just to make them more aware."

*"Diversity is just what it is – a word. It is not really something that is here to bring us all together, because it does not really happen."*

Students spoke about how diversity impacts their perspectives and understanding via their interactions with others. Specifically students say they learned a lot and gained an increased awareness about themselves, others and the world through interactions with others. "Some of the kids when I first got to school are like my best friends here now and they're all from different backgrounds. Being around them so much you get to learn about them and you grow personally from learning about other types of people." Discussions in class were a primary place where this exposure happened and students attributed it to a presence of diverse students in the class and the discussions that took place among the students. Similar interactions take place in other environments including residence halls. While some students expressed a belief that being forced to live with people who were different from them was a good thing, others felt that there should be no social engineering, that race should not be a factor in assigning living situations. Some White students felt that diversity was a concept forced upon them in an unnatural way.

*"I feel that once you get here, community is something you have to look for. Once you look for community, you will find it."*

Several students described themselves as sharing their culture with others, celebrating holidays they would not traditionally celebrate with other students, and generally incorporating the aspects of others cultures into their interactions (e.g., kosher foods). These interactions and the exposure to new and different aspects of the individual and the world seem to lead to a wider more open perspective that may lead to the bridging of differences of understanding during their development. Additionally, academic exposure broadens views and helps students gain a greater perspective "I know when I was a sophomore, I took a class and it was a combination of BSOS, the Academy of Leadership and College Park Scholars. It was this dialogue on race, gender and ethnicity. It was a two-semester class. The first semester we had dialogues on these issues and learned how to facilitate in the next semester. That class like, I learned more from that class than any business class, any Spanish class I have taken here. I will take more from that class than any other class I have taken here. I think classroom experiences like those, where it's real intimate, where you really can get into the issues, are very important."

*"I think classroom experiences like those, where it's real intimate, where you really can get into the issues, are very important."*

*"This school fosters different races but it doesn't do anything to promote getting groups to work more together."*

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to gain information directly from students on their experiences and perspectives related to the UM campus climate and community. A diverse array of students participated and contributed their thoughts and ideas for the purpose of gathering useful information and recommendations for consideration by campus decision makers. The topics raised and discussed covered a broad spectrum of issues and ideas that provided much fodder for thought and dialogue. While the conversations certainly were a reflection of the feelings and beliefs of the participating students, it is important to remember that the information cannot be considered to be generalizable to the entire UM student body. Furthermore, one must also consider the impact that a student's stage of personal identity development has upon a student's views and perspectives. Therefore, students' level of awareness of their own identity and the existence of other identities will influence their thoughts about identity in general and the experiences of others. This study provided a structured opportunity for students to share their thoughts, experiences, and suggestions for the purpose of providing insight into the student perspective. With these thoughts in mind, readers of this report can take the information provided by the student participants into consideration when thinking about or planning for the UM campus and community.

The questions designed for the focus groups intentionally asked about climate and community in relation to three aspects of identity: gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The discussions that resulted followed these parameters, but also occasionally strayed to talk of community in a generic sense or to other topics (e.g., campus parking, relations with the town of College Park, religious diversity). However, most of what students contributed applied directly to the topics of highest interest for the purposes on this study.

Gender as a topic did not elicit much conversation or discussion. Students commented on differences in population of certain academic departments or majors; some departments have more female than male students and others seem to have more male than female students. Students did not express a strong feeling that gender inequality inundated the UM campus. Some students, both male and female, expressed a belief that some different treatment was probably present, and some female students even shared experiences where they believed they encountered different treatment, but there were no strong expressions of problems related to this issue. Gender related issues seemed to generally be held as not needing to be a top priority. The one issue where gender differences were most noted was that of safety, with women saying they sometimes felt unsafe on campus, and men presenting that female students probably have more concerns in this area.

Student participants generally approached and discussed race/ethnicity related topics with candor and comfort. Such discussions did not seem a new experience for most of the students. The exact contents and focal point of the discussions varied depending upon the composition of the group. Many African American and Asian students spoke of their involvements with organizations associated with their race/ethnicity. They spoke of the support and sense of belonging that they found through their involvement. Hispanic/Latino and Native American students did not speak of similar identity related involvements, instead they raised the issue of a lack of availability of these types of involvements. Furthermore, they expressed a feeling of



invisibility here at UM that they attributed to the presence of fewer students of their race/ethnicity. Meanwhile, some White students stated that they felt unable to truly understand what it is like to be a student of color. Another issue raised by some White students was a concern over a believed presence of reverse racism in the form of preferential consideration of students of color for some opportunities on the UM campus.

Discussions related to sexual orientation and community, by both LGB and non-LGB students, indicated that this is the issue where students perceive the greatest presence of unequal treatment and less acceptance at UM. While some students expressed a belief that the campus is relatively accepting of homosexual and bisexual students, this was not a universal perception. Many LGB students shared negative personal experiences that they perceived to be associated to their sexual orientation. Another concern expressed by some LGB students was their feeling of a lack of attention given to sexual orientation equality issues and an inability to find other LGB students for support on the UM campus. Having a physical and safe space and a way to organize with other LGB students was a major point among LGB students. For some this was what they really wanted and for others who had found this it was a strong source of support and community. Some non-LGB students also shared a belief that LGB students faced the most adversity here at UM of any type of minority student.

Several topics arose in multiple focus groups, regardless of the group's composition of students. Involvement was one such topic. Students spoke of their own involvement, possible campus involvements and programs, and others' involvements. (It should be noted that students who responded to the invitation to participate in the focus groups might, by definition, be more inclined to become involved.) Overall, most students considered involvement as a method and source for developing or finding community. It was felt that community often develops out of a student's involvements because all the students involved in a particular organization or activity share a common bond or focus. For many students their involvements aided them in finding links on the campus, which can otherwise be overwhelming in its size and number of students. Furthermore, students that expressed struggles related to finding a community raised the issue of not having involvement options available with which they identified. When talking about their experiences with community or what they considered to be their community, students most frequently referred to their within campus involvements rather than a sense of campus wide community.

For those students that did think globally and spoke of a campus wide community their comments were repeatedly linked with a reference to a large scale, campus wide event (e. g., Maryland Day, Art Attack). Students spoke of the presence of many different students that came out to these types of events. Students perceived these types of events to be open and inviting to all students, more so than events that were sponsored by a particular student group. Sports and sporting events especially emerged as a source of campus wide community. The NCAA men's basketball championship was an example of an event where all students felt they could claim membership; it was not limited to any particular segment of the campus population. Students can all consider themselves as "Terps," regardless of their individual aspects of identity.

Students' comments revolved around their own experiences and responsibilities as well as whom and what they considered necessary contributors to the development of community.

The perception held by many is that community, particularly on a large or campus wide scale, is a shared responsibility of the students, faculty and administration. Therefore, students made many references to others who are present at UM and considered to influence the development of community. Students accepted responsibility for finding community and recognized that students often need to take the personal initiative to seek out sources of community. However, they also acknowledged the impact that faculty and administrators have on their sense of community. Professors and Teaching Assistants affect the classroom environment and the level of acceptance that students feel in their classes. Many students feel it is the responsibility of the professor to foster discussion and tolerance in classes. Also, many students of color expressed that having faculty or advisors of color provides them a figure they can identify with and potentially find support. The administration at UM also influences the presence of community that students perceive. Staff presence at campus events, and sponsorship of campus events, were both suggested as ways they could contribute to the campus community. Multiple students also expressed their belief that UM was currently doing a good job in promoting and supporting diversity here at UM.

## APPENDIX A

### Acknowledgements

#### **Campus Assessment Working Group**

The Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) was established in 1996 and is currently chaired by Robert E. Waters, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs and Special Assistant to the President. CAWG is dedicated to building a culture of evidence at the University of Maryland. CAWG presently consists of four subgroups covering various aspects of the student experience. The current and former members of the CAWG subgroup, the Assessing Campus Experiences Subgroup, that worked on various aspects of this project, are:

Adrienne Hamcke Wicker (Chair), Commuter Affairs and Community Service  
Kathleen Lis Dean, Career Center  
Chip Denman, Office of Information Technology  
Irma Dillon, University Libraries  
Karen Douglas, Education Measurement and Statistics  
Wallace Eddy, Campus Recreation Center  
Pat Hunt, Counseling Center  
Lacretia Johnson, College Park Scholars  
Julie Kromkowski, Facilities Management  
Sharon La Voy, Institutional Research and Planning  
Sarah Ranck, Campus Assessment Working Group  
Erin Rooney-Eckel, Engineering Student Affairs  
Jessica Shedd, Institutional Research and Planning  
Audran Ward, Arts and Humanities Student Affairs  
Terry Zacker, Stamp Student Union and Campus Programs

Kathy Denz and Eowyn Rehwinkel, Office of Institutional Research and Planning, also provided notetaking and organizational assistance.

More information about CAWG is available on the website, [www.umd.edu/cawg](http://www.umd.edu/cawg), or from:

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Office of Institutional Research and Planning  
University of Maryland  
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## **Climate Assessment Advisory Group**

CAWG acknowledged that there are many professionals on this campus who have interest and expertise in the issues explored by this project, and in the services provided to students associated with these issues. We convened a group of such experts and asked that they serve in an advisory capacity to this project. Some met with us once to share their thoughts, and others were more extensively involved. We thank them for their time and expertise, and hope that they find value in this report. They are:

Cordell Black, Academic Affairs  
Gloria Bouis, Human Relations  
Deborah Bryant, College of Computer, Math, and Physical Sciences  
Sharon Fries-Britt, Education Policy and Leadership  
Ray Gillian, formerly of the President's Office  
Robert Hampton, Undergraduate Studies  
Luke Jensen, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Equity  
Jeffrey Milem, Education Policy and Leadership  
Timothy Ng, Research and Graduate Studies  
William Sedlacek, Counseling Center  
Jose Torero, formerly of Fire Protection Engineering  
Robert Waters, Academic Affairs  
Ann Wylie, President's Office

## **Peer Consulting Network**

CAWG is indebted to the Peer Consulting Network in the Office for Organizational Effectiveness. Their help and expertise in facilitating these focus groups were invaluable. The facilitators who helped us on this project are:

LaVern Chapman, Robert H. Smith School of Business  
Heidi Hanson, University Libraries  
Denise Maple, Office for Organizational Effectiveness  
Laura Nichols, Women's Studies  
Jacob Sciammas, Campus Recreation Services

## **Senior Vice President and Provost**

Dr. William Destler provided financial assistance in support of this project. We thank him for his continued dedication to these issues.

## **Student Participants**

Finally, CAWG is indebted to the students who willingly and even enthusiastically participated in these focus groups. Their comments were thoughtful, engaging, and provocative, and we appreciate their time and attention.

## APPENDIX B

### References

The University of Maryland has a history of awareness of the importance of campus diversity and related climate issues. Below is a list of existing campus reports that were reviewed in preparation for this project.

Making a Difference for Women: Report of the Committee on Undergraduate Education (1988)

Access is Not Enough: A Report to the President Concerning Opportunities for Blacks at the University of Maryland at College Park (1989)

Women on Campus, President's Commission on Women's Affairs (1990)

Excellence Through Diversity: Providing Opportunities for Black Americans at College Park (1992)

An Action Plan in Response to Studies of Progress Toward Diversity Goals for African American Faculty, Staff, and Students (1993)

The Status of Asian, Hispanic, and Native Americans at the University of Maryland at College Park (1995)

Cultural Attitudes and Climate at UMCP (1995)

From a Diverse Campus to a Diverse Community (2000)

The issues explored in this project have also been explored to varying degrees in peer-reviewed research and other publications in higher education. Below is a brief list of some of the resources that were reviewed in preparation for this project. Anyone interested in reading more about these issues should consult these and other works by these well-respected authors.

Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bauer, K. W. (Ed.). (1998). *Campus climate: Understanding the critical components of today's colleges and universities* (New Directions for Institutional Research No. 98). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hurtado, S., Milem, J. F., Clayton-Petersen, A. R., & Allen, W. R. (1998). Enhancing campus climates for racial/ethnic diversity: Educational policy and practice. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21(3), 279-302.

Kuh, G., Schuh, J. S., Whitt, E. J., & Associates. (1991). *Involving colleges: Successful approaches to fostering student learning and personal development outside the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sedlacek, W. E., Helm, E. G., & Prieto, D. O. (1997). The relationship between attitudes toward diversity and overall satisfaction of university students by race. *Journal of College Counseling*, 1(2), 111-120.

## APPENDIX C

### Methodology

Undergraduate students were recruited to participate in the groups. A total of 157 students (including five from a pilot focus group) participated. The size of the individual groups ranged from two to twelve participants with the average number being about seven participants in a group. Two types of focus groups were formed, heterogeneous groups and homogeneous groups. Heterogeneous groups were composed of randomly selected students from the Student Information System (SIS) and then sent a letter that described the project and invited them to respond if they were interested in participating. The homogeneous groups were composed of students who shared some common aspect of their identity: gender, race/ethnicity or sexual orientation. These groups included: Female, Male, African-American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, White, and students that self-identified as Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual (LGB). (Although there is a growing interest in addressing the needs of transgendered students, this project did not include them. We were advised by campus colleagues that we would not be able to recruit an appropriate number of transgendered students willing to participate in a focus group. Therefore, we will not claim to address their issues in this report by adding the “T” to our abbreviation of “LGB.” Some student quotes included in this report refer to “LGBT” issues, and those quotes remain intact.) Students for the homogeneous groups were recruited through multiple methods including: random selection based upon race/ethnicity or gender information in the SIS; referrals from school administrators; or fliers that were passed out in classes, meetings or posted on campus. All potential participants were informed of the topic of the focus group and the composition of the group (heterogeneous or homogeneous) before they agreed to participate. All participants were offered a \$30 gift certificate to either the University Book Center or a local store. When students responded and indicated their interest in participating they were assigned to a focus group and then informed of the time and location.

The focus groups were held during April and the first two weeks of May 2002. Twenty-three focus groups were proposed. A pilot focus group was conducted to test the questions and 21 of the 23 proposed focus groups were held. Six groups were heterogeneous, fifteen were homogeneous: Female (2), Male (2), African-American (2), Asian (2), Hispanic (1), Native American (1), White (2), LGB (3). The six heterogeneous groups and half of the homogeneous groups were recruited randomly (except for the gay, lesbian, and bisexual groups); that is, students received a letter as part of a random stratified sample. The other half of the homogeneous groups were recruited through corresponding contacts, such as the Black Student Union, Campus Programs staff, etc. Two of the homogeneous groups were never scheduled because of a lack of respondents who fit that aspect of identity (Hispanic or Native American). An experienced facilitator who was with either CAWG or the Office for Organizational Effectiveness led each group. The group sessions were audiotaped and a note taker was present to take notes throughout the session. Students were allowed to use pseudonyms if they desired and were reassured that no names would be used in the reporting of the study’s findings. The audiotapes were professionally transcribed, the transcriptions were reviewed, and statements were linked with the first name or pseudonym of the participant who made the statement. (The tape from one of the heterogeneous groups was inaudible and the handwritten notes were not detailed enough to form a complete view of the group, therefore no transcript was developed for this group.)

Members of CAWG's Assessment of Campus Experiences subcommittee analyzed the transcripts from the focus groups to identify common themes. The transcripts from all of the focus groups were separated by question. Subcommittee members were paired off and then each dyad examined the responses to one of the questions across all the groups, as appropriate, to identify similarities or themes in the responses across the groups.

### Limitations

As with any study, this one had limitations. One challenge in this type of study was how to ensure the participants felt comfortable and secure enough to be candid and honest. Another area of difficulty was achieving representation for the various aspects of identity. The UM population of Hispanic and Native American students is small and therefore so is the potential pool of participants. The LGB student population is not identifiable in student records, so it was not possible to produce a random sample. Recruitment efforts for that population included word of mouth, class announcements, and the posting of fliers.

Some focus group specific limitations include the fact that some students didn't speak up as much as others. Discussions are limited to the topics raised by the facilitator and participants. Also, technology did not allow us to capture every comment word-for-word on tape, and tapes are not able to capture body language and other non-verbal participation in the discussion.

Finally, although many of the groups were comprised of students who had been randomly selected, those who chose to come may have had an increased interest in the topic as it was presented to them and/or in participating in a campus project such as this one. Therefore, their thoughts on the topics covered might be more developed, or they might be generally more involved than the average student.

## APPENDIX D

### Focus Group Questions

<b>Homogeneous Groups</b> (Homogeneous groups included: Female, Male, African-American, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, White, LGB)	<b>Heterogeneous Groups</b>
<p>1.           <b>A.</b> What has helped you to feel a part of the UM campus community, if anything?</p> <p>                  <b>B.</b> What do you think helps students from different backgrounds to feel a part of the UM campus community?</p> <p>2. As a(n) _____ student, what has your experience been like at UM?</p> <p>2 <b>A.</b> How has your race/gender/sexual orientation affected your academic experiences, if at all?</p> <p>2 <b>B.</b> How has your race/gender/sexual orientation affected your out-of-class experiences, if at all?</p> <p>3. Have you been treated differently here at UM that you believe was based on your race/gender/sexual orientation, and if so, how?</p> <p>4. What campus resources are you aware of, or have you found helpful, in regard to _____ student issues on campus?</p> <p>5.           <b>a.</b> How are University-sponsored efforts (those by faculty, administrators, and student organizations) helping to build community?</p> <p>                  <b>b.</b> What are they currently doing that hinders the building of community?</p> <p>6.           <b>a.</b> What are students doing informally to build community?</p> <p>                  <b>b.</b> What are they currently doing that hinders the building of community?</p> <p>7. What <u>could</u> the UM faculty, administration, and sponsored student groups do to enhance the feeling of community for all students?</p> <p>8. What <u>could</u> students themselves do to enhance the feeling of community for all students?</p>	<p>1.           <b>A.</b> What has helped you to feel a part of the UM campus community, if anything?</p> <p>                  <b>B.</b> What do you think helps students from different backgrounds to feel a part of the UM campus community?</p> <p>2.           What is your perception of the experience of.... a) non-white students here at UM? b) female students here at UM? c) gay, lesbian, or bisexual students here at UM?</p> <p>3.           How has the diversity at UM affected your academic experiences, if at all?</p> <p>4.           How has the diversity at UM affected your out-of-class experiences, if at all?</p> <p>5.           <b>a.</b> How are University-sponsored efforts (those by faculty, administrators, and student organizations) helping to build community?</p> <p>                  <b>b.</b> What are they currently doing that hinders the building of community?</p> <p>6.           <b>a.</b> What are students doing informally to build community?</p> <p>                  <b>b.</b> What are they currently doing that hinders the building of community?</p> <p>7.           What <u>could</u> the UM faculty, administration, and sponsored student groups do to enhance the feeling of community for all students?</p> <p>8.           What <u>could</u> students themselves do to enhance the feeling of community for all students?</p> <p>9.           What questions should we have asked to help us better understand issues of diversity and community at UM?</p>