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Editor: Dr. Genevieve Brown
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Sam Houston State University

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College of Education
Sam Houston State University

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Graduate Student Perceptions of College of Education Culture and Climate

Dr. Cynthia Pemberton, Dr. Beverly Ray, Dr. Hamdan Said, Dr. Deb Easterly, Dr. Chris Belcher

Abstract

This study queried graduate student perceptions of, and experiences with harassment and discrimination in a college of education (COE). The study employed inclusive sampling, targeting all graduate students enrolled in COE classes from fall 2000 to summer 2006. One hundred and ninety-three surveys were completed and returned (12% response rate). While findings revealed relatively low incidences of harassment (26 incidents or 13.5%) and discrimination (27 incidents or 14%) within the COE; with oral remarks, in terms of insensitive or disparaging comments, perpetrated by faculty and students, within COE classrooms, the most frequent form of harassment/discrimination observed and/or experienced; this study contributes yet another example of data-driven evidence regarding the ongoing need in higher education settings for organizations and individuals to act with intentionality and purpose to ameliorate persistent harassment and discrimination.

Key words: Culture, Climate, Discrimination, Diversity, Harassment

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Introduction

In 1970, 42% of college undergraduates were female. By 2001 that percentage had risen to 56% (Hudson, Aquilino, & Kienzi, 2005). By 2005, 57.4% of all students enrolled in higher education were female (Schmidt, 2007). In 1980, females received 55% of associate's degrees and 50% of bachelor's degrees. By 2001 these figures had increased to 60% and 57% respectively. As of 2004-2005, almost 60% of bachelor's and master's degrees were awarded to women (The Nation, 2007). Similarly, "...[c]ollege enrollment among Hispanics and Asian Americans more than tripled from 1980-81 to 2000-01. African-American college enrollment grew by 56 percent and among American Indians, college enrollment grew by 80 percent" (ACE, 2003, Para. 11). In terms of degrees earned, according to the 2003 ACE report "[m]inorities went from receiving 11 percent of all bachelor's degrees in 1980-81 to earning 22 percent in 2000-01, and from 11 percent to 19 percent of master's degrees" (Para. 16).

At the graduate student level, although overall men earned 54.7% to women's 45.1% of doctorates in 2005, women earned more doctorates in Education, Humanities, Life Sciences, Social Sciences, and Professional Fields. Further, a report from the United States (U.S.) Department of Education (2006) predicted, "...from 2006 to 2015 women's enrollment is expected to continue growing at a faster rate than men's" (p. v). Similarly, the 2008 report, *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 1998-2008* (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008) noted:

Much of the increase in total graduate enrollment has been the result of increases in the numbers of temporary residents, women and U.S. racial/ethnic minorities....Graduate enrollment has increased at an average annual rate of 3.8% for women versus 2.3% for men over the past decade. And, total enrollment has increased at a faster rate for U.S. racial/ethnic minorities than for Whites in nearly every broad field over the past ten years. (p. viii)

As these numbers indicate, women [and minorities] comprise and are expected to do so increasingly, the numerical majority of college students. Despite this, and despite passage of antidiscrimination laws, academia can be and often is, a "chilly and alienating [place] for women [and minorities]" (Aquirr, 2000, p. 1).

Even as women's (and minorities'—albeit to a lesser degree) enrollment numbers have increased, Granger (1993) reported, "Decision-makers in many institutions of higher education may pay lip service to affirmative action by developing systems [that], on the surface, [seem] to seek and welcome women [and minorities], but really attempt to comply with federal regulations on paper only" (p. 121, 123). Too often the result is a potentially hostile and/or unsafe academic environment for female and minority faculty and students.

Based on a 1996 report, *The Chilly Climate: Subtle Ways in Which Women are Often Treated Differently at Work and in Classrooms*, Sandler, Silverberg, and Hall (1996) noted over 60 ways in which women were treated differently from men. According to Sandler (1999) subtle ways the classroom climate differed for women included "behaviors that communicate lower expectations for women," (§ 4) and "ignoring women while recognizing men, even when women clearly volunteer to participate by raising their hand" (§ 7). The literature on sexual harassment (i.e., discrimination based on sex) in academia suggests not only that harassment

and discrimination persist, but, that too often students remain silent about their experiences. A report prepared for the American Association of University Women (AAUW) by Hill and Silva (2005), stated that many students did not know who to tell, and/or were scared and embarrassed. According to this report, two-thirds of respondents experienced some form of sexual harassment, but less than 10% reported it to authorities. There are a variety of reasons that may be associated with non-reporting. These are: (a) uncertainty about whether they will be believed (Fitzgerald et al., 1988), (b) worry that the harasser will retaliate against them (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995), (c) doubt that persons in positions of authority will take action to remedy the problem (Dziech & Weiner, 1990), and (d) feelings of shame or embarrassment (U.S. Department of Defense, 1994). Students also worry about potential damage to their collegiate or professional reputations. These anxieties and fears, coupled with a lack of knowledge about reporting processes and/or university resources available for redress, result in a low number of reported incidents (Reilly, Lott, & Gallogly, 1986).

Discrimination and harassment also persist against minority students (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Holley, Larsen, Adelman, & Trevino, 2008; Parker, 2006). Research by Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) revealed that African American students reported experiencing more racist behavior from faculty than did White students. In terms of student-student relationships, Parker (2006) stated, "Race relations among students continue to be unhealthy, despite widespread and public institutional support for diversity" (p. 18.) Likewise, Holley et al. (2008), "found that when comparable scales were used to measure attitudes toward LGB people and toward members of five ethnic/racial groups, attitudes toward the six specified groups were correlated" (p. 95). Holley et al. found higher levels of negative attitudes about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) students than any other demographic group, and more negative attitudes about Latino students than African American students.

Discrimination and harassment, in all forms, create a hostile learning environment (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Hurtado, Carter, Kardia, 1998); and, as per Parker (2006), "[a] negative...climate severely impedes the fulfillment of an institution's goal to promote diversity....and...can affect students' experiences and academic performance" (p. 19). Over the years, a number of laws have been enacted in an effort to ameliorate the negative impact of discrimination and harassment, some of which have been particularly relevant to the higher education setting. These include: Executive Order 11246 (1965) and as amended Executive Order 11375 (1968) (i.e., Affirmative Action), Title IX of the Education Amendments (1972), and Executive Order 13160 (2000).

Affirmative action attempts to alleviate past discriminatory practices by taking into account race, sex, etc. There have been a series of cases in the Supreme Court that have attempted to set forth affirmative action guidelines. The Court has come to a variety of decisions as to how, and to what extent, affirmative action is allowed. In 2003 the Supreme Court struck down the University of Michigan's undergraduate *race-conscious* admissions point system, but upheld the Law school's admission policy noting that race could be a factor used in making admissions decisions (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003). This decision effectively reaffirmed the 1978 landmark decision, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, wherein the Court suggested that while set-asides (i.e., racial quotas) were forbidden, racial diversity as a *plus factor* could be used for admission decisions.

In 1972, a Federal civil rights statute, Title IX, was enacted as part of the United States Education Amendments. Title IX was designed to broadly address issues of education equity (i.e., admission and recruitment policies and practice, educational programs and activities, etc). Title IX states that, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Title IX 1972, 1975). The link to federal financial assistance (i.e., federal dollars funneled directly or indirectly to schools) ties Title IX to virtually all public and most private educational institutions.

Executive Order 13160 (2000) was signed by President Clinton, to address discrimination based on sexual orientation. It states, in part, that “...discrimination on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, and status as a parent will be prohibited in federally conducted education and training programs and activities” (Exec. Order No. 13160, 2000, Para. 2). For the purpose of clarification, programs and activities are defined to include programs or activities “...conducted, operated, or undertaken by an executive department or agency” and include, “...but are not limited to, formal schools, extracurricular activities, academic programs, occupational training, scholarships or fellowships, student internships, training for industry members, summer enrichment caps, and teacher training programs” (Exec. Order No. 13160, 2000).

The law generally, and these laws in particular, attempt to provide guidelines that regulate the boundaries of behavior, and thereby balance varied interests among individuals with differing priorities, values, and beliefs. Despite attempts to legislate behavioral boundaries, discrimination and harassment remain problems too often evidenced on campuses and in classrooms (Lindsay & Justiz, 2001). van Roosmalen and McDaniels (1998) suggested that many in positions of authority have either hoped these issues were no longer problems or have waited silently for them to disappear.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive study was to query graduate student perceptions of, and experiences with harassment and discrimination in a college of education (COE). This study was motivated by a need to: (a) provide a safe avenue through which students could express issues and concerns, both positive and negative, regarding their perceptions of, and experiences with harassment and discrimination within their college; (b) add to the growing body of literature confirming the existence and persistence of harassment and discrimination in higher education; and (c) provide an institution specific research-based foundation for action. This study was guided by two research questions. These were: (a) What are COE graduate student perceptions of and experiences with harassment?; and (b) What are COE graduate student perceptions of, and experiences with discrimination?

Methodology

Survey research was used to query COE graduate students' perceptions. The COE exists within a doctoral granting research university in the inter-mountain west of the United States. The COE was selected as the University unit for this study, because it was the researchers'

home college, and the source of study funding and support. Resources were not available for a broader university-wide inquiry. The study employed inclusive sampling to provide all potential respondents an opportunity to share their perspectives (Patten, 2001; Patton, 2002).

Respondents and Sampling

Sampling was delimited to all graduate students enrolled in classes in the COE from fall 2000 to summer 2006. This time span was selected because: (a) it was deemed recent enough to increase the likelihood of obtaining accurate contact information from the University data-base, and (b) it spanned enough time to increase the likelihood of surveying at least some graduate students who could reasonably be expected to have completed their masters, education specialist, or doctorate degree programs of study. A sample of 1644 graduate students was identified using institutional 10th day enrollment reports and annual graduate student graduation rates for the proscribed years.

A University data-base, available through the Office of Institutional Research, was used to generate a mailing roster of the 1644 graduate students identified. Because of the nature of the information collected, students were assigned a number code. This code was used throughout all steps in the research process to maintain confidentiality. To further assure confidentiality, a third party employee of the University's Office of Research opened returned envelopes, physically removed the code numbers from the surveys, and separated surveys and signed Informed Consent forms before data entry began.

Two hundred sixty-eight surveys were returned as undeliverable resulting in an estimated actual research sample of 1376 (N = 1376). It is possible that some surveys neither reached their address target nor were returned as undeliverable – therefore, the actual sample number was considered an estimate. One hundred and ninety-three surveys (n = 193) were completed and returned, resulting in a 12% response rate. Sixty-nine respondents (35.7%) contributed written comments related to the study's goals. Respondents included numerous demographic groups: (a) student status demographics (i.e., domestic and international students, master's and doctoral degree-seeking, full- and part-time students, etc.); and (b) student personal demographics, including age, gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, citizenship, disability, marriage, and family status. (See Table 1)

Table 1
Student Demographics

Variable	Total number of responses
Citizenship	
U.S. Citizen	174 (90.2%)
Non-U.S. Citizen	8 (4.1%)
No Response	11 (5.7%)
Program degree area	
Masters	77 (39.9%)
Ed. Specialist	18 (9.4%)
Doctorate	44 (22.8%)
No Response	(27.8%) ^a
Status	
Full-time student	48 (24.9%)
Part-time student	118 (61.1%)
No response	27 (14.0%)
Age	
20-25	1 (0.5%)
26-30	20 (10.4%)
31-35	23 (11.9%)
36-40	19 (9.8%)
41-45	31 (16.1%)
46-50	39 (20.2%)
50+	48 (24.9%)
No Response	12 (6.2%)
Gender	
Male	63 (32.6%)
Female	117 (60.6%)
Transgender	1 (0.5%)
No Response	12 (6.2%)
Sexual Orientation	
Bisexual	3 (1.6%)
Heterosexual	160 (82.9%)
Declined to Respond	14 (17.3%)
No Response	16 (8.3%)
Race/Ethnicity	
Caucasian	157 (81.4%)
Non-Caucasian	20 (2.6%)
No Response	17 (8.8%)
Disability	
Yes	10 (5.2%)
No	156 (80.8%)
No Response	27 (14.0%)
Spousal Status	
Single	26 (13.5%)
Married	144 (74.6%)
Partnership	5 (2.6%)
No Response	18 (9.3%)
Do you have children?	
Yes	151 (78.2%)
No	28 (14.5%)
No Response	14 (7.3%)

(continued)

Table 1 *continued*

Variable	Total number of responses
Number of children?	
1	17 (8.8%)
2	54 (28.0%)
3	29 (15.0%)
4	22 (11.4%)
5	28 (14.5%)
5+	15 (7.8%)
No Response	45 (7.3%)
Number of Children Currently Residing with You	
1	37 (19.2 %)
2	36 (18.7%)
3	20 (10.4%)
4	7 (3.6%)
5	2 (1.0%)
5+	2 (1.0%)
No Response	89 (46.1%)

^a One or more of the respondents answered the questions with two or more responses.

Instrumentation

This study employed a survey questionnaire developed based upon: (a) the researchers' knowledge and expertise; (b) related literature (Alger et al., 2000; Hill & Silva, 2005; Maruyama & Moreno, 2000; Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1994; Sandler, 1996); and (c) a review of existing university-based surveys addressing harassment and discrimination (e.g., The Claremont Graduate University: Exit Survey, the Cleveland State University: Adult Graduate Students: Perceptions of Gender & Race Survey, The Indiana State University: Survey of the National Origin Climate, The Pennsylvania State University: Assessment of Campus), including the University wherein the research was conducted. Once drafted, the researchers' confirmed the legitimacy of the instrument and the link between survey items and the research questions by creating a content alignment matrix between the research questions and survey items. In an effort to further enhance instrument validity and reliability, the draft instrument was then reviewed by University colleagues external to the researchers, and piloted with domestic and international graduate students from another college. The review and piloting generated feedback used to clarify survey items and revise/finalize the instrument.

The finalized questionnaire included item sections addressing harassment, discrimination, diversity, and respondent demographics. Along with a Likert scale, a modified semantic differential scale was used for data collection. Instrument inter-item reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Patten, 2005). According to Leedy (1997), a score over .70 is acceptable for Cronbach's alpha. The alpha coefficient for harassment related items was $\alpha = .973$ (33 items). The alpha coefficient for discrimination related items was $\alpha = .966$ (26 items). The instrument and full institutional report is available at <http://ed.isu.edu/depts/diversity/CCreport08/index.htm>.

Procedures

As stated, all COE graduate students enrolled (full- or part-time in credit bearing COE graduate courses) during the proscribed time period were mailed a letter explaining the purpose of the study and requesting their participation. Included with this letter was a statement of Informed Consent, the survey questionnaire, and a return addressed, postage paid envelope. Due to the nature of the issues addressed, the researchers declined to solicit responses from those who did not reply to the initial mailing. The decision not to contact non-respondents, as well as the sensitive nature of the issues addressed, and the questionnaire length, may have contributed to the relatively low response rate (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006; Dillman, 2000). Response rate as a limitation of the study is discussed below.

The surveys were mailed to potential participants in October and November of 2006. Although initially the researchers anticipated allowing 1 month between survey mailing and data analysis, data analysis occurred in March 2007.

Data were primarily quantitative (nominal and ordinal), with some qualitative data derived from open-ended questions. Survey data were entered into a database created by a member of the research team using *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*® (*SPSS*®). A research team member with extensive experience using *SPSS*® ran descriptive analyses on the quantitative data (i.e., response frequencies and corresponding percentages as well as measures of central tendency). Qualitative data were analyzed using a general inductive method (Thomas, 2006). Narrative data were read and reread by two members of the research team. Emergent themes and patterns were noted independently, then compared for cross-validation, and used to further explicate the study's quantitative findings.

Results

This descriptive study queried graduate student perceptions of, and experiences with harassment and discrimination in a college of education (COE). Limitations are examined, followed by a report of the findings beginning with a review of respondent demographics, followed by findings related to perceptions and experiences regarding harassment, and then discrimination.

Limitations

The response rate was relatively low (12 %) and is an important limitation to keep in mind as the findings are reviewed and discussed. Beyond the procedural decision not to engage follow-up contacts, a number of potential response-related factors may have impacted this study: (a) Despite the fact that anonymity and confidentiality were assured, participants may have feared retribution, which may have impacted the response rate, and inhibited fully truthful responses (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995); (b) Some of the participants know one or more of the researchers (in some cases as colleagues in the COE) and may have responded in what they perceived to be socially desirable ways (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006), or felt threatened (for themselves or others) and sought to discredit and/or skew the study findings; (c)

For some participants, considerable time had lapsed since they had taken COE classes, which could contribute to forgetting incidents and/or muting incident memories; and (d) Response rates are "...often higher among the more intelligent, better educated, more conscientious, and those more interested or generally more favorable to the issue involved in the questionnaire" (Ary, Jacob, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 414) as a result, those who responded may not be fully representative of the target population and may reflect a disproportionate number of "...those more interested..." (p. 414).

Demographics

As displayed in Table 1, just over 60% of the respondents were female, with 32.6% male (some respondents declined to indicate sex, and one noted transgendered). Age ranges spanned from 20-25 years to over 50 years, with the majority (just over 41%) indicating they were over 40 years of age. Ninety percent of respondents were U.S. citizens, who identified themselves as White/Caucasian (81.4%), English speaking (86%), heterosexual (83%), and married (74.6%) with one or more children (78.2%). These demographics were fairly consistent with both the COE and broader University demographics (i.e., majority female, 35-40 years of age), and indicated that the survey respondents, while somewhat more female dominated, were demographically representative of the COE and University graduate student populations (ISU, 2007).

Relative to program-specific alignment, most respondents were not currently COE graduate students (64%), were graduates of the COE graduate program within which they took classes (57%) (46 doctoral students, 18 education specialist students, 77 master's students, 6 dual degree program students [i.e., masters, education specialist, doctorate combinations], and 46 no responses), and were not members of a COE cohort program. Also, similar to broader University graduate student demographics, the majority (61%) indicated they were, or had been, part-time graduate students.

Harassment

Harassment was defined as uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical conduct, comment, or display, that demeans, belittles, intimidates, or humiliates a person or group (Alexander & Alexander, 2001; Carpenter, 2000; Dziech & Weiner, 1990; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Hill & Silva, 2005; Reilly, Lott, & Gallogly, 1986; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sandler, 1999; Sandler et al., 1996; U.S. Department of Defense, 1994; van Roosmalen & McDaniels, 1998). Perceptions of harassment were queried relative to whether COE students who had taken graduate classes (hereafter referred to as students) believed they had experienced and/or witnessed harassment, the type and form of harassment, location of occurrence, and whether the harassment was reported, and to whom.

Of the 193 respondents, 26 (13.5%) indicated "yes" they had experienced harassment in the COE, 162 (83.9%) said "no," and 5 (2.6%) did not respond. Similarly, 24 respondents (12.4%) indicated the harassment interfered with their ability to learn, 23 (11.9%) stated witnessing harassment interfered with their ability to learn, and 31 (16.1%) believed that the harassment they witnessed interfered with another student's ability to learn. In absolute terms these numbers may be relatively small, and given the low response rate, this study does not

suggest the findings are generalizable. However, a theoretical extrapolation of these numbers, that is, “implied incidents” (Hill & Silva, 2005, p. 14), viewed in terms of a broader student population of 2000 graduate students could translate to nearly 300 students experiencing harassment, and among a general student body of 14,000 students, these numbers could translate to nearly 2000 students experiencing harassment.

In terms of type of harassment, among those who reported experiencing harassment, findings revealed that: (a) student harassment by faculty occurred most frequently in terms of race/ethnicity/color/national origin, sex, and language/culture; (b) student harassment by staff/administration, while reported as less frequent than harassment by faculty, was similarly concentrated in these three categories; and (c) student on student harassment was most frequently reported in terms of race/ethnicity/color/national origin, religion, and language/culture. (See Table 2) Incidents of harassment were elaborated on by some respondents through written responses to open-ended questions. Five students reported first-hand accounts of harassment on the part of faculty. Three others reported observing faculty harassment of other students. A female participant stated:

While I did not personally experience harassment from COE Admin/Staff, 2 different women confided in me about sexual harassment & bullying from a male COE admin/staff that they each experienced. It should be noted that these 2 women did not know each other & were not enrolled in the same courses.

Another commented: “Students with children @ home often were “reminded” what their priorities should be.” Similarly a female respondent noted: “I was in the graduate program several years ago and that is when the discriminatory comments were made against women in administration. This attitude convinced me not to finish the masters program at that time.”

Beyond identifying frequency of incident occurrence, survey responses revealed faculty harassment based on sex out-numbered harassment reported as perpetrated by staff/administration and students combined; while reports of harassment of students by students on the basis of race were nearly as high as those for faculty. Only veteran status resulted in zero reports across all three groups. Reports of harassment on the basis of religion occurred with limited frequency (3 = faculty; 1 = staff/administrative; 4 = students).

These findings indicate that harassment experiences were evidenced, and were consistent with Hill and Silva’s 2005 AAUW report, *Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus*. In Hill and Silva’s study, 7% of the students reported being harassed by faculty. Also consistent, were findings that harassment by staff/administration occurred less frequently than by faculty and/or other students.

Table 2
Type of Harassment

	Once	More than once	No response
Faculty			
Race/Ethnicity/Color/National Origin	7 (3.6%)	0	186 (96.4%)
Exceptionality in Ed/Disability	3 (1.6%)	0	190 (98.4%)
Age	3 (1.6%)	0	190 (98.4%)
Sex	7 (3.6%)	0	186 (96.4%)
Sexual Orientation	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Religion	3 (1.6%)	0	190 (98.4%)
Socio-Economic Status	3 (1.6%)	0	190 (98.4%)
Veteran Status	0	0	193 (100%)
Language/Culture	6 (3.1%)	0	187 (96.9%)
Staff/Administrative			
Race/Ethnicity/Color/National Origin	4 (2.1%)	0	189 (97.9%)
Exceptionality in Ed/Disability	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Age	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Sex	2 (1.0%)	0	191 (99.0%)
Sexual Orientation	0	0	193 (100%)
Religion	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Socio-Economic Status	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Veteran Status	0	0	193 (100%)
Language/Culture	2 (1.0%)	0	191 (99.0%)
Students			
Race/Ethnicity/Color/National Origin	6 (3.1%)	0	187 (96.9%)
Exceptionality in Ed/Disability	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Age	0	0	193 (100%)
Sex	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Sexual Orientation	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Religion	4 (2.1%)	0	189 (97.9%)
Socio-Economic Status	0	0	193 (100%)
Veteran Status	0	0	193 (100%)
Language/Culture	4 (2.1%)	0	189 (97.9%)

Hill and Silva's 2005 study went on to note that sexual harassment experiences were not only "widespread among college students across the country" (p. 2), but that "[m]ore than one-third of college students do not tell anyone about their experiences with sexual harassment" (p. 4). In this study, just over a third of those indicating they had experienced harassment said they reported it. Among those who reported harassment—told someone, most told a family member, friend, or fellow student. Five respondents indicated they reported harassment to a COE faculty member, four said they told a COE administrator, none reported anything to the Human Resources department, and only one said she/he reported harassment to the Affirmative Action office. (See Table 3) These data were consistent with the low incidence of harassment reporting noted more broadly in the literature (Hill & Silva, 2005; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fisher, 1995), and suggest the need for awareness information and/or training regarding available harassment reporting avenues and offices.

Table 3
Harassment Reporting

	Yes	No	Not applicable	No response
Did you report the harassment?	9 (4.7%)	17 (8.8%)	58 (30.1%)	109 ^a (56.5%)
To whom did you report the harassment?				
A family member	16 (8.3%)			177 (91.7%)
A friend	13 (6.7%)			180 (93.3%)
A fellow student	15 (7.8%)			178 (92.2%)
A COE faculty	5 (2.6%)			188 (97.4%)
A COE admin	4 (2.1%)			189 (97.9%)
A non-COE faculty	1 (0.5%)			192 (99.5%)
A non-COE admin	0			193 (100%)
Human Resource	0			193 (100%)
Affirmative Action	1 (0.5%)			192 (99.5%)
Other	1 (0.5%)			192 (99.5%)
Not Applicable	54 (28.0%)			139 (72.0%)

^a One or more of the respondents answered the questions with two or more responses.

Data detailing the form and frequency of harassment indicated that oral remarks, occurring within COE classrooms, followed by oral remarks occurring in COE offices, were the most frequent form and location of harassment reported. Further, insensitive or disparaging remarks from faculty were reported as occurring more than twice as often about women as about men, or any other group (i.e., race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and language/culture). (See Table 4)

Table 4
Form and Site of Harassment

	Yes	No response
In what form was the harassment?		
Oral remarks	22 (11.4%)	171 (88.6%)
Written comments	1 (0.5%)	192 (99.5%)
Anonymous phone calls	0	193 (100%)
E-mails	3 (1.6%)	190 (98.4%)
Graffiti	0	193 (100%)
Bullying	3 (1.6%)	190 (98.4%)
Denial of services/support	6 (3.1%)	187 (96.9%)
Threats of physical violence	0	193 (100%)
Actual physical assault or injury	1 (0.5%)	192 (99.5%)
Other	4 (2.1%)	189 (97.9%)
Not Applicable	52 (26.9%)	141 (73.1%)
Where did the harassment occur?		
In a COE classroom	20 (10.4%)	173 (89.6%)
In a COE lab	2 (1.0%)	191 (99.0%)
In a campus office in the COE	12 (6.2%)	181 (93.8%)
In a public space in the COE	3 (1.6%)	190 (98.4%)
While working at my Coll/Univ Job	2 (1.0%)	191 (99.0%)
At a COE/Campus event	0	193 (100%)
Other	2 (1.0%)	191 (99.0%)
Not Applicable	52 (26.9%)	141 (73.1%)

Although these data imply a relatively low incidence of harassment within the COE, harassment incidents were evidenced. Specifically, harassment, in the form of oral remarks, noted in terms of insensitive or disparaging comments, perpetrated by faculty and students, within COE classrooms, appear to be an area in need of redress.

Discrimination

For the purpose of this study, discrimination was defined as unfair or unequal treatment or consideration of a person or group (i.e., prejudicial bias) on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, national origin, exceptionalities in education, disability, age, sex/gender, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status (SES), veteran status, language or culture (Alexander & Alexander, 2001; Carpenter, 2000; Cheney & Pemberton, 2002; Freire, 1998). Perceptions of discrimination were queried relative to whether students believed they had experienced discrimination, the type and form of discrimination, location of occurrence, and whether the discrimination was reported, and to whom. When asked if they had experienced discrimination, as defined in this study, by faculty, staff/administration, or students, 27 (14.0%) responded “yes,” 153 (79.3%) responded “no,” and 13 (6.7%) did not respond. The incidence of occurrence reported was similar to that noted for harassment (Harassment data: Yes: 26 (13.5%), No: 162 (83.9%) and No Response: 5 (2.6%) respectively).

In terms of type of discrimination, like harassment, most respondents did not report the occurrence of discrimination. However, among those who did, faculty were reported as the most frequent sources of discrimination, with sex, religion, and race/ethnicity/color/national origin noted as the discrimination demographics with the highest frequencies of occurrence. Staff/administration and student sources of discrimination were reported with less frequency across all categories than discrimination by faculty. (See Table 5) The qualitative data supported these findings. Respondents wrote about their discrimination experiences based on religion (5 comments), gender (3 comments), and ableness/ability (2 comments). A participant wrote: “I believe that the religion that is predominate in this area creates prejudices in the community and this university against non-members. I also see this religion creating a climate of sex discrimination and white superiority in this region.” Another stated:

I would like to know how many students who use wheelchairs for mobility have actually finished the program... Both graduate students and under graduates with disabilities very quickly found out that if you used a wheelchair for mobility you could not graduate in special education.

Interestingly, when queried through example-based follow-up survey items as to whether they believed they had “...been judged on the basis of [their] gender,” 36 (18.7%) said “yes,” 17 (8.8%) believed they had been “...singled out in class to speak on behalf of [their] gender,” 10 believed they had experienced “...discrimination based on [their] gender,” and 6 believed they had “...experienced sexual harassment.” These numbers, while similar to those reported earlier, were somewhat higher. Likewise, a higher number of respondents indicated they believed they had “...been judged on the basis of [their] race/ethnicity” 24 (12.4%), “...been singled out in class to speak on behalf of [their] race/ethnicity” 15 (7.8%), and “...experienced discrimination

based on [their] race/ethnicity” 11 (5.7%), and “...experienced sexual discrimination” 15 (7.8%). These additional queries further support and validate the study findings in terms of student perceptions regarding occurrences and experiences of harassment and discrimination.

Table 5
Type of Discrimination

	Once	More than once	No response
Faculty			
Race/Ethnicity/Color/National Origin	8 (4.1%)	1 (0.5%)	184 (95.3%)
Exceptionality in Ed/Disability	3 (1.6%)	0	190 (98.4%)
Age	4 (2.1%)	0	189 (97.9%)
Sex	10 (5.2%)	0	183 (94.8%)
Sexual Orientation	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Religion	9 (4.7%)	0	184 (95.3%)
Socio-Economic Status	5 (2.6%)	0	188 (97.4%)
Veteran Status	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Language/Culture	3 (1.6%)	1 (0.5%)	189 (97.9%)
Staff/Administrative			
Race/Ethnicity/Color/National Origin	5 (2.6%)	0	188 (97.4%)
Exceptionality in Ed/Disability	2 (1.0%)	0	191 (99.0%)
Age	3 (1.6%)	0	190 (98.4%)
Sex	3 (1.6%)	0	190 (98.4%)
Sexual Orientation	0	0	193 (100%)
Religion	4 (2.1%)	0	189 (97.9%)
Socio-Economic Status	0	0	193 (100%)
Veteran Status	0	0	193 (100%)
Language/Culture	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Students			
Race/Ethnicity/Color/National Origin	4 (2.1%)	0	189 (97.9%)
Exceptionality in Ed/Disability	2 (1.0%)	0	191 (99.0%)
Age	4 (2.1%)	0	189 (97.9%)
Sex	3 (1.6%)	0	190 (98.4%)
Sexual Orientation	1 (0.5%)	0	192 (99.5%)
Religion	6 (3.1%)	0	187 (96.9%)
Socio-Economic Status	2 (1.0%)	0	191 (99.0%)
Veteran Status	0	0	193 (100%)
Language/Culture	3 (1.6%)	0	190 (98.4%)

Like the findings reported for harassment, few respondents indicated they reported discrimination. Among those who did, most reported it to a family member, a friend, and/or a fellow student. Only one instance of reporting to the Affirmative Action office was noted, and zero reports to the Human Resources department occurred. (See Table 6)

Table 6
Discrimination Reporting

	Yes	No	Not applicable	No response
Did you report the discrimination?	9 (4.7%)	24 (12.4%)	60 (31.1%)	100 ^a (51.8%)
To whom did you report the discrimination?				
A family member	16 (8.3%)			177 (91.7%)
A friend	13 (6.7%)			180 (93.3%)
A fellow student	11 (5.7%)			182 (94.3%)
A COE faculty	6 (3.1%)			187 (96.9%)
A COE admin	6 (3.1%)			187 (96.9%)
A non-COE faculty	1 (0.5%)			192 (99.5%)
A non-COE admin	0			193 (100%)
Human Resource	0			193 (100%)
Affirmative Action	1 (0.5%)			192 (99.5%)
Other	2 (1.0%)			191 (99.0%)
Not Applicable	58 (30.1%)			135 (69.9%)

^a One or more of the respondents answered the questions with two or more responses.

Also similar to the findings reported regarding harassment, respondents indicated oral remarks, followed by grading and denial of services/support were the most frequent forms of discrimination experienced. Consistent with the most frequently cited source and form of discrimination, respondents indicated discrimination occurred most often within COE classrooms and offices. (See Table 7)

Table 7
Form and Site of Discrimination

	Yes	No response
In what form was the discrimination?		
Oral remarks	24 (12.4%)	169 (87.6%)
Written comments	0	193 (100%)
Grading	12 (6.2%)	181 (93.8%)
Anonymous phone calls	0	193 (100%)
E-mails	0	193 (100%)
Graffiti	0	193 (100%)
Bullying	3 (1.6%)	190 (98.4%)
Denial of services/support	10 (5.2%)	183 (94.8%)
Threats of physical violence	0	193 (100%)
Actual physical assault or injury	0	193 (100%)
Other	4 (2.1%)	189 (97.9%)
Not Applicable	59 (30.6%)	134 (69.4%)
Where did the discrimination occur?		
In a COE classroom	18 (9.3%)	175 (90.7%)
In a COE lab	3 (1.6%)	190 (98.4%)
In a campus office in the COE	12 (6.2%)	181 (93.8%)
In a public space in the COE	2 (1.0%)	191 (99.0%)
While working at my Coll/Univ Job	2 (1.0%)	191 (99.0%)
At a COE/Campus event	1 (0.5%)	192 (99.5%)
Other	4 (2.1%)	189 (97.9%)
Not Applicable	59 (30.6%)	134 (69.4%)

Discussion

As stated, this study queried graduate student perceptions of, and experiences with harassment and discrimination in a college of education (COE). The discussion reflects on respondent perceptions of harassment and discrimination, and suggests conclusions and recommendations derived from the findings.

Summary Perceptions of Harassment and Discrimination

While the majority of respondents did not perceive they had experienced harassment or discrimination while taking graduate classes in the COE, the findings revealed that incidents of harassment and discrimination have occurred within the COE, and were perpetrated most often by faculty and students within COE classrooms. Consistent with the broader literature on sexual harassment reporting, just a third of the respondents who indicated they had experienced harassment/discrimination reported it, with virtually none telling a COE or University person/

office of authority (i.e., the Affirmative Action office or Human Resources). Disparaging remarks in terms of race/ethnicity/color/national origin, sex, and language/culture were the most frequently cited manifestation of harassment/discrimination perceived by students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Hill and Silva's 2005 AAUW report on sexual harassment offered concluding thoughts that are not only relevant, but instructive to this COE and University. Paraphrased and inclusive of discrimination, these thoughts read as follows: Sexual harassment and discrimination defy a simple solution, demand action and are unlikely to go away on their own. Talking candidly, while seeking commonalities and acknowledging conflicts, are necessary steps toward creating harassment- and discrimination-free environments within which all students can achieve and succeed (p. 39). This inquiry explored graduate student perceptions of, and experiences with harassment and discrimination, and revealed that incidents of harassment and discrimination have occurred within this COE. According to Palmer (1998), a safe learning environment is essential if learning is to occur. Kess (2003) supported this assertion, stating "...a safe learning environment provides clear and realistic opportunities for success for all students" (p. 56). Harassment and discrimination foster the antithesis of learning environment safety, and impede and impair student achievement and success (Ormerod, Collinsworth, & Perry, 2008).

This study and these findings are important, because: (a) they add to the growing body of literature confirming the existence and persistence of harassment and discrimination in higher education; (b) they have the potential to become a model for broader university-wide inquiry regarding obstacles (i.e., harassment and discrimination) that impede an educational culture and climate that values and supports all students and their learning; and (c) they provide a college-specific data-based foundation for awareness and action, from which necessary steps toward creating a harassment- and discrimination-free COE culture and climate can be operationalized and pursued. To that end, the following recommendations are offered.

Recommendations

Issues of harassment and discrimination are important for individuals and organizations—colleges/universities---to consider. Evidence provided by studies such as this, encourage academic units to assess not just culture and climate, but perceived culture and climate. Evidence also serves as measure of current conditions that can then be used longitudinally to access positive changes as they occur within and across units; as well as across different student academic levels (e.g., undergraduate students and graduate students). Additionally, using the currency of academia, that is, research findings, this study provides the needed documentation to justify and motivate the provision of harassment/discrimination sensitivity training for faculty, staff/administration, and students. In particular, education stakeholders (faculty, staff, and administrators) interested in the retention of students must be informed about study findings such as these and educated about the nature and meaning of harassment and discrimination; as well as how their actions impact students' perceptions of them as professionals and of the college as a community of learners. Particular attention should be paid to the damage disparaging remarks, as a manifestation of harassment and discrimination, can inflict on students' educational experiences.

“Sexual harassment [and zero-tolerance anti-discrimination] policies should be complemented by educational efforts. A policy alone does not change behavior” (Howard-Hamilton, Phelps, & Torres, 1998, p. 57). Howard-Hamilton, Phelps, and Torres reported on studies showing that providing education on sexual harassment policies does change the climate at universities. Similarly, research conducted by Peterson and Quarstein (2001) revealed that holding sensitivity training for disability specialists was successful in helping them overcome insensitivities they exhibited when working with disabled clients. According to Peterson and Quarstein (2001), “Professionals tend to become inured to the hardships of others and lose sight of the need for both verbal and non-verbal sensitivity in the workplace” (p. 43). Sensitivity training for those already in the workplace can yield positive results. These findings provide data-driven rationale to support conducting harassment and discrimination sensitivity training.

Likewise, students need to be made aware of their obligations and options in regard to these issues, and informed about existing institutional mechanisms and reporting avenues to protect them and others from harassment and discrimination. Students, too, play a role in establishing and maintaining the culture and climate within an academic unit (Parker, 2006). In-person and electronic communications, as well as on-line workshops and training programs could be used to achieve these ends. In particular, information on how and where to get support, along with incident reporting avenues and protection assurance mechanisms need to be in-place, broadly communicated, and advertised.

Even one incident of harassment and/or discrimination is one too many. Evidence, such as the findings presented here, serve to shine light on persistent harassment/discrimination problems, and provide an evidence-based foundation upon which education leaders can act with intentionality and purpose to ameliorate persistent harassment and discrimination.

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