



## Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) – Diverse Learning Environments Survey 2018 Results for UW-Whitewater

### Introduction

This report provides a brief overview of the results of the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey, in which UW-Whitewater participated in Spring 2018. This represents the first time that UW-Whitewater participated in this survey of all undergraduate students on campus with sophomore and junior status. While the respondent rate was significantly lower than desirable, the results of the survey provide helpful insights into how students perceive UW-Whitewater (and their place at the university) in terms of the education and social climate, as well as on issues related to discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual abuse/assault.

### Methods of Analysis

The DLE survey contains forty-nine (49) questions; twenty-four (24) of these questions ask students to provide either demographic or academic information about themselves, which can be used to contextualize responses and/or better understand the composition of the respondent population. The remaining twenty-five (25) questions (many of which are multi-fold and are associated with follow-up sub-questions) asks students to share their perceptions of the social and educational climate at UW-Whitewater and to describe their experiences with discrimination and sexual harassment, abuse and assault on campus. These questions are grouped into fifteen (15) 'factor' categories.<sup>1</sup> In addition, UW-Whitewater students were posed three additional (3) questions on classroom climate, as part of an optional survey module.<sup>2</sup>

The survey was administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA on behalf of UW-Whitewater. HERI has designed this survey to be administered to second and third year students at both two and four year institutions; at UW-Whitewater, the survey population consisted of undergraduate students that had either sophomore or junior status by the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 2017 Fall term.<sup>3</sup> Initial invitations were sent on February 12, 2018. The survey was open until March 12, 2018, during which time multiple reminder emails were sent to the survey population. Overall, four hundred (400) students from the survey population completed the

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<sup>1</sup> These categories include: Sense of Belonging, General Interpersonal Validation, Academic Validation in the Classroom, Institutional Commitment to Diversity, Critical Consciousness and Action, Harassment, Discrimination and Bias, Conversations Across Difference, Curriculum of Inclusion, Co-Curricular Diversity Activities (Campus-facilitated), Habits of Mind, Pluralistic Orientation, Civic Engagement, Social Agency, and Academic Self-Concept.

<sup>2</sup> This module focused on the student experience in the classroom and their involvement in educational activities as well as respondent's perceptions regarding the pedagogical practices of instructors.

<sup>3</sup> The survey population included 5,414 undergraduate students.

survey, resulting in a 7.4% response rate. The majority of respondents were full-time students with sophomore or junior status.<sup>4</sup> That said, a disproportionate number of survey respondents identified themselves as women, while students who identify themselves as persons of color are slightly overrepresented in the respondent population<sup>5</sup> – these demographic factors should be taken into account when interpreting the survey results.

## Findings

Generally speaking, UW-Whitewater respondents reported their perceptions of campus climate as being on par with respondents at other four-year public institutions participating in the 2018 survey. In the fifteen (15) grouped categories of questions, UW-Whitewater students responded more positively to questions in six (6) categories than their counterparts, to a statistically significant degree. Particularly noteworthy, 52.1 % of UW-Whitewater students responded positively to questions measuring the extent to which students' view of faculty actions in class reflect concern for their academic success; and 51.4% of UW-Whitewater students responded positively to questions measuring student's perception of the campus' commitment to diversity.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, UW-Whitewater respondents reported their perceptions of the classroom climate as being on par with respondents at other institutions participating in this optional survey module. UW-Whitewater students also responded more positively to several questions in the classroom climate module than the benchmark population.<sup>7</sup> With regard to instructors, for example, a notably higher percentage of UW-Whitewater respondents indicated that all or most of their instructors a) are sensitive to the ability levels of all students, b) turn controversial topics into good discussions, c) encourage students to contribute different perspectives in class, and d) share their own experiences and backgrounds in class. In addition, notably fewer UW-Whitewater respondents (18.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that they did not feel comfortable contributing to class discussions. In terms of course structure, UW-Whitewater respondents reported that their courses involved more lectures and more group projects but less lab work and fewer longer (10+ page) research papers than their counterparts. The survey also reveals several areas in which UW-Whitewater students are more likely to face issues and challenges. This was particularly notable in responses related to questions on sexual harassment and abuse.

## Conclusion

The results of the HERI DLE survey appear to indicate that UW-Whitewater students generally perceive campus climate in a way that is either on par with or more positive than their counterparts at other four-year public

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<sup>4</sup> This included 376 full-time respondents from UW-Whitewater. However, almost 20% of respondents described themselves as seniors; these students may have achieved senior status between Fall 2017 (when they qualified for the survey pool) and Spring 2018 (when the survey was administered).

<sup>5</sup> 66.0% of full-time respondents identified themselves as women (in comparison, only 49.3% of the Fall 2017 undergraduate population at UW-Whitewater identified themselves as women in their application materials); conversely, 77.4% of full-time respondents identified their racial/ethnic identity as 'White' (in comparison, 81.9% of the Fall 2017 undergraduate population at UW-Whitewater identified themselves as 'White/Caucasian' their application materials).

<sup>6</sup> In comparison to 50.4% and 49.2% of respondents from other four-year public institutions, respectively. The difference in the positive respond rates for both these questions achieved a high-level of statistical ( $p < .001$ ) and substantive significance, according to the HERI analysis. UW-Whitewater respondents also responded more positively than their counterparts on questions dealing with sense of belonging, general interpersonal validation, curriculum of inclusion and participation in co-curricular diversity activities.

<sup>7</sup> In this section of the survey, the benchmark population is all respondents who had the option of answering questions posed in the optional module.

institutions participating in the survey.<sup>8</sup> Response rates to particular questions in the survey are helpful in identifying areas in which UW-Whitewater students are having particularly positive experiences on campus as well as areas in which UW-Whitewater may need to do more in order to provide students with a safe and inclusive campus experience.

While the survey provides valuable information on student perceptions of campus climate at UW-Whitewater, conclusions drawn from this survey must take into account the markedly low response rate and the disproportionate number of women respondents to the survey. The low response rate may reflect the fact that this is the first time that the UW-Whitewater has participated in this survey; alternatively, it may reflect the level of survey fatigue on campus, especially among undergraduate students. Regardless, caution must be taken in generalizing the perceptions articulated in this survey to the entire undergraduate population, given the small number of respondents.

Similarly, the differences in the response rates to certain questions between UW-Whitewater and other four-year public institutions may be impacted by the disproportionate number of women respondents to this survey at UW-Whitewater. This is particularly the case for questions to which women are generally likely to have a negative response (questions regarding sexual harassment, for example). This does not mean that the notable difference in the response rate between UW-Whitewater and the benchmark population for these questions should be discounted; rather, it suggests that the profile of the respondent population should be taken into account when interpreting the magnitude of this difference.

As the 2018 survey cycle represents the first administration of the DLE survey to UW-Whitewater students, trend data is not available. It would therefore be advisable to administer the survey again, ideally in two years, in order to begin collecting trend data. Given the low response rate, it would be advisable to focus effort and resources to publicize the survey and encourage participation, should the survey be administered again.

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that schools self-select participation in the survey; therefore, the percentage of positive responses from respondents at four-year public schools may constitute a biased perspective of students at four-year public schools across the US.