



In Their Own Words:
Students' Experiences with Diversity and Inclusion at K



Purpose of the Study

- To gain a clearer understanding of how students of various races, ethnicities, and nationalities experience their time at K
- To help the College identify ways to improve the K experience for all students



Focus Group Methods

- 9 pilot interviews to refine questions
- 15 focus groups
- 80 participants (51 students of color; 29 white students)
- Separate focus groups for white students and students of color
- One facilitator, two note takers
- Audio recording

Survey Methods

- Conducted a SurveyMonkey survey over spring break and early spring quarter
- 36% response rate (462 students)
- 277 white students (33%)
- 140 domestic students of color (48%)
(23 African-American, 33 Asian, 34 Latino, 48 Multiracial, 2 Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander)
- 20 international students (25%)

Stages of Racial/Ethnic Identity Development (as summarized by Beverly Daniel Tatum)

People of Color

White People

Pre-Encounter

Abandonment of Racism

Encounter

Contact

Disintegration

Immersion/Emersion

Reintegration

Defining a Non-Racist White Identity

Internalization

Pseudo-Independence

Immersion/Emersion

Autonomy



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What Was Surprising When Students Arrived

STUDENTS OF COLOR



What Was Surprising When Students Arrived – Students of Color

- How frequently they were made aware of their race/ethnicity/nationality
- Prevalence of micro-aggressions, racism, and stereotypes
- Some students were surprised by being underprepared academically compared to many white students, especially in the natural sciences
- Whiteness of the student body and faculty/staff
- The wealth of many students



What Was Surprising When Students Arrived – Students of Color

“Always having to be aware of my race and always constantly having to think about it surprised me.”

“[I was] surprised by level of disrespect I went through initially. Things that I heard, the way people talked to me: ‘You are black, you like rap music, right?’ The ‘black people deserve to be in shackles’ comment was being screamed through my hall. Who the hell are these white people who didn’t think there were gonna be black people where they lived? I didn’t know if I could trust people here.”

“I was surprised by how far behind academically I was compared to white students. Other students took AP Bio, and here I am struggling. Their conception of failing is a B, mine is, I actually got an F. The learning gap was so big...There was Supplemental Instruction [SI] and white students dominated SI sessions and obscure questions you might have.”

What Was Surprising When Students Arrived

WHITE STUDENTS

What Was Surprising When Students Arrived – White Students

- Students from more diverse communities were surprised by the overall whiteness of the student body and faculty/staff
- Students from predominantly white communities felt culture shock with regard to the level of diversity
- The wealth of many students
- The cliquish nature of the student body
- The number of international students



What Was Surprising When Students Arrived – White Students

"I felt like, 'Oh my god! so many white people, so many people with privilege.' I was like, 'Why am I here?' K prides itself on being diverse but it's not the reality."

"Where I come from it was all white. Super white. So I had culture shock. And I was like, 'Oh my god, so diverse!' So when people say we don't have much diversity, I can't relate because compared to where I'm from it's so diverse."



Experiences of Racial/Ethnic Diversity on Campus

STUDENTS OF COLOR



Students of Color – Main Themes

- Thinking about race/ethnicity much more at K than at home
- Disparity among white students and students of color when it comes to thinking and talking about race
- Assumptions about students of color based on race, ethnicity, or nationality
- **Feeling marginalized, unsafe, and uncomfortable in the classroom**
- Being ignored outside of the classroom
- **The prevalence of micro-aggressions, racism, and stereotypes**
- White students speaking for students/people of color
- Feeling like a token



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

Thinking about race/ethnicity much more at K than at home

“It crosses my mind here like more than ever in my entire life. Like it’s just exhausting sometimes... But back home, it would never cross my mind, like at school or at home or anything. But here it’s so common.”

“Freshman and sophomore year, I had a fixation with race. I couldn’t exist without thinking about it. On study abroad I was in a society where no one cared that I was black... I could exist without being black.”

“When I visited I only saw one student of color ... So I knew what I was getting into. So I wasn’t surprised, but at the same time I’ve never felt so black until I came to K.”

“My skin is brown everyday; I can’t really change that.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

Disparity among white students and students of color when it comes to thinking and talking about race

“People don’t talk about racism here. When I was in class one time and the question was shouldn’t we try and stop racism? A student answered, yeah, in a million years, but we should just avoid it. I didn’t know people felt like that.”

“I try hard to be open about my racial identity so that [white people] don’t feel scared to talk to me. I want to talk about racial issues as openly as I can, but it doesn’t mean I won’t get offended every once in a while.”

“That’s why I hate going to the race talks because it’s always the same people, preaching to the choir. It’s like we’re all here for the same thing, like I saw you at the last one, what’s up? We ain’t doing anything.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

Assumptions about students of color based on race, ethnicity, or nationality

“I’m dancing with someone who is white and they’re like ‘I’m so white, I can’t dance.’ They assume just because I’m black I can dance. It comes out in social situations more than academic situations.”

“If you’re a student of color in Dow the white students don’t think you are capable of helping at all. This happens with peer-to-peer work and TA-ing; it has happened over and over again.”

“I think of the random things people ask me, which is related to my nationality most of the time. ‘Do you smoke weed, do you live on the beach?’ People assume my first language isn’t English because of my accent. They ask, ‘When did you start to learn English?’ because it’s ‘so good.’ They think they speak superior English compared to developing countries.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

Feeling marginalized, unsafe, and uncomfortable in the classroom

“Being the only Latino in the classroom... I hate it when people have to get into groups during class, and you see all the white kids get into a group and you’re the last one to get chosen.”

“Definitely in my science classes I noticed it... when we have lab, and you’re just one of the few people of color, and you’re wondering who you’re going to be partners with and trying to figure that out... I noticed I was different.”

“The curriculum here is very white... I don’t have a relationship with any professors in my department. It’s awkward now that I want to go to graduate school. I need recommendations and I don’t have anyone to write them.”

“In other classes, I read things written by white authors, I don’t have a passion for people like Shakespeare... I want classes where we look at people of color before 9th week when [students] are no longer engaged in the class.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

Feeling marginalized, unsafe, and uncomfortable in the classroom

“In classes I’ve been invited to a safe space, but you say something and you feel the room change... I don’t feel that there are that many spaces around here without having someone getting embarrassed, angry, or insulted.”

“So [in] class, the topic [was] civil rights and like, vocabulary. And, racial slurs come up. And, the time comes that I would have to say the ‘n’ word. I don’t say the ‘n’ word. And so I pause, and the teacher filled in the ‘n’ word for me. She said the ‘n’ word. She said THE ‘n’ word, the actual word. I’m like I’m shocked and she says, ‘You should try to say it sometimes, it’s freeing.’ There’s one or two people of color in the class, and I looked over to the other person of color. And it’s like, what just happened?”

“[In one of my classes] a girl says there were going to be more minorities at Western because it’s cheaper. You don’t want to be seen as an angry Latina, [but I’m thinking] you’re assuming all minorities don’t have enough money to be at a private institution. What angered me more was that the professor didn’t say anything either.”

Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

Feeling marginalized, unsafe, and uncomfortable in the classroom

“I missed class to retake a comprehensive exam. I told the professor, and she said she didn’t take it personally but she was concerned for me professionally when I go into the labor force. Comparison to the day before when she had a white girl miss class. Her response was ‘just take care of yourself.’ Seeing those differences in treatment, I wanted to tell her, but then I remembered that she was grading me.”

“[I was talking with a professor] about how students of color often feel like they don’t belong in classrooms and her response was, ‘Well, when I go into the classroom, I’m not thinking about how students feel. My responsibility is to teach and that’s all I do. I don’t think about how everybody is feeling.’ And I thought, are you kidding me? If I don’t feel like I belong in the classroom it will influence how I do in your class, and you don’t care that I don’t feel like I’m a part of your class? I was so heated I couldn’t respond. I just said I’m really sorry but I have to leave, I have a meeting to go to.”

Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

Students of color being ignored outside of the classroom

“I found out that like the academic and the social are very different for people here. It’s two separate worlds almost. When it comes to the classroom, everybody gonna say what they gotta say, like they’re just trying to get that grade, so they’re gonna talk to who they need to talk to, they’re gonna be friendly, they’re gonna be cool, but when it comes to being friends, kickin’ it, it ain’t gonna happen.”

“[MECHA] decided to go to K parties. The moment we got there white students started to stare at us. Guess they had never seen a lot of Latino students together, like 60. We just got there and people started saying that we killed it.”

“Nobody gets near MECHA students during parties.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

The prevalence of micro-aggressions, racism, and stereotypes

“When people are drunk they say racist things. When I walked in [to the party] they said, ‘Hey Posse is here!’ and I’m not in Posse.”

“Posse is another byword for out of state or minority.”

“At a party three white people asked if I can twerk for them.”

“People also think it’s funny to call me Mexican, even though I am from [a different country]. It’s not that I have a problem with it, but I’m not Mexican. No it’s not funny. I just play it off, but if you say it one more time I’m gonna punch you.”

“I want to separate myself from the lumping that does go on. Because we’re not all Mexican. We’re not all Salvadorean. We’re not all from LA... there are different cultures and people don’t see that and people don’t understand that.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

The prevalence of micro-aggressions, racism, and stereotypes

“I went to like a house party. And one of the white guys comes over, and we started talking and then he’s like, ‘Also are you one of the Mexicans?’ And I was just like, ‘What? Did you say that?’ I literally felt my heart skip a beat. I felt so offended, I felt so hurt. And from there I’m realizing, I guess race is an issue on campus and the way people identify you and see you.”

“I started to realize what the term ‘Mexican’ meant. Back home... [Mexicans] are people who come from Mexico... Apparently, coming here, Mexican means Latino.”

“I don’t ask Michiganders, ‘Are you from Michigan... Are you from Finland?’ You don’t ask white people to [explain] their heritage. Why do it to us?”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

The prevalence of micro-aggressions, racism, and stereotypes

“The shackles comment was made by [white] people who know where I lived, but as a joke among white friends. There were a lot of times I was ready to go home... I don’t know if I can trust these people here. I’m always on edge. My reason for being here is more than me. I’m the first one in my family to go to college, so that’s what keeps me here. I have people looking up to me. I’m not here to make friends or for white people to like me. I’m here to get a degree at the end of the day.”

“During election night, a guy came and he was drunk, and he voted for Romney, and he was upset. That doesn’t excuse his behavior. He basically knocked down my door telling me that I better turn down my TV (Obama was speaking) because nobody wants to hear this shit and that I better do it right away. Then his roommate comes down and says, ‘I think you need to do this because he’s really upset and if you don’t he might beat you up’... I left my TV on... I called my mom and I was crying. At that moment I was just ready to go... Why is this happening to me? Everyone in this hall is a Democrat.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

White students speaking for students/people of color

“What surprised me is how a lot of white students think they know the struggle. No you don’t, please shut up. Somebody in class said that because Obama was president there is no racism in the U.S. What are you saying? No! It surprised me that people on campus try to take our stories and try to say that it’s ok because we’re here [at K].”

“Just ‘cause you know a little something, now you’re going to tell me about the life I live ‘cause you had a glimpse of it in some class? People kill me with their education.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – Students of Color

Feeling like a token

“It’s hard to... feel like you’re just a token on campus. You’re just sort of there to make sure that rich white parents are sending their kids to this college and they can be sure that they’re getting to be cultured by interacting with people who are black or poor or brown.”

“I feel like a lot of times we are puppets for the administration. To be placed in a pretty picture and just put up ... and then after that we’re just thrown to the side.”



Experiences of Racial/Ethnic Diversity on Campus

WHITE STUDENTS



White Students – Main Themes

- Encountering issues of race and ethnicity in the classroom
- Encountering issues of race and ethnicity outside of the classroom
- **White privilege**
- A divided student body
- **“Walking on egg shells:” Fear of engaging across difference**



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – White Students

Encountering issues of race and ethnicity in the classroom

“In my ANSO class we talked a lot about race. I heard people from my class making offensive jokes later. People participate in the discussion for a grade but they’ll perpetuate the same things we’re talking about later.”

“Having to take an ANSO class where the professor’s main goal was having us take responsibility for these social constructs – that really checked my privilege. These are issues I need to be accountable for.”

“I talk about it in class a ton. I’m an ANSO major. Last quarter in [class], we talked about it every day. I occasionally bring it up out of class...The tone of the conversation is negative at me a lot for being a white male.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – White Students

Not encountering issues of race and ethnicity in the classroom

“I don’t talk about it much being in the sciences, though I’ve come to see here at K how important it is...spending 9 out of 10 times in Dow I hardly get to discuss things. This [the focus group] is rare. I don’t know, it’s a new way of thinking for me and it’s not necessarily easy...”

“Just being a math and physics major, we don’t study a lot of issues of race, so I don’t think about it that much.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – White Students

Encountering issues of race outside of the classroom

“Coming here you definitely question a lot more. Coming from a place where confederate flags are on the back of trucks, definitely more.”

“My whiteness and white privilege, I really never thought about it before coming to K. It was definitely brought to my attention by the people who I’m living around, who I talk to, my classes.”

“I’ve noticed that if I’m meeting a person of color for the first time, I automatically think that they have certain thoughts about me because I’m white... [that] they think that I think that I’m better than them maybe, which I don’t at all, but for some reason that comes to my mind... and I’m like, ‘Why am I thinking that?’ I’ve been working on not doing [that] because that’s stupid.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – White Students

White privilege – becoming aware

“I’ve confronted my privilege and I’m starting to work with people in solidarity who don’t necessarily have my privilege. That’s where I’m headed. I haven’t crafted that yet, but it’s the next step.”

White privilege – feeling paralyzed

“There’s a difference between saving [the world] and being in solidarity. I stopped doing a lot of things because I felt like I had the save the world complex thing. Like, what am I supposed to be doing? Now that I know about my privilege, now what?”

“Because of my white privilege, I don’t know what am I supposed to do about it. Should I acknowledge it? I understand it, but how do I go about doing something about it? That’s a big source of confusion and I’m sure a lot of other people feel that way.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – White Students

Misunderstanding or struggling with the idea of white privilege

“[The other day] I got yelled at for having white privilege... I was told I don't understand because I have white privilege... I was hurt. People can see privilege in the color of your skin. But you don't often know the disadvantages that people are going through because you can't see everything.... There have been not that many situations where I was just so confused and so not able to process how to deal with a situation.”

“I'm sick of feeling like I should feel guilty for being born white... Equality means everyone being treated equal and having equal privileges and opportunity... We are all just people. I don't understand why we can't act accordingly.”

“Other races are privileged. Just because you're white doesn't mean you're rich.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – White Students

A divided student body

“Especially this quarter, I've realized this diversity around me and its importance. Yet I'm still friends with predominantly people of my color, or race. But yet I'm 'acquaintances' with people of different races but not necessarily that I hang out with them on the weekends, which is interesting. I started noticing that especially with the whole StuComm thing being brought up.”

“Some people are exposed in their classes. You develop a vocabulary about [race]. Some people don't have [that exposure] in classes or in friend groups. There is a weird divide on campus. Even talking about race becomes segregated. People who talk versus people who don't. Then add the layer of race/ethnicity. It's completely separated.”

“I think this campus is very divided – athletics, non-athletics, different ethnic groups, people from different countries, so many different groups... you want to stay with people that you have stuff in common with and have discussions with those people. Those discussions often get distorted because you're around the same people. And when different groups don't communicate it's really difficult.”



Experiences of Diversity on Campus – White Students

“Walking on egg shells:” Fear of engaging across difference

“I think what might be a factor in who I decide to be my friend is who I’m comfortable with. And I think the culture is so different between me and another ethnic group that I’m wary to become friends with them or speak to them because I don’t want to offend their culture. I would love to be friends with them, but I’m scared. I don’t want to engage in that and be wrong...”

“I feel like learning about all those micro-aggression things makes people more scared to talk with each other.”

“[Race is] a touchy subject. Conversations get dampened a lot. Conversations are shallow because people are afraid of saying something wrong, or everyone is just rushing to show their liberal opinions in discussions of controversial subjects.”

Experiences of Diversity on Campus – White Students

“Walking on egg shells:” Fear of engaging across difference

“I feel like I only talk about [race] in the classroom or with my housemates after an event. I’d never just be on the campus talking about it... I don’t know, maybe I just don’t want to have battling opinions with someone: ‘You’re from [up north], you don’t know anything about race.’”

“A lot of my friends at home are very diverse and a lot of my friends here are primarily Caucasian. And over the four years at K I’ve gotten more and more wary of approaching people who aren’t my same race just because K is such a volatile place when it comes to racism... I feel like so many times I’m confronted with a lot of anger towards the fact that I’m white and a lot of judgment that I’m confused by. In a lot of ways K has created both a safe and unsafe place for diversity.”

Campus Resources Available

STUDENTS OF COLOR



Campus Resources to Help Students with Issues of Race and Ethnicity – SOC

“[In response to the question about resources...] Z E R O. It’s the students who take the initiative to create groups – Sukuma started freshman year. It was started by an African American in science...It was a mentoring group for help in labs or to ask questions they were too scared to ask in class. It’d be more okay if it was K starting it. I’m tired of feeling alone.”

“The institution is so detached from the student body. They just want to see two happy colored faces and two happy white faces – they don’t want to deconstruct the complexity of the student body on this campus...They don’t care. They assume that by us being together we are going to be happy but it’s up to students to deal with it – they don’t put that in the brochure.”



Campus Resources to Help Students with Issues of Race and Ethnicity – SOC

“I’m concerned and excited for the first years. I notice the increase in diversity and there’s a lot of increasing tension too. These issues keep getting brushed under the rug and not addressed... and there are inadequate resources. I think retention is going to be a problem.”

“You look up to seniors on this campus and see what they did. As my friends were dropping out I thought about senior students of color. How did they do it? How did they make it through all four years? I wanted to go up and ask them, but I couldn’t. How did they survive?”

“You hold onto friendships here more than you ever have because if you lose this person of color on this campus then you have no one.”



Campus Resources
Available

WHITE STUDENTS



Campus Resources to Help Students with Issues of Race and Ethnicity – WS

“I really have no idea who I would go to if I were struggling with being white at K, or struggling with what that comes with. I don’t know who I would go to. Maybe I’d look at the Arcus Center, but I don’t know.”

“K has lots of resources like the counseling center or talking to Jaime Grant. But I just talk to other people with the same background.”

“In terms of what I wish was there, I don’t think it’s as potent or as effective to have faculty or staff or any sort of authority be there as the person who fixes your problem because it makes it less real when it’s not peer-to-peer. I wish there was a peer panel or student advisers that are well versed in these problems. And it would be more helpful and more real.”



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS



Recommendations

Recruit a more diverse faculty and staff, not limited to just people of color, but also individuals who have the capacity to work effectively with students of color and who students of color can relate to

“They need to have more professors of color who get what’s going on. Because there are a slim amount that you can talk to, who feel sympathy or actually make a change.”
(student of color)

“Have more people of color as workers, meaning academic staff, not people who serve me in the cafeteria.” *(student of color)*

“Hire more American professors of color. All of the professors of color that I know are from other countries. Specifically urban, African-American men.” *(white student)*

“White professors offer a different perspective than professors of color. As a white student and as a person in the world, I think the value of my education would increase if I had more professors of color.” *(white student)*

Recommendations

Revise the curriculum to include non-Eurocentric histories and perspectives

“Generally there should be more classes [about non-European countries and cultures]. Even learning about different people around you. The approach to learning in terms of including people can be better.” *(student of color)*

“I have heard a lot about ethnic studies. I think one of the ways is integrating ethnic studies into all departments’ syllabi. You have to integrate it into all aspects; it has to be mandatory. You’ll have a wider population of people getting this information and they are going to learn.” *(student of color)*

“The requirements of the college should reflect the values and population of our community:...the language requirement allows us to be ‘citizens of the world’ but we should also have a required class that prepares us to be a local citizen, i.e. one who can effectively and meaningfully interact across difference, and this isn’t happening now.”
(white student)

Recommendations

Offer pre-orientation experiences that are more inclusive

“They should come up with programs that benefit everybody because the LandSea program only benefits white people who have money, hence it actively excludes black people.” *(student of color)*

“Thinking back on how I made friends originally at K, my first friends were from LandSea, which is highly white because it’s expensive, it’s just privileged. I can’t remember racially what it looks like, but I’m pretty sure it’s mainly white. That’s how I made my first friends and that was my starting point.” *(white student)*

Recommendations

Integrate more programming on racial/ethnic diversity into first-year orientation and forums

“During orientation they were talking about the drinking culture and sex. And I was just like, why is that important? [laughing in room] Emotionally during first week, I thought I was abnormal. I was like, is it just me? I thought I was weird, feeling withdrawal, feeling homesickness, feeling isolation. No one told me that was okay to feel, it’s normal. [The administration] caters to white, middle class, suburban students. And the main problems for white middle class suburban students are the drinking and sex culture. Not assimilation, not adjustment, not homesickness. You can’t blame [the administration] because they can’t cater to every student’s needs, but when a large minority of students feels like that, something should be done.” *(student of color)*

“During orientation, [...] Tim Wise being on campus... I feel like we have that a lot. We have these great speakers come in and then they leave. There’s no follow up.” *(white student)*

Recommendations

Provide training for current faculty/staff so that they are better able to facilitate and address discussions/commentary/questions on race, ethnicity, or culture that may come up

"In the professors' defense, when issues of race come up in the classroom and they have no training in conversations that are drawn to tense moments, nobody wants to be thrown under the bus. They just move on and not talk about it. I had a class where [the professor] said she's not going to go over race, because the last time she did it she got bad evaluations... So she said we would have the race discussion after she gave out the evaluations. So that's a problem, that people are skipping over sections because they're afraid of evaluations."
(Professor not here anymore) *(student of color)*

"When race comes up in the classroom, students get so quiet. The professors act like she or he didn't hear it. Faculty need to be trained. They are not trained and so they are afraid to even have these discussions because of what will happen in the classroom."

Focus Group Leader: "Why do you think they have this fear?"

"It's a predominately white campus and predominantly white faculty, and so I'm guessing they're afraid their whiteness will show up in the classroom because that's going to happen. Whatever race you have is going to show up in the classroom, so I think that we have to be trained in how to have these conversations." *(student of color)*



Recommendations

Provide more resources and clear points of support to help students of color deal with the emotional, cultural, academic, and social challenges of being at a predominantly white institution

"How can you attract diversity without having the resources? When we invite students of color, we should feel we belong just as any other student. White students feel entitled to be here but students of color feel like it's a privilege." *(student of color)*

"Each department can have a place, once a week or when needed for students of color and they could talk about the struggles they are having. The fact that there were no black people in [my] department made me stray away. For the long term, they are spending so much money on the Arcus Center; they should drop a few on a meeting/chill space where students of color can meet. Whenever I go into a building I am always in the minority." *(student of color)*

"We need a department that deals with multicultural affairs. Then maybe they could work with the Arcus Center. I envision this department with more people who are Caribbean, Asian, etc. Maybe a board of people coming together to make the campus more welcoming for people of color." *(student of color)*

"Have some kind of support system that is like out there. Explicitly, I think just making it clear that there's people here to talk to could go a long way." *(student of color)*



Recommendations

Institute resources that provide white students with the framework/analytical toolsets to enable fruitful conversations about race, privilege, and ethnicity

"I think the college needs to [...] focus more on white privilege because we can't move forward if the people we keep talking to don't understand white privilege. We can all talk about what we want. If the other side, white students, don't understand that and see where they're benefiting, we're not going to move anywhere as an institution." (*student of color*)

"Create a resource center for diversity! There is nowhere to go." (*white student*)

"Our goal is to be diverse, so [the administration] should teach us how to have these conversations. Maybe a class like Race and Racism as a freshman seminar." (*white student*)



CLOSING THOUGHTS

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