



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Diversity and Community Responsibility:
A Qualitative Analysis of Alumni Experiences

Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG)
Completions Subcommittee
Fall 2006 Forum

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2005 Alumni Survey: Background

- Web-based
- Administered every 3 years to students who have graduated from UM within a year
- Quantitative questions:
 - Post baccalaureate education
 - Employment
 - Experiences with diversity
 - Skills and abilities
 - Miscellaneous

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Survey Respondents

- N = 850 (16% return rate)
- 397 of the 850 respondents (48%) completed the qualitative question
- Gender and college of degree representative of population
- Race not quite representative of population

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Recognition

The following graduate students contributed to the qualitative analysis:

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2005 Alumni Survey: Background

- Qualitative question on diversity:

“How did your experiences at UM contribute to your ability to interact effectively with diverse others in the workplace?”

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Limitations

- Representativeness of data
- Not all themes represented by equal numbers of comments
- Some themes are more prominent than others
- Results not generalizable to alumni population

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Qualitative themes regarding diversity

- Characterization of diversity
- UM as a diverse community
- Role UM plays in fostering diversity
- Negative, indirect, or no effect
- Professional/work experiences

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Characterization of diversity

- “Anytime a person is exposed to such an amalgamation of ethnicities, races, and religions, they become more adept at interacting with people in ‘the real world.’ This is one advantage of going to a large university.”
- “Interacting with people from different walks of life and varying cultures on a daily basis provided me with life skills that no textbook could ever offer.”
- “I learned a lot about understanding and appreciating people of different backgrounds which is very helpful in my current job.”

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UM as a diverse community

1. Diversity of campus

- “Being as such a large, diverse school like UMD I was exposed to many different people from various backgrounds.”
- “Anytime a person is exposed to such an amalgamation of ethnicities, races, and religions, they become more adept at interacting with people in ‘the real world.’”
- “Because UM is such a diverse university, it is easy for me to integrate myself into other diverse environments.”

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Characterization of diversity

- Respondents defined diversity as based on race/ethnicity or culture
- Avoided a clear definition by using generic words like “background”
- Other characterizations

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UM as a diverse community

- Diversity of campus
- Involvement and employment
- Living arrangements
- Socializing

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UM as a diverse community

2. Campus involvement and employment

- “My participation in student organization, on-campus employment, and interactive classes allowed me to work with individuals of different backgrounds. I have been enriched by these experiences and better able to adapt to a diverse workplace.”
- “... by living in the dorms, living in a fraternity house (and taking an active role in fraternity leadership), and participating in campus activities (such as marching band), I feel that I learned how to deal with people and differing viewpoints and how to let my opinions be heard without undermining others.”

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UM as a diverse community

3. Living arrangements

- “The University of Maryland was really my first opportunity to deal with and live with people from different backgrounds. It really helped me become better acquainted with all types of people and personalities, and has helped me immensely in my current workplace.”
- “Working and living with people of many cultures was a big benefit in being able to relate to others in the workplace.”

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Role UM plays in fostering diversity

- Providing an example of the real world
- Diversity initiatives and programs
- UM actively creates a diverse environment
- UM teaches skills and changes views

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Role UM plays in fostering diversity

2. Diversity initiatives and programs

- “The University of Maryland sponsored diversity programs and required diversity courses did not help my ability to interact with diverse others.”
- “UM doesn’t offer any real education or experience that truly contributes to working in a diverse environment.”
- “These dialogue sessions [through the OHRP] should be mandatory. I learned more in my 2 hours each week than I did in any functional skills or upper-level class.”

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UM as a diverse community

4. Socializing

- “(The) campus is very diverse, and it is just the perfect place to make friends! It is unbelievable how each of them has contributed greatly to my growth as a student, a friend, and into a professional.”
- “Even though students at UM were prone to flock to ‘their kind’ I got a sense of general respect and an attempt to understand other cultures from other students. However, it’d be even more rewarding if people would mix it up a bit.”

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Role UM plays in fostering diversity

1. Providing example of the real world

- “Maryland give you an excellent idea as to what the real world looks like and how people should be treated.”
- “The diversity at Maryland prepared me for what I have found in my workplace experiences.”
- “In reality, fields requiring degrees seem a bit homogeneous in this area of the US. I think the community at Maryland, in this sense, sets up graduates for quite a shock when their open-minded, college educated selves venture forth and discover the pallor.”
- Unfortunately, I have found that not all U.S. communities and states are [as] tolerant and respectful [as UM].”

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Role UM plays in fostering diversity

3. UM actively creates a diverse environment

- “My experience at UM built my confidence and ability to interact effectively with diverse others in the workplace by putting me and other students in unique social and academic situations that I otherwise would never have experienced.”
- “I have never had a problem interacting with other diverse people, although it was good to gain greater exposure working with international students and other people which I normally would not have come in contact with.”

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Role UM plays in fostering diversity

4. UM teaches skills and changes views

- “My experiences at UMD gave me the ability to feel comfortable with individuals of various backgrounds and be more conscious of their potential sensitivities.”
- “I believe that my experiences at UM have allowed me to view issues from various perspectives... UM allowed me to see the world through a different lens, one which I think is more accurate of the world around us today.”
- “UM helped me to appreciate, respect, and better understand people from other cultures and backgrounds... I have gained such a great appreciation for diversity that I have found myself missing it when my surroundings have not supplied it.”

Negative, indirect, or no effect

1. Negative effect

- “Great, but I don't understand UM's obsession with diversity. It's important and necessary up to a point, but the benefits of diversity have a ceiling. After a certain point, the quality of the professors and the actual education is more important than diversity. Except for rare group projects in class, I noticed that there wasn't much interaction between different ethnic groups.”
- “UM's attitude towards diversity has always seemed over-the-top to me. Clearly, diversity is important, but I'm not sure that the way to achieve a vibrant, diverse community is to jump up and down shouting 'Diversity!' until you're foaming at the mouth. People will never accept it as a natural part of everyday life until you treat it that way.”

Role UM plays in fostering diversity

3. No effect

- “I had already been exposed to people of diverse backgrounds in high school. UM was much less diverse than my high school.”
- “I don't believe it made much of a difference; I have been interacting with diverse group[s] of people all of my life.”
- “I have always been surrounded by diversity and different cultures from elementary school on. Having that experience has helped a great deal in the work environment as well as in life. The more you know about and surround yourself with different cultures, the more aware and well rounded you become as a person and co-worker.”

Negative, indirect, or no effect

- Negative**
Students who feel diversity is over-emphasized
- Indirect**
Student specifically stated UM did not directly impact them but then directly cite a UM-related experience that did impact them
- No effect**
Students' prior experiences contributed more to their understanding of diversity

Role UM plays in fostering diversity

2. Indirect effect

- “My experience at the University of Maryland did not directly contribute to [my ability to interact with] diverse others in the workplace. However, I believe the exposure on a day-to-day basis did help indirectly.”

Professional/work experiences

- Current work environment
- Climate for diversity in the workplace
- Preparation for the workplace
- Skills carried over to the workplace

Professional/work experiences

1. Current work environment

- “My experiences at UMD working with people of all different moral, ethical and social backgrounds prepared me to work in a labor force that is extremely diverse.”
- “You get to learn so much about different cultures [at UM], and I think I became more interested in learning about different cultures from being a student at UM. That has lead me to become interested in my co-worker’s cultures and helped me bond with them as well.”
- “My workplace is only somewhat diverse but I am comfortable with people of all races.”

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Professional/work experiences

3. Preparation for the workplace: Prepared

- “My diversity experiences at Maryland [are] what definitely prepared me the most for the work force/graduate school. These experiences are what I am most pleased with from my education at Maryland.”
- “My experiences at UMD allowed me to live and learn with others different from me (racially, ethnically, socially, in ability, SES, etc.) This experience has proved invaluable in my masters program and assistantship.”
- “I work in a suburb outside of Atlanta right now, and I would consider myself to be years ahead of some of the people here in terms of diversity. Maryland gives you an excellent idea as to what the real world looks like and how people should be treated.”

Professional/work experiences

4. Skills carried over to the workplace

- “I learned a lot about understanding and appreciating people of different backgrounds which is very helpful in my current job.”
- “I have acquired amazing people skills from mingling with classmates and friends on campus. These are valuable assets that have helped me in school, now at work, and will continue to be utilized for the rest of my life.”

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Professional/work experiences

2. Climate for diversity in the workplace

- “[It] seems that in most fields requiring a degree, diversity is just a word they like to stick in the mission statement.”
- “My company probably wastes even more money than UM does on worthless diversity nonsense.”

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Professional/work experiences

3. Preparation for the workplace: Not prepared

- “I didn’t feel like I ‘had’ to interact with those of different backgrounds until I entered the workplace. So I’m not sure UM really contributed to effective interaction.”
- “The team focus at UMD was important, but in my specific job, the team work is very different than the situations experienced at UMD.”
- “I’ve come to realize while working, that it doesn’t matter what you look like if you can’t perform your job. But you would never know/learn that at UMD, and that is one of it’s major downfalls.”

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General impressions

- Results not generalizable to entire alumni population
- Both positive and negative comments
- Many respondents understand diversity is a priority at UM; some appreciate this diversity while others do not
- Respondents were less likely to applaud overall UM diversity efforts versus individual/programmatic efforts

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UM Policy on Diversity in Educational Programs

Approved by President, April 5, 2005

“As the community has become more heterogeneous, the University has determined that a diverse student population enhances the educational experience and is an integral component of educational excellence.”

Context for framing our discussion

Full statement in handout and also available at
http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/docs/05_000a.pdf

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Questions, comments,
and discussion.



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