

# **Bringing Equity and Quality Learning Together: Institutional Priorities for Tracking and Advancing Underserved Students' Success**

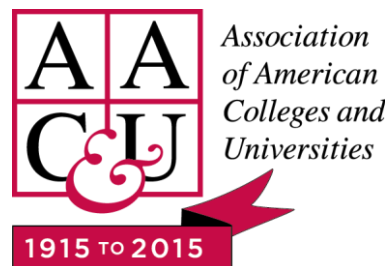
**Key Findings from a Survey and In-Depth Interviews among  
Administrators at AAC&U Member Institutions**

**Conducted on Behalf of  
the Association of American Colleges & Universities**

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**By Hart Research Associates**

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## Methodology

From July 15 to October 13, 2015, Hart Research conducted an online survey among 325 Chief Academic Officers or designated representatives at AAC&U member institutions to measure the prevalence of specified learning outcomes in higher education institutions today and to document priorities and trends in undergraduate education. The margin of error is  $\pm 4.4$  percentage points for the entire sample, and it is larger for subgroups. The total population for the survey included 1,001 AAC&U member institutions that were invited to complete the survey, and thus the response rate for the survey is 32%. The sample is representative of AAC&U's total membership in terms of both institution type (11% associates, 30% bachelor's, 39% master's, 19% doctoral/research, and 1% other) and affiliation (46% public, 28% independent, 25% religious, and 1% proprietary).

Additionally, from August 4 to September 24, 2015, Hart Research conducted 14 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with higher education leaders who completed the online survey. Individuals who indicated in the survey that their institution is tracking and disaggregating data and setting goals related to diversity and equity were invited to participate in these in-depth interviews. Respondents represented institutions from various states, Carnegie classifications, and included some minority-serving institutions. The interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. The discussions were designed to provide a deeper understanding of how diverse institutions are focusing on advancing equity and closing attainment and achievement gaps.

Select findings from the survey and in-depth interviews about priorities for tracking and advancing the success of underserved students are outlined in this report. Forthcoming reports will provide analysis of findings related to AAC&U's member institutions' reporting on general education design elements and assessment of student learning.

## Overview

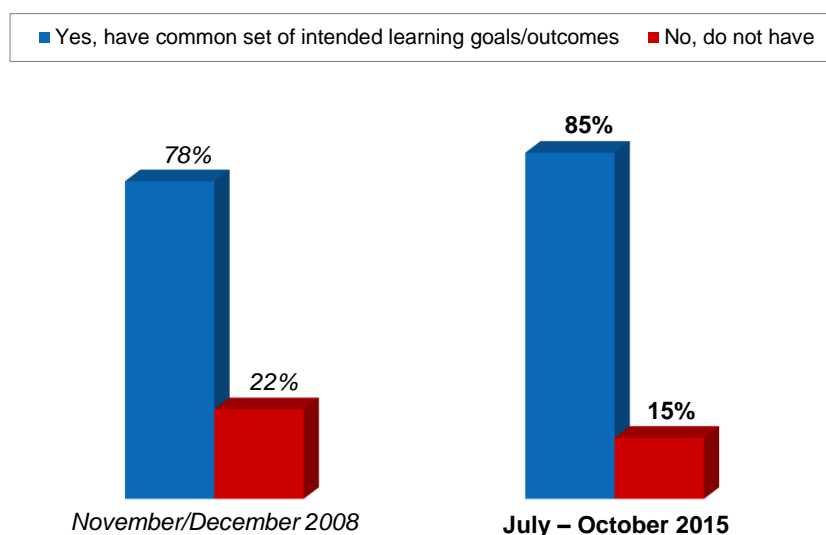
- Most AAC&U member institutions have a common set of learning outcomes that apply to all students, and their overarching focus is on making changes to advance success for all students. Many institutions are tracking students' achievement of learning outcomes, but few are disaggregating this data by various student characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, income levels, or parental education levels).
- AAC&U member institutions are implementing a variety of evidence-based interventions to advance all students' success with a focus on those that support the successful transition to college. These include several high-impact educational practices.
- Many AAC&U member institutions are tracking and disaggregating data on the retention and graduation rates of students from traditionally underserved groups. Far fewer institutions are disaggregating data on students' participation in high-impact learning practices or on their achievement of institutional learning outcomes.
- AAC&U member institutions are trying to advance success among students who traditionally have been underserved by higher education, but they are doing so primarily through strategies *embedded within* their broader efforts to advance success for all students. Their strategies for closing equity gaps are still works-in-progress that they are continuing to expand and refine.
- Some AAC&U member institutions are setting explicit goals for closing gaps in retention and/or on-time graduation rates for students from different racial and ethnic groups. Far fewer are setting explicit goals for closing achievement gaps in student learning outcomes or participation in high-impact educational practices.
- Many AAC&U member institutions are taking proactive steps to build faculty and staff capacity to use culturally competent teaching strategies and are working to expand opportunities for high-impact learning, especially among first-generation, low-income students, and/or students of color.

## Key Findings

### **1 Most AAC&U member institutions have a common set of learning outcomes for all of their students.**

Fully 85% of AAC&U member institutions report that they have a common set of intended learning outcomes for *all* undergraduate students. This is up from 78% of institutions that said they had common learning outcomes in 2008. In addition, 70% of institutions are tracking students' achievement of these learning outcomes.

**Does your institution have a common set of intended learning goals or learning outcomes that apply to ALL undergraduate students?**



### **2 Many institutions are implementing evidence-based practices to advance student success, and they are most likely to require high-impact interventions that support the successful transition to college.**

In the in-depth interviews, administrators discuss the value of high-impact learning practices both in supporting higher rates of persistence and higher levels of achievement of learning outcomes. Some also note that student demand for these experiences is high.

Of the 10 high-impact interventions tested in the survey, however, there are only three that a majority of institutions require for all their students, and two of those focus on supporting first-year students. Fully 60% of AAC&U member institutions indicate that their campus requires *all* students to engage in first-year experiences that support the transition to college, and more than half (52%) require *all* students to participate in first-year academic seminars. Additionally, a little more than half (52%) require *all* students to take global or world culture studies.

Notably fewer (34%) require *all* students to participate in diversity studies and experiences. Other evidence-based, high-impact practices such as service learning,

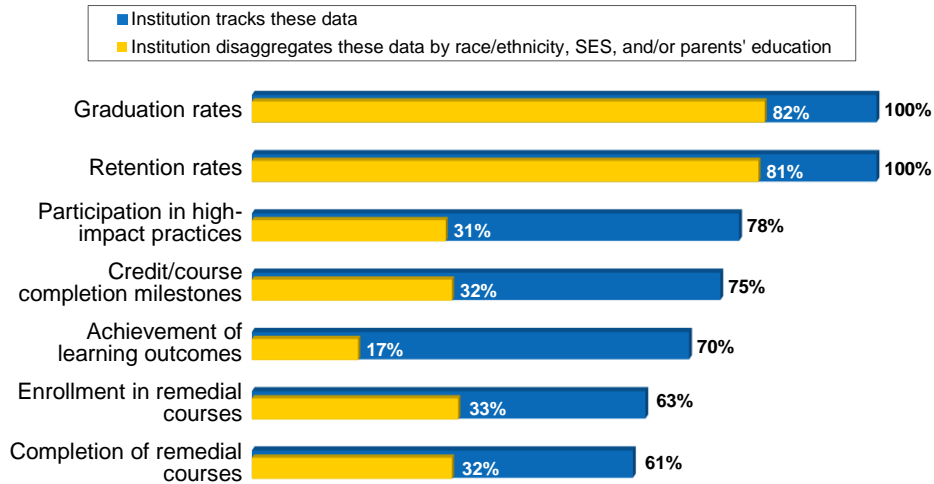
learning communities, undergraduate research, and internships are offered by many institutions, but few require all students to participate in them.

	<b>Required of All Students</b>	<b>Optional</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
First-year experiences that support the transition to college	<b>60</b>	31
First-year academic seminars	<b>52</b>	30
Global or world culture studies	<b>52</b>	41
Diversity studies and experiences	34	53
Service learning in courses	14	79
Learning communities	12	59
Undergraduate research	9	87
Practicums and supervised fieldwork	7	90
Internships	6	92
Study abroad	2	94

**3 Many AAC&U member institutions are tracking and disaggregating data on the retention and graduation rates of students from traditionally underserved groups. Far fewer institutions are disaggregating data on participation in high-impact learning practices or on achievement of institutional learning outcomes. To the extent that institutions are disaggregating data, many more are looking at differences by students' race and ethnicity than their socioeconomic status or their parents' level of educational attainment.**

Data tracking on retention and graduation rates is universal across AAC&U member institutions, and large majorities of institutions say they track data on participation in key high-impact learning experiences (78%), achievement of credit/course completion milestones (75%), and achievement of institutional learning outcomes (70%). Fewer campuses, but majorities nonetheless, also track enrollment in remedial courses (63%) and successful completion of those courses (61%).

**Institutions report on their tracking and disaggregation of data on student persistence, graduation, and/or achievement of learning outcomes.**



More than four in five campuses disaggregate data on retention and graduation rates by at least one of three variables (race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status<sup>1</sup>, and parents' level of educational attainment<sup>2</sup>). No more than one in three disaggregates data in any of the other three areas, however. For instance, while 78% of institutions say they track participation in high-impact practices, only 31% disaggregate that data by at least one of the three variables. Specifically, 30% of campuses say they disaggregate participation by race and ethnicity, 16% disaggregate by students' socioeconomic status, and only 12% disaggregate by parents' level of educational attainment. Similarly, while 70% of institutions track achievement of institutional learning outcomes, just 17% say they disaggregate that data. Only 16% disaggregate by race and ethnicity, 9% by socioeconomic status, and a mere 6% do so by parents' level of educational attainment.

As illustrated in the accompanying table, in each case, campuses are more likely to say they disaggregate data by students' race and ethnicity than by their socioeconomic status or parents' level of educational attainment.

<sup>1</sup> In the in-depth interviews, administrators indicate that looking at Pell-eligible students vs. those who are not Pell-eligible is a proxy that many institutions use for disaggregating by socioeconomic status.

<sup>2</sup> In the in-depth interviews, respondents indicate that disaggregation by parents' level of educational attainment typically involves looking at data among first-generation students.

## Institutions' Tracking and Disaggregation of Data in Key Areas

	<b><u>All Respondents</u></b> <b>%</b>
<b>Track retention rates</b>	<b>100</b>
Disaggregate by race/ethnicity	80
Disaggregate by socioeconomic status	40
Disaggregate by parents' level of educational attainment	29
<b>Track graduation rates</b>	<b>100</b>
Disaggregate by race/ethnicity	80
Disaggregate by socioeconomic status	39
Disaggregate by parents' level of educational attainment	29
<b>Track participation in high-impact learning experiences</b>	<b>78</b>
Disaggregate by race/ethnicity	30
Disaggregate by socioeconomic status	16
Disaggregate by parents' level of educational attainment	12
<b>Track achievement of credit/course completion milestones</b>	<b>75</b>
Disaggregate by race/ethnicity	31
Disaggregate by socioeconomic status	16
Disaggregate by parents' level of educational attainment	12
<b>Track achievement of institutional learning outcomes</b>	<b>70</b>
Disaggregate by race/ethnicity	16
Disaggregate by socioeconomic status	9
Disaggregate by parents' level of educational attainment	6
<b>Track enrollment in remedial education courses</b>	<b>63</b>
Disaggregate by race/ethnicity	31
Disaggregate by socioeconomic status	17
Disaggregate by parents' level of educational attainment	11
<b>Track successful completion of remedial education courses</b>	<b>61</b>
Disaggregate by race/ethnicity	30
Disaggregate by socioeconomic status	15
Disaggregate by parents' level of educational attainment	10

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*"We're a PeopleSoft Campus, and so we keep track of most of those variables just through the application process. But then, many of the others, we keep track of for a number of reasons. We are an urban campus, first-generation campus. We went through a massive general education reform, which I led, and it's probably why I'm sitting in the office I am now, because it was a success.*

*We wanted to be able to look at our students in a disaggregated way and target how we wanted to work with the students and intervene where we needed to intervene. And so we started disaggregating and tracking our students about...four or five years ago.*

*So you add up our major endeavor at reforming our gen ed, and making it learning outcomes based. You just look at our changing demographics and then add on top of that our state's shift in terms of following Complete College America. But in all honesty, also we changed our whole funding formula. And so we needed to follow some of these things as well, so we could have predictive analytics in terms of what our upcoming funding is going to be.*

*All of that led to a change in how we collect data."*

*– Public, Doctoral/Research*

*"...50% of our students are minority...We have looked at the disaggregated data; we know what our Latino graduation rate is, our African-American graduation rate, etc., etc., male, female, first generation. And so within that overall increase, we have established goals within those sub-criteria to get us to where we want to go."*

*– Public, Doctoral/Research*

**4** The in-depth interviews indicate that many of the ways in which AAC&U member institutions are trying to advance success among underserved students are embedded within broader efforts to advance success for *all* students through the implementation of high-impact interventions as described above. Many institutions are piloting approaches, and their discussions suggest that their strategies for advancing student success are works in progress that they are continuing to expand and refine.

Across the in-depth interviews, when administrators are asked about the process their institutions are using to advance the success of underserved students, they describe varied approaches that their campuses have undertaken to improve the success of *all* students. While some programs and efforts are aimed specifically at providing resources or support to underserved students (discussed later in this report), their focus largely is on furthering the success of *all* students.

In discussing efforts to advance student success on their campuses (including that of underserved students), to a large extent administrators focus on the efforts aimed at increasing retention and completion rates. They outline many different high-impact interventions that they have undertaken or are beginning on their campuses, with a particular focus on reshaping students' transition to college. These interventions fall into four main categories: a) the redesign of developmental education, b) the adoption of first-year experiences that are required for all



students, c) the transition to early alert systems and intrusive advising, and d) the expansion of high-impact learning practices (most of which are optional at this point).

**a) Redesigning developmental education:** Administrators describe a variety of ways in which their campuses are redesigning developmental education to advance student success. With underserved students overrepresented in remedial education, they believe that these efforts benefit many underserved students with improved retention and learning quality. Administrators describe a wide variety of changes their campuses are making to redesign remedial education beyond the specific strategies described below.

- Replaced developmental education with a program in which students who normally would need remediation are required to take a two-week session prior to the start of the semester that provides intensive writing and mathematics instruction at no extra charge. This is supplemented by another program, which continues into the semester and provides intensive tutoring for students who did not achieve everything needed in the pre-semester session.
- Created a free program in the summer with academic workshops in several areas. Students take an evaluative test after the program and can place out of remedial classes.
- Redesigned the approach to remedial math in various ways, including on-time remediation, a math bridge program, and modularized instruction.
- Redesigned the approach to remedial English by separating English language learners into an English Language Learner Gateway English course and providing a two-semester gateway English course for remaining students legitimately in need of remedial English.

**b) First-Year Experiences:** Administrators describe these initiatives as comprehensive approaches to the first-year experience that link curriculum, early alert systems, advising, academic supports, and learning communities. Campuses that have introduced these programs or plan to do so describe many similar elements and supports. Key components or structures that they describe in the interviews are outlined below.

- Every student is in a cohort of 50 students and takes two courses with that cohort—a writing course and an academic inquiry course that introduces them to the modes of inquiry in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Every cohort has a peer mentor trained to be a source of support.
- There is a student success team for each cohort of about 60 to 70 students that includes a peer mentor, math tutor, writing tutor (embedded into a class), library liaison, technology liaison, and counselor. This team works with the faculty.
- The first-year experience includes a year-long seminar focused on student success, including academic planning, career planning, and getting them officially into a major by the end of their first year. Seminar instructors are students' first-year advisors.

- There are learning communities in the first year—which include the first-year seminar and two other classes—so that a student is in at least three classes with the same group of peers to provide a sense of community that enhances learning.
- There is a vertically integrated Gen Ed curriculum that includes the first-year seminar, second-year seminar, and a capstone course. Learning outcomes are introduced in the first year and reinforced in the second, and it includes an assessment protocol.

**c) Early Alert Systems and Intrusive Advising:** Many campuses are using predictive modeling and early alert systems to trigger intervention by an advisor. These systems typically are within the structure of the first-year experiences at institutions that have such a program in place.

Some administrators mention that they are using specific retention and completion tools that have early warnings. These predictive analytics highlight where supports are needed and inform the outreach and support provided by advisors. Some institutions also have user-friendly degree tracking tools for faculty and students to track a student's progress.

The full utility and value of these systems has yet to be realized as their use still is in the early stages (or has not yet begun) on most campuses. Some administrators note that predictive analytics and early alerts also could be used to tease out data on specific groups (e.g., minorities, low-income, or first-generation students) to inform interventions for those groups.

**d) Evidence-based, High-impact Practices:** As noted above, administrators acutely recognize the value of high-impact learning practices. Some institutions require high-impact practices through their General Education program, while some include a component in their required first-year experience. Many are expanding optional high-impact practices such as service learning, internships, study abroad, civic engagement, undergraduate research, capstone projects, a campus-wide research day, or an introduction to composition class that requires all students to present their work. Few require all students to participate in these types of high-impact practices beyond what they require through first-year experiences, however.

**e) Other Interventions to Advance Student Success:** Colleges and universities are doing many things to advance student success that are in addition, and often complementary, to the four major areas of focus outlined above. These various initiatives and programs include outreach to and transition-coaching for local high school students, aggressive onboarding during required new student orientation, promoting summer school, ensuring small class sizes, moving to professional advisors, adding peer mentors, and ensuring that schedules and course offerings align with students' needs.

Other administrators describe how their campus has introduced a campus narrative about graduation that did not exist before to influence the mindset and the conversation, as well as the creation of a time-to-completion program that encourages students to complete their undergraduate education in four years and makes them aware of the costs if they do not. These additional interventions are focused almost exclusively on improving persistence to degree.

**5 More than half of AAC&U member institutions have equity goals to close racial and/or ethnic gaps in retention and on-time graduation. Far fewer have goals to address inequities in achievement of learning outcomes or participation in high-impact practices.**

Within each goal, AAC&U member institutions are more likely to have a goal to close racial/ethnic gaps than to close gaps by socioeconomic status or parents' level of educational attainment.

<b>Proportion of Institutions that Have Set Equity Goals for Specific Groups</b>	
	<u>All Respondents</u> %
My institution has set goals to close gaps in <b>retention and/or on-time graduation</b> among students...	
From different racial and ethnic groups	57
From different socioeconomic groups	36
Whose parents have different levels of educational attainment	27
My institution has set goals to close gaps in <b>achievement of student learning outcomes</b> among students...	
From different racial and ethnic groups	31
From different socioeconomic groups	24
Whose parents have different levels of educational attainment	14
My institution has set goals to close gaps in <b>participation in key high-impact learning practices</b> among students...	
From different racial and ethnic groups	28
From different socioeconomic groups	23
Whose parents have different levels of educational attainment	15

*"...When I talk about closing gaps, I may mean that differently than other respondents, because some respondents may be talking about gaps within their university, whereas I'm more thinking about the fact that the vast majority of our students are low-income...More than 70% are ethnic minorities. What I'm trying to do is say as an institution, we want to provide, we want our retention and graduation rates, we want the access to high-impact practices...We want to be able to close the gap between what is available to students at more affluent institutions and more affluent students with ours.*

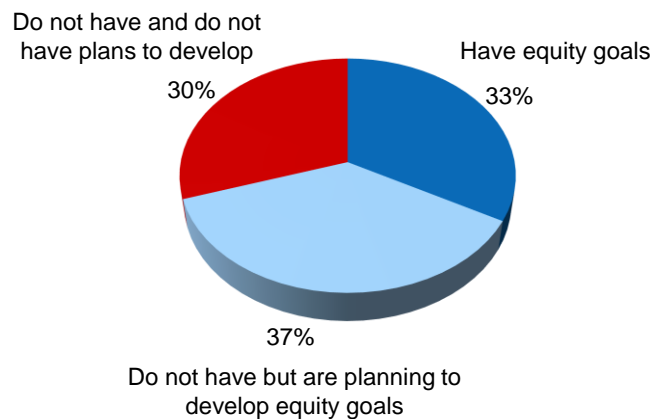
*...The research on high-impact practices shows that, one, they do have a high impact, but they're much more available at more affluent institutions and institutions that serve wealthier groups of students, and that's the gap I'm talking about..."*

*– Public, Master's*

**6 Many AAC&U member institutions are taking proactive steps to build faculty and staff capacity to use culturally competent teaching strategies and they are working to expand opportunities for high-impact learning among first-generation, low-income students, and/or students of color.**

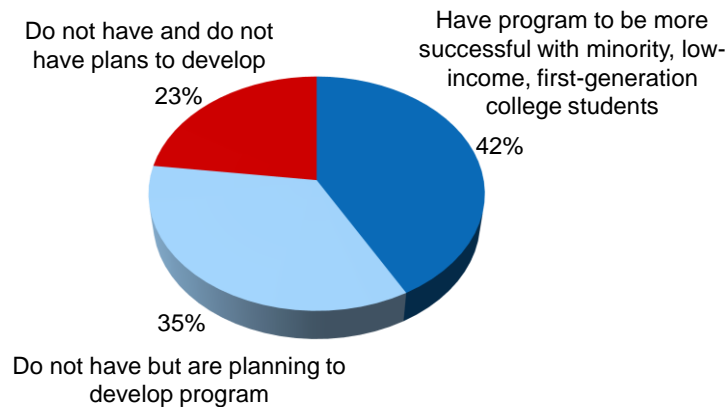
While only one in three AAC&U member institutions says that they have specific, explicit equity goals that are aimed at building new opportunities for high-impact learning for first-generation students, low-income students, and/or students of color, another 37% say they are planning to develop them. This leaves only 30% who do not plan to do so.

**Does your institution have specific, explicit equity goals aimed at building new opportunities for high-impact learning for first-generation students, low-income students, and/or students of color?**



Additionally, more than two in five (42%) member institutions have a program to build faculty, instructor, and staff capacity to use culturally competent teaching and program strategies and be more successful among underserved groups, and another 35% say they are planning to develop such a program. That leaves only 23% who have neither a program nor plans to create one.

**Does your institution have a program to build faculty, instructor, staff capacity to use culturally competent teaching/program strategies and/or to be more successful with minority, low-income, and/or first-generation college students?**



In the in-depth interviews, many administrators indicate that a key focus of their campus's faculty development efforts relating to diversity and inclusiveness is a strong emphasis on hiring and retaining faculty that reflect the student body. They are focused particularly on efforts to hire more minority faculty, but they also talk about the need for faculty who can relate to first-generation students, low-income students, international students, and LGBT students.

Faculty and staff development programs on topics such as teaching first-generation students, working with diverse populations, and developing culturally responsive pedagogy vary across the institutions, with some programs being more comprehensive and robust than others. The central focus is on helping faculty and staff recognize cultural differences and understand how to best approach and teach students of different backgrounds. Administrators outline a variety of initiatives that their campuses have to facilitate greater cultural competence among faculty. Below are just some examples of the efforts institutions are undertaking:

- Providing unintentional bias training to all faculty
- Embedding a focus on pedagogy, diversity, cultural competency, and inclusive classrooms in required new faculty orientations, new faculty experiences, faculty learning communities, and general faculty retreats
- Incorporating a focus on multicultural awareness, unconscious bias, and inclusive classrooms into faculty training on high-impact practices
- Creating a formal setting for students of different backgrounds, races/ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, or sexual orientations to tell faculty about their experiences in the classroom
- Creating cohorts of new faculty that attend an orientation and multiple meetings, some of which address topics related to diversity and inclusiveness

➤ Closely linking the Provost's Office with the Office of Diversity

While some of the training forums for faculty are required (particularly for new faculty), most administrators say their institutions have developed programs and forums that are voluntary for faculty, and they stress the importance of getting faculty buy-in and engagement with these efforts to ensure their success.

*"And part of what we're trying to do, and this is more of a communication strategy than it is any sort of initiative or set strategy, is to sensitize people to the notion that different groups do respond differently to failure in classes or failure on a test.*

*And, for example, this is something I've picked up from our faculty experts, is that a Latino student who fails their first exam in a subject doesn't respond by saying, 'well, I guess I didn't study right, I need to go talk to the instructor and find out how to study better for their tests,' but are more likely to say, 'I'm not sure I belong in college, maybe I should drop out because I don't really belong here.' And so it's understanding those kinds of differences that we would like for more of our instructors to be tuned in to, so that they are culturally sensitive to how they give feedback to students."*

*– Public, Doctoral/Research*

*"To bring a talented group of students in is a little hard, but it's not very hard. What's hard is building an inclusive community. And we're struggling with that...A number of the faculty have been here a long time. There are insensitivities, there are unintended biases, there are remarks in class. And some [faculty members] say they're not comfortable in talking about issues of race."*

*– Religious, Doctoral/Research*

*"So we brought, what historically in [ours] and many institutions, was an office that was isolated and dealt with more student affairs and grievances and whatnot, and it's now seamlessly back and forth between Academic Affairs and the Provost's Office and Office of Diversity Initiatives, and that is a huge step forward. Because now, it's just expected that diversity and academics go hand in hand."*

*– Public, Doctoral/Research*