

# **An Assessment of a University's Undergraduate Racial/Ethnic Climate: Implications for Fostering Student Development**

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## **Abstract**

*This article presents results of a racial/ethnic climate study conducted at Georgia State University (GSU). The study was designed to assess undergraduate student perceptions of the university's racial/ethnic climate. This included assessing student's overall level of satisfaction, satisfaction with GSU services and facilities, experiences with discrimination, and racial tension. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were employed. Implications for fostering more positive campus cultural climates and conducting similar surveys are presented.*

Georgia State University (GSU), a state funded, public institution located in the southeastern part of the United States, has become a unique institution within the University System of Georgia (USG), with the most diverse student body of Georgia's public universities and colleges. There has been a significant increase in the percentages of racial/ethnic minority students since 1992 within this majority White campus, especially African Americans. The urban location of GSU accounts for much of this rapid rise, as Atlanta has experienced a recent influx of international residents into a city that was already predominantly African American. Thus, the 2000 Federal Census (US Census Bureau 2001) indicates that the racial/ethnic composition of this metro city was 61.39% African American, 33.22% White, 1.93% Asian, 4.49% Hispanic, and 1.24% multiracial.

The table below shows the steady increase in the diversity of the racial/ethnic groups of the student body from 1992 to 2004. It should be noted that group identification is by self-report according to the racial/ethnic designations provided by the university.

## Racial/Ethnic Makeup of GSU Student Body from 1992-2004

Race/Ethnicity	F1992	F1995	F1998	F1999	F2000	F2001	F2002	F2003	F2004
White	72.0%	65.6%	65.8%	50.7%	48.3%	46.2%	43.8%	49.0%	49.3%
Black	20.0%	22.5%	24.6%	31.8%	31.8%	31.8%	31.3%	32.1%	31.9%
Asian	6.0%	5.3%	6.8%	9.6%	10.4%	10.6%	10.6%	10.6%	10.7%
Hispanic	2.0%	2.5%	2.5%	2.8%	3.2%	3.2%	3.1%	3.2%	3.3%
American Indian	<1%	<1%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%
Mixed	—	—	—	4.8%	5.8%	8.0%	11.0%	4.8%	4.4%

The new standards for classification of federal data on race and ethnicity which were used in the 2000 Census were first announced in 1999 and also were first used by this university that year. When the federal designation of “Multiracial” was allowed as a separate category, the university followed suit and considered what it termed “Mixed” to be a racial/ethnic group. There may seem to be a dramatic decline in the percentages of White students between 1998 and 1999, but this may be partially explained by this newly designated multiracial group. Students, who may have identified themselves as White between 1992 and 1998, may now identify themselves as having multiracial heritages.

The change in the racial/ethnic makeup of the university parallels that of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2002), as of the 2000 academic year Whites made up approximately 68% of the students enrolled in higher education. Of the 32% of minority enrollments, Blacks made up approximately 11%, Hispanics 10%, Asians 6%, and American Indians 1%.

At GSU, there were several race related campus incidents during the period from 1992 to the present. The first occurred in November 1992. Students held campus demonstrations and a sit-in in the President’s office related to episodes of racial harassment of African American students by two White fraternities and racial graffiti in the Student Union. Among the student demands was the formation of a Senate committee focusing on cultural diversity (which was to be the Senate Committee on Cultural Diversity initiated in 1993), and the creation of an African American Studies Department. The President agreed to both.

There were other incidents in 2003 and 2004. In fall 2003, a predominantly White fraternity held a private party with the theme “Ghetto-Party,” and a guest wore blackface. Members of a Black fraternity were present and made a complaint to school authorities. The Black Student Alliance and many students of color held campus demonstrations in spring 2004 for several days. Asian and Hispanic students were vocal in their support of the African American students while they also called for a broader campus focus beyond Black/White issues. One of the members of the White fraternity made a complaint to authorities against the Black Student Alliance. The cases ultimately went to mediation, and both the predominantly White fraternity and the Black Student Alliance were found guilty of varying degrees of discriminatory harassment. In addition, the section of the Student Conduct Code relating to discriminatory harassment by groups was revised. During fall 2004, there were several

incidents of swastikas scratched and inked in a classroom where a class in Jewish studies was taught. The perpetrators were never discovered, nor was it determined whether they were campus insiders or outsiders from the larger Atlanta community.

Meanwhile, in 2002 the Board of Regents formed a Task Force on Enhancing Access for African American Males, strongly concerned about the low percentage of African American male students who enrolled in and graduated from the University System of Georgia (USG) colleges and universities. This was known as the African American Male Initiative (AAMI). The Task Force sought to increase this low percentage by developing initiatives at K-12 levels as well as that of USG institutions and including them as recommendations in their May 2003 final report for all USG institutions. One of these recommendations was that during the 2004-5 academic year, all USG institutions would conduct racial climate surveys of currently enrolled African American males, and that “the research should drive policy and procedural changes” (Perry-Johnson et al. 2003, 8).

The immediate relevance of the AAMI to GSU is apparent from difficulties related to recruitment and retention with African American students that are similar to those at institutions of higher education nationwide. The average length of time that African American students take to graduate after entering as freshmen is six years. This is consistently longer than other racial/ethnic groups on campus. Moreover, the percentages of African American males enrolled as entering freshmen have been consistently about one-third of the percentages of African American females.

In fall 2003, GSU’s Provost appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on the AAMI to review the Regents’ recommendations for their application to GSU. The AAMI Committee worked with the University Senate Cultural Diversity Committee to develop long-term, intermediate, and short-term recommendations by spring 2004, and then these recommendations were ranked in priority by the Senate Cultural Diversity Committee for the Provost in fall 2004. It was clear that the climate survey assessing the perceptions of African American male students was first needed and had already been recommended by the Board of Regents.

In spring 2004, the University Senate Executive Committee requested the Senate Cultural Diversity Committee to administer the Racial/ Ethnic Climate Survey by fall 2005 and report on its findings. Funding for the project would come from the Provost’s Office, with administrative assistance by the Office of Institutional Research (OIR). This was a significant undertaking. GSU had never conducted a racial climate survey, although its rapidly increasing percentages of minority students suggested the need for such a survey. Furthermore, GSU was the first, and continues to be the only, USG institution to follow this Regents recommendation.

The Climate Survey Subcommittee began its deliberations in late Fall 2004, with Professors Julie Ancis, from the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services and Christine Gallant, from the Department of English, appointed as co-chairs who brought complementary professional skills and experience to their positions.

# Method

## Participants

At the time this study was initiated in fall 2004, 16,316 undergraduates were enrolled at GSU and 4,996 were surveyed. Seven hundred ninety undergraduate students responded, representing a response rate of 15.8%. Regarding class year, 30 (3.8%) were first year, 179 (22.7%) were sophomores, 260 (32.9%) were juniors, and 317 (40.1%) were seniors. The sample is representative of the gender and racial/ethnic makeup of the GSU undergraduate population. Approximately 60% of the respondents were female and 40% male. The racial/ethnic breakdown of participants paralleled that of the university population: White/European American (45.4%), Black/African American (27.4%), Asian American/Pacific Islander (8.6%), Hispanic/Latino(a) (5%), American Indian/Native American (.005%), Multiracial (6.1%), International (3.3%), and Other (2.4%). The average age of respondents was 24.5 years ( $SD=7.37$ ; range=17-58). Respondents identified with the following religious affiliations: Christian (68.9%), Jewish (1.9%), Muslim (2.2%), Hindu (1.6%), Buddhist (2.2%), None (14.9%), and Other (7.7%). Respondents self-identified sexual orientation was as follows: Heterosexual, 91.4%; Gay, 3.5%; Lesbian, 1.1%; Bisexual, 2.8%; Transgender, 1%; and Other, .6%.

The climate survey was designed to assess student perceptions of the racial/ethnic climate at Georgia State University. Consistent with previous research (Seidman 2005), an institution's climate is largely determined by institutional practices and interactions between faculty and students. This included assessing the student's overall level of satisfaction, satisfaction with GSU services and facilities, experiences with discrimination, and racial tension. The climate survey used in the present study was composed of instruments with established reliability and validity statistics. After extensive research, racial climate scales from two large state university studies were chosen—those from Indiana State University and the University of Maryland, College Park. These instruments had been developed by nationally prominent race relations consultants, Dr. John Dovidio for Indiana State University and Dr. William Sedlacek for the University of Maryland-College Park. Both institutions granted us permission to use sections of their surveys gratis. Attitudes related to Jewish and Muslim students were also assessed because of the recent swastika incidents and the national events surrounding September 11, 2001. Lastly, open-ended questions were developed to obtain more in-depth information related to student perceptions of the racial/ethnic climate at GSU and suggestions for improving the campus climate. Although beyond the scope of this study, campus climate variables related to the recruitment and retention of racial/ethnic minority students were explored.

## Cultural Attitudes and Climate Questionnaire

(CACQ; Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto 1998).

Satisfaction with the overall climate and environment at GSU was measured with the Overall Satisfaction subscale of the CACQ. This instrument was previously used at

University of Maryland-College Park and modified for use at GSU. The four-item subscale measures a sense of belonging, perception of an open environment, and perception of the quality of programs. Students respond to items on a Likert scale with 1=*disagree strongly*, 2=*disagree somewhat*, 3=*neutral*, 4=*agree somewhat*, and 5=*agree strongly*. Students may also respond to *don't know* option. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction. The present study obtained an alpha of .82, indicating high internal consistency.

### **Perceptions toward the Environment Scale**

(PES; Snider, Dovidio, and Heflin 1996).

This thirteen-item measure assesses satisfaction with a range of university services and facilities, including academic advising, interaction with faculty, financial aid services, food services, registration procedures, and campus police. This measure was previously used at Indiana State University and modified for use at GSU. Students responded on a Likert scale with 1=*very dissatisfied*, 2=*somewhat dissatisfied*, 3=*neutral*, 4=*somewhat satisfied*, 5=*very satisfied*, and the option of *not applicable*. Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction with specific university services and facilities. The scale demonstrates high internal consistency; alpha=.82.

### **Experiences with Discrimination Scale**

**(Snider, Dovidio, and Heflin 1996).**

Students' experiences of discrimination at Georgia State within the past year as a function of their race or national origin were assessed using this eleven-item scale. This scale was used at Indiana State University and modified for use at GSU. It includes: 1) being called names or insulted; 2) being put down intellectually; 3) being left out of a social event or activity; 4) receiving insulting calls/letters; 5) being in sight or hearing of racial jokes, cartoons, or graffiti; 6) being physically threatened or attacked; 7) being in a class where a faculty member has treated a person negatively; 8) being in a class where a teacher has embarrassed a student; 9) being in a class where students have treated a person negatively; 10) being in a class where students have embarrassed a student; and 11) other discrimination. Students respond to a Likert scale with 1=*never*, 2=*once or twice*, 3=*sometimes*, 4=*often* and 5=*very often*, with higher scorers reflective of more frequent discriminatory experiences. The scale has an alpha=.85, indicating high internal consistency.

### **Racial Tension Subscale**

(Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto 1998).

This eight-item instrument was used to measure perceptions of the extent of racial tension on campus. This measure had been previously used at the University of Maryland-College Park and modified for use at GSU. The subscale is designed to assess perceptions regarding the extent of racial conflict, respect by faculty and students for racially and ethnically diverse students, racial/ethnic separation on

campus, university commitment to the success of diverse students, friendship between students of different racial and ethnic groups, and interracial tensions in the residence halls and classroom. Students respond on a Likert scale with 1=*little or none*, 2=*some*, 3=*quite a bit*, 4=*a great deal*, and the option of *don't know*. Higher scores indicate greater experiences of racial tension. The scale has an alpha coefficient=.72, indicating good internal consistency.

### **Anti-Semitism Survey**

(Student Affairs Research Office 1997).

Select questions were taken from the survey used at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and modified for use at GSU. Students were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought anti-Semitism exists on the Georgia State campus. Anti-Semitism was defined as negative beliefs about Jewish people which are sometimes acted out in discriminatory or hostile behaviors. Students respond on a Likert scale with 1=*very great extent*, 2=*great extent*, 3=*some extent*, 4=*little*, 5=*very little*, or the option *do not know*. Students were also asked how frequently they experienced faculty stereotyping, making negative remarks about or telling jokes that “put down” Jewish people. Students respond on a Likert scale with 1=*never*, 2=*rarely*, 3=*sometimes*, 4=*often*, 5=*very often*, or the option *do not know*.

### **Anti-Muslim Survey**

(Ancis 2006).

Paralleling the anti-Semitism questions, students were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought anti-Muslim beliefs exist on the Georgia State campus on a Likert scale with 1=*very great extent*, 2=*great extent*, 3=*some extent*, 4=*little*, 5=*very little*, or the option *do not know*. Students were also asked how frequently they experienced students stereotyping, making negative remarks about or telling jokes that “put down” Muslim people. Students respond on a Likert scale with 1=*never*, 2=*rarely*, 3=*sometimes*, 4=*often*, 5=*very often*, or the option *do not know*.

### **Procedure**

The Climate Survey was e-mailed to 4,996 undergraduate students. We sought to obtain a sample that was representative of the gender and racial/ethnic group membership of the university population. Using the GSU racial/ethnic classification system, Black, Asian, Latino/a, American Indian, and Mixed students were over sampled by 2%. Within the Black sample, Black males were over sampled by 20% as Black men compose only 30% of Black undergraduates relative to Black women. Those who identified as White, Non-reported, and Other were under sampled by 10%.

The racial/ethnic categories developed for this survey parallel those used in related university climate research. Students were asked to identify the racial/ethnic group that best described them using the following categories: White or European American, Black or African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino/a,

American Indian/Native American, Multiracial, International, and Other. Next they were asked to complete the CACQ, the PES, the Experiences with Discrimination Scale, the Racial Tension Subscale, questions from the Anti-Semitism Survey, the Anti-Muslim Survey, and several open-ended questions related to the racial/ethnic climate at GSU.

## **Results**

### **Overall Satisfaction**

Results indicate that overall students are satisfied with GSU, with means for each racial/ethnic group ranging from 3.59 (Asian American/Pacific Islander) to 4.05 (Black/African American). Using an analysis of variance (ANOVA), significant racial/ethnic differences were found,  $F(6, 770)=5.87, p<.001$ . Bonferroni Post-Hoc tests revealed that overall, Black/African American students ( $M=4.05$ ) are more satisfied with the overall climate and environment at GSU than Asian ( $M=3.59, p<.005$ ) or White/European American students ( $M=3.66, p<.001$ ).

### **Satisfaction with GSU Services**

Overall, students reported feeling neutral to somewhat satisfied with GSU Services with means for each racial/ethnic group ranging from 3.28 (Other) to 3.62 (Black/African American). Thus, students did not have strong positive or negative feelings with regard to a range of services at Georgia State University but seemed to be generally satisfied.

Significant racial/ethnic differences were found on this measure using an ANOVA,  $F(6, 771)=3.97, p<.001$ . Bonferroni Post-Hoc tests revealed that overall, Black/African American students were more satisfied with services at Georgia State University than White/European American ( $M=3.62, p<.025$ ) or Asian/Pacific Islander students ( $M=3.29, p<.003$ ). In terms of specific services, Black/African American students were more satisfied than students of other racial/ethnic groups in the following areas:

1. Black/African American students ( $M=3.63$ ) were more satisfied with academic advising than White students ( $M=3.23, p<.004$ ).
2. Black/African American students ( $M=3.73$ ) were more satisfied with registration procedures than White/European American ( $M=3.36, p<.03$ ) or Asian American/Pacific Islander students ( $M=2.99, p<.001$ ).
3. Black/African American students ( $M=3.41$ ) were more satisfied with university administration than White/European American ( $M=2.89, p<.001$ ), Asian American/Pacific Islander ( $M=2.79, p<.004$ ), or Multiracial students ( $M=2.76, p<.012$ ).
4. Black/African American students ( $M=3.63$ ) were more satisfied with Disability Services than White/European American students ( $M=3.22, p<.017$ ).

The one area where White/European American students ( $M=4.15$ ) were significantly more satisfied, compared to Black/African American ( $M=3.91, p<.03$ ) or Asian/Pacific Islander students ( $M=3.69, p<.001$ ), concerned interactions with faculty in class. While

Black/African American students appear to be more satisfied overall and more satisfied with specific GSU services, White/European American students seem to experience more positive interactions with faculty within the classroom. No significant differences were found in terms of interactions with faculty outside of class.

Lastly, White/European American (M=4.11) and Black/African American students (M=4.24) were more satisfied with athletic facilities than Asian students (M=3.69,  $p < .036$ ,  $p < .002$ ).

**Experiences with Discrimination**

Overall, student reports of discriminatory experiences as a function of race or national origin were low, with means for each racial/ethnic group ranging from 1.22 (Black/African American) to 1.54 (Other). An ANOVA indicated that overall racial/ethnic differences were not significant,  $F(6, 770) = 1.89$ ,  $p = .08$ . Thus, all students regardless of racial/ethnic background experienced little to no discrimination as measured by this scale.

However, the results indicated significant racial/ethnic differences by the particular discriminatory event. Black/African American students were more likely than White students to report intellectual put-downs as a function of their race.

	<i>Black/African American</i>	<i>White/European American</i>
Often or Very Often	3.3%	0%
Sometimes or Once or Twice	13%	8.5%
Never	83.8%	91.6%

White/European American students were more likely than Black/African American students to report being left out of a social event or activity because of their race.

	<i>Black/African American</i>	<i>White/European American</i>
Often or Very Often	2.3%	12.2%
Sometimes or Once or Twice	10.7%	19.2%
Never	87%	68.6%

White/European American students were more likely than Black/African American students to report being in sight or hearing of racial jokes, cartoons, and graffiti.

	<i>Black/African American</i>	<i>White/European American</i>
Often or Very Often	5%	11.2%
Sometimes or Once or Twice	22.1%	34.2%
Never	72.8%	54.6%



Other students were more likely than Black/African American or Asian American/Pacific Islander students to report being discriminated against in another way.

	<i>Other</i>	<i>Black/ African American</i>	<i>Asian American/ Pacific Islander</i>
Often/Very Often	15.8%	1.4%	0
Sometimes/Once or Twice	21.1%	14.8%	15.1%
Often/Very Often	63.2%	83.7%	84.8%

Students were asked to indicate the most upsetting of the eleven numbered events. The results are as follows in order of most upsetting to least upsetting for each racial/ethnic group:

- 1. For White/European American students**, the most upsetting discriminatory events included being left out of a social event or activity because of their race (18.1%); being in sight or hearing of racial jokes, cartoons, and graffiti (17.3%); being discriminated against in another way besides those listed (13.4%); and being in a class where a teacher has treated a person negatively because of race or national origin (11.4%).
- 2. For Black/African American students**, the most upsetting discriminatory events included being discriminated against in another way besides those listed (17.2%); being in a class where a teacher has treated a person negatively because of race or national origin (16.6%); being in sight or hearing of racial jokes, cartoons, and graffiti (15.2%); being put down intellectually because of their race or national origin (12.6%); and being physically threatened or attacked because of their race or national origin (11.3%).
- 3. For Asian American/Pacific Islander students**, the most upsetting discriminatory events included being called names or insulted because of their race or national origin (21.7%); being in sight or hearing of racial jokes, cartoons, and graffiti (15.2%); being discriminated against in another way besides those listed (15.2%); being put down intellectually because of their race or national origin (10.9%); and being in a class where a teacher has treated a person negatively because of race or national origin (10.9%).
- 4. For Hispanic/Latino(a) students**, the most upsetting discriminatory events included being in sight or hearing of racial jokes, cartoons, and graffiti (20.8%); being in a class where a teacher has treated a person negatively because of race or national origin (20.8%); and being discriminated against in another way besides those listed (12.5%).
- 5. For Multiracial students**, the most upsetting discriminatory events included being in sight or hearing of racial jokes, cartoons, and graffiti (22.9%); being left out of a social event or activity because of their race (20%); and being discriminated against in another way besides those listed (17.1%).
- 6. For International students**, the most upsetting discriminatory events included being in a class where a teacher has treated a person negatively because of race or national origin (25%), and being discriminated against in another way besides those listed (15%).

While differences exist between racial/ethnic groups, there is some overlap in responses. The two most common discriminatory experiences across racial/ethnic groups are being in sight or hearing of racial jokes, cartoons, and graffiti, and being in a class where a teacher has treated a person negatively because of race or national origin. The latter experience was predominant in the responses of International students and Black/African American students. Being discriminated against in another way besides those listed was also prominent. The qualitative data helps to inform this response and will be discussed later.

Students were asked to indicate the location of the most upsetting event. Black/African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino(a), and International students reported that the most upsetting event occurred in the classroom. White/European American, Multiracial, and Other students reported that the most upsetting event occurred while walking around on campus.

### **Racial Tension**

Overall, students reported some racial tension on campus, with means ranging from 1.98 (Black and Multiracial) to 2.24 (International), with an overall mean of 2.04. An ANOVA,  $F(6, 753) = 1.35, p = .23$  revealed no significant racial/ethnic differences.

A high percentage of students indicate “quite a bit” to “a great deal” of respect by faculty for students of different racial and ethnic groups: 75.6% of White/European American students, 63.3% of Black/African American students, 51.5% of Asian American/Pacific Islander students, 82.1% of Hispanic/Latino(a) students, 74.4% of Multiracial students, 53.8% of International, and 72.2% of Other students. Similarly, a high percentage of students indicate “quite a bit” to “a great deal” of respect by students for other students of different racial and ethnic groups: 63.8% of White/European American students, 59.1% of Black/African American students, 45.6% of Asian American/Pacific Islander students, 68.4% of Hispanic/Latino(a) students, 56.6% of Multiracial students, 61.6% of International, and 52.6% of Other students.

However, a high percentage of students from each racial/ethnic group indicated “quite a bit” to “a great deal” of racial/ethnic separation on campus: 64.3% of White/European American students, 53.3% of Black/African American students, 50% of Asian American/Pacific Islander students, 74.3% of Hispanic/Latino(a) students, 55.3% of Multiracial students, 57.7% of International, and 57.9% of Other students.

### **Anti-Semitism/Anti-Jewish Attitudes and Behavior**

Most students indicated that very little anti-Semitism exists on the GSU campus (40%) or that they did not know (46%). Most students indicated that they never (60%) or rarely (16%) experienced students stereotyping, making negative remarks about or telling jokes that “put down” Jewish people. However, White/European American ( $M=1.51, p<.004$ ) and Asian American/Pacific Islander ( $M=1.71, p<.005$ ) students were significantly more likely than Black/African American students ( $M=1.24$ ) to experience such stereotyping. Fourteen percent of all students indicated that they

simply did not know. Forty-two percent of International students indicated that they simply did not know.

Most students indicated that they never or rarely experienced faculty stereotyping, making negative remarks about or telling jokes that “put down” Jewish people. Students also indicated that they simply did not know, particularly International students (46%). While some racial/ethnic differences exist in terms of perceptions of student or faculty stereotyping, the results suggest that perceptions of anti-Jewish sentiment are rare.

### **Anti-Muslim Attitudes and Behavior**

Most students indicated that very little (33%) or little (11%) anti-Muslim beliefs exist on the GSU campus or that they did not know (34%). Most students indicated that they never (44%) or rarely (22%) experienced students stereotyping, making negative remarks about or telling jokes that “put down” Muslim people. However, “Other” students ( $M=2.57$ ) were more likely than White/European American ( $M=1.73$ ,  $p<.04$ ) or Black/African American students ( $M=1.63$ ,  $p<.012$ ) to experience such stereotyping. Thirteen percent of students indicated that they sometimes experienced such stereotyping and 16% of students indicated that they did not know.

Students were also asked how frequently they experienced faculty stereotyping, making negative remarks about or telling jokes that “put down” Muslim people. Most students (72%) indicated that they never experienced such faculty stereotyping. Students also indicated that they simply did not know (16%), particularly International students (56%). However, International students ( $M=1.82$ ) were more likely than White/European American ( $M=1.14$ ,  $p<.005$ ), Black/African American ( $M=1.18$ ,  $p<.014$ ), or Multiracial ( $M=1.15$ ,  $p<.024$ ) students to experience such stereotyping.

It is important to consider that in terms of religious affiliation, 69% of the participants identified as Christian, 1.9% as Jewish, and 2.2% as Muslim. As a result, Jewish and Muslim students’ perceptions of anti-Jewish or anti-Muslim attitudes and behavior could not be adequately investigated.

### **Climate and Recommending GSU/Recruitment Implications**

The question of whether the GSU climate is affecting recruitment of students could not be directly addressed and is beyond the scope of this survey. However, current students were asked whether they would recommend the institution to siblings or friends as a good place to go to college. Interestingly, Black/African American students were more likely than White/European American students or Asian/Pacific Islander students to recommend GSU to siblings or friends as a good place to go to college. Eighty-two percent of Black/African American students compared to 70% of White students and 56.5% of Asian American/Pacific Islander students agreed that they would recommend GSU.

Correlational analyses were conducted to assess variables that may influence student recruitment. A correlation of  $-.31$  was found between experiences with discrimination and the likelihood of recommending Georgia State to siblings or friends as a good place to go to college. This relationship was highly significant at the  $.01$  level. A correlation of  $-.38$  was found between racial tension and recommending Georgia State to siblings or friends as a good place to go to college. This relationship was highly significant at the  $.01$  level. Thus, a significant, negative relationship exists between experiences of discrimination and racial tension and recommending GSU. The greater the students' experiences of discrimination and racial tension, the less likely they would recommend GSU.

Further statistical analyses were conducted to determine the degree to which multiple factors influence students' likelihood of recommending GSU to others. Multiple regression analyses were conducted with Racial Tension and Experiences with Discrimination as independent variables and Recommending GSU to Siblings and Friends as a Good Place to Go to College as the dependent variable. Separate multiple regression analyses were conducted with all students. Separate analyses were then conducted for Black students, White students, and Asian students. There were too few responses by Hispanic students to warrant an analysis.

For all students, experiences with discrimination and racial tension accounted for 17% of the variance in recommending GSU. This relationship was highly significant at the  $.001$  level. This model held for White/European American students, with both experiences of discrimination and racial tension having approximately the same impact on recommending GSU. For African American/Black students, experiences with discrimination and racial tension accounted for 14% of the variance in recommending GSU. This relationship was highly significant at the  $.02$  level. For Black/African American students, racial tension was the more impactful variable, accounting for 12% of the variance in recommending GSU. Thus, discriminatory experiences and perceptions of racial tension negatively impact whether both White/European American and Black/African American students recommend GSU to others.

For Asian American/Pacific Islander students, experiences with discrimination accounted for 10% of the variance in recommending GSU at the  $.007$  level. Racial tension was not a significant variable. Thus, for Asian/Pacific Islander students, discriminatory experiences significantly impact whether they would recommend GSU to others, whereas experiences of racial tension do not.

### **Climate and Overall Satisfaction/Retention Implications**

The relationship between academic climate and retention is beyond the scope of this survey. However, previous research suggests that satisfaction with the university climate relates to retention. The level of participation and the degree to which an institution's environment is perceived as comfortable by students of color, particularly Black, Latino(a), and American Indian, is critical. Actively supportive,

nondiscriminatory campus environments are associated with greater satisfaction in college, better adjustment, and persistence through graduation (Kuh et al. 1991; MacKay and Kuh 1994). This is particularly the case for students of color.

The relationship between perceptions of the climate at GSU and overall satisfaction was investigated. Statistical analyses were conducted to explore the impact of racial tension and experiences with discrimination on overall level of satisfaction. Multiple regression analyses were conducted with all students. In addition, separate regression analyses were conducted with Black/African American students as well as White/European American students only.

For all students, racial tension and discriminatory experiences accounted for approximately 19% of the variance in overall satisfaction. Racial tension alone accounts for approximately 16% of the variance in overall level of satisfaction. This is significant at the .004 level. Discriminatory experiences alone account for approximately .025% of the variance in overall level of satisfaction above and beyond racial tension. Thus, experiences of racial tension and discriminatory experiences have a significant impact on students' overall satisfaction. For European American/White students, racial tension and discriminatory experiences accounted for approximately 18% of the variance in overall satisfaction. This is significant at the .01 level. Discriminatory experiences account for approximately .020% of the variance in overall level of satisfaction above and beyond racial tension. For Black/African American students, racial tension and discriminatory experiences accounted for approximately 20% of the variance in overall satisfaction. This is significant at the .01 level. Discriminatory experiences account for approximately .030% of the variance in overall level of satisfaction above and beyond racial tension. Thus, racial tension seems to be the more impactful variable in terms of overall level of satisfaction for all students.

### **Experiences with Discrimination and Retention Implications**

In order to assess if students' experiences with a particularly discriminating event at Georgia State University were related to their retention, a correlational analysis was conducted. No significant relationship was found between the most upsetting discriminatory experience and thoughts about leaving Georgia State. While no relationship was found, it is important to remember that this analysis was limited to the most discriminatory event experienced. The accumulation of more covert or less severe discrimination on a regular basis seems to impact recruitment and satisfaction, and may, in turn, impact retention rates.

### **Experiences with Discrimination and Academic Success Implications**

A correlational analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between the most upsetting discriminatory experience and students' perceptions of whether the event interfered with their ability to perform well academically. A statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ) correlation of  $r = .12$  was found indicating that such a relationship exists. Thus, while a particularly upsetting discriminatory experience may not directly impact

students' thoughts about leaving GSU, it may hinder their academic success. A negative impact on academic success may, in turn, adversely affect graduation rates.

## **Qualitative Analyses**

Students were asked to respond to three or four open-ended questions in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of their experiences with the campus racial/ethnic climate. All students were asked to respond to the following three questions:

### **Question 1: Please Explain How You Have Been Discriminated Against in Any Other Way.**

This question was presented directly after the *Experiences with Discrimination Scale*, a measure designed to assess experiences with discrimination at Georgia State University. The scale consists of eleven items that pertain to being discriminated against in a variety of ways and settings as a function of race or national origin. The last item of the scale asks if the respondent has been discriminated against in any other way.

Questions 2, 3, and 4 were placed at the end of the Racial/Ethnic Climate Survey. The rationale for this placement was that these questions are relatively transparent and direct. It was assumed that placing these questions at the end of the survey would prevent students' responses to the entire scale from being unduly influenced.

### **Question 2: How Can Georgia State Improve its Campus Climate with Regard to Racial/Ethnic Diversity?**

### **Question 3: Do You Have Any Additional Comments or Concerns, Positive and/or Negative, about the Georgia State Campus Climate with Regard to Racial and Ethnic Diversity?**

African American male students were asked to read and respond to the above three questions, as well as to the following question: Question 4: "As part of its African American Male Initiative to encourage the recruitment and graduation of African American males from institutions of higher education in Georgia, The Board of Regents has mandated all Georgia state colleges and universities to 'investigate how currently enrolled African American males perceive their college climates.' Your answers to the following question will be valuable in helping us support this initiative: What Aspects of Georgia State Might Make You Want to Leave Before Graduation?"

## **Participants**

A total of 129 students responded to Question 1, 479 to Question 2, 307 to Question 3 and 114 to Question 4. Given the relatively small number of students who responded relative to the Georgia State University student population and the particularly small number of responses of students who identified as Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Multiracial, International, and Other, decisions were made to provide the most valid

results possible. As such, the following groups were analyzed separately: White/European American students, Black/African American students, and other students of color for Question 1, 2, and 3. No gender differences were found in terms of responses to questions 1, 2, and 3. Interestingly, although Question 4 was specifically geared toward African American males, several students of other racial and ethnic groups chose to respond to this question.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative methodology was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of students' racial/ethnic climate experiences at Georgia State University. Qualitative analysis is particularly useful to study phenomena for which little information is available. It is relevant for investigating students' subjective or phenomenological interpretations of the constructs of interest. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted to examine students' unique conceptions and attitudes regarding the campus climate emerging from the data.

Constant comparative methodology (Lincoln and Guba 1985) was employed. Specific incidents in the data were continually compared, organized, and reorganized into progressively fewer but more meaningful categories. Similar categories were grouped and regrouped, resulting in final themes. The themes represent the experiences of the majority of respondents.

## **Results**

### **Question 1: Please Explain How You Have Been Discriminated Against In Any Other Way.**

Three major themes emerged from the responses of White/European American students. No themes emerged from the responses of Black/African American students or other students of color.

#### **Themes**

##### ***Discomfort in Interracial Settings***

Students expressed discomfort with expressing personal opinions and viewpoints, as well as feeling accepted in interracial settings. Students expressed particular discomfort with African American students. They described feeling apprehensive about expressing personal opinions for fear of being perceived as racist. Students also suggested the theme of clustering, in which students group according to racial and ethnic backgrounds during classroom group work. Students consistently described what they perceived as an overrepresentation of African American students congregating and handing out flyers to other Black/African American students in the University Plaza outside Pullen Library.

##### ***Professor and Student Political Bias***

Students expressed not feeling comfortable expressing political viewpoints that

differed from those of other students or professors. There was a perception of a “liberal” bias, especially amongst faculty members. Students indicated that faculty tended to express their own political beliefs frequently in classroom settings. Those with a more conservative viewpoint did not feel that their perspectives were valued.

### ***Activities Geared Toward African American Students***

Students indicated that most of the activities on campus seemed developed exclusively for African American students. They perceived these organizations as racially exclusionary. Students described feeling “left out.” Moreover, a perception exists that the GSU administration “caters” to African American students at the expense of other racial and ethnic groups on campus.

## **Question 2: How Can Georgia State Improve Its Campus Climate With Regard To Racial/Ethnic Diversity?**

The following five themes represent the responses of all students. No significant differences were found in the responses of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

### **Themes**

#### ***Promote More Interracial/Interethnic Events, Activities, and Programs***

Students discussed discomfort with the prevalence of racial clustering on campus and in the classrooms. Similarly, there is a perception that activities outside of the classroom tended to be geared to African American students. Students suggested that the university implement more activities in which students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds could participate and interact. Many of the suggestions involved events in which students could experience other cultures in the form of music, food, and dance. Examples included the following: Movie Nite, semester party or picnic with a variety of international music, an international day with food and cultural activities from around the world, and cultural awareness programs. The need for a more interactive community was expressed. Interestingly, while all students suggested a need for more inter-racial and inter-ethnic interactions, Black students and others students of color were more likely to discuss specific events to further such interactions.

#### ***Promote Seminars, Speakers, Information Sessions***

Students suggested forums in which diversity issues could be discussed openly. They expressed a need for more open dialogue as diversity was seen as a topic often not discussed publicly. It was suggested that student leaders talk to each other about race relations. A mandatory course in ethnic and race relations was suggested. Coursework for both students and faculty in multiculturalism was also proposed. Students related the need for greater education on issues of race and ethnicity.

#### ***Problems with “One Stop Shop”***

Students expressed significant difficulties with negotiating the “One Stop Shop,” a centralized office which handles enrollment concerns, particularly with regards to



financial aid. They complained of poor service, an insufficient number of staff, preferential treatment for African Americans, and long lines. Students presented examples of differential treatment by staff toward students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Students complained of the Financial Aid Office not providing money on time to purchase needed books. The latter issue was reported primarily by African American students. Seidman (2005) notes that many African American college students are first generation, and from single-parent homes, and that often many such students have trouble navigating complicated financial aid systems. Administrators at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) list finances as a primary reason for their students' departure (Landry 2002-2003). It is clear that financial aid can play an important role in the retention of minority students.

### ***Georgia State is Doing a Good Job***

Many students felt that Georgia State was handling diversity issues, "doing the best they could" or "doing a good job," or that no improvements were needed.

### ***Improvements are the Responsibility of Students and Faculty***

Students indicated that improvements in campus climate are the responsibility of students and faculty. They did not perceive that GSU as an institution was responsible for such efforts.

### **Question 3: Do You Have Any Additional Comments Or Concerns, Positive And/Or Negative, About The Georgia State Campus Climate With Regard To Racial And Ethnic Diversity?**

No significant differences were found between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds in response to Question 3. The responses seemed to parallel those of Question 2. Additional suggestions for improving the campus climate with regard to racial and ethnic diversity included addressing issues of race during orientation, adding a Core Curriculum course on racial/ethnic diversity, providing a place for comments on the GSU Web site, and providing diversity workshops in the dormitories.

### **Question 4: What Aspects Of Georgia State Might Make You Want To Leave Before Graduation?**

Although 81.8% of African American males (n=72) who responded to the survey answered this question, most did not identify racial issues as central to their decision to leave Georgia State. In fact, a significant number (thirty students) felt that nothing would keep them from graduating. For instance, one respondent said ". . . I think Georgia State is an excellent institution for Black men. I don't regret my choice at all. . . ." Three themes arose from the responses:

#### **Themes**

#### ***Structural Barriers for All Students***

Many of the respondents identified structural barriers that inhibit the college experience for all students. These barriers particularly focused on the high cost of GSU

and the awkward process of financial aid. Additionally, students were not satisfied with the “One Stop Shop,” lack of adequate parking, and large class size.

### ***Inadequate Opportunity for Mentoring and Networking***

Several of the respondents expressed concern with the lack of support for African American men on campus. Several students mentioned the “Tighter Grip” program but felt that it lacked resources and clout on campus. Other students were disappointed with the lack of African American male role models in the faculty and administration, felt non-Black faculty and staff were not attuned to the needs of African American men, and were frustrated with the lack of formal and informal mentoring for black men. Other respondents felt there were few opportunities for Black men to socialize and network with each other except through athletics and Greek organizations. This finding has important retention implication, for it has been shown that mentoring activities that help to acculturate students into the college community aid minority retention (Landry 2002-2003).

### ***Other Responses***

Interestingly, forty other students, who were not Black men, also responded to this question. Although their responses are not directly relevant to this survey, these responses also reflected the theme of “Structural Barriers for All Students” discussed above. Several students were offended that this question was asked only of African American males and felt this reflected a bias in favor of African Americans.

## **Discussion and Implications**

Results indicate that overall students are satisfied with Georgia State University and its services and facilities. Moreover, students report little racial tension or overt experiences of discrimination. The most common instances of discrimination included being in sight or hearing of racial jokes, cartoons, and graffiti, and being in a class where a faculty member has treated a person negatively because of race or national origin. In addition, the prevalence of racial and ethnic separation on campus and a desire for more interracial/interethnic interactions are prominent. The results also indicate that although all students experience a positive campus racial/ethnic climate, instances of discrimination and racial tension do impact some students’ likelihood of recommending GSU to others, as well as their academic performance. Experiences of racial tension are particularly related to students’ level of overall satisfaction.

Another prevalent issue seems to be a growing dissatisfaction among White/European American students with what they perceive to be favoritism toward Black/African American students in services and activities. Research demonstrates that students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds have divergent perspectives regarding features of campus life. Whereas White students tend to view groups composed solely of African American or Asian American students as “racial segregation” (Loo and Rolison 1986, 72), students of color perceive the same groups as providing a valuable source of

support. As GSU has become more diverse, tensions between students have been shaped by rising numbers of minority and international students.

The figures provided in the beginning of this report show the rapidly changing face of the campus since 1998. It is recommended that universities broaden their cultural focus to be more reflective of the diverse population it presently serves. Alan Seidman (2005) urges institutions to create opportunities for interaction between racial/ethnic groups and the presentation of diverse viewpoints in the classroom and to support the social needs of students from various backgrounds. Many studies indicate that retention rates and degree aspirations of all students are positively associated with experiences of diversity. Several studies demonstrate that higher levels of cross-racial interactions are related to greater cognitive development (Gurin et al. 2002), higher graduation rates (Chang 1999), growth in leadership skills and cultural awareness/understanding (Antonio 2001; Milem 1994), and college satisfaction (Astin 1993; Chang 1999). At Georgia State, an Intercultural Relations program was instituted in 2004. The office strives to offer an intercultural education that everyone can embrace and learn from in dealing with diversity. In addition, the office provides diversity programs and activities that reflect contributions to the social, cultural and academic climate of the university and the community at large. There are other steps that may be taken by universities to strengthen their commitment to student diversity. At Georgia State, the majority of freshmen take GSU1010: New Student Orientation, a course that includes modules on inclusion of all groups, clarifying values, and understanding learned behaviors. Alternatively, a core curriculum course in cultural diversity that includes racial/ethnic diversity may be required of all freshmen.

All units, administrative and academic, should review their policies and practices to determine if more effective methods can be instituted to promote diversity in activities, events, and teaching where appropriate. Universities can also identify those offices and units that focus specifically on multicultural climate issues and discuss how the services might be advertised and coordinated. Data on the level of financial support it supplies to these units may be gathered and a discussion of how the level of funding affects the ability of the unit to deliver services to the University community may ensue. University Web sites should provide sufficient information on faculty, student, and staff racial and ethnic diversity which is readily available. Within offices geared toward Student Life and Leadership, conversations and student focus groups may be conducted, representing all racial/ethnic groups, to discuss ways to serve a diverse student population.

Since the Racial/Ethnic Climate Survey was originally recommended by the Board of Regents to determine possible changes in policies and procedures that might aid the University in its recruitment and retention of African American male students, the quantitative responses of these students were analyzed separately. In addition, the Racial/Ethnic Climate Survey included an open-ended question specifically for African American male students (#4). Black/African American students in general, and males in particular, seem satisfied with GSU and its services, and the majority would recommend GSU to siblings and friends. However, interactions with faculty in the

classroom seem to be an area of concern. Several related programs have recently been initiated at GSU. One is the student organization Tighter Grip, an organization that currently has seventy-five active members. Another is the Staff-to-Student Mentor Program that has recently been initiated as part of the African American Male Staff Initiative (AAMSI) sponsored by the Office of Opportunity Development and Diversity Education Planning. Initiated in 2005, AAMSI provides mentoring for African American male staff, with such staff members aiding in the recruitment and retention of African American male students by serving in turn as their mentors through the Staff-to-Student Mentor Program. Universities should support existing African American leadership and mentoring programs and other relevant programs. Moreover, Freshman Learning Communities (FLCs) on topics appealing to African American males have been developed and offered. The twenty-five students in each FLC take five classes together the first semester, including GSU 1010 and English 1101. FLCs are proposed and led by interested staff and faculty advisors who select three additional courses to complement the FLC theme. The African American Culture and History FLC will prepare the students to take his or her place as a leader in an increasingly multi-cultural United States as well as in the international global village. This FLC is designed for students interested in careers in African American studies, history, sociology, political science, art and music.

Initiatives to recruit more underrepresented faculty should, if possible, be strengthened. The desire for such faculty to provide non-majority perspectives was expressed by all students, and racial/ethnic minority students also wished for such faculty to serve as role models. Research indicates that role models are especially important for underrepresented minority student success, particularly in the sciences. Several studies (Fleming 1984; McBay 1985; Schwitzer, Ancis, and Griffin 1998) have noted the importance of similarities in demographic makeup between African-American college students and faculty members as determinants of social adjustment and academic success. At Georgia State, the number of black tenure track faculty has increased from fifty-six (7.8 percent) in fall 2001 to seventy-two (9.5 percent) in fall 2006. In the same time period, the number of Asian faculty has increased from fifty (7.0 percent) to seventy-four (9.8 percent).

The data indicate that racial/ethnic graffiti and cartoons are one of the most prominent forms of discrimination experienced. Elimination of racial/ethnic graffiti and cartoons is a high priority with sanctions made clear to students, faculty, and staff. Moreover, students of color consistently report discrimination in the classroom. Faculty tolerance of diversity needs to be assured. Support from faculty is important to students' perceptions of comfort because they determine how students experience an academic environment (Richardson, 1991). Faculty are actively encouraged to attend multicultural sensitivity training related to challenging biases and stereotypes. If possible, faculty should be funded to attend regional and national conferences on diversity. In addition, the annual performance evaluations of both tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty may include information on any discriminatory behavior of the faculty member toward non-majority and international students, and any such behavior is addressed by department chairs in their annual faculty reviews. This also

may be an area of instruction that pre-tenure and post-tenure reviews evaluate. If there is a pattern of intolerant behavior, then the offender may be required to attend workshops or training sessions in diversity. Moreover, the annual performance evaluations of staff members may include information on any discriminatory behavior of the staff member toward students seeking assistance. In addition, such staff may attend diversity workshops or training sessions.

### **Implications for Administration of Climate Surveys**

There are several implications for subsequent administrations of climate surveys. Certainly, too many student surveys given in a year may result in respondent burnout and thus low response rates. Recommendations for future climate surveys include consideration of the response rate of electronic surveys. There are mixed reports on whether mode of survey administration affects results (Carini et.al 2003; Evans and Mathur 2005; Larson 2005). Inconsistent findings exist on whether response rates are higher for paper-based versus on-line surveys, and most current research reports that the rates are comparable for both modes (Daley et al. 2003; Mertler and Earley 2003).

Response rates to surveys in general have declined in the last forty years. Reasons suggested in the literature include the proliferation of junk mail as well as the rapid growth and ease of large-scale student assessment. Low Web-survey response rates are also attributed to e-mail box saturation (Wilson and Laskey 2003), fear of viruses and security issues, fear that answers will not be kept confidential (Evans and Mathur 2005), and feelings that the survey takes too much of an effort (Andrews, Nonnecke, and Preece 2003). Students on many campuses feel increasingly bombarded with questionnaires, whether paper or Internet-based (Sax, Gilmartin, and Bryant 2003). Decreasing the number of surveys given may therefore increase the response rate.

E-mail response rates of 20 percent or lower are not uncommon (Witmer, Colman, and Katzman 1999). Some demographic patterns in response rates have been found. Research has found that regardless of the survey method used, women respond at greater rates than men and underrepresented minority students respond at lower rates than do Whites, Asian Americans, and international students (Underwood, Kim, and Matier 2000). Minority college students typically have less experience with technology than do their White and Asian American peers, even after controlling for differences in technological preparedness that are due to parental education, parental income, and high school type (Sax, Ceja, and Teranishi 2001).

Methods to increase the response rates of Web-based surveys have been discussed in the literature. Response rates are higher when a short, pre-notification invitation e-mail introduces the coming e-mail survey and provides “opt-in” or “opt-out” options to participate. Follow-up reminder e-mails appear to increase participation (Andrews, Nonnecke, and Preece 2003). To increase response rates up to 70 percent, more sophisticated approaches integrate online and offline invitations and reminders beginning with an invitation postal letter, then a paper survey and an e-mail survey with a URL option, followed by reminder postcards (Andrews, Nonnecke, and Preece 2003).

When racial climate surveys are administered there will be the recognition that they are different from other campus surveys, both in the nature of the survey and in the typical reluctance of racial/ethnic minority subjects to respond to surveys. Over-sampling of racial/ethnic minority groups is often warranted to assure approximately equal representation of all groups.

Caution is advised against over-surveying a student body. Those surveys with a broad significance for the entire University should be prioritized. It is generally agreed by researchers in the social sciences that incentives increase the response rate. This may prompt public universities (which are prevented from using public funds) to seek financial incentives from private foundations. Pre-survey publicity may be utilized so that students are aware that the survey is coming. It would be helpful to ensure that online surveys remain open to respondents for at least six weeks and that there are multiple reminders to students to respond to the survey.

Several limitations to the study exist. One limitation concerns the fact that the surveys used are self-report measures. Further investigations of the university climate may benefit from observational data. However, the existence of actual incidents of racial and ethnic conflict and students' qualitative responses lend validity to the students' self-reports.

In addition, existing differences within racial and ethnic groups may affect perceptions and experiences of the campus racial/ethnic climate. Such individual differences include level of racial or ethnic identity, level of acculturation, and socioeconomic status. Future investigations may explore the relationship between these individual differences and students' perceptions and experiences of the campus racial/ethnic climate (Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr 2000).

## **Conclusion**

Campus racial/ethnic climate, and relatedly student retention, clearly is an important issue, particularly at public institutions where governmental agencies want to be sure that the funds they are investing in higher education produce citizens whose education helps them to get jobs and return the money indirectly through taxes. Since college graduates earn \$1.2 million more in a lifetime than high school graduates, their monetary return to the federal and state governments in taxes and spending is far greater than that of non-graduates over their lifetimes (Seidman 2005). Thus, the greater the students' integration into the social and academic aspects of the college, the greater their satisfaction and commitment to the college, and the more positive their retention rates (Terenzini, Lorang, and Pascarella 1981; Pascarella, Smart, and Ethington 1986). Students' perception of a welcoming and supportive racial/ethnic climate within their University thus significantly benefits everyone.

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