

Role of Faculty Support in the College Adjustment of Underrepresented Students: A Climate Study

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INTRODUCTION

- Research has consistently shown that positive campus climate is associated with better college adjustment, commitment, and satisfaction, especially for racial/ethnic minorities (e.g., Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003) and sexual orientation minorities (e.g., Woodford & Kulick, 2015).
- Perceived faculty support has been associated with student retention, academic adjustment, and institutional commitment for the general student population (Shelton, 2003), as well as racial/ethnic (e.g., Baker, 2013) and sexual orientation (e.g., Woodford & Kulick, 2015) minority students. Therefore, it is important to identify faculty factors and behaviors that contribute to students’ perceptions of faculty support across diverse groups.
- This project is part of a larger campus climate study identifying which faculty factors students consider the most supportive, their experiences with these factors, and the implications of these factors on their college adjustment, focusing on differences that emerged as a function of race/ethnicity and sexual orientation.

Table 1: Importance of Faculty Support Factors by Race/Eth & Sexual Orientation

Race/Ethnicity:	Sexual Orientation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Understand/appreciate the perspectives of racially/ethnically underrepresented students. <i>M: 4.18 (minor) > 3.81</i>Pronounce my name correctly or at least make an effort. <i>M: 4.14 > 3.87</i>Respect my preferred pronouns and name. <i>M: 4.11 > 3.81</i>Faculty representative of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. <i>M: 3.91 > 3.48</i>Safe Zone stickers. <i>M: 3.44 > 3.08</i>Do not use me as an example/representative of my group. <i>M: 3.44 > 3.05</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Understand/appreciate the perspective of students with diverse sexual orientations. <i>M: 4.32 (minor) > 3.77</i>Understand/appreciate the perspective of students with diverse gender identities. <i>M: 4.32 > 3.75</i>Faculty representative of diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identities. <i>M: 4.13 > 3.56</i>Understand/appreciate perspectives of racially/ethnically underrepresented students. <i>M: 4.13 > 3.87</i>Faculty representative of racial/ethnic backgrounds. <i>M: 3.84 > 3.54</i>Safe Zone stickers. <i>M: 3.65 > 3.02</i>

Table 2 Experiences with Faculty Factors by Race/Eth & Sexual Orientation

Race/Ethnicity:	Sexual Orientation:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pronounce my name correctly/show good faith effort. <i>M: 3.90 (minor) < 4.18</i>Respect my preferred pronouns and name. <i>M: 3.84 < 4.11</i>Have a friendly, welcoming and open personality. <i>M: 3.58 < 3.83</i>Understand/appreciate perspectives of race/ethnic underrepresented groups. <i>M: 3.31 < 3.63</i>Understand/appreciate perspectives of diverse sexual orientation. <i>M: 3.27 < 3.58</i>Understand/appreciate perspectives of diverse gender identity. <i>M: 3.23 < 3.51</i>Include presentations, materials, and examples of my identity. <i>M: 2.87 < 3.33</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have a friendly, welcoming and open personality. <i>M: 3.55 (minor) < 3.82</i>Understand/appreciate perspectives of racially/ethnically underrepresented groups. <i>M: 3.15 < 3.62</i>Understand/appreciate perspectives of diverse sexual orientations. <i>M: 3.07 < 3.59</i>Understand/appreciate perspectives of diverse gender identities. <i>M: 2.88 < 3.56</i>Conveying confidence about my potential. <i>M: 2.88 < 3.25</i>Include presentations, materials, and examples of my identity. <i>M: 2.62 < 3.34</i>

METHODS

Participants

- 532 undergraduate students at SUNY Geneseo
- 311 women, 86 men (140 cisgender, 6 transgender, 21 agender/genderfluid, 2 prefer not to say)
- Racial/ Ethnic group membership:
- Majority: 318 White
 - Minority: 211 (65 Asian, 54 Latino/a, 47 Black, 26 Multiracial, 12 Native American, 7 Middle Eastern/ Arab, 5 other/not listed)
- Sexual Orientation:

Measures

Importance/Experience Faculty Support Factors

Student Engagement

- When faculty...
- ❖ Listen to my opinions in class
 - ❖ Do not tell inappropriate jokes, but still have a sense of humor
 - ❖ Convey confidence in my potential
 - ❖ Have a friendly, welcoming, open personality
 - ❖ Do not act awkward or uncomfortable around me
 - ❖ Respect my preferred pronouns and name
 - ❖ Pronounce my name correctly/show a good faith effort to do so
 - ❖ Take time out of class to answer my questions or meet with me
 - ❖ Attend the student-oriented programs and events that I attend

Understanding/Appreciation of Diversity and Identities

- When faculty...
- ❖ Grade in ways that are open to unique perspectives beyond their own
 - ❖ Do not use me as an example/representative of my group
 - ❖ Include presentations, materials, examples that are representative of many groups/identities
 - ❖ Have a safe zone sticker in their office
 - ❖ Are representative of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds
 - ❖ Understand/appreciate the perspectives of racially/ethnically underrepresented students
 - ❖ Understand/appreciate the perspectives of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities
 - ❖ Understand/appreciate perspectives of students with diverse sexual orientations
 - ❖ Understand/appreciate perspectives of students with diverse gender identities
- Note: 5pt Likert scale: 1-not at all to 5-a very high degree

College Outcomes

- Academic Adjustment - 9 items (Alpha = .76)
- Academic Efficacy- 8 items (Alpha = .87)
- Institutional Commitment - 8 items (Alpha = .79)

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Importance of Faculty Support Factors

- 2 (Group Membership: Maj, Min) X 18 (Importance) Mixed ANOVA: Significant main effect of faculty factors, $F(17, 6052) = 43.58^{***}$. Post-hoc tests revealed:
- Most important cluster (believe in me, be open, be available):* When faculty... have friendly, welcoming, open personality: $M=4.36$; convey confidence in my potential: $M=4.30$; take time outside class to meet with me: $M=4.30$.

Second cluster (respect my uniqueness, understand/ appreciate the perspectives of diverse students): When faculty... do not act awkward or uncomfortable around me: $M=4.03$; pronounce my name correctly/show good faith effort: $M=4.01$; understand and appreciate the perspectives of racially/ethnically diverse students: $M=4.00$, students with diverse sexual orientations: $M=3.99$, students with diverse gender identities: $M=3.97$; respect my preferred pronouns and name: $M=3.97$.

- Significant Group Membership X Importance interaction for both race/ethnicity, $F(17, 6052) = 4.86^{***}$, and sexual orientation, $F(17, 6154) = 6.13^{***}$. Post-hoc tests revealed significant differences between majority and minority students on the importance of several faculty support factors (see Table 1). Both racial/ethnic and sexual minority students reported diversity-related factors to be more important than did white and heterosexual students.

Experience with Faculty Support Factors

- 2 (Group Membership: Maj, Min) X 16 (Experience) Mixed ANOVA: Significant main effect of faculty factors, $F(15, 4110) = 146.31^{***}$. Post-hoc tests revealed:
- Most important cluster:* Pronounce my name correctly/show good faith effort ($M=4.04$); Respect my preferred pronoun and name ($M=4.01$); Take time outside of class to meet with me ($M=3.89$)

Second cluster: Have a friendly, welcoming and open personality ($M=3.72$); Listen to my opinions in class ($M= 3.63$)

- Significant Group Membership X Experience interaction for both race/ethnicity, $F(15, 4110) = 2.23^{**}$, and sexual orientation, $F(15, 4140) = 4.99^{***}$. Post-hoc tests revealed significant differences between majority and minority students, with minority students reporting fewer experiences with faculty being welcoming and open and with faculty understanding and appreciating the perspectives of diverse groups (see Table 2).

- There is a disconnect between what students rate as most important and what students report experiencing with faculty (e.g., conveys confidence in my potential). Diversity factors were rated as important (especially for underrepresented students), yet underrepresented students report experiencing those factors less frequently than majority students.

Experience with Faculty Factors & College Outcomes

- As shown in Table 3, correlations revealed that students who report experiencing faculty factors that they consider to be important have higher academic self-efficacy, academic adjustment, and attachment to the institution. These patterns emerged for racial/ethnic and sexual minority students, as well as white, heterosexual students. Interacting with faculty who demonstrate cultural competency and appreciation/understanding of diversity benefits college outcomes for ALL of our students.