

INTRODUCTION

The report from the visiting team from McDaniel College is attached. The McDaniel visiting team met with nearly thirty (30) students and eighteen (18) members of the faculty and staff. The feedback, opinions, and perspectives included in the McDaniel Team's report are therefore not able to be generalized to the campus community as a whole, nor are they intended to be "representative" of any particular group (e.g., representative of what all students believe). We do find the feedback, opinions, and perspectives extremely helpful, however. The students, faculty and staff members of the Teagle Diversity Project at W&J have reviewed the report and have begun to discuss several strategies to further promoting diversity, including:

- Messages and activities that encourage all students to move beyond their own comfort zones to seek opportunities to learn about people different from themselves
- Challenging students to apply what they are learning from "D" courses and from other experiences with diversity (such as living with an international suitemate, etc.), particularly in their interactions with peers and also with regard to "town-gown" relations
- Creating venues for students to discuss the impact of studying abroad on their experience with/understanding of diversity, and encouraging students who have studied abroad to talk about their experiences with others and to continue their learning about diversity here on campus and in the area

If you additional ideas, or if you have questions about the report, please contact one of the individuals listed below. Any of them would be happy to discuss the report, and the Teagle Diversity Project, with you, and potentially identify ways you can be involved with diversity initiatives at Washington & Jefferson College, as well.

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**Report of the McDaniel College Visiting Team
Visit to Washington & Jefferson College
“Diversity in the Formal and Informal Curriculum”
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The perspectives we identify below are based on conversations with approximately 27-30 students, at least 12 of whom are athletes, at least 5 of whom are Resident Assistants and at least 3 of whom are involved with a multicultural organization. We also spoke to approximately 18 members of the faculty and staff/administration. It is difficult to make a strict distinction in the faculty and staff numbers as many with whom we met both teach and provide administrative leadership. In what follows we share our findings in the context of the seven “Big Questions.” We present Big Questions #2 and #3 together as our findings for the two are intertwined. We conclude with a short list of lingering questions that the W&J Teagle Group may want to consider and/or share with the larger campus community.

Big Question #1: How do students perceive the connection between diversity in the curriculum and student life programming?

Students see the connection as organic to certain majors and programs, particularly those in the humanities, social sciences and languages. All of the students with whom we spoke were receptive to attending diversity events related to their courses, and generally agreed that after having attended a course-required event, they were more likely to attend events of their own accord. We saw the most enthusiasm from students who experienced diversity as integral to their major and overall professionalization; some specific experiences included internships, observation exercises, and working with businesses and organizations outside of campus. While such experiences are not part of student life programming per se, the implication is that diversity experiences external to the classroom are most welcomed when recognized as vital to the major. As one student noted: “*When something’s related to your major, you’re more compelled to go to it.*”

Big Questions #2 and #3: How do minority students experience the classroom at W&J, and how do minority students experience “difference” at W&J—on the athletic field, in the classroom, in the residence halls?

The minority students with whom we spoke find the campus to be welcoming, but did sometimes express a need to “find their bearings” with their self-identified group before extending themselves across campus communities.

One minority student explained, “*I sort of gravitated more towards [specific club] as a way to bolster my identity on campus, but once I became comfortable being a minority on campus, then I was ok with going to other groups and participating in other things...at first, I was intentionally staying with people of my own group because I wasn’t that comfortable here, but then as time went by...I became more open to spontaneous events and interaction.*”

The comments minority students shared suggest that early integration into the campus community is critical to their overall success and increases the likelihood that they will remain at W&J. Further, we noticed that the students involved with multicultural organizations take ownership for explaining their cultural contributions, perspectives, and so on to the larger campus. In this sense, multicultural organizations provide minority students with both a comfort zone and a platform from which to engage the campus community.

We found that self-identified minority students were not the only ones with perspectives on the “minority student experience” at W&J. Many of the majority students with whom we spoke expressed the belief that minority or “diverse” students isolate themselves from the rest of the student body. To be clear, the tone of such comments was more frustrated than critical; there seems to be a genuine desire on the part of majority students to interact with students they consider diverse.

One student noted that, *“at first, foreign exchange students, they keep to themselves...it takes them a while to mesh up with everybody and by that time they’re ready to leave”* (handful of students agree).

In reference to a foreign exchange student who participated in a sport: *“it was blatantly obvious that if X wasn’t on the team, we wouldn’t have even known X’s name...a lot of us keep in touch with X now.”*

Short of structured experiences (academic course or team) or social situations (residence halls), majority students believe it is incumbent upon minority students to reach out. While one majority student asserted, *“I feel like if I had more of a chance to meet these people, I’d do it, it’s fun,”* another noted that *“you’d have to go out of your way [to interact with diverse people].”*

But at the same time that athletes and members of Greek organizations expressed a desire for minority students to extend themselves, they also acknowledged the prevalence of cliques on campus and the difficulty of moving between groups for everyone.

Standards

Conversations with students, staff and faculty about diversifying the student body often turned to the subject of academic standards. There is a concern about bringing to campus minority students who can flourish both socially and academically (the conversation was always about minorities, not about other groups such as LGBT). A student explained that *“you want to make sure the quality of the school stays the same...[my] high school is better, but there’s different factors, [my high school] has more money, better taxes...it’s tough to promote inner city people to come to the school.”* Another student expressed the belief that *“something would have to be sacrificed [to include minority students].”* Those majority students who expressed a concern about standards also raised questions about whether targeted scholarships might improve minority enrollment.

It seems that the YES Program (Youth Engaged in Service), of which we heard about briefly, speaks to the two major concerns expressed about minority students: standards and comfort zone. The program produces high school graduates who meet the academic standards of W&J, and

there may be a positive cohort effect in that such students may more quickly get their bearings and reach out to other communities. As one faculty member noted, minority students' "psychological flexibility"—the ability or willingness to identify with more than one group on campus—is critical to his/her success at W&J. Lastly, it appears that the (potential) Julius LeMoyne Scholars Program may be well-received by majority students if they know that the academic standards of the college are maintained.

Big Question #4: What do faculty know about student life programming related to diversity?

W&J faculty recognize that courses are only one component of a comprehensive learning experience and that the curricular components, ideally, interface with programming and student life. Of the faculty with whom we spoke, some require attendance at student life events, usually for extra credit and/or to supplement course material. We found an open flow of communication between the faculty, the Office of Diversity Programs and Multicultural Affairs, and the Office of Student Life, but two points were raised in terms of how communication may be improved.

First, faculty members can better incorporate events into their syllabi when they are notified well in advance.

Second, the process for posting department or faculty-coordinated events to the central calendar might be made more transparent. Focus group participants with whom we spoke were unsure of exactly whom to contact and by when.

As more majors and programs move to requiring some sort of diversity events or experiences, it follows that faculty awareness of student life programming will necessarily increase—for instance, with the new study abroad requirement for Foreign Language or the emphasis on globalization/global awareness in Business.

Big Question #5: What do student life personnel know about diversity in the curriculum?

The awareness of diversity in the curriculum differs slightly between Student Life staff and Residence Life staff, but this seems largely due to the fact that the Residence Life staff are fairly new to W&J. Student Life staff seem to have the most direct and frequent communication with faculty—particularly those faculty teaching “D” courses or involved with student organizations. Still, Residence Life leadership is actively reaching out to faculty in order to complete the circle comprising the living and learning aspects of students’ lives. It seems likely that such communication will also be a natural outgrowth of the recently piloted Living/Learning Communities. We found the Residence Life emphasis on “community-building” and helping students to “plug in” to campus in keeping with the college-wide focus on “whole student” development. While they no longer require Resident Assistants to incorporate a diversity themed event, they do encourage RAs to take advantage of club events and student life programming—an approach to which RAs have responded positively. Noted one student, *“Residence Life supports if you want to advertise in buildings...we don’t have a diversity [event] requirement*

anymore, but they still will direct you to the RAs so they can have events...everyone, if you go to them, they are more than happy to help you with anything.”

We noticed that Student Life programs such as leadership retreats reinforce what students are learning in their courses. We also noticed strong interaction between students and Student Life leadership, particularly with Deans Shepherd, Sherman and McCrae; students clearly have a direct line to administrators and staff who can act as their advocates or “make things happen,” as one student put it.

On the whole, W&J seems a nurturing environment where the entire campus seems committed to supporting both the academic and social growth of students. We saw this not only in terms of Residence Life and Student Life staff, but also in the attitude of coaches. Student athletes agreed that academics come first as proven by rescheduling of practices around students’ course schedules and releases from practice for course-related events. The community service component that many coaches advocate also suggests an emphasis on “whole student” development.

Big Question #6: What is the perceived impact of diversity courses on students’ behavior outside of class?

Based on focus group comments and conversations, it is clear that many W&J students are intellectually transformed as a result of “D” courses. Students who had taken “D” courses spoke confidently about everything from subject position and oppression, to economic inequality and cultural difference. In this regard, it would seem that the courses are achieving their goal of preparing students to “respond sensitively and intelligently to peoples of varied social backgrounds and cultural frameworks.” Some students noted that diversity courses and experiences break the “bubble” that students live in prior to matriculating at W&J. and that “D” courses open their eyes to the larger world. Still, there is a marked estrangement from the larger Washington community; students expressed a general discomfort about going off-campus, but noted that they are not particularly welcoming when they encounter someone from the local community on campus. When the athletes were asked whether they felt they were part of the Washington community the near unanimous response was “not at all.”

One student declared: *“It’s not so much the campus that makes people feel unwelcome...it’s more western Pennsylvania.”*

In this regard, there may be a need for more activities such as the one facilitated by Residence Life wherein RAs were required to interview three businesses in town. Such activities can facilitate frank conversations about how students regard the local community, perhaps examining their use of terms such as “townie” much as they would examine ethnic slurs or gendered language in a “D” course.

Big Question #7: Where does learning about diversity happen on campus?

We identified three main spaces in which diversity education takes place: the classroom, co-curricular/extra-curricular events and living environments. We include study abroad within the

category of “living environments” as students with whom we spoke emphasized the cultural immersion of study abroad more than the programmatic learning associated with classroom experiences.

Classroom

We found that students choose their “D” courses based on a range of factors: some take a course because of personal interest/cultural identity, others focus on relevance to their major and still others are simply trying to complete their general education requirements. Regardless of their reasons for choosing a “D” course, the majority of students had high praise for their “D” course experiences and several mentioned recommending to friends the specific course they took. Recent strategic hires have added to the variety of “D” courses available on a regular basis and reflect a commitment to diversity on the part of the college.

One student admitted that *“Normally I wouldn’t have taken X course, but because we have the diversity credit, I’m learning about X...it’s pretty interesting so far, what we’re learning so yeah probably I will [take more classes]”* and a science major said *“I never even thought I would take a class like that...it opened my eyes because I was never introduced to any ideas like that.”*

In terms of looking for “D” courses that meet more than one requirement, at least half of the athletes agreed that *“when you’re looking for courses, you’re looking for that “D.”*

Students did note a lack of uniformity across “D” courses in terms of the amount of diversity content, and a few students went so far as to say that they didn’t really consider such examples *real “D” courses.*

We found that the time spent educating freshman on what it means to receive a liberal arts education has made students more open to diversity education in that they see it as a legitimate and important part of a liberal arts experience. Below are three quotes from different students illustrating this perspective.

“I think a liberal arts college is based on diversity...you don’t just take major courses or minor courses...and I feel like that’s diversity too, you’re not just focusing on one subject.”

“It’s [diversity education] a big part of liberal arts...we need to be aware of other people.”

“I feel like it’s essential, especially if you push the whole well-roundedness thing...you can’t have liberal arts without diversity, I think they go hand in hand.”

Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Events

We found that students are learning about diversity sometimes without even realizing it. Almost all of the athletic teams participate in team-organized service activities that give them an opportunity to interact with different groups, as do the sororities. When asked about such activities, students didn’t seem to think of them as related to “diversity” so much as just being “what we do.”

Further, we learned from students that they are less likely to attend an event that is marketed as diversity-specific. One member of a multicultural organization even noted that *“the trick to getting people to come...is it’s going to have to not be blatantly about [particular cultural group]...it has to be something that students respond to, that they can kind of discuss [diversity], but not really blatantly discuss it because they don’t want to be ‘talked to’ all day, they want to have fun...it’s a balance we may not have gotten to yet.”* One exception (there may be more) to this resistance was diversity events with food. As one student noted of an event at which culturally specific food was served: *“It was a good way to expose students to culture by sucking them in...with an incentive.”* Another chimed in that *“food is a really big incentive”* in getting students to attend and sit through a presentation while they’re eating.

No one complained of a lack of activities or programming, and those involved with student organizations noted the generous budgets for activities and events.

Students and staff did express concern about the low attendance for events. From the students’ perspectives, there are three main reasons:

- Students delete emails promoting events
- Students have several strains on their free time: courses, athletics, clubs, jobs, etc.
- Students do not associate diversity-specific events with “fun”

In terms of what does motivate student attendance, we found:

- Friends or teammates involved in the activity, performance
- Course requirement or extra credit
- Positive experience at previous event
- “Hands on” events, i.e. events at which students are active participants rather than passive receivers

Two Types of Diversity Education

Our focus groups revealed that students perceive two types of diversity education: the first is diversity education aimed at telling students “what not to do”; the second is diversity education that students find critical to their success as individuals and/or professionals. Within the two types, students also distinguish between “experiencing” diversity and “being told about” diversity. One exchange was particularly revealing of such student perceptions and we’ve captured it below.

Student A: *“To be blunt, we’ve had diversity issues pounded into our heads since we could talk...I think we all understand not to do certain things and not to say certain things...just to hear it over and over gets irritating after a while”* (some agreement on the part of other students present).

Student B: *“Learning about what other people feel [in classes]...reading personal journal entries...it’s different from being told something.”*

Student C: *“For me [diversity education] is really important...I don’t take it as something being pounded into my head, I take it as an experience...the more you’re immersed in something... you understand people better.”*

Living Environment

As noted in other sections of the report, students learn about diversity in social spaces such as residence halls and athletic teams, but especially through study abroad/travel opportunities. Students acknowledge that there is a lot of support for study abroad, and indicated that Intercession is the best opportunity for those with sports or other obligations. Several of the students who had gone abroad spoke of wanting to go again. Some examples of learning about diversity socially included a student with a suitemate from another country—they have had informal conversations about differences between the student’s native country and the U.S. Another example included a student who participated in the Magellan Project, as well as another student who hadn’t studied abroad, but who said s/he learned about the culture “second hand” from friends who did. In terms of advocating study abroad, students said the following:

“I think a lot of Americans...think that every other country is just like America...that needs to be addressed a lot more.”

“I went abroad...I just realized how important it is to know about other cultures...you want to seem like you know what’s going on and when you come back you have a totally new appreciation for what’s going on at home and in school.”

Teagle Common Question

Students: Do you feel that diversity education is an important part of a liberal arts education? Where should such learning take place?

As evinced in the responses to Big Question #7, students do believe diversity education is an important part of a liberal arts education. They also agree that diversity education should take place in a range of spaces: classroom, social space, professionalization activities and so on.

Faculty and Staff: Do you feel that diversity education is an important part of a liberal arts education? What is your role or responsibility in this regard?

All of the faculty and staff with whom we met answered in the affirmative with some stating “it is essential.” It should be noted, however, that we met almost exclusively with faculty and staff who either teach “D” courses, or who provide diversity leadership.

Residence Life staff articulated their responsibility in terms of encouraging RAs to take advantage of programs/events sponsored by various campus groups/clubs and by requiring RAs to be intentional about programs—RAs must be able to articulate how an event or program will facilitate the goal of community building. The Six Week Challenge (one event a week for the first six weeks of the year) seems likely to encourage RAs to make use of pre-planned events and may be a good time for multicultural or diversity events. Perhaps Dean Shepherd, members of Residence Life and members of multicultural organizations could discuss how they might work together strategically at the start of each semester.

Lingering Questions

- The Entrepreneurial Funds provide some incentive for developing “D” courses, but we did hear that those who utilize such funds are generally “the same faces.” Is there a way to engage different faculty members in “D” courses, perhaps through team-teaching or guest lectures?
- In response to student complaints that foreign exchange students leave just as they are starting to get comfortable reaching out, is there a way that exchange students can be more quickly integrated into the campus community during such a short stay? Is there an exit interview for foreign exchange students that might shed some light on their situation?
- In response to the concern expressed that the study abroad requirement for Foreign Language may discourage athletes or others from the major or double-major, might it be productive to examine whether Intercession offers a possible compromise, or whether a year of living in something like a “language house” might serve the same purpose?
- Is there a comprehensive peer mentoring program? To whom should a new student turn to for guidance, and how is that communicated? What “safety net” mechanisms are in place for diverse students? Are they intentional, i.e. automatically triggered, or more spontaneous, i.e. dependent upon the close-knit nature of the community?
- What about religion? Who coordinates the various religious groups? Are there safe spaces for discussions of faith and faith differences? Is religion viewed as a part of creating a welcoming and supportive environment for diverse students?
- Does the wording of the requirements for “D” certification reflect the outcomes goals for the courses? Does the current wording exclude some useful courses?

N.B.: Due to the extreme storms between which our visit took place, we had to cut short our stay. While we believe we met with most of the campus constituencies, we should acknowledge that we had to cancel our meetings/focus groups with the Curriculum & Planning Committee, Student Life Staff, Student Government Association Representatives and President Haring-Smith.

