

2020

**The
UConn
Racial
Microaggressions
Survey**

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For More Information about the Project:

To learn more about the UConn Racial Microaggressions Interdisciplinary Research Project visit: <https://rms.research.uconn.edu/>, or contact Dr. Eleanor Shoreman-Ouimet, Department of Anthropology, University of Connecticut, 354 Mansfield Road, Storrs, Connecticut 06269 (email: eleanor.ouimet@uconn.edu).

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Executive Summary

In this report, we summarize findings of research on the racial microaggression experiences of students of color at the University of Connecticut. The UConn Microaggressions Research Team (UConn MRT), an interdisciplinary team of faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students, invited UConn students of color to participate in an online survey between Spring 2019 and Winter 2020. In total, 1229 students of color completed the survey.

Forty-three percent of students who completed the survey reported feeling as though they need to minimize aspects of their racial and ethnic background to fit in at UConn; and approximately 45% of students reported that race relations at UConn ranged from somewhat to extremely problematic.

Almost 60% of students reported feeling comfortable reporting experiences with or witnessing racial harassment and discrimination at UConn; yet 60% of students reported not feeling confident that UConn would respond appropriately; and more than 70% of students reported being unaware of UConn's formal procedures for handling incidents of racial or ethnic discrimination.

Over 70% of students who completed the survey reported that they found faculty and staff to be welcoming of students of color; 59% reported that they found students to be welcoming of students of color. Although more than three-quarters of students reported feeling safe in or not avoiding the majority of campus locations (e.g., admissions, financial aid, residence halls, athletic facilities, the Student Union, libraries etc.), classrooms and fraternity/sorority houses emerged as spaces that many students of color reported avoiding or

feeling uncomfortable in. Thirty-one (31) percent of students reported feeling uncomfortable in or avoiding classrooms, and 58% of students reported avoiding or feeling uncomfortable in sorority/fraternity houses.

Almost 30% of students who completed the survey reported being the only student of color in their classes; 29% of students reported being singled out to provide discussions of diversity in class or other campus settings. In this report, we use quantitative survey data and provide quotations to describe the experiences of students of color with racial microaggressions in and outside the classroom at UConn. We also discuss how students cope with incidents of racial microaggressions, and share initial findings on how these race-related negative experiences affect their psychological health.

We conclude this report by making a set of recommendations to inform relevant policy change at the university level. Racial microaggressions across a variety of settings at UConn do not only undermine the sense of safety, belonging, and attachment of students of color, but they also have a detrimental impact on the learning environment and campus climate at our institution (Ogunyemi, Clare, Astudillo, Manu, & Kim, 2020). It is the vision of the UConn MRT that this work can enhance collective understanding of our students' experiences of racial microaggressions and the impact of microaggressions on students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well being. We offer our data and findings with hopes that we can provide empirical evidence to inform relevant policy change at the university level to enhance the collegiate experience of our students of color, and to ensure that their academic and psychological needs are met during their time as UConn Huskies.

Introduction

American universities and colleges have been working for almost five decades to create learning environments that are diverse, equitable, accessible, and multicultural (Pope, Mueller, & Reynolds, 2009); and US college campuses have become increasingly diverse in terms of culture, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation of their student bodies (Mayhew, Rockenbach, Bowman, Seifert, & Wolniak, 2016; Quaye & Harper, 2015). Yet, for many students of color predominantly White institutions (PWI) and historically White institutions (HWI) remain spaces where they feel unwelcome and unsupported (e.g., Harper & Hurtado, 2007) due to institutional policies, race-related hostilities, and discrimination in social and academic settings, as well as more subtle events, practices, and interactions that they experience on a daily basis (e.g., Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Most recently, “Black At” Instagram accounts (including the Black at UConn Instagram account) have made campus racism widely visible (Smith-Barrow, 2020; Suero, 2020).

A large and growing body of literature has linked racial discrimination to indicators of compromised psychological well-being such as depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, other psychiatric symptoms, low self-esteem, and even physical ailments across ethnic-racial groups (e.g., Benner, Wang, Shen, Boyle, Polk, & Cheng, 2018; Lui & Quezada, 2019). Meta-analytic reviews confirmed the detrimental effect of racial discrimination on the mental health of Black Americans (Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2012), Asian Americans (Lee & Ahn, 2011) and Hispanic Americans (Lee & Ahn, 2012). Therefore, it is unsurprising that an unwelcoming and unsupportive racial campus climate has negative consequences for the academic adjustment (including retention and persistence) and psychological well-being of students of color (e.g., Hwang & Goto, 2008; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008), and that perceived discrimination has been linked to academic distress in (Latinx) college students of color (e.g., Cheng, McDermott, Wong, & McCullough, 2020).

Structural and institutional racism, including in academic settings, validate, support, and enforce everyday racist interpersonal experiences (Sue, Alsaidi, Awad, Glaeser, Calle, & Mendez, 2019), which are known as racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are “commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, & Nadal, 2007, p. 278). Theory and research in the last two decades have provided support for the prevalence of these often subtle, everyday, and interpersonal forms of racism and their detrimental impact on the physical, economic, and psychological well-being of people of color (Sue & Spanierman, 2020).

Racial microaggressions are “commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, & Nadal, 2007, p. 278).



Studies of racial microaggressions have also revealed their prevalence on college campuses (e.g., Choi, Lewis, Harwood, Mendenhall, & Hunt, 2017; Harwood, Browne Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012) and they have linked racial microaggression experiences to lower sense of belonging among African American, Latino American, Asian American, and Multiracial college students (e.g., Lewis, Mendenhall, & Ojiemwen, 2019) and to different educational experiences and stresses between students of color and Whites (e.g., Choi et al., 2017; Harwood et al., 2012; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Browne Hunt, 2013, 2016). Hence, in our study, we aimed to learn about the racial microaggression experiences of students of color at UConn.

Sue et al. (2007) identified three types of microaggressions. *Microinsults* refer to behaviors/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity. Examples include students of color being "complimented" by peers and faculty that they are articulate or a credit to their race, which are driven by the underlying stereotype that people of color are intellectually inferior (e.g., Sue & Spanierman, 2020). *Microinvalidations* refer to verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feeling or experiential reality of a person of color. Examples include when Asian or Latinx Americans are told they speak English well or to go back where they came from (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Lastly, *microassaults* are explicit racial derogations characterized primarily by a violent verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions.

Examples include students of color being called racial slurs or exposed to racial epithets scribbled on classroom desks or in bathroom stalls. Whereas perpetrators of microinsults and microinvalidations are often unconscious of their actions, those perpetrating microassaults are typically consciously engaging in these behaviors (Sue & Spanierman, 2020).

Although these racial microaggressions may seem mundane, they lead to enduring psychological stress, cognitive depletion, and physiological hyperarousal (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). The cumulative and multi-faceted deleterious effects associated with racial microaggressions on college campuses have been described as "Racial Battle Fatigue" (RFBT) among many students (and faculty) of color (Arnold, Crawford, & Khalifa, 2016; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). In sum, racial microaggressions on college campuses have a major negative impact on the learning environment (Ogunyemi et al., 2020).

In 2011-2012, a team of researchers from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), designed and implemented a large-scale study to examine racial microaggressions on campus. Findings of this study have been reported in several publications (e.g., Choi et al., 2017; Harwood et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2013, 2016). In these papers, the team detailed information on the racialized experiences of students of color on this large Midwestern university campus. These included situations in which a student of color felt uncomfortable, insulted or invalidated because of their race, and experienced as well as experiences coping with racial microaggressions and feelings of marginalization.

... racial microaggressions on college campuses have a major negative impact on the learning environment (Ogunyemi et al., 2020).

Methodology

Following Harwood and colleagues (2012), the UConn Racial Microaggressions Team, an interdisciplinary group of faculty, staff, graduate, and undergraduate students (<https://rms.research.uconn.edu/blank/>) conducted a mixed-methods, web-based survey designed to assess experiences of racial microaggressions among students of color across all UConn campuses. The objectives of this research were: 1) to give a greater voice to students of color and a stronger platform from which to articulate instances of racial microaggressions, perceived racism, and race-related stress, and the related negative health consequences; 2) to analyze quantitative survey data and qualitative data gleaned from open-ended questions to identify trends, patterns, and recurrent issues that need institutional attention; and 3) to elucidate and improve the experiences of students of color at UConn.

The Racial Microaggressions Survey was an IRB-approved, 30-minute survey intended for all students of color currently enrolled as undergraduate or graduate students at UConn. The survey was made available to students during Spring 2019, and again in the Fall-Winter 2019-2020. In total, 1516 students completed the survey, which included 265 respondents who identified as white and 22 respondents who did not identify their race. Although we saved these responses for future comparative analyses, we did not use them in the analysis of racial microaggressions among students of color. Thus, our analyses were based on data from 1229 students of color across all UConn campuses who completed the survey.

The racial and ethnic background of the survey participants included: American Indian or Native American (less than 1 %), Middle Eastern (.8%),

Asian/Pacific Islander (28%), Biracial or Multiracial (13.3%), Black or African American (22%), Hispanic or Latinx/a/o (17.7%), Non-Hispanic White (17.7). Seventy percent of the sample was cis-female, 28.2% cis-male, .8% non-cis gender. Graduate students made up 11.5% of the survey respondents. About 78% of students of color who completed the survey were located at the Storrs campus.

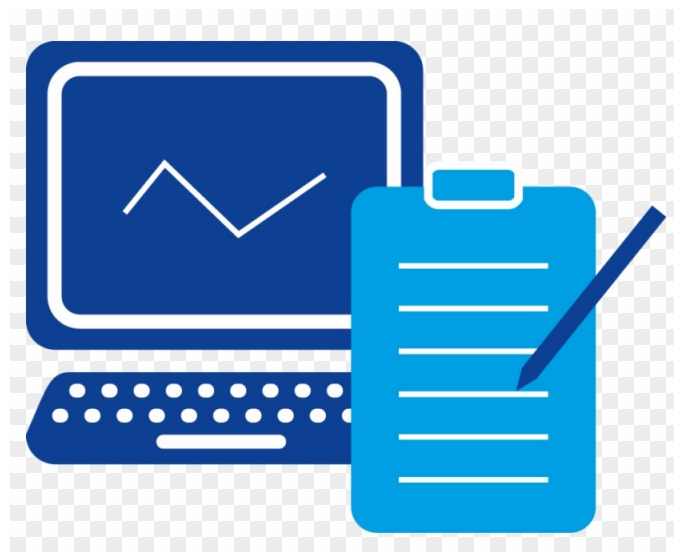
Racial microaggressions were measured using the Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS, Torres-Harding, Andrade, & Romero Diaz, 2012). The RMAS was developed to measure the frequency with which individuals experience different forms of racial microaggressions including themes related to racial microinvalidations and microinsults that emerged in the literature. The RMAS consists of 32 items grouped into six subscales that tap the following racial microaggression themes: invisibility, criminality, low-achieving/undesirable culture, sexualization, foreigner/not belonging, and environmental invalidations (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Items were rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (0 = *never* to 3 = *often/frequently*). Subscale scores were computed by averaging subscale item scores, with higher scores indicating more frequent experiences with racial microaggressions. Torres-Harding et al. (2012) reported good reliability and concurrent and convergent validity for the measure.

Additionally, drawing on items used by Harwood and colleagues in the University of Illinois Racial Microaggressions Research Project, we asked students how problematic they thought race relations were on campus; to what extent they thought faculty, staff, administration, and students were welcoming of students color; and whether they felt that they needed to minimize aspects of their racial/ethnic culture such as language, clothes, and ways of interacting in order to be able to “fit in” to the culture of their campus.

We also asked students to indicate whether they would feel comfortable reporting their experiencing or witnessing of racial harassment at UConn to a faculty, staff, or administrator, and how confident they were that their institution would respond appropriately. We asked them how familiar they were with the university’s formal procedures for handling incidents of racial/ethnic discrimination/bias.

Regarding race-related experiences in and outside the classroom, we also asked them to report whether they have ever been singled out to provide discussion of diversity in class/other settings, and whether they were the only person of color in any of their classes. Finally, students were asked to indicate which campus settings (e.g., classrooms, library, admissions, financial aid office, residence halls, fraternity/sorority houses) they felt uncomfortable in and/or avoided due to their race/ethnicity.

In addition to collecting quantitative and qualitative data on the racial microaggression experiences of UConn students of color, we also gathered quantitative data on students’ sense of belonging, coping strategies, and indicators of psychological well-being and identity, as well as demographic background.



Overview of Findings

Racial Climate of the Classroom and Other Campus Settings

Forty-five (45) percent of students of color who completed the survey reported that race relations on campus were somewhat to extremely problematic. When students of color who reported race relations being a little problematic were also included, the percentage of students who reported race relations being problematic on campus increased to 77%. Putting it differently, only 23% of students of color reported campus relations not being problematic at all.

Students of color who completed the survey also felt uncomfortable in and avoided a number of campus spaces. As shown in Table 1, the two campus settings where the largest number of students of color reported feeling uncomfortable or that they reported avoiding (or doing both) were **fraternity/sorority houses** and **classrooms**. Almost 60 percent of students of color who completed the survey reported feeling uncomfortable in, avoiding, or feeling uncomfortable *and* avoiding fraternity and sorority houses on campus. It is especially concerning that classrooms ranked second among the 13 campus settings that students of color reported feeling uncomfortable in or avoiding. The next most frequently avoided settings included the financial aid office, athletic facilities, academic departments, and residence halls. Libraries emerged as the safest spaces as the smallest number of students of color reported avoiding or feeling uncomfortable there.

Table 1. Campus Locations where Students of Color Report Feeling Uncomfortable (or Avoid) Because of their Race

Rank	Locations	# of Responses
1	Fraternity/ Sorority Houses	528
2	Classroom	293
3	Financial Aid Office	226
4	Athletic Facilities	223
5	Academic Departments	218
6	Residence Halls	214
7	Instructor's Office	210
8	Admissions	202
9	The Student Union	168
10	Downtown/Storrs Center	164
11	Student Health	157
12	UConn Transportation	152
13	Libraries	147

The survey also included a series of questions asking students of color about their experiences with racial microaggressions in the classroom and on campus. Students of color reported experiencing racial microassaults (e.g., being targets of offensive jokes or racial slurs because of their race) and racial microinsults (e.g., being made to feel intellectually inferior and not being taken seriously because of their race). As shown in Table 2, the most frequently reported racial microaggressions were being exposed to racially offensive jokes and language. It is concerning, however, that a smaller, yet substantial number of students of color also reported experiencing harassment because of their race (n = 334).

Over 40% of students of color reported racial microaggressions that related to their intellectual aptitude. Given that the survey captured racial microaggressions in an educational setting, **it is especially alarming that hundreds of students of color reported being made to feel inferior, not being taken seriously, and being discouraged from pursuing their educational and academic goals because of their race at UConn.** In addition, over 30% of students of color reported being **singled out for discussions of diversity** in the classroom and other settings and feeling as though they **needed to minimize aspects of their racial and ethnic background to fit in** at UConn.

Table 2. Racial Microaggressions in the Classroom/on Campus

Racial Microaggressions in the Classroom/on Campus	% Yes
I have experienced someone making offensive jokes to me on this campus because of my race.	57%
I have experienced someone using offensive language on this campus because of my race.	56%
People have made me feel intellectually inferior on this campus because of my race.	46%
I have experienced discouragement in pursuing my academic or educational goals because of my race.	42%
I have experienced not being taken seriously in my classes because of my race.	41%
I have experienced harassment (emotional, verbal, or physical) on campus because of my race.	35%
Ever been singled out to provide discussion of diversity in class/other settings.	31%

Of the 1229 students of color who completed the survey, 625 (ca. 50%) reported experiencing **feelings of isolation on campus because of their race.** The frequency of these experiences ranged from less than once a year (n =190) to once a week or more (n =76). About 30% of students of color reported feeling isolated because of their race relatively rarely (less than once a year to a

few times a year); about 21% reported feelings of isolation because of their race more frequently (about once a month to once a week or more). These feelings of isolation are problematic particularly for students of color who reported being the only student of color in their classes (over 30% of students who answered the question).

70%+ of students of color who responded to this set of questions reported being **unaware of UConn’s formal procedures for handling incidents of racial or ethnic discrimination.**

Finally, the survey also asked students of color about institutional policies, procedures, and response to racial microaggression experiences reported on campus. Over seventy (70) percent of students of color who responded to this set of questions reported being unaware of UConn’s formal procedures for handling incidents of racial or ethnic discrimination. Fifty-nine (59) percent of students of color reported that they would feel comfortable reporting incidents of racial harassment and discrimination; 39% of respondents felt confident that UConn would respond appropriately if they were to report racial harassment or discrimination.

These quantitative data suggest that racial microaggressions are not isolated incidents. They appear to be deeply and systematically engrained in the university culture.

The next section of this report reveals the racial microaggression experiences of students of color in their own words across UConn campuses. To collect qualitative data on students’ experiences with racial microaggressions, via open-ended questions, we asked students 1) to describe situations in which they felt uncomfortable, insulted, invalidated, or disrespected by a comment that had racial overtones; 2) how others have subtly expressed their stereotypical beliefs about their race/ethnicity; and 3) how people have suggested that they do not belong at UConn because of their race/ethnicity. Finally, we also asked students what they thought needed to be done in terms of diversity and inclusion on campus.

Students of Color Tell Their Stories

Racial Microassaults at UConn

The examples below corroborate the previously reported quantitative data that showed a considerable percentage of students of color experience conscious and deliberate acts of racial microassaults that include verbal (e.g., racial slurs, racially offensive jokes, or being racially harassed) and avoidant behaviors (e.g., being excluded from learning activities). Several of these quotations indicate that racial microassaults often occur in residence halls, which is especially troubling, as dorms represent students' home away from home where they should feel safe.

I am a member of the SchOLA2RS Learning Community, which means I live on a floor of Werth Tower for which 50% of the floor is all black men. When non-SchOLA2RS on the floor or even in the building are unaware that I am listening, I constantly hear the vilification of the members of my community and the LC as a whole. Secondly, I'm a sophomore here, and the amount of times I've been referred to as the N-word by non-black individuals is ridiculous.

I [student of Chinese descent] have also heard racial slurs at both the Hartford and Storrs campuses that were directed towards me, but also other students.

White people who I thought were my friends slip up and say the N word around me and no one else tells them that it's wrong. I always have to stand up for myself and let them know that what they said was wrong and why it was wrong.

*Person wrote n***** on my white board I was so sad and upset.*

There has been a recent incident that happened this semester of individuals writing offensive racial slurs such as the N word along bulletin boards in my dorm. This made me feel very offended and unwelcome in my own living environment.

At the beginning of my second semester, several students in my residence hall wrote racial and homophobic slurs on bulletin boards on our floor.

*I watched a white student call someone else a n***** at a bar and it triggered me. I felt furious and honestly that it was the breaking point for a lot of students who are Black.*

My floor mates who are all whites used to always harass and bully me and my roommates and say things like "bet they're just asian" that we both feel extremely uncomfortable seeing people in the hallway or the floor lounge in general. I feel that I always had to act tough and unapproachable when I'm back in my dorm building to scare them off or in order for them to not keep stepping all over me."

When we had a controversial guest speaker last year on campus, I was walking back from class alone around 6:30pm one night and had to pass students and other community members waiting in line outside of the lecture hall to get into the speaker's event. I was approached by a young man and told to "Jump back over the border."

When I was living on campus, a few white males in my building would make fun of me because of my ethnic background and that I would wear my traditional clothing in the building. They told me that if I was wearing those clothes then I should go back to the country. It made me feel like crap. I wouldn't go out into the lounge areas even though my friends would be there. I started wearing sweatpants and shorts to fit in but then that was pointed out too and I was labeled a fraud.

... One of the black frats was out tabling for something or other and as the white boys were walking on, one of them says something like, "What are they even doing here man, when did the campus become overrun with them?" To which the other responds. "My dad said this was a predominately white school and I was really hoping that stayed true."

Thirdly, being one of like 3 black people in STEM lectures, the majority of students shy away from working with black people, fearing that they'll bring down their grade.

Leaving me out of things. I had a group project I almost failed because my peers wouldn't email me back and once I submitted all the emails I had sent, I was able to do the project on my own.

Racial Microaggressions in the Classroom

As mentioned in the previous section of this report, almost a third of students of color indicated feeling uncomfortable in classroom settings because of their race or ethnicity. Much of this discomfort appears to result from students being one of very few students of color in classes. Some students cite the discriminatory behavior and racist comments from white students as the root of their discomfort in classroom settings; others feel neglected and underestimated by instructors and peers. Students of color shared their experiences with various forms of **racial microinsults** (“verbal and nonverbal interpersonal exchanges that convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and that demean a person’s racial, gender, sexual orientation, heritage, or identity” (Sue & Spanierman, 2020, p. 49) and **microinvalidations** (“interpersonal communication (both verbal and nonverbal) that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of certain groups such as people of color” (Sue & Spanierman, 2020, p. 52).

Everytime I enter a class, I find myself surveying the racial makeup of my class. Oftentimes noticing if I am the only, or one of the only people of color. I believe UConn is segregated heavily, and I am constantly taking notice.

I remember walking into my first ever college class this fall and thinking "wow, there is no one like me here" it was truly a sad and eye-opening moment

I just look around in my classroom and I can tell that this set up wasn't there to welcome me. I look at the curriculum and I do not see myself reflected in my learning.

I've had professors make me feel like I wasn't valuable to a classroom.

I am the only black graduate student in my department. Because of this, I feel isolated from people of my race, but with the amount of work I have to do, I don't have the time to get involved in clubs or groups with people that look like me.

“...almost **a third of students of color** indicated feeling **uncomfortable** in classroom settings **because of their race or ethnicity.**”

As a graduate student, I feel there is still a lack of diversity within the graduate programs. As a school that utilizes the word "diversity" quite often, I feel as though there is a disconnect between what the school is preaching, and who their students really are.

My doctorate program is predominantly white and I have heard numerous comments of insensitivity towards Asians on campus within my program, despite myself being Asian ... Maybe I should speak up more but I usually just keep quite to avoid tension in my class.

Sometimes within my program when I try to volunteer to answer a question in class teachers avoid my gaze or don't call on me. It makes me feel invisible or like they expect my answer to be wrong which makes me very upset and doesn't make me motivated for school.

The most hostility I have felt from UConn students occurs in the classroom

Additionally, due to the white majority undergraduate population, I notice assumptions about my intellect when I teach and needing to earn their respect more than my white peers. This is a major issue. [Black female graduate student]

It is particularly disturbing that as student quotations illustrate, at an institution of higher learning such as UConn, students of color experience racial insensitivity; rudeness; stereotyping; exclusion; as well as treatment as second-class citizens, inferior learners, and perpetual foreigner objectification from faculty. As suggested by students' accounts, it is also very concerning that some faculty disproportionately single out students of color in the classroom, often, though not always, in discussions of diversity.

I asked for feedback from one of my Professors about a paper and she told me "I need to learn the English language". English is my first and only language, and I know she wouldn't have said that if I was white.

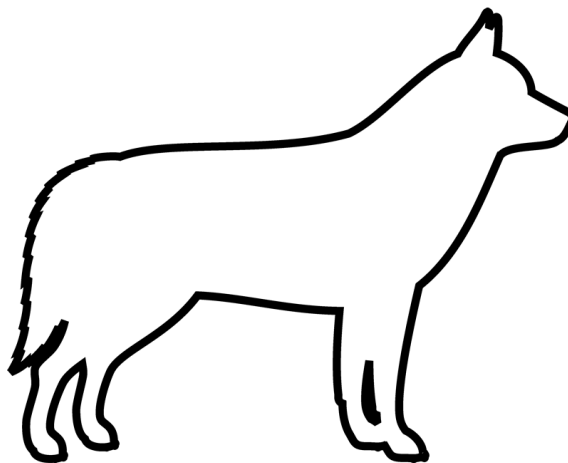
A professor went on a tangent during class when speaking two weeks ago about the corruption of political correctness in America. He referenced the period in which he grew up as a time when black people were acceptedly called "negro" and "another N-word I'm probably not allowed to say". I felt some hostility and uncomfortableness due to being the only African American student in the class and wanted to report him but was afraid.

I had a professor who refused to give me a fair test. I had an excused absence from a midterm, which I had informed him well in advance. I was asked why I should be "given special treatment" that I should get a make-up exam. When I went to the temporary department head, he told me the professor "sees my hijab" and does not take me seriously. This professor wouldn't even listen to the temporary department head because he had an accent/was of the same ethnicity, so the professor did not respect them as much. I didn't think too much of it because I was tired of fighting. I was later told by a TA that this professor had given out makeup exams or similar makeups to other students in past semesters. Due to the whole ordeal, I was no longer able to focus in class and properly learn. I was ill prepared for the final because I had not had a chance to learn to take the exam in the way the professor administered them. I couldn't sign up for a class the following semester because I did not like how the professor treated me and knew I couldn't learn from them. I had to drop my concentration (something I was extremely interested in till this treatment).

In the classroom, students of color experience:

- * **racial insensitivity**
- * **rudeness**
- * **stereotyping**
- * **exclusion**
- * **treatment as second-class citizens and inferior learners**
- * **perpetual foreigner objectification from faculty**
- * **being singled out in diversity discussions**

In an organic chemistry lecture sophomore year the professor made comments on several occasions that seemed racially biased. For example, when there were protests about confederate statues saying that Robert E. Lee was a good guy and the professor commented that people were making a big deal out of it and said "it's all just history to me." He also commented on Colin Kapernick's kneeling saying that if he were in the military he'd be doing push-ups. This made me feel very uncomfortable considering that 1. He was wasting class time talking about racial issues that clearly had nothing to do with organic chemistry and 2. He was sharing his opinions that nobody asked about, and I was so upset by his comments that I couldn't concentrate on his lectures.



As noted in previous sections of this report, almost thirty percent of students of color who completed the survey recalled instances of being singled out in a class to provide discussions of diversity. **Many students highlighted instances in which faculty or TAs inappropriately assumed their race, ethnicity, or life experience based on their appearance.**

I've been in a few classes where whenever there is a conversation that includes a discussion of Africa, privilege or oppression I am always singled out especially because I have an accent so people just assume that I'm from an African country without even asking (I am not African).

It's incredibly agitating. In one instance, my professor asked if anyone in the class was from a different country. I did NOT raise my hand. Yet, she singled me out and asked where I am from. I'm from here. Thank you, next.

This reminds me of a time in class when the professor decided to ask if the "African-American" students in class approved of a point that he was making. I was very irritated with that statement and I'm sure the other Black students were as well. For one, "African-American" is not an umbrella term for Black people or people of African descent. Second, singling us out in front of the whole class is not the way to assure if something is ok or not. We may not even have the same thoughts on it. We are people just like everyone else and have different thoughts and opinions on things. In that moment, it felt like I was less than human and just a category being checked off.

As a black, woman I often feel that I have to be the spokeswoman for my whole race when an issue of race comes up in class or sometimes issues for any minority group regardless of my identification as a member of that group. I feel expectations from my peers and faculty members to respond to these situations. I also sometimes feel disregarded in class.

Once, a professor attempted to facilitate a discussion about racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom. He began by singling out the only Black student in the class, then the only Asian student, and then turned to me (mixed-race) and said, "I don't know what you are, but do you have anything to add?"

In a seminar class, during a discussion of "sense of belonging" the instructor pointed out that I was "the only one" in the class- meaning the only non-white person.

During class discussion a professor asked me to share my thoughts for black people. I was highly upset and explained that I do not represent Black people and neither the spokesperson for black people (because that does not exist).

In a class discussion regarding race, I was singled out as one of the students of color to discuss past experiences with discrimination by my TA. I was extremely uncomfortable sharing my experience and I felt insulted by claims from my white classmates that students of color are undeservedly treated better than white students

The time a professor pointed at me and asked if I was a U.S. citizen was the most insulted I have felt on this campus. It was last semester and I can still remember this instance clear as day. When asked this question, I was genuinely so shocked that I couldn't even answer the question at first. I was downright insulted and was confused as to why I was being asked this question because to me, I was just like anyone else in the room. And I knew I was being asked this question because I was the only person of color in the room, which made me feel more insulted and angry. Once I responded, I had trouble concentrating afterwards because of how embarrassed I was by being called out in front of the entire class about my citizenship.



Racial Microaggressions in Other Campus Settings

Students of color who responded to the open-ended survey questions also shared experiences with various forms of racial microaggressions outside the classroom. Several of these incidents involved Asian-descent students.

When people talk about the Asian students on campus, they assume we're all Chinese or Korean, and they assume we're rich. That's not the demographic I fall under and I feel underrepresented. So much so that it creates this false model minority myth that Asians don't need advocates because we're all so rich, when that's not true.

And lastly (for now), I've been told that I'm only here due to affirmative action an uncomfortable amount of times.

Once, at Student Health Services, I had an appointment for a prolonged migraine. Sitting outside, I could hear the nurse and a student worker loudly discussing my Chinese first name (I have an English middle name that I prefer) and the nurse said something along the lines of "they all do this, change their names and pretend not to be Asian" and that made me extremely vulnerable and uncomfortable. When they called my name, the student asked me how I pronounce my name, and I explained that I prefer to use my middle name, but the nurse aggressively pressed on, saying "why won't you just say it, we want you to say it, so say it. What is it?" In that moment I felt so helpless, especially because I was there as a patient trying to figure out why my migraine won't go away, and needless to say, my appointment was not comfortable. The fact that both the student worker and the nurse were pressuring me, as well as talking about their assumptions about me without even knowing who I am made me not want to go back to SHS in the future.

I have been asked to return back to China on more than one occasion on the Storrs campus.

People have asked me where I'm "really from." They've taken random guesses at my ethnicity. I've heard stereotypical things like "Asians are bad drivers" and other comments that fall in line with the model minority myth.

I am unable to specify a specific racial background because I am Latino. Some see me as White others do not. I don't see myself as a white person, but rather a person of color. My feelings around different areas (or around different groups) of campus have left me feeling isolated, unrelatable, or tokenized. Usually this manifests in anxious-avoidant behaviors where I will occupy certain places I feel more comfortable or I stick with a certain group of people. I would like to explore and meet new people but typically I haven't been welcomed by non-people of color and heteronormative folk. I have to add that as a gay man I also have felt microaggressions around campus due to being apart of the LGBT+ community and I wish I could express those feelings of irritation and microaggressions in this survey.

I experience a lot of microaggressions from students at UCONN. There are many groups of people that I avoid for I know they don't understand people of my ethnicity. However, even people who I believe understand racial differences and are "woke" do say things and act in racially insensitive ways and take offense when I do speak up about it.



Minimizing One's Race/Ethnicity to Fit in at UConn

Approximately 43% of students of color felt that they needed to minimize aspects of their racial/ethnic culture such as language, clothes, and ways of interacting in order to be able to “fit in” to the culture of their campus. Some students recall actually being told out right to tone down aspects of their racial or cultural identity in order to fit in, get jobs, etc.

I have been told directly that in order to be successful I need to assimilate.

As an Asian American, I try to avoid clothes or behaviors that might make me seem like an international student because of the bias against them.

Since coming to UConn, I've been asked why I "talk white" or "don't act black" a number of times.

I was asked to straighten my hair for it to look more presentable. It made me feel like my natural hair wasn't beautiful. Last semester, i told them that I was not comfortable conforming to their ideals

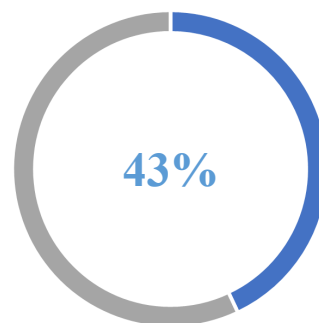
Students tell me not to do certain things, otherwise I'd be one of "those" puerto ricans.

One specific example is working in the School of Business last semester I was working a networking event. There were professionals from across campus and the business world. We were in Rome Ballroom. I had my AsACC name tag on. I have a Chinese last name (that was of course on the name tag). A white businessman I've never met approached me and the first thing they said was "Why's your last name Wong? That's an ethnic last name. Chinese right?" They continued with "Since you're ethnic, how many languages do you speak?" After I answered they said "Do you think in English? That's a true sign you've assimilated." These instances are not rare for me at UConn and I've become numb to the feelings that come with them. I was annoyed and hurt of course, but if I let myself get defeated each time this happened, I would've left UConn three days after being here.

I had a board of trustee member speak to me in spanish because i was representing latinx students, and after telling them I didn't speak the language well and asking for their email, they told me to remind them who I was by stating I was the puerto rican that didn't speak spanish.

Often times, I feel additional pressure around how I look, talk and act as a Black woman and don't feel like there are specific sources of support for graduate students of color.

Recently girls who I consider friends have been speaking about black men in fetishizing ways and would not understand when I call them out. I feel like I need to dilute my opinions when talking with white uconn students no matter how aware they are, in fear of making them uncomfortable or offended.



of students of color felt they needed to minimize aspects of their racial/ethnic culture in order to fit into campus culture

Students of Color Lack Confidence in Institutional Response to Racist Incidents

As mentioned in the previous part of the report, 60% of students reported not feeling confident that UConn would respond to instances of racial discrimination appropriately. These sentiments stem from recurring instances of racist language and behavior going unpunished in various campus settings; as well as the experience of actually reporting racist events with little response from the UConn administration.

I also feel as though UConn as a university, would not bring attention to the entire student body if there has been an issue relating to race. This is because I have heard of other events getting swept under the rug, in order to protect the image of the university”

I have become aware of the more overt forms of discrimination that exist on campus such as the multiple occasions during which students have used racial slurs against other students. Apparently, this happens every semester on campus, but no changes are made and thus it continues to happen.

I currently am a student manager at a dining hall here on campus. Last semester, a chef called one of my student employees a racial slur while at work. We reported it to our full-time managers who then reported it to HR. The chef did not receive any discipline as far as I am aware. He still works at the dining hall, and is still allowed to work with students; in particular the student he said this word to. Though HR may have asked him to attend "sensitivity training" it is my understanding that I will never be allowed to know if appropriate action was taken.

At the beginning of my second semester, several students in my residence hall wrote racial and homophobic slurs on bulletin boards on our floor. The hall director attempted to investigate who the individuals involved in this incident were but eventually the matter was forgotten. This made me feel as if other students have gotten away with similar incidents with no repercussions. This also reminded me that racial discrimination is still definitely occurring on campus even if it's not obvious.



6 out of 10

students ...

do not feel confident that UConn would respond to instances of racial discrimination appropriately

Microaggressions regularly from white students. Macroaggressions occasionally by students. NO HELP OR ACCOUNTABILITY by Presidential/Administrative. Some help from DOS.

There was a situation where someone in my dorm wrote the n word all over my hall. It was reported and my mother called the school to make sure everything was handled and she was brushed off. She was told she would receive a call back regarding the situation and she was never contacted again. To me, this exemplified the level of unimportance racial discrimination and acts of racism are to administration at UConn.

Recently though, I have become aware of the more overt forms of discrimination that exist on campus such as the multiple occasions during which students have used racial slurs against other students. Apparently, this happens every semester on campus, but no changes are made and thus it continues to happen.

How Students of Color Cope With Racial Microaggressions

As shown in Table 3, the largest majority of students (51%) reported coping with racial microaggressions by talking to friends. The next most commonly reported coping strategy was assuming the ignorance of the perpetrator (39%). A quarter of students reported engaging in avoidance coping (i.e., using distractions such as work, video games, social media, YouTube etc.). Substantial proportions of students of color sought family support (22%) or educated themselves about racism (23%). Some students coped with racial microaggressions by limiting exposure to racism (e.g., signing off social media) (15%), or by trying to dismiss or ignoring the incidents (16%). Students also mentioned exercise, meditation, activism, student leadership, religious activities, prayer, and engaging in campus activities (7%-12%) as helpful coping mechanisms. Less than 10% of students engaged in less adaptive coping

strategies such as rumination (6%) and self-blame (4%). Although educating the perpetrator is a common coping strategy against racial microaggressions (Sue & Spanierman, 2020), only nine percent of students of color at UConn reported coping this way with racist incidents.

Small percentages of students of color reported using harmful coping strategies (e.g., drinking, substance use, self-harm, suicidal ideation, aggression, or changing sexual activities or eating habits (.5%-6%); as well as academic disengagement (e.g., disengagement from course (7.5%), skipping or dropping class, and/or wanting to withdraw from university (< 2.5%). **Very few students reported making use of institutional resources such as a therapist, student health, or other campus resources (range: <1%-7%).**

Table 3. Top 10 Coping Strategies: How Students Respond to Incidents Related to Race on Campus

Coping Strategy	% Yes
Talking to friends	51
Assumed that the person(s) were ignorant	39
Finding distractions (e.g., work, video games, social media, YouTube etc.)	25
Educating self (e.g. seeking out more information about racism)	23
Getting support from family	22
Dismissed or ignored the incident	16
Limiting exposure to racism (e.g., signing off social media)	15
Blamed the media (in any way)	12
Physical exercise	10
Activism	10

The Effects of Racial Microaggressions on Students at UConn

Students' words suggest that the impact of racial microaggressions that they experience in the classroom and other settings at UConn include feelings of sadness, upset, hypervigilance, feeling unwelcome, and invisible. **Several student quotations show how incidents of racial microaggressions affect their learning process.** They mentioned that experiences of racial microaggressions undermined their academic motivation, hampered their ability to concentrate on the classroom activity at hand including faculty lectures, and excluded them from group learning activities and assignments.

Correlational analyses provided quantitative support for these qualitative themes. **Students of color who reported negative race-related experiences on campus** (for example, feeling isolated because of one's race, being target of racially offensive jokes, harassment, not being taken seriously, and being treated as intellectually inferior) **also reported more depressive symptoms, lower sense of belonging, and they scored higher on the Trauma Symptoms of Discrimination Scale.** Each of the six subscales (foreigner/not belonging, criminality, sexualization, low-achieving/undesirable culture, invisibility, and environmental invalidations) of the Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS) was significantly correlated with the Trauma Symptoms of Discrimination Scale. Of the six racial microaggression categories, racial microaggressions that led to feelings of invisibility were the most strongly related to discrimination-related trauma symptoms ($r = .732, p = 0.000$).



Sadness

Hypervigilance

Invisibility

Difficulty concentrating

Feeling Unwelcome

Exclusion.

Students' Requests and Recommendations

Students of color who completed the MRT survey made a number of requests and recommendations to affect positive change at UConn. Of special note is students' request to increase awareness of the unique needs and experiences of international students of color at the University. As illustrated by the selection of statements below, students repeatedly emphasized the need for the University to make concerted efforts to celebrate diversity and cultural differences (**more events aimed to promote diversity and inclusion at the University**); increase the diversity of faculty and staff (**hire more faculty and staff of color to diversify the University's workforce**); clarify and increase the severity of the consequences for racist behavior (**cultivate a culture of zero tolerance for racism at UConn**); and institute mandatory, in-person annual training for faculty, staff, and students, specifically for Greek organizations (**more diversity training for students, faculty, and staff**).

More Diversity Training for Students, Faculty, & Staff

I feel like UConn should have more training for incoming freshman on racial sensitivity because a lot of white students don't see an issue with racial slurs even in songs. They don't seem to understand that their words have meaning

I think the University needs to stop focusing on the numbers and statistics about our "diverse" campus and focus more upon its students' wellbeing. I also think the University needs to do a better job about educating the student body about how racism can manifest in our daily lives. For example, the diversity module that students must take shouldn't be so easily passable, and people should have to put in more thought and effort into their replies.

*The frats and sororities leach on black culture and are continuously saying the N word or N*****R on campus property whether it be outside of class or in their buildings, posting it on social media like its a joke. There should be a comprehensive and mandatory online lesson, like the one for drugs and alcohol that everyone should take on cultural appropriation and teach them what diversity actually is. Without that proper level of education, no one will speak out about the low levels of inclusivity on campus.*

"PLEASE HAVE A GEN ED COURSE FOR FOLKS TO TALK ABOUT IT"

Diversity and inclusion training for not only the students but also faculty. I feel as often times people try to be "culturally appropriate" but what they say to act that way often ends up being inappropriate as they are trying too hard.

Perhaps something like AlcoholEdu that teaches more about racial sensitivity.

Students, faculty, and staff need to realize that international students face a whole set of different, and challenging circumstances including the language, culture, homesickness, etc. Their hurdles are so much bigger than ours and just because they congregate together and speak in their languages together does not mean they aren't trying to succeed at UConn both socially and academically. Not only is this extremely discriminatory, it reinforces stereotypes that many ethnic students born in the US also face and there is more pressure for them to behave in a more americanized fashion.



More Events to Promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The University should host more events (like inclusion round tables, events centered around different cultures) to promote discussion between students, faculty, and staff of all backgrounds, majors, ages, etc.

Have programs and meeting where diversity and inclusion are emphasized. While the cultural centers do host events that emphasize inclusion, this is generally more specific to the cultural center that they are representing; I think there should be programs emphasizing inclusion for all ethnic groups instead of focusing on one and then the next.

Celebrate diversity and cultural differences: e.g., “Promote more multicultural events”

The university should also survey students about their needs that haven't been met by the school thus far. For example, expanding the Halal food section in the dining halls on campus or providing services for students during ramadan.

We need a cultural center that brings all people of color together. If we band together to create an inclusive environment we can change the way this campus works.

Diversify Faculty and Staff at UConn


We also need more racial diversity in UConn faculty and staff. Our faculty/staff should represent the change we want to be.

Increase the diversity of faculty and staff: “More faculty [and staff] of color should be hired,”

Cultivate a Culture of Zero-Tolerance against Racism

“... There must be a radical condemnation of racism and discrimination on campus. UCONN must do the work to make acts of hate, microaggressions, and discrimination so socially unacceptable that no one would dare to commit such acts.”

I think UConn should make it easier to report incidents of racism, or make it more clear how to go about reporting such incidents. As it stands, I have no idea how to do this.

ST  P
THE
HATE.

Recommendations

Between 2010 and 2020, multiple diversity-related reports have been issued by various constituents of the University of Connecticut (e.g., Provost's Commission on Institutional Diversity 2011-2012 Summary Report; 2015 UCONN Diversity: A Taskforce Report; 2017 Workplace Climate Survey; 2019-2020 Faculty and Staff of Color Town Hall Meetings Executive Summary). Several of these reports have called for annual campus climate surveys, yet, to our knowledge, there has not been a comprehensive survey of the University's racial climate, particularly from the perspective of students of color. Therefore, we addressed this important gap by conducting an online survey of the racial microaggression experiences of students of color across all UConn campuses. Several themes emerged in the pattern of results that our quantitative and qualitative analyses produced.

These included **1) unwelcoming learning and living spaces (e.g., classrooms, residence halls, fraternities and sororities); 2) prevalence of racial microaggressions perpetrated by faculty, students, and staff in learning and living spaces; 3) lacking awareness of UConn's racial bias policies and reporting procedures; and 4) lack of confidence in the University administration's response to racial bias incidents.** Collectively, these themes suggest a climate and culture at the University in which explicit and implicit expressions of racial bias and microaggressions can flourish, but one which leaves students of color feeling invisible, harmed, and impeded in their learning process. Next we share a set of recommendations informed by the quantitative and qualitative findings of our study, the racial microaggressions literature, review of the UConn ODI website, and the aforementioned reports. Our recommendations coalesce around three broad areas: **1) training, 2) policy, programmatic, and curricular changes, and 3) communication/public relations.**

Train, Educate, and Empower Faculty, Staff, and Students

Quantitative findings along with students' explicit requests and recommendations highlight the desperate need for more training around racial microaggressions for faculty, staff, and students. To improve the campus climate and create an inclusive learning, working, and living environment, training around racial microaggressions needs to be **recurring, tailored**, include opportunities for **critical self-reflection**, and **empower** participants for action. Repeated, in-person, small group training sessions are more conducive to creating opportunities for deep self-reflection, experimentation with strategies to disrupt racism than asynchronous online, one-shot, large group, or lecture-style presentations.

For Faculty:

- Provide training about racial microaggressions for new faculty hires (in addition to already existing mandatory diversity awareness training for new hires)
- Conduct training about racial microaggressions for (full-time and adjunct) faculty each semester
- Incorporate module on racial microaggressions into mandatory annual compliance training
- Offer CETL workshop/seminar series on racial microaggressions in the classroom
- Develop CETL workshop/seminar series on inclusive teaching practices
- Offer CETL workshop/seminar series on effective microinterventions in the classroom¹

¹Sue and colleagues (2020) define microinterventions as “the everyday words or deeds, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate to targets of microaggressions (a) validation of their experiential reality, (b) value as a person, (c) affirmation of their racial or group identity, (d) support and encouragement, and (e) reassurance that they are not alone. [...] They are interpersonal tools that are intended to counteract, change or stop microaggressions by subtly or overtly confronting and educating the perpetrator” (p. 134).

For Staff:

- Mandate at least twice-a-year training on racial microaggressions for staff (especially in the financial aid office and academic departments)
- Incorporate training on racial microaggressions and racial microinterventions into onboarding training for residential hall staff including student workers
- Train residential hall staff on University and residential life policies on racial bias incidents (including reporting requirements and procedures for handling)

For Students:

- Offer mandatory, small-group, in-person training about racial microaggressions for students in residence halls, fraternities, and sororities
- Develop workshop series and training sessions on racial microaggressions and microinterventions each semester
- Create and disseminate across all campuses brochures about racial microaggressions to help students identify when racial microaggressions are occurring, and to empower them to respond appropriately
- Support the work of students who are documenting their experiences at the University such as Black.at.UConn
- Facilitate frequent intergroup dialogues on race, racial microaggressions, white privilege, and anti-racist practices
- Fund student initiatives related to diversity, equity, and inclusion events and activities
- Livestream diversity-related events to make them accessible to students (faculty and staff) across all UConn campuses
- Rotate location of diversity-related events across UConn campuses to ensure equitable access

Policy, Programmatic, and Curricular Changes

- Mandate 1-credit U.S. Anti-Black Racism course for all students (in addition to CA-4 Diversity General Education Requirement)
- Mandate inclusion of statement on zero tolerance for racial microaggressions and University's bias reporting procedures into all course syllabi

- Mandate inclusion and completion of racial microaggressions module into every HuskyCT course (much like plagiarism module)
- Allocate funding for racial microaggressions training each fiscal year
- Fund and commission yearly racial campus climate study to be released to the University community (aggregate data on racial bias incidents, racial microaggressions, and representation), accompanied by a strategic plan (updated yearly with achieved and unachieved goals) to address racial bias and racial microaggressions at each campus, and within each department, and academic unit.
- Incentives faculty and staff engagement in anti-racist, diversity, equity, and inclusion training.

In addition, based on findings of our study, we whole-heartedly support the calls made in the 2019-2020 Faculty and Staff of Color Town Hall Meetings Executive Summary and the 2017 Workforce Climate Survey Report to:

- diversify faculty and staff at UConn and
- incorporate diversity engagement activities in annual, merit, tenure, and promotion reviews.

University Communication/Public Relations

- Fund and develop university-wide information campaign to promote anti-racism, diversity, inclusion, and social justice
- Include a permanent DEI section in the UConn Daily Digest where diversity-related events, resources, policies are disseminated
- Create a social media campaign and ongoing plan for increasing awareness of racial microaggressions, and educating all members of the UConn Nation on how to disrupt racism and racial microaggressions
- Engage in transparent and prompt communication of racial bias incidents at all UConn campuses
- Distribute information about University's response including of consequences of racial bias incidents for perpetrators each semester
- Create and maintain racial bias incident dashboard to cultivate transparency
- Disseminate findings of annual racial climate survey to the entire University community
- Hold annual town hall meetings across University campuses to solicit feedback and suggestions on campus climate

Over the last two years, UConn has undergone a number of administrative changes, including the welcoming of a new President, Provost, Dean of CLAS, and Deans of other Colleges, Vice President & Chief Diversity Officer, among others. Cultivating diversity is high among this administration's objectives and we are optimistic that the President's strategic plan, emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion and student success will help remedy many of the problems highlighted in this report. Recent steps such as creating a reporting system (INFORM), which includes reporting bias incidents, and the mandatory "Welcome to the Pack" diversity and inclusion module for incoming undergraduate students represent important first steps toward creating a University environment that communicates that all students including students of color are welcome. However, the University has a great deal of work to do in order to overhaul a culture that has to any extent tolerated overt and covert microaggressions up to this point.

We conclude this report with a reminder of the six characteristics outlined by Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to define institutions of higher education. (These were also cited in the Provost's Commission on Institutional Diversity 2011-2012 Summary Report.) It is our hope that the information we shared in this report will advance UConn toward becoming a community that is purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative of all its members including students, (faculty, and staff) of color.



A Purposeful Community

A college or university is, above all, a purposeful community, a place where the intellectual life is central and where faculty and students work together to strengthen teaching and learning.

An Open Community

A college or university, at its best, is an open, honest community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed.

A Just Community

A college or university is a just community, a place where the dignity of all individuals is affirmed and where equality of opportunity is vigorously pursued.

A Disciplined Community

A college or university is a disciplined community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good.

A Caring Community

A college or university is a caring community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged.

A Celebrative Community

A college or university is a celebrative community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared.

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