



Spring 2016 Washington State University Vancouver Student Campus Climate Survey Results

Prepared by

Elias Cohen, Office of Academic Affairs
Helen Gregory, Office of Student Affairs

Kandy Robertson, Department of English and Chair of the WSU Vancouver Diversity Council

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Summary

The WSU Vancouver student campus climate survey was administered during spring 2016 term to help understand student attitudes concerning campus diversity, to evaluate the effectiveness of current diversity and equity initiatives, and to look for differences in student experience based upon differences in personal background. Analysis of survey responses revealed:

-Students generally expressed satisfaction with the educational experience at WSUV and generally viewed the diversity climate positively. Furthermore, students widely recognized the campus commitment to diversity and equity.

-Support for increasing campus diversity and increasing support for diversity initiatives was mixed. Campus average responses generally fell between support and lack of support. Analysis of differences between population groups revealed that students of color, women, and LGBTQ students were more likely to rate highly the importance of diversity support issues than were their peers.

-16% of respondents identified as having been impacted negatively based on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability status, or gender. 5% had experienced discriminatory acts. 11% witnessed acts of discrimination against others. Reporting of such incidents through official mechanisms was rare.

-Respondent comments indicated a wide range of attitudes concerning diversity efforts on campus. While some student supported such a focus, others expressed dissatisfaction with diversity advancement as taking away focus from the primary education mission of the university. Many respondents expressed the belief that the campus was biased and inhospitable to politically/socially conservative perspectives.

-When compared to results from the 2014 student survey, the present results reflect smaller differences between perceptions of campus climate based on demographic groups. The addition of comment sections in this year's survey allowed for greater depth in understanding of student attitudes.

Introduction

The Student Campus Climate Survey was administered over the 2016 spring term as part of an effort to understand student attitudes pertaining to campus diversity on behalf of the WSU Vancouver Diversity Council and the Office of Academic Affairs. 358 Students participated, comprising roughly 11% of the total student population.

Survey items were organized around five themes: (1) academic experience, (2) attitudes toward persistence, (3) specific diversity educational activities, (4) diversity climate, and (5) support for diversity action. For each theme, participants were asked to respond to statements using a five-point Likert scale as well as to provide elaborated feedback via short comment sections. A final survey section allowed for the tabulation of specific incidents of bias or discrimination. Summaries of multiple choice items are presented in this report followed by a summary of common themes found in respondent comments.

For more detailed response data, an appendix has been attached depicting response data for each question.

Respondent Profile

The following figures display demographic characteristics of survey respondents. Similar to institutional data, 24% of respondents who chose to identify their racial/ethnic background selected groups of color¹. Each individual was asked to select as many identity groups as appropriate. The results were as follows.

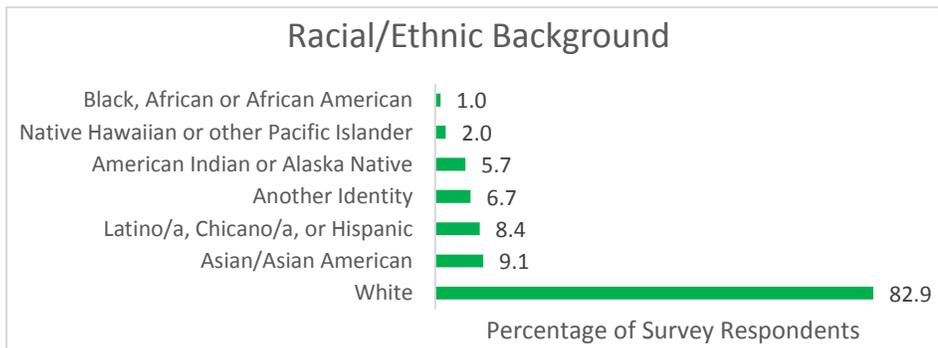


Figure 1 Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds identified by respondents. Respondents were asked to select as many backgrounds as appropriate. Summed percentages equal greater than 100%.

Gender	
Female	62.1%
Male	36.9%
Genderqueer	1.3%
Transgender	0.3%

Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	89.3%
Bisexual	5.8%
Gay	1.7%
Lesbian	1.4%
Asexual	0.7%
Queer	0.7%
Another Identity	0.7%

Age	
Under 21	21.1%
21-30	52.0%
31-40	15.1%
41-50	7.6%
Over 50	4.3%

¹ The total percentage of respondents identifying as students of color, 24%, includes any respondent who selected *at least one* minority background. In many cases, respondents selected multiple categories.

22% of the student population answered yes to having one or more dependent children. 11% identified as having a disability that substantially impairs one or more major life functions. Finally, the percentage of respondents who transferred from another college or university was 74%. The margin of error for these questions was 5%.

In most cases, percentages of populations are close to previously estimated campus population sizes. The drawing of a representative sample supports the conclusion that average item responses are representative of campus views in general. However, it is worth noting that the small number of respondents in many sub-groups (for instance Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander students) prevents the responses of those groups from being viewed as representative of the demographic segment. Nonetheless, it is possible in some cases to find statistical differences between population groups within the respondent pool itself.

Academic Experience and General Satisfaction

Respondents were asked to rate satisfaction with their academic experience at WSUV as well as to rate agreement with statements pertaining to their experiences with employees and other students. The survey employed a scale which ranged from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5).

Responses for the campus as a whole were generally positive. 81% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience at WSU Vancouver with only 7% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Few differences existed between student demographic groups for any of these high-level satisfaction statements. This pattern is similar to the last student survey conducted in 2014, suggesting there is not currently reason to suspect differences between groups in overall satisfaction.

Attitudes toward persistence

When asked about persistence at WSUV, only 5% of respondents suggested they were planning on withdrawing prior to graduation². Again, no differences were found in the percentage of students considering withdrawal based upon demographic group. The consistently low rate of considering withdrawal in this year's survey stands in contrast to the results of the 2014 survey. In that survey students identifying from racial/ethnic minority groups were found to be more likely to be considering withdrawal than white students, warranting further attention. While the disappearance of this difference is encouraging, further monitoring is needed to determine if the change results from campus improvements rather than fluctuations from small respondent groups.

Diversity climate and specific diversity educational activities

² An incoming student intention survey administered to new freshmen from 2008-2014 suggests that roughly 31% of entering freshmen students intend to use WSUV as a launching point for study at another institution rather than staying to earn a degree. This 31% presents a discrepancy with the 5% suggested in this survey, indicating either that student goals change quickly after matriculation or that students who intend to leave (or are already in the process of doing so) are not well represented by this survey. Further differences may result from the imbalance of transfer students and those admitted as freshmen.

Respondents were asked to rate several statements about the diversity and equity climate on campus. As a group, responses to the general climate reflect the perception that the campus displays strong support for this aspect of its mission. For instance, 79% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The university is committed to promoting diversity and equity on our campus.” Only 6% disagreed. Similarly, 77% of respondents agreed that “Individuals from different backgrounds get along at this university” while only 4% disagreed.

In order to understand the student educational experience at a finer detail level as it relates to diversity and equity topics, respondents were asked to evaluate statements about specific activities (See figure 4). The results suggest that while most students are engaged in discussions related to such societal influences, topics do not receive equal attention. 74% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I have participated in discussions about socio-economic differences within and/or outside the classroom.” The percentage was identical for discussions about race/ethnic relations, 67% for discussions about sexual orientation, and 63% for discussions about ability/disability status.

Support for diversity action

Distinct from other sections of the survey, the *support for diversity action* section attempted to quantify student preferences with regard to increasing diversity and equity efforts. These support statements received decreased agreement in relation to other sections of the survey. 41% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “the university should recruit and retain more faculty and staff of color”. 44% agreed “the university should recruit and retain more students of color.” 29% agreed that “The university should increase gender diversity of faculty and staff”. 30% agreed that “The university should increase lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer representation.” Of the five statements indicating support for increases in action, the only one to receive agreement from a majority of respondents (54%) was the statement in support of disability: “The university should increase support for faculty, staff and students with disabilities”.

While these statements do not suggest strong support for further action, it is difficult to interpret whether such preferences originate in a lack of support for the missions of diversity and equity within the university in general or the view that the university has already achieved success in these domains. Indeed 62.4% of respondents agreed with the statement “Students, faculty and staff at this university are diverse.” This suggests that students may not view increases in campus diversity as necessary.

Differences between groups

The *support for diversity action* section also contained the greatest number of response differences by student group. Four demographic dimensions, race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability status corresponded with attitudinal differences (see Table 1 below). In each case, individuals identifying from a historically disadvantaged group (racial/ethnic minorities, women, LGBTQ individuals, students with disabilities) were more likely to identify a greater need to increase diverse campus representation or support efforts. In many cases, these increases were not confined to the demographic dimension that differentiated an individual. For instance, individuals identifying with a racial/ethnic minority group were more likely to agree with a need to increase gender and sexual identity representation in addition to racial/ethnic diversity.

	Campus Average	Differences based on population group				
		Race/Ethnicity (Minority)	Race/Ethnicity (Underrepresented Minority)	Gender (Female)	Sexual Orientation (LGBTQ)	Disability Status (Disability)
The university should recruit and retain more faculty and staff of color.	3.48	↑.62	↑.91	↑.42		
The university should recruit and retain more students of color.	3.54	↑.59	↑.91	↑.37		
The university should increase gender diversity of faculty and staff.	3.25	↑.51	↑.73	↑.30	↑.40	
The university should increase lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer representation.	3.16	↑.40		↑.50	↑.89	
The university should increase support for faculty, staff and students with disabilities.	3.71	↑.28	↑.61			↑.36
The university focuses too much attention on diversity-related issues.	2.90	↓.42		↓.43	↓1.11	

Table 1. Numerical summary data for questions related to *diversity support*. Campus average numbers treat responses as a 5-point scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Columns 2-6 show the results of comparisons by group type. Where a number is presented, it represents a statistically significant difference between groups. The arrow indicates the direction of mean difference in favor of the group listed in parenthesis (e.g. female students rated employee recruitment .42 higher than male students). Where group comparisons did not produce significant differences the table is left blank.

Another important difference between groups concerned the topic of fairness. In rating the statement “Faculty and instructors give feedback and evaluate students fairly, regardless of student’s race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, or disability status”, respondents identifying from underrepresented minority backgrounds were less likely to agree than their white peers. This suggests a key discrepancy in how students perceive treatment.

Finally, students identifying with disabilities were less likely to be satisfied by available learning opportunities at WSU Vancouver.

Incidents of bias

With the goal of gathering data on specific incidents of bias, survey participants were asked to identify whether or not in the past year they had (1) been impacted negatively because of their “race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability status, or gender”, (2) been threatened or experienced discriminatory acts, or (3) witnessed discrimination against others. The following table lists the percentage of respondents who identified such incidents according to the source of bias. 16% of respondents identified as having been impacted negatively based on one or more of the listed factors. 5% had experienced discriminatory acts. 11% witnessed acts of discrimination against others.

	Race/ Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Religion	Age	Disability Status	Gender
I have been impacted negatively at WSU Vancouver because of my:	5.8%	3.5%	4.2%	4.8%	2.6%	8.4%
In the past year, I have been threatened or experienced discriminatory acts at WSU Vancouver because of my:	2.0%	0.7%	2.0%	2.9%	0.7%	1.6%
In the past year, I have witnessed an act or acts of discrimination against others at WSU Vancouver based upon:	3.6%	4.3%	2.0%	2.3%	3.6%	3.9%

Table 2. Percentage of respondents identifying incidents of bias or discrimination. Some respondents selected multiple categories.

Respondents were also asked about reporting of bias incidents. Only a small percentage of students who selected that they had experienced incidents stated that they had reported those incidents to campus authorities (19% of those who had been impacted negatively, 22% of those who had been threatened or experience discrimination, and 22% of those who had witnessed an act of discrimination). In comments about reporting, most respondents tied their lack of reporting to belief that such a report would not effect change in the identified behavior. Many feared retribution from faculty in the form of grades. Others could not identify the proper avenue to report such incidents. Similarly, when the entire subject pool was asked about reporting discrimination, only 45% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “in the event that I witness or experience an act of discrimination, I know where to report the incident to campus authorities.

Respondent Comments

42% of respondents used one or more of the comment sections to elaborate on rating answers to the survey. For the most part, the commenters were a representative sub-sample of students, while this group contained a slightly smaller percentage of minority and female students than the underlying respondent population.

Comments addressing the diversity climate represented a broad range of views. Some commenters reflected the view that efforts to support diversity should be increased in addition to increasing the competency of faculty to handle the task of instructing in a way that is sensitive to all students and raises student understanding concerning the societal complexities surrounding issues such as race and socioeconomic status. Commenters in this group also mentioned the need to diversify faculty and staff. Still, many identified the attention to diversity and equity as a strength of the campus. One student wrote, “This campus promotes/advertises diversity more than any campus I’ve been to.”

However, a more sizeable group of commenters expressed frustration with the campus’s focus on diversity and equity, suggesting that this focus is in opposition to a more important focus on quality education at WSUV and a drain of resources. In a typical comment, a student wrote “By focusing so much on diversity, the university is alienating a large percentage of the student body.” Another wrote “I have felt that because I do not identify or participate in diversity related events I am not catered to by any

means. If I don't write a paper about social justice I will get a poor grade". Similarly, many commenters emphasized that considerations of diversity should be absent from hiring, for example, "Hire those that are qualified for the job. Don't hire them just because they are a different race. Hire people that are fit for the job."

Many of these same commenters expressed that they felt some views were more valued at WSUV. A frequent sentiment included the idea that *political* diversity should be more emphasized and conservative viewpoints should be more respected inside and outside of the classroom. Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with a perceived left-leaning bias of the campus. "Only liberal classes are taught and conservatives are left feeling like outsiders. Diversity and inclusion is not supposed to be only left, liberal, LGBT, and people of color, but anyone not meeting that criteria is left out."

Respondents historically viewed as "non-traditional" students emphasized a number of obstacles on campus. For instance, older students reflected views of being marginalized by their peers and the view that the inflexibility of courses made study difficult to balance with their lives. Said one, "I feel WSUV does an inadequate job to help students in my same age and lifestyle to be successful. Limited scheduling options, programs, extra-curricular activities, limited representation, and inability to take Global online classes mixed with on-campus classes."

Students identifying as having disabilities voiced frustration with obstacles as well, as exemplified in this statement:

Some faculty members question and sometimes will not allow accommodations that have been approved by the Access Center. Many will ask why the accommodation is necessary and ask for specific medical reason/necessity for the accommodation which I feel is a violation of my privacy. I am treated differently from staff because of my disability. I have been targeted as a difficult student by staff members because I advocate for my needs as a disabled student.

No topic attracted dissatisfaction as much as the campus *Gender Neutral Bathroom Week*. While a few commenters expressed support, the majority of those who mentioned the initiative were strongly against it. Said one, "I felt extremely uncomfortable during gender-neutral bathroom week and did not feel comfortable using the restroom on campus that entire week. Many of the students that I spoke with also felt uncomfortable and felt that their safety was compromised." Reactions to the GNBW initiative were, at times, distinct from student opinions regarding accommodations for transgender students, with some students indicating that making single occupancy bathrooms on campus available all the time would be more appropriate. Many felt that GNBW was poorly publicized and explained as well as disruptive.

Evident in the responses of some students was the belief that issues associated with diversity and equity are irrelevant to certain majors. This was especially true for engineering and computer science students. For example, "I'm a CS student. No one cares about diversity because it doesn't matter in our major."

Finally, it is worth noting that the first section of the survey dealt with general satisfaction with campus academics. When students provided comments in this section, these comments rarely touched upon diversity and equity issues but tended to reflect on the quality of instruction (with a roughly equal percentage of praise and criticism). Rather, comments concerning diversity issues were concentrated within survey sections explicitly devoted to these issues. Such concentration hints that diversity and equity

concerns were not highly elevated in what was viewed by respondents as central issues to their academic experience.

Discussion

Both multiple-choice responses and written comments suggest widespread recognition of the campus's prioritization of advancing diversity and equity. However, evaluation of that priority is distributed across a wide (and perhaps bimodal) spectrum. Some students applaud this emphasis and seek to bolster the effectiveness of associated efforts further. Other students have a negative perception of efforts associated with diversity and equity and perceive such efforts as symptomatic of a left-leaning campus that does not value conservative viewpoints.

How should campus administrators understand these results in light of a campus population that is quickly becoming more diverse and in light of a national tide of calls for greater recognition for equity efforts on college campuses? In the current make-up of campus, many WSUV students of color in particular continue to seek increased awareness of issues of bias and structural inequality in society and on campus. However, there is some resistance to such efforts at WSUV amongst the student body. Quantifying the strength of that resistance is difficult given the limitations of a small survey, small respondent pool, and smaller group of passionate commenters.

College campuses are perhaps the strongest venue for individuals to learn from each other and gain awareness of perspectives previously foreign to their experience. Diversity and equity efforts are entirely consistent with this mission. However, students who perceive these efforts as part of a political agenda are recoiling rather than gaining from them educationally.

WSUV's 2016 – 2021 Strategic Plan has set ambitious goals toward achieving equitable educational outcomes across student groups and building a climate of dialogue around equity and diversity issues. In the coming years, the campus plans to build infrastructure in support these goals and to support a rapidly changing student population. These efforts are likely to enjoy the greatest success if campus dialogue is seen as respecting all viewpoints. Achieving equity goals will require faculty, staff, and students to become knowledgeable about the many perspectives that characterize our community and skilled in bridging the divide between them.

Another issue arising from these results is the lack of effectiveness perceived in reporting of bias incidents. To some extent this perception reflects the reality of the complex nature of such incidents. Cases of clear discrimination are outnumbered by cases of bias with varying levels of severity. The campus community will benefit from better understanding not only of official reporting structure but of what actions are taken in response.

Appendix

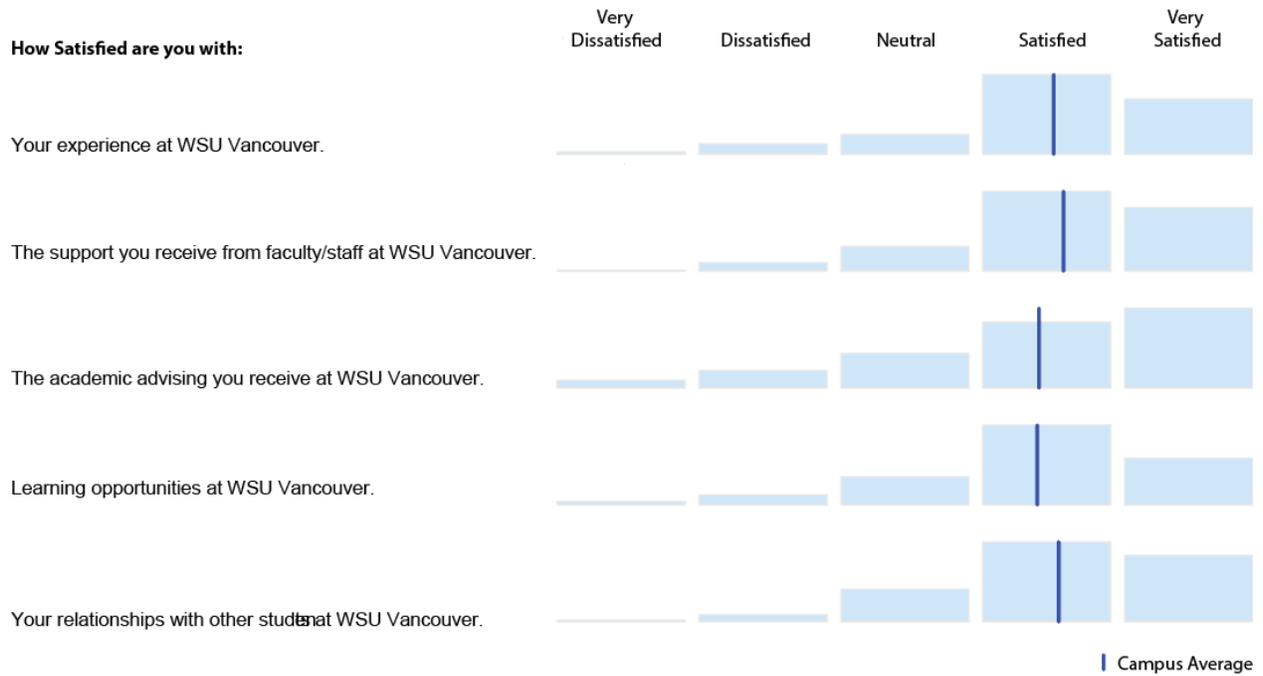


Figure 2 | Summary data for questions related to academic experience. The height of light blue rectangles reflects the frequency of response for each of the five response options. Dark blue vertical lines reflect the mean response for all respondents who answered a given question when responses were converted to numerical values.

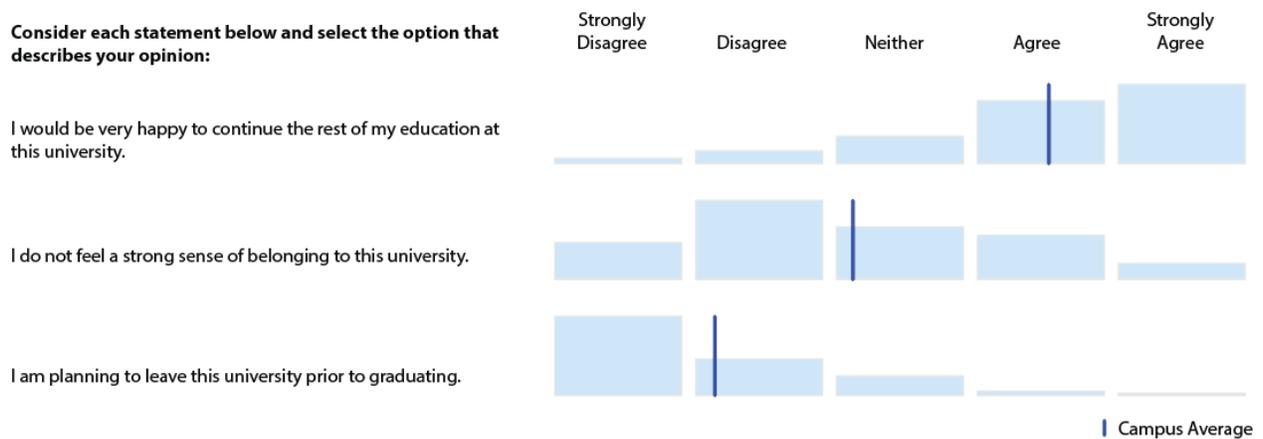


Figure 3 | Summary data for questions related to attitudes toward persistence.

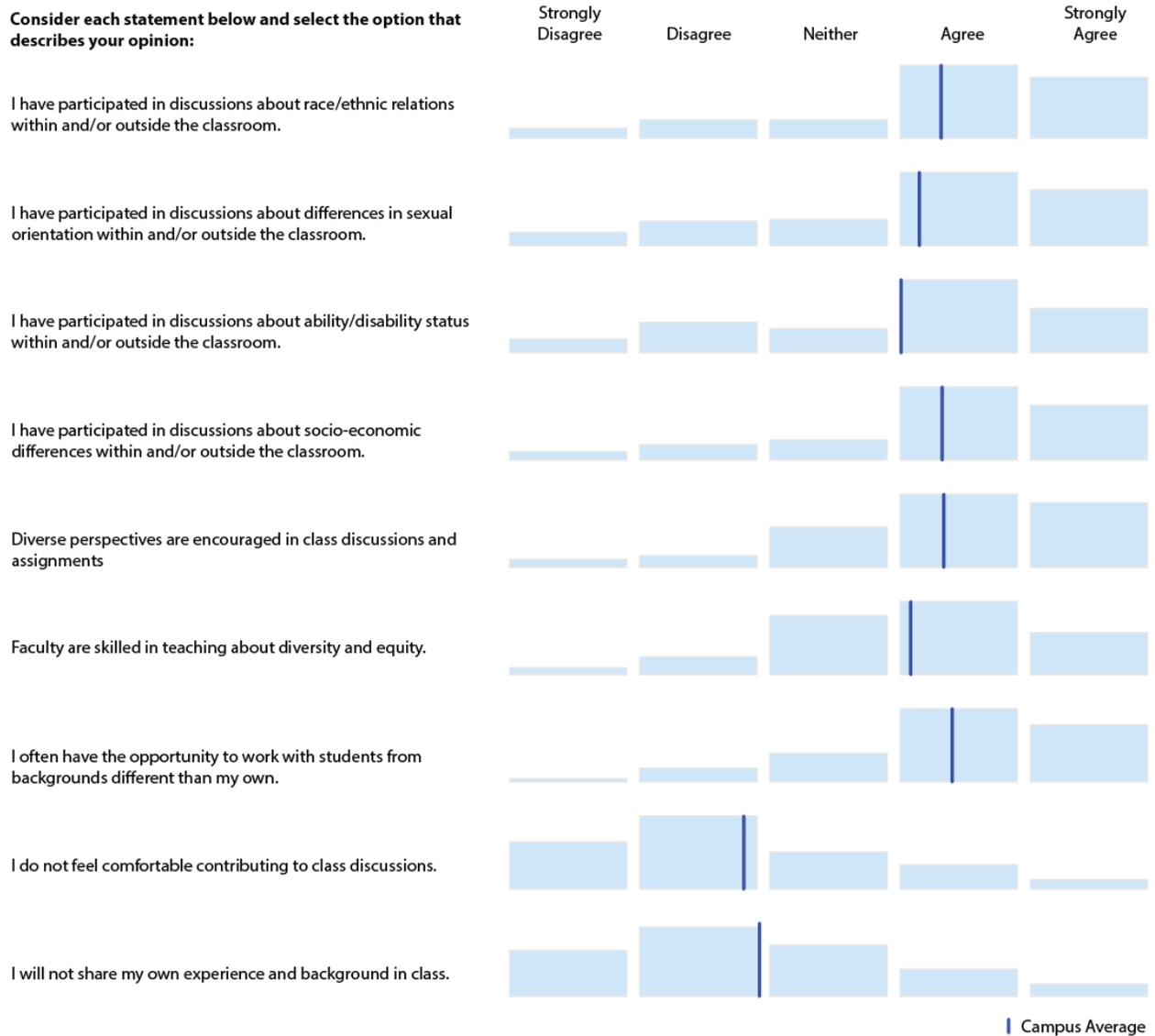


Figure 4 | Summary data for questions related to specific diversity educational activities.

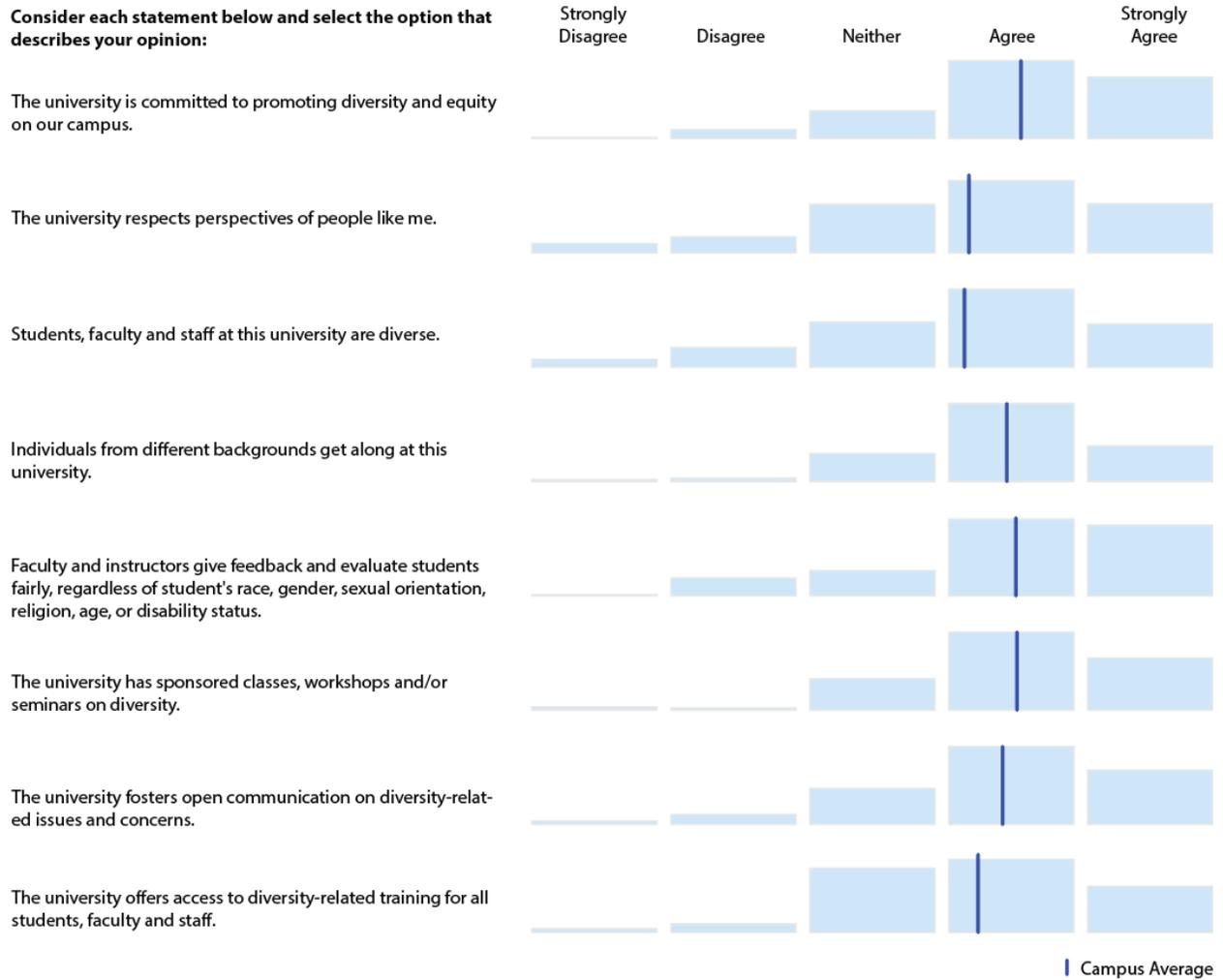


Figure 5 | Summary data for questions related to general diversity experience.

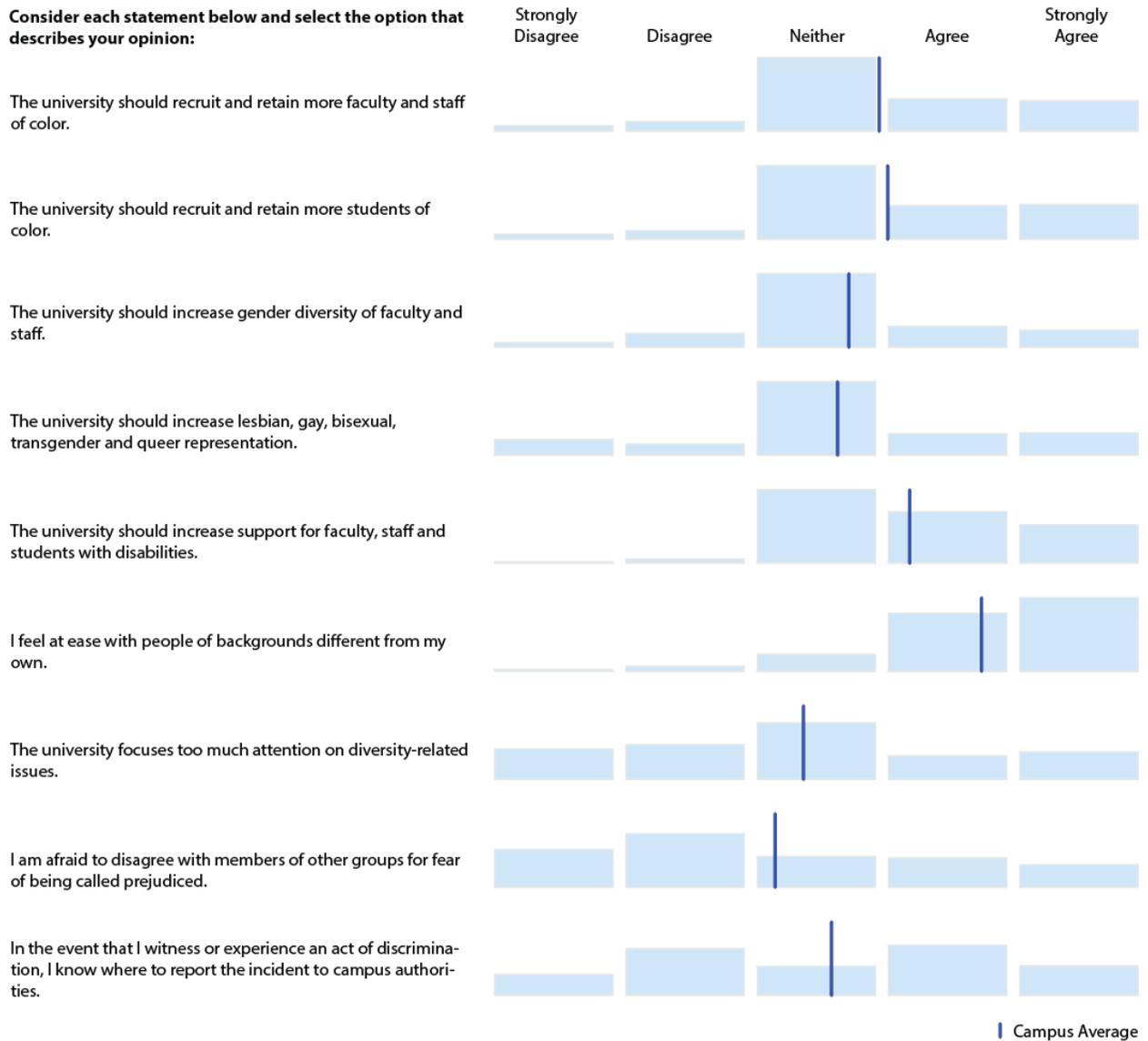


Figure 6 | Summary data for questions related to support for diversity action.