

2018 DIVERSE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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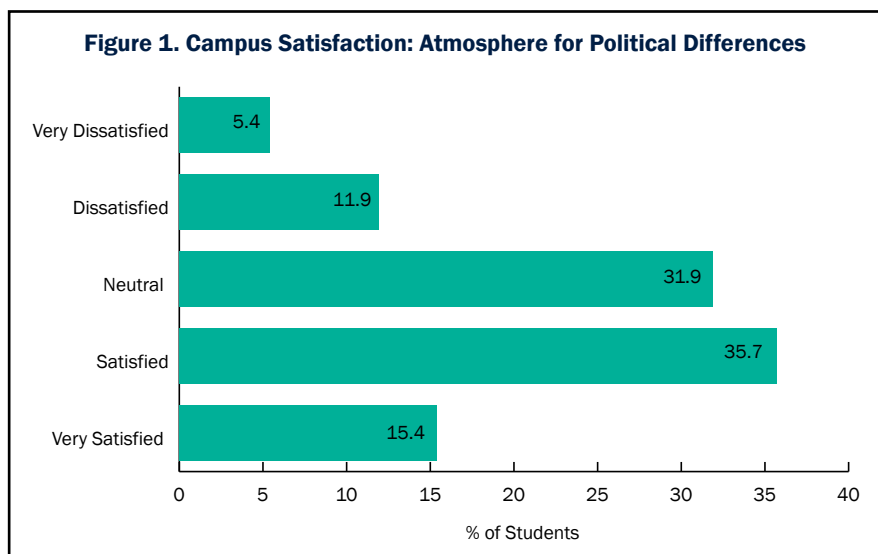
The Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) survey has been administered by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) since 2011. The sample for the 2018 survey includes 12,649 students from 26 different institutions, including 272 students from one two-year college. The aims of the DLE survey are for institutions to evaluate their campus climate, explore their institutional practices, cultivate an environment that encourages diversity, and understand how students with different identities experience the overall climate of the college/university. This brief discusses the institutional climate for diversity of opinions, freedom of expression, and the overall sense of safety for students. However, not all of the findings ring true across all sectors of the student population, therefore, this brief disaggregates the findings according to students' gender identity, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and political identity.

ATMOSPHERE FOR DIFFERENCES

Colleges and universities must continue to strive to create spaces where students feel safe and have the freedom to explore different aspects of their social and political identities. More than ever college campuses in the United States are grappling with how to best do this in the midst of protests, uncivil discourse, and deep political divide. Balancing the needs of a wide spectrum of students is increasingly more complex. Institutional agents often feel conflicted on how to best provide an inclusive environment which celebrates the diversity of its most vulnerable students while also protecting free speech for all students. Understanding students perceptions and experiences can begin to explain how to unpack this paradox.

The DLE survey asks students if they are satisfied with the atmosphere for differences in a range of areas such as: political beliefs, religious beliefs, and sexual identity diversity. As Figure 1 shows, about half of the students (51.0%) that took the survey were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the atmosphere for political differences at their institution.

Overall there were small differences for this item by race and gender. When disaggregated by race, we found that the smallest percentage of students that selected "satisfied" or "very satisfied" were Native American students (30.4%), followed by Multiracial students (38.4%) and White students (40.4%). Meanwhile, the highest percentage of students who were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the political atmosphere were Black (43.6%), Asian (43.5%), and Latinx (43.2%). In terms of gender identity, 48.5% of



male, 52.7% of female, 46.2% of trans men (25 students total), 87.5% of trans women (8 students total), 41.4% of genderqueer/gender non-conforming, and only 27.9% of students who identified as “different identity” reported being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the atmosphere for political differences.

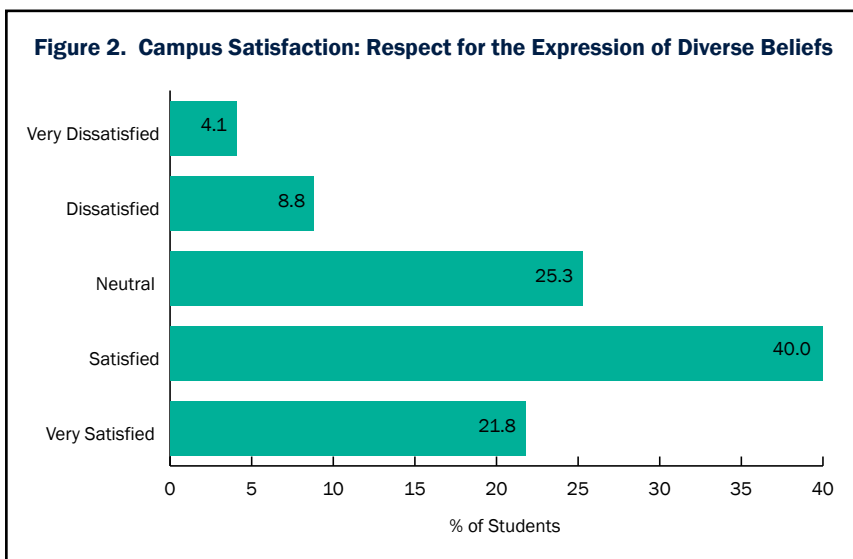
However, if we examine students’ overall satisfaction with the campus atmosphere for political differences according to their self-identified political views, the findings illustrate some of the complexities that college administrators and staff are facing. Of students who identify their political views as far left and liberal, 53.0% and 55.5%, respectively, indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the campus’ atmosphere for political difference. By contrast, of those who identified at the opposite end of the political spectrum, only 32.6% who identified as far right and 43.7% who identified as conservative felt the same. Although students at either end of the political spectrum are in the minority, it is important to recognize that these students may need additional support.

The DLE survey also asks students if they feel like the campus atmosphere has respect for the expression of diverse beliefs. As Figure 2 shows, about 3 out of 5 (61.8%) students were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the campus atmosphere for respect for the expression of diverse beliefs. Disaggregating this figure by race, 66.5% of Asian students, 60.8% of Black students, 62.5% of White students, 58.5% of Latinx students, 58.3% of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students, 57.6% of Multiracial students, and 56.5% of Native American students were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the atmosphere for the expression of diverse beliefs. In terms of gender identity, 58.7% of men, 63.6%

of women, 50.0% of trans men, 75.0% of trans women, 52.1% of genderqueer/gender non-conforming, and 32.8% of different identity students indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the campus atmosphere for respect for the expression of diverse beliefs.

Looking at this item along the spectrum of political views shows a slight contrast in students’ experiences. While 55.7% of students who identify as far left and 65.2% of students who identify as liberal indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the atmosphere on campus for diverse beliefs, a smaller percentage of students who identified as “far right” (43.8%) indicated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the atmosphere for diverse beliefs. These figures show that some sectors of the student population may feel less supported than others.

Differences among students along the political spectrum also depicted other interesting realities. For the most part students with different political identities agree (57.8%) that the institution encourages them [students] to have a public voice and share their ideas openly. But the most conservative students (29.3% who identify as far right) are more likely to disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. Comparing this to other students: conservatives (16.8%), middle-of-the-road (11.6%), liberal (10.8%), and far left (19.6%) shows that students on the far right may feel like the institution does not encourage their opinions being shared openly. Interestingly, a higher percentage (36.7%) of students who identify as far right “strongly disagree” or “disagree” with the statement “I feel a sense of belonging to this campus,” compared to students who are politically conservative (21.9%), middle-of-the-road (22.2%) liberal (22.6%), and far left (28.5%).



Additionally, students that characterized their political views as far right or conservative more frequently felt discrimination for their political views (30.3% and 15.0% “often” or “very often,” respectively). In contrast, only 2.8% of students that identified as liberal, 3.7% middle-of-the-road, and 6.1% far left indicated that they “often” or “very often” experience discrimination because of their political beliefs on campus.

In terms of how “safe” students feel on campus, students who identified as far left were more likely to indicate that they “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “I feel unsafe on this campus”

(14.4%) in comparison to other groups (8.1% liberal, 6.7% middle-of-the-road, 6.6% conservative, and 8.1% far right).

WHO ARE THE STUDENTS ALONG THE DIFFERENT POINTS OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM?

As shown in Figure 3, students who responded to the 2018 DLE survey self-identified along the political spectrum in the following ways: 6.2% far left, 37.9% liberal, 37.6% middle-of-the-road, 17.3% conservative, and 1.0% far right. In the following section, we break down students along the political spectrum in terms of their race, gender identity, and societal goals.

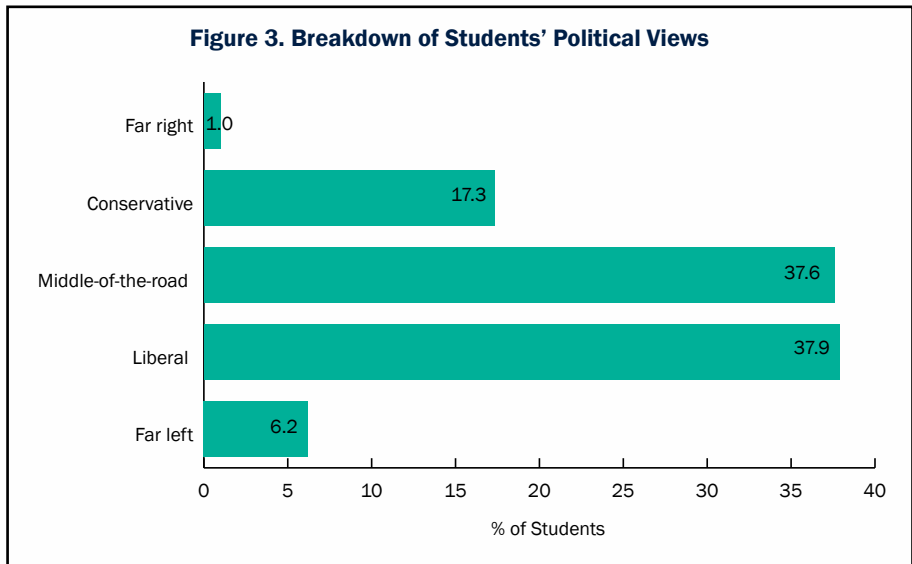
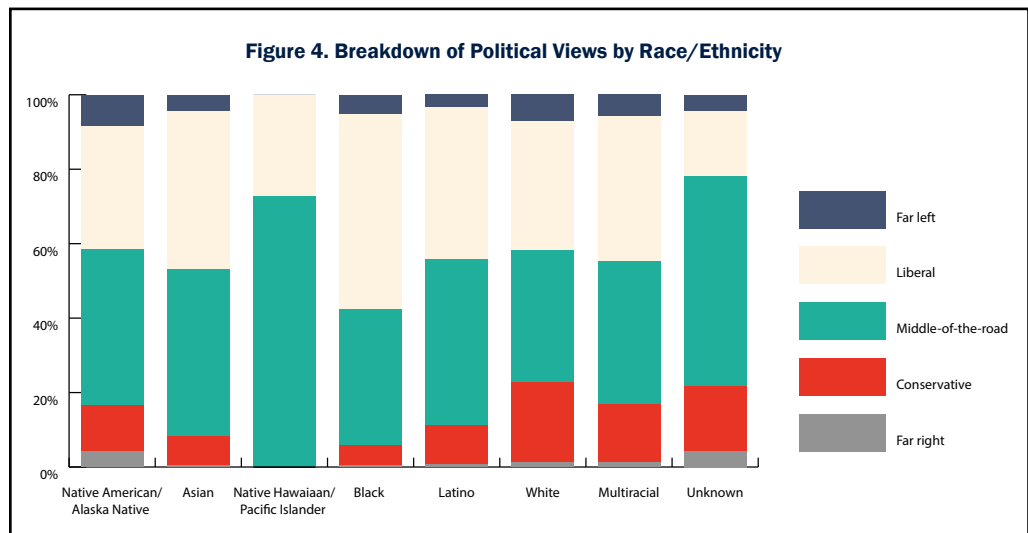


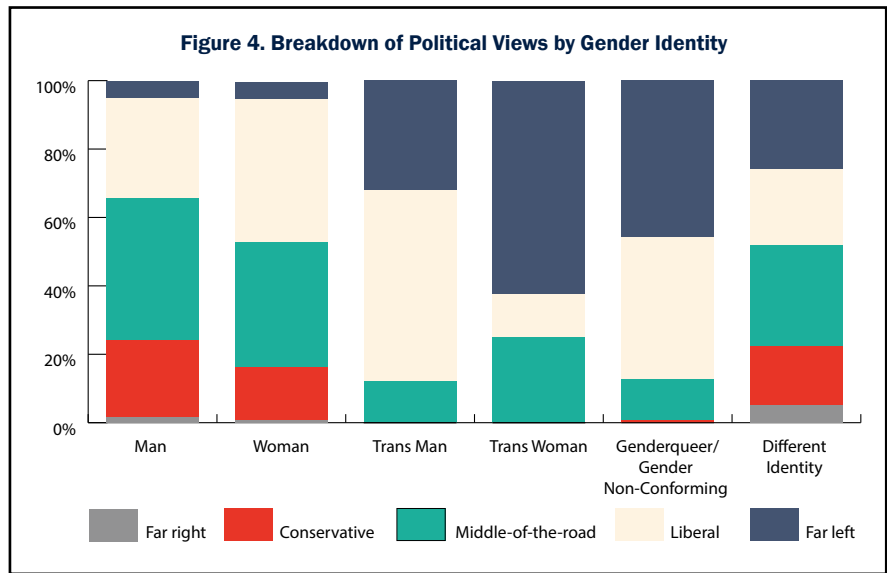
Figure 4 shows in detail how each race group identifies along the political identity spectrum. The majority of students in all major race groups identified as either middle-of-the-road or liberal. Although only 24 Native American students took the survey, 41.7% of these students identified as middle-of-the-road, followed by liberal (33.3%), conservative (12.5%), far left (8.3%), and far right (4.2%). Similarly, even though only



11 students identified as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 72.7% identified as middle-of-the-road, while 27.3% identified as liberal, 1.9% as conservative, 0.7% as far left, and 0.1% as far right. For Asian students, 45.1% identified as middle-of-the-road, followed by liberal (42.2%), conservative (7.9%), far left (4.4%), and far right (0.3%). Latinx and White students, as well as those who identify their race group as “unknown” identify as middle-of-the-road (44.6%, 35.4%, and 56.5% respectively). Finally, about half of all Black (52.4%) and over a third of Multiracial 39.1% identify as liberal.

breakdown of the political views for students along different gender identities. The majority of students who identify as “man” (41.7%) identify their political identity as middle-of-the-road. On the other hand, women largely identify as liberal (41.8%). Although other gender identities are represented at a smaller rate within this student sample, we are able to see that they also largely identify as liberal or far left and middle-of-the-road. For instance, of the 25 students who identify as “trans man,” 56.0% of them also identify as liberal. For the eight students who identify as “trans woman,” 62.5% identify as “far left.” For the 120 students who identify as “genderqueer/gender non-conforming,” 45.8% also identify as far left. Finally, for the 58 students who identify as “different identity,” 29.3% identify as middle-of-the road.

Disaggregating students’ political identity along their gender identification shows that students are evenly spread throughout the spectrum. Figure 5 shows the percentage



CONCLUSION

As the United States has become more polarized over issues of racial discrimination, immigration, foreign relations, and the overall future direction of the country (Doherty, 2017) it is vital that colleges and universities continue to foster an atmosphere that allows for transformative learning. Transformative learning is the process of students actively challenging their own beliefs and prior formed judgements (Mezirow, 1978). This process of transformation is more likely to take place if students can openly discuss their ideas, identify where these ideas come from, and critically reflect (Mezirow, 1978). Since students’ political views are often closely tied to the multiple ways they self-identify

ENGAGING WITH PERSONAL POLITICAL VIEWS AND THE LARGER SOCIETY

In terms of understanding students’ desire for reflecting on their own political views as well as impacting the larger community and/or society, our survey found that some groups might be more interested in doing so than others. The DLE survey asked students if they would like to continue to learn more about current social and political issues and students all along the political spectrum largely agreed that they would be interested in doing so. Leading all other groups, 47.5% of students who identified as liberal agreed with this statement. In comparison, 44.0% of middle-of-the-road, 40.3% of conservative, 35.7% far right, and 32.6% far left felt the same. Most students from every political view indicated that they “frequently” evaluated their own political ideology on an issue. Overall, 70.0% of students on the far left indicated that they “frequently” critically evaluated their position on a political issue, in comparison to 59.3% of liberal students, 48.7% of middle-of-the-road students, 44.7% of conservative students, and 42.9% of far right students.

(Appiah, 2018), it is imperative that institutions understand how students from different identity groups view the atmosphere for discussion and engagement. Although, as data from this brief shows, there is more likely to be overlapping agreement, the smaller groups of students who feel isolated also deserve to be heard, understood, and given a space for transformational learning. Affording all students revelatory and core-shaking experiences is indeed one of the purposes of higher education in our country (Gutman, 1999).

As far as students who identified that their goal was to keep up to date with political affairs, most students said that this was “somewhat important” or “very important” (total of 74.5%). The majority of students who identified as far right (37.4%), liberal (44.3%), or far left (38.8%) felt that keeping up to date with political affairs was “very important” while students who identified as conservative (42.9%), middle-of-the-road (46.3%) indicated that this was “somewhat important.”

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