Executive Summary

Resistance begins with people confronting pain, whether it's theirs or somebody else's, and wanting to do something to change it.[1]

— bell hooks, *Yearning*

American colleges and universities are charged with creating an environment characterized by equal access for all students, faculty, and staff regardless of cultural differences, in which individuals are not just tolerated but valued. Institutional missions suggest that higher education values multicultural awareness and understanding within an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Institutional strategic plans advocate creating welcoming and inclusive climates grounded in respect, nurtured by dialogue, and evidenced by a pattern of civil interaction.

The North Dakota University System (NDUS) believes in creating such an environment as is evidenced by the system's support and commitment to this project and its own mission statement. The project was commissioned by the Chancellor's Office and the Diversity Council to identify challenges and implement initiatives to create an inclusive, socially just climate. To minimize internal bias, the Diversity Council contracted with an outside consultant[2] to assist in identifying the challenges confronting NDUS and the Minot State University (MSU) community with respect to underrepresented[3] employees and students. The project was a proactive initiative by the Diversity Council to review the climate on campus for underrepresented groups. An internal assessment was conducted, and the results will be used to identify specific strategies for addressing the challenges, supporting positive diversity initiatives, and developing a strategic plan to maximize equity at MSU. This report provides an overview of the process for maximizing equity and the findings of the climate assessment, including the results of the campus-wide survey and a thematic analysis of comments provided by survey respondents. This assessment will help to lay the groundwork for future initiatives.

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[1] hooks, b. (1990). *Yearning*. Boston: South End Press.
[2] Rankin & Associates Consulting was the firm hired to conduct the project.
[3] Underrepresented groups can be based on age, ancestry, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability, national origin, religious creed, or sexual orientation.

Due to the inherent complexity of the topic of diversity, it is crucial to examine the multiple dimensions of diversity in higher education. The conceptual model used as the foundation for this assessment of campus climate was developed by Smith et al. (1997) and modified by Rankin (2002).[4] The survey questions were informed by the work of Rankin (2003).[5]

The Diversity Council and various constituent groups reviewed drafts of the survey. The final survey contained 62 questions and one additional open-ended question for respondents to provide commentary regarding their experiences. It was distributed to the campus community during the spring 2006 semester. All members of the MSU community were invited to participate in the survey, and particular effort was made to recruit respondents from underrepresented populations. The survey was designed for respondents to provide information about their personal experiences with regard to climate issues, their perceptions of the climate for underrepresented members of the academic community, and their perceptions of institutional actions, including administrative policies and academic initiatives regarding climate issues and concerns on campus.

To allow constituent groups the opportunity to respond to the findings of the assessment and provide suggested revisions and/or further clarifications, the Diversity Committee reviewed a draft of the final report. A summary of the findings, presented in bullet form below, suggests that while MSU has several challenges with regard to diversity issues, these challenges are found in higher education institutions across the country[5]

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[4] See Appendix D for a more detailed description of the Transformational Tapestry© model.
[5] Rankin (forthcoming) is a national study examining the campus climate for underrepresented groups.

Sample Demographics

654 surveys were returned representing the following:

- 21.8 percent response rate
- 441 students, 75 faculty, 99 staff, and 12 administrators
- 53 people of color[6]
- 156 people who identified as having a physical, cognitive, or emotional disability
- 21 people who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or "uncertain" of their sexuality
- 475 women; 171 men; 2 transgender[7]
- 119 people who identified their spiritual affiliation as other than Christian (including those with no affiliation)

Quantitative Findings

Personal Experiences with Campus Climate[8]

- **A small percentage of respondents reported that they personally experienced offensive, hostile, or intimidating conduct that interfered unreasonably with their ability to work or learn on campus on campus (hereafter referred to as harassment).[9] "Position on campus" was most often cited as the reason given for the harassment. People of color and sexual minorities[10] experienced such harassment more often than White people, and many of them felt it was due to their race or sexual orientation. Harassment largely went unreported.**

  o 16 percent of respondents had personally experienced offensive, hostile, or intimidating conduct that interfered unreasonably with their ability to work or learn on campus.
  o The conduct was most often believed to be based on the respondents' position on campus, age, gender, education level, and political views.

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[6] While recognizing the vastly different experiences of people of various racial identities (e.g., Chicano(a) versus African-American or Latino(a) versus Asian-American), and those experiences within these identity categories (e.g., Hmong versus Chinese), Rankin and Associates found it necessary to collapse some of these categories to conduct the analyses due to the small numbers of respondents in the individual categories.

[7] "Transgender" refers to identity that does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender, but combines or moves between these (Oxford English Dictionary, 2003). *OED Online*. (2004, March) London, UK: Oxford University Press. Retrieved February 17, 2006, from http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00319380..

[8] Listings in the narrative are those responses with the greatest percentages. For a complete listing of the results, the reader is directed to the tables in the narrative and Appendix C.

[9] Under the United States Code Title 18 Subsection 1514(c)1, harassment is defined as "a course of conduct directed at a specific person that causes substantial emotional distress in such a person and serves no legitimate purpose" (http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/vii.html). In higher education institutions, legal issues discussions define harassment as any conduct that has unreasonably interfered with one's ability to work or learn on campus. The questions used in this survey to uncover participants' personal and observed experiences with harassment were designed using these definitions.

[10] Sexual minorities are defined, for the purposes of this report, as people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

- Compared with 16 percent of White people, 21 percent of people of color had personally experienced such conduct.
- Of respondents of color who reported experiencing this conduct, 55 percent stated it was because of their ethnicity.
- Compared with 16 percent of heterosexual people, 38 percent of LGB and "uncertain" respondents had personally experienced such conduct.
- Of sexual minority respondents who reported experiencing this conduct, 38 percent stated it was because of their sexual orientation.
- A higher percentage of women (18%) than men (11%) experienced harassment; 28 percent of women and 6 percent of men said it was based on their gender.
- 23 percent of respondents who experienced this harassment made a complaint to a MSU employee or official; 16 percent did not know who to go to, and 23 percent did not report the incident out of fear of retaliation.

- **A small percentage of respondents had been sexually harassed or sexually victimized.**
  - Less than 2 percent (n=10) were victims of sexual assault while at MSU. Seven assaults happened on campus. All of the survivors were heterosexual, White women. None contacted the police, and two sought medical services.
  - 49 percent of all respondents believed MSU would support them and take action on their behalf if they were sexually assaulted, while 36 percent were unsure about how MSU would react.
  - 8 of the 10 sexual assault survivors believed MSU would not support them or take action on their behalf.

Perceptions of Campus Climate

- **Most respondents indicated that they were "comfortable" or "very comfortable" with the overall climate at MSU (80%), in their academic department/program of study or administrative unit (81%), and in their classes/work area (84%). Fewer were comfortable/very comfortable with the climate in the local community (78%). The figures in the narrative indicate some disparities based on race.**
  - Compared with 86 percent of White people, 70 percent of people of color were comfortable with the overall climate at MSU
  - Compared with 88 percent of White people, 79 percent of people of color were comfortable with the climate in their classroom or work unit.
  - Compared with 80 percent of White people, 80 percent people of color were comfortable with the climate in the local community.

- **A small percentage of respondents reported they were aware of harassment on campus. The perceived harassment was most often based on race, position status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender. People of color and sexual minorities were more aware of such harassment. Such incidents often were not officially reported.**
  - o 18 percent of the participants had observed or personally been made aware of conduct on campus that created an offensive, hostile, or intimidating working or learning environment.
  - o Compared with 17 percent of White people, 26 percent of people of color had observed or personally been made aware of such conduct.
  - o Compared with 17 percent of heterosexuals, 38 percent of sexual minorities had observed or personally been made aware of such conduct.
  - o Compared with 31 percent of faculty, 17 percent of administrators had observed or personally been made aware of such conduct, as were 25 percent of staff and 14 percent of students.
  - o These incidences were reported to an employee or official only 15 percent of the time. 17 percent didn't know who to go to, and 14 percent didn't report the incident out of fear of retaliation.

- **27 percent of staff, 21 percent of faculty, and 8 percent of administrators were aware of discriminatory employment practices.**
  - o Respondents indicated that they were most often based on position status, gender, age, and educational level.

- **A notable percentage of student respondents (68%) felt that their classrooms were welcoming to members of underrepresented groups. Students of color, women students, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual students felt this way less often than did their "majority" counterparts.**
  - o Compared to 71 percent of White students, 49 percent of students of color felt the classroom climate was welcoming for historically underrepresented and marginalized students.
  - o Compared to 69 percent of heterosexual students, 57 percent of LGB students felt the classroom climate was welcoming for historically underrepresented and marginalized students.

- **61 percent of employee respondents felt that the workplace was welcoming to members of underrepresented groups.**
  - o Compared to 64 percent of White employees, no employees of color felt that the workplace climate was welcoming for employees from underrepresented and marginalized groups.
  - o Compared to 61 percent of heterosexual respondents, 50 percent of LGB employees felt the workplace climate was welcoming.

Institutional Actions

- More than half of all respondents believe the following offices/units had visible leadership to foster diversity/social justice at MSU: faculty in their schools (64%), the President's Office (57%), their direct supervisors (55%), and student organizations (52%).
- 58 percent of respondents believed that MSU values their involvement in diversity initiatives on campus.
- Approximately half of all respondents felt that providing workshops/programs that focus on issues, research, and perspectives related to age, country of origin, ethnicity, race, English as a second language status, psychological disability status, learning disability status, physical disability status, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, socioeconomic class, and veterans/active military status would improve the campus climate for these groups.
- Respondents were less likely to believe that *requiring* students and employees to take a class on these issues would positively affect the campus climate.
- 36 percent of respondents thought that including diversity related activities as a criterion for hiring and/or performance evaluations would improve the climate at MSU.

Qualitative Findings

Out of the 654 surveys received at MSU, a relatively small percentage of respondents (approximately 11%) contributed remarks to the four open-ended questions (questions 9, 28, 35, and 62). Respondents included undergraduate and graduate students, as well as administrators, faculty, and staff. The open-ended questions asked for general elaboration of personal experiences and thoughts[11, 12]

Of the respondents who provided comments regarding these questions, they were divided between whether attention to diversity was a positive or negative aspect of MSU. Many praised the University's efforts to create a welcoming atmosphere, asserted that the climate had improved in recent years, and/or suggested the campus would further benefit from additional actions to promote diversity. Others believed, however, that diversity efforts were over-emphasized or have led to reverse discrimination. These comments

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[11] The complete survey is available in Appendix B.
[12] A brief analysis of the comments is provided in Appendix A.

indicate that many respondents believe not only that diversity efforts are unnecessary, but also that diversity efforts are actively harmful.

While many respondents reported positive experiences with diversity and diversity initiatives, some individuals described common experiences of lack of adequate responses to specific types of complaints. It is not suggested that these experiences are typical, or that the conclusions drawn by the commenter are accurate representations of what happened. Rather, these examples "give voice" to the experiences reported in the quantitative findings of the report. As mentioned in the comments, some respondents indicated they would not report complaints because of perceived lack of support of the University.

Overall, the results in this report parallel those in similar investigations where people of color, women, sexual minorities, and people with disabilities tend to feel that the institution is not addressing systemic, structural, and informal issues as favorably as for their White, male, heterosexual, and able-bodied counterparts. The next steps in this project are to use the results of this assessment to identify specific strategies for addressing the challenges facing the community and to support positive initiatives on campus.