Rackham Student Diversity Forum, December 8, 2015

To begin gathering input from students, Rackham hosted the first in a series of student forums on December 8, 2015. Almost 100 students participated in a Rackham community conversation regarding diversity, equity and inclusion which included an exploration of issues, challenges, and short and long term ideas for change. The primary goal was to share and learn more about students’ reflections and perspectives in ways that can help shape and inform our current and future actions.

The input provided through this Rackham Student Diversity Forum has been organized below into a set of themes for each question. You may also want to review the summary of themes that emerged at the university-wide Community Assembly event held on November 10, 2015.

**Question 1: What are the issues and challenges around diversity, equity, and inclusion that affect you as a graduate student?**

**Thematic Arrangement of Consolidated Responses**

**Clarity**

- Students are looking for clarity in the planning process (university, school and department) and working definitions of diversity, equity and inclusion

**Lack of Inclusion**

- Being inclusive of other voices and experiences in the diversity conversation (e.g., Asian Americans, international students, white students, students with disabilities, transgender students, Arab American students)
- Lack of systematic inclusion of diverse voices and experiences in conversations on committees (e.g., diversity task force, admissions, faculty hiring), strategic planning initiatives, faculty orientation, GSI training, and development of the academic curriculum

**Student Burden**

- Students of color and student allies for diversity feel that they are responsible and expected to support recruitment and diversity efforts in their departments and schools. In addition, these same feelings are shared for managing and solving issues related to diversity in their departments
- The students’ commitment to change and self-selecting to be involved and invest their time is unrecognized and sometimes penalized by their faculty mentor
Campus Climate

- The frequency and impact of microaggressions
- The lack of opportunity to embrace the intersectionality of identity and experiences challenge the ability of students to share their authentic self, articulate their individual and collective identity as graduate students at U-M has resulted in harassment and exclusion based on students’ identities
- There are a number of issues that impact the interactions between students including labeling, privilege, elitism, classism and stereotypes
- The lack of representation of students, faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds have resulted in feelings of isolation, being singled out, and limits peer and academic support network

Faculty Issues

- Faculty do not take responsibility for their role in developing the climate and the marginalization of other faculty and students, resulting in minority faculty taking positions elsewhere and students leaving ABD (All But Dissertation)
- The value of diversity among the faculty is reflected in their lack of presence and participation in diversity related activities, blaming it on their lack of knowledge and level of expertise in order to defer responsibility to the student
- There is a gap between desire and skill – Faculty are not trained to deal with diversity and lack knowledge of resources to meet the needs of students and address issues
- Some students are afraid of their faculty – they are aggressive, devalue diversity research and work, and do not provide social emotional support

Question 2a: What are your short term (12 months) ideas for change?

Thematic Arrangement of Consolidated Responses

Inclusion

- Include students in everything (e.g., faculty hiring, recruitment, admissions, curriculum)
- Include faculty in creating the diversity plans
- Continue dialogue and open spaces to share solutions and seek regular anonymous feedback from graduate students
- Increase the diversity of people in positions of power

Clarity

- Transparency of the diversity strategic planning process, timelines, making the work public – share data, and define students’ role in the plan
• Define diversity, equity and inclusion, how DEI is one conversation and how the separate parts fit together for Rackham
• Identify who students can talk with about issues of diversity

Planning

• Be a leader – Rackham needs to take the lead
• Rackham diversity plan should have SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound) goals
• Get a baseline through climate surveys
• Continue to integrate students and student reviews into the practices of the graduate school
• Incorporate faculty into the planning process

Practices

• Develop a diversity training and/or integrate diversity into current trainings/orientations for faculty and students
• Hold departments accountable with incentives and penalties
• Continue the diversity conversation – take programming to departments
• Connect students to each other – more events for students with URM (underrepresented minority) identities
• Develop an online toolkit for faculty on issues and resources to address diversity
• Identify a set of communication strategies for sharing key diversity related information and resources

Question 2b: What are your long term (5+ years) ideas for change?

Thematic Arrangement of Consolidated Responses

Climate for Diversity

• Increase diversity in representation of students, faculty, and senior staff positions
• Diversity should not be considered an extracurricular activity
• More shared power in decision making with students – eliminate the hierarchy
• Find ways to validate student identities and experiences

Student Engagement

• Develop intentional spaces to engage students on diversity and mentorship, for students with specific identities, and for students to interact with their departments on diversity
• Involve students in all major committees in departments and at Rackham
Practices

• More fluid communication strategies to increase awareness and transparency of diversity efforts
• Develop mandatory training for all faculty and students (e.g., training on diversity, sexual harassment, unconscious bias, mentoring, advising)
• Provide compensation to people who are doing the diversity work – students, faculty and staff

Policy

• Redefine faculty hiring practices
• Recommend the inclusion of graduate students on admissions and hiring committees
• Although Rackham does not require the GRE, continue to urge departments to evaluate the use of the GRE in admissions

Evaluation

• Increase opportunities to define and measure student progress and diversity in standardized and equitable ways