

The Evergreen State College

Evergreen Student Experience Survey 2006

Experience of First-time, First-year Students

Diversity at Evergreen

Students were asked a series of questions regarding the importance of diversity to learning, the amount of respect for diversity, and interactions with people on campus who are different from themselves in terms of backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles. In terms of the importance of diversity on campus to learning, the most common response among first-time, first-year respondents was that diversity was "Very" important with nearly as many indicating "Quite a Bit." About one-quarter of the first-time, first-years indicated that diversity was "Somewhat" important to their learning and 17.5% indicated that it was "Not at All" or "A Little Bit" important.

On the question: "How much respect do you think there is for different backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles on campus?" the most common response was "Quite a Bit." About ten percent of first-time, first-year respondents (9.7%) indicated that there was very little or no respect for different backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles on campus.

How important do you think diversity on campus is to your learning? (N=117)

Not at all (0)	A little bit (1)	Somewhat (2)	Quite a bit (3)	Very (4)	Skipped question (N)
3.5%	14.0%	24.6%	28.1%	29.8%	3

Mean = 2.67

Median = 3.00

How much respect do you think there is for different backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles on campus? (N=117)

None (0)	Very little (1)	Some (2)	Quite a bit (3)	A lot (4)	Skipped question (N)
3.5%	6.2%	23.9%	46.0%	20.4%	4

Mean = 2.73

Median = 3.00

How do you feel about your interactions with people at Evergreen who have different backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles than your own?

A total of 96 first-time, first-year respondents wrote a response to this question. Responses were categorized to look for patterns among responses and in some cases to protect confidentiality. Some students' had multiple comments that fit within different categories. See the table on the next page that shows the number of comments within each category.

The largest category of responses were those that described interactions as "Great," "Good," "Wonderful," or used other similar language: 22.9% of respondents described their interactions in this manner. Six additional respondents used similar language but added qualifiers to this language and additional comments (that were categorized elsewhere). A total of 14 (14.6%) respondents used language such as "fine," "pretty good," and "OK" to describe their interactions and six more respondents used similar language, but qualified it with additional comments. There were 18 respondents (18.8%) who described interactions with people different from themselves as valuable learning experiences.

Eighteen respondents (18.8%) had comments related to a perceived lack of diversity on campus, whether this was ethnic, racial, political, socioeconomic, or related to perspectives and lifestyles. Many of these respondents thought that increasing the diversity on campus would address some problems that they have perceived around ignorance, intolerance of other views, or a lack of interaction across differences. Ten respondents (10.4%) noted that interactions with people who are different from themselves does not occur often. Some of the respondents attributed this to a lack of diversity on campus while others did not elaborate.

Type of Comment	Number of Respondents with Type of Comment	Percent with type of comment
Interactions described as "Great," "Good," "Wonderful" with no qualifications	22	22.9%
Interactions described as "Great," "Good," "Wonderful" but with qualifications	6	6.3%
Interactions described as "Fine," "Pretty Good," "OK," "Comfortable" with no qualifications or exceptions	14	14.6%
Interactions described as "Fine," "Pretty Good," "OK," "Comfortable" but with qualifications	6	6.3%
Interactions are enriching learning experiences	18	18.8%
Not enough diversity at Evergreen/more diversity needed	18	18.8%
Don't have this type of interaction often/doesn't occur generally	10	10.4%
Respondents described themselves as open or respectful	10	10.4%
Everyone's different/don't pay attention to differences	10	10.4%
People are open and accepting on campus	7	7.3%
People are judgmental and biased against or not accepting of other political views	5	5.2%
People are judgmental and biased against or not accepting of other religions/religious beliefs	2	2.1%
People are judgmental and biased against or not accepting of other races, ethnicities, cultures	2	2.1%
People are judgmental and biased against others generally/for other reasons	3	3.1%
Lack of intermingling among students	3	3.1%
Recalled negative experiences in seminar	2	2.1%
Recalled positive experiences in seminar/differences are good for class discussion	2	2.1%
Commented on survey question	4	4.2%
Not on campus much or do not interact with others/keep to oneself	2	2.1%
The diversity that exists on campus goes unnoticed	2	2.1%
Made suggestions for activities, training or other institutional action	1	1.0%
Other/not able to categorize	3	3.1%

Ten respondents (10.4%) described themselves as open-minded, respectful or accepting in interactions with people different from themselves. Another ten respondents (10.4%) emphasized that everyone is different and that they don't pay attention to differences. Seven respondents (7.3%) described people at Evergreen generally as open and accepting.

Some comments related to people at Evergreen being judgmental, biased against, and not accepting of others. There were five comments related to people being closed-minded or biased against those with different political beliefs, especially those with conservative political opinions and beliefs. Two additional comments related to bias or judgment against people with other religions beliefs -- in one case the respondent observed bias against Christianity and in another Judaism. Two respondents commented that white students on campus treat people of color poorly, are racially and culturally in-sensitive, or "look down" at friends who are people of color. A couple of comments were directed more generally about bias and discrimination. One respondent wrote, "Evergreen is not separate from society, though. People can still perpetuate racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism, etc." Another respondent commented about being more open-minded than most "Greeners." A third noted that people seemed less open to talking about sexual orientation.

Three respondents commented on the lack of intermingling or divisions among students; one of the respondents specifically noted a lack of intermingling among international students and other Evergreen students. Another respondent said that seminar groups in their program were racially segregated.

There were two comments specific to seminar. One of these was the comment about segregated seminar groups. Another comment was that issues around sexual orientation are left unspoken in class and that because there are limited opportunities for interactions with people of a different racial or ethnic background that seminar on racism and bigotry is "fair ridiculous."

Two respondents mentioned seminar in a positive light. One respondent commented: "...diverse people contribute a lot to the Evergreen community, particularly by bringing a wide array of ideas and thoughts into seminars." The other student said that although there are sometimes heated debates in seminar, people seem to leave seminar without being angry or having hurt feelings.

Four respondents had comments that either directly or indirectly related to questions on the survey. A respondent wrote: "Everyone has a different background/ perspective/ lifestyle, so this is kind of a weird question." Another respondent wrote: "Great! Why wouldn't it be?" Finally a respondent wrote: "Fine, but these questions about diversity are entirely inconsequential." Another respondent wrote that question 15 is phrased poorly and that it would "inflate the answers." (Question 15 is "How much respect do you think there is for different backgrounds, perspectives, and lifestyles on campus?")

Two respondents said that they do not interact with others much. One mentioned not liking to interact with people who use drugs, and the other indicated a desire to have more time to get to know other students.

Another two respondents said that the diversity that exists on campus often goes ignored or unnoticed. One of the respondents elaborated: "I feel as if people are sometimes too concerned with racial diversity and don't acknowledge the variety of diversity that is often ignored." The other explained seeing differences within individuals instead of "lumped into groups."

In reference to activities on campus, one student wrote: "I wish there were more activities that celebrated difference and allowed all people to join and learn along side each other. I felt a lot like Day Of Absence was strange, and an 'invitation' only type event. It didn't feel like others were welcome to learn."

There were three comments that were not categorized. One respondent wrote: "Feel like they eat 'the other' hippie cultural appropriators." Another respondent wrote: "For the most part I feel that Evergreen is a great place where people can come together from different backgrounds and feel accepted but I also feel there is the same tensions that appear between different people happen here (as well as anywhere) as long as they're not addressed. The problem with Evergreen is there is so much diversity sometime[s] those tensions aren't addressed or removed." The third uncategorized comment was about a general lack of interest among freshmen.

