



Rankin & Associates, Consulting

Assessment • Planning • Interventions

Ramapo  
College

Campus Climate  
Project  
Executive Summary

Final Report  
May 1, 2006



## Executive Summary

*Resistance begins with people confronting pain, whether it's theirs or somebody else's,  
and wanting to do something to change it.<sup>1</sup>  
--- 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, where 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 that are grounded in respect, nurtured by dialogue and evidenced by a pattern of civil interaction.

Ramapo College believes in nurturing such an environment as evidenced by the institution's support and commitment to this project, its own mission statement<sup>2</sup> and the Diversity Action Committee's vision for its work<sup>3</sup>. The project was commissioned by the College President and the Diversity Action Committee to identify challenges and implement initiatives to create this climate. To minimize internal bias, the Diversity Action Committee contracted with an outside consultant<sup>4</sup> to assist them in identifying challenges confronting the College community with respect to underrepresented<sup>5</sup> employees and students. The project was a proactive initiative by the Diversity Action Committee to review the climate on campus for underrepresented groups. An internal

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<sup>1</sup> Hooks, b. (1990), *Yearning*. Boston: South End Press.

<sup>2</sup> The mission statement for Ramapo College states that "Ramapo College is committed to maintaining strength and opportunity through diversity of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and economic background among faculty, staff, and students. Ramapo College is a selective institution committed to providing equal access to under-represented populations. Barrier-free, the College maintains a continuing commitment to persons with disabilities" (<http://www.ramapo.edu/about/ramapomission.html>).

<sup>3</sup> DAC vision – "In promoting and celebrating diversity, Ramapo College pledges to respect and value personal uniqueness and differences, to seek to attract diverse faculty, staff and students that reflect the changing demographics in the region and beyond, to seek and acknowledge common ground, to challenge stereotyping, and to promote sensitivity and inclusion. It understands that the diversity of its staff, faculty and students enriches the learning experience for all and encourages people to expand their perceptions, values and thinking. As expressed in its Culture and Values Statement, Vision Statement, Mission Statement and Strategic Plan, it takes seriously its commitment to diversity and implementing ideas of value" (approved by Cabinet, 9-12-05).

<sup>4</sup> Rankin & Associates, Consulting was the firm hired to conduct the project.

<sup>5</sup> Underrepresented groups are included in the Diversity Action Committee's definition of diversity which states that "*Human* diversity includes, but is not limited to age, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, physical or mental abilities and disabilities, socio-economic status, viewpoint differences (e.g. political), sexual orientation, gender identity, and national origin" (approved by Cabinet, 9-12-05).

assessment was conducted and the results will be used to identify specific strategies for addressing the challenges and supporting positive diversity initiatives through the development of a strategic plan to maximize equity at Ramapo College. This report provides an overview of the process for maximizing equity and the findings of the internal assessment including the results of the campus-wide survey, and a thematic analysis of comments provided by survey respondents. The internal assessment will help to lay the groundwork for future initiatives.

Because of 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 (1999) and modified by Rankin (2002).<sup>6</sup> The survey questions were informed by the work of Rankin (2003).<sup>7</sup> The Diversity Action Committee Campus Climate Sub-Committee and various constituent groups reviewed the drafts of the survey. The final survey contained sixty-nine questions and four additional open-ended questions for respondents to provide commentary regarding their experiences. It was distributed to the campus community in Fall semester, 2005. All members of the Ramapo College community were invited to participate in the survey, but particular effort was made to recruit from populations who in society are historically disenfranchised. 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.

President Peter Mercer and the Diversity Action Committee, to allow constituent groups the opportunity to respond to the findings of the internal assessment and provide suggested revisions and/or further clarifications, reviewed a draft of the final report. A summary of the findings presented in bullet form below suggests that while the College

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix A for a more detailed description of the Transformational Tapestry© model.

<sup>7</sup> Rankin (forthcoming) is a national study examining the campus climate for underrepresented groups.

has several challenges in regard to diversity issues, these challenges are found in higher education institutions across the country (see footnote 7).

### **Sample Demographics**

Two thousand, ninety-one surveys were returned representing the following:

- 1,508 undergraduate students, 25 graduate students, 14 post-baccalaureate students, 176 faculty, 277 staff, and 29 administrators
- 556 people of color<sup>8</sup>
- 98 people who identified as having a physical disability
- 204 people who identified as having a cognitive or emotional disability
- 150 people who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning
- 1,318 women; 717 men; 8 transgender<sup>9</sup>
- 1,159 people who identified their spiritual affiliation as other than Catholic (including those with no affiliation)

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<sup>8</sup> 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 in the individual categories.

<sup>9</sup> “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. March 2004. Oxford University Press. Feb. 17, 2006 <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00319380>>.

## Quantitative Findings

### Personal Experiences with Campus Climate<sup>10</sup>

- **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 (hereafter referred to as harassment)<sup>11</sup>. Gender was the largest reason given for the harassment. People of color and sexual orientation minorities<sup>12</sup> experienced such harassment much more often than White people, and many of them felt it was due to their race or sexual orientation. Harassment went largely unreported.<sup>13</sup>**
  - Twenty-one percent of respondents had personally experienced offensive, hostile, or intimidating conduct that interfered unreasonably with their ability to work or learn on campus.
  - The conduct was most often believed to be based on the respondent's gender (36%), Ramapo College status (30%), race (29%) and/or ethnicity (22%).
  - Compared with eighteen percent of White people, a much higher percentage of people of color (28%) and sexual orientation minorities (30%) had personally experienced such conduct.
  - Of respondents of color who reported experiencing this conduct, sixty-one percent stated it was because of their race.
  - Of sexual minority respondents who reported experiencing this conduct, forty percent stated it was because of their sexual orientation.
  - Less than a third of respondents (29%) who experienced this harassment made a complaint to a Ramapo College employee or official.
- **A small percentage of respondents had been sexually harassed or sexually victimized.**
  - Nineteen percent were subjected to sexual harassment while at Ramapo and eight percent of respondents had been sexually victimized.

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<sup>10</sup>Listings here are those with greatest percentages. For a more complete list the reader is directed to the tables in the narrative and Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Sexual orientation minorities are defined for the purposes of this report as people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

<sup>13</sup> These findings parallel assessments of climate at other institutions where between 20%-25% of respondents indicate personally experiencing harassment based mostly on their race, their gender, or their ethnicity.

Perceptions of Campus Climate

- **Most respondents indicated that they were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the overall climate at Ramapo College (83%), in their academic school or administrative unit (81%), and in their department/work area (80%). The figures show substantial disparities based on race.**
  - Compared with thirteen percent of White people, people of color were twice as likely (27%) to be less than comfortable with the overall climate at Ramapo.<sup>14</sup>
  - Compared with seventeen percent of White people, people of color were almost twice as likely (30%) to be less than comfortable with the climate in their academic school or administrative unit.
  - Compared with eighteen percent of White people, people of color were one-third more likely (24%) to be less than comfortable with the climate in their department/work area.
  
- **A small percentage of respondents reported awareness of harassment on campus. The perceived harassment was most often based on race. People of color and sexual orientation minorities were more aware of such harassment. Most responding administrators were aware of such harassment, but such incidents were not often officially reported.**
  - Thirty-one 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.
  - Most of the observers attributed this harassment to race (52%), ethnicity (34%), gender (32%), and sexual orientation (32%).
  - Compared with twenty-nine percent of White people, thirty-six percent of people of color had observed or personally been made aware of such conduct.<sup>15</sup>
  - Compared with thirty percent of heterosexuals, thirty-eight percent of sexual orientation minorities had observed or personally been made aware of such conduct.
  - Compared with twenty-five percent of undergraduate students, sixty-six percent of administrators had observed or personally been made aware of such conduct, as well as fifty percent of staff and forty-three percent of faculty.
  - These incidences were reported to a Ramapo employee or official only thirteen percent of the time.

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<sup>14</sup> Because the purpose of this survey is to determine what climate zones are susceptible of improvement, this analysis includes those who were not sure about their degree of comfort.

<sup>15</sup> Of note and unique to Ramapo as compared to parallel investigations at other institutions, the form of the observed harassment was most often reported as racial profiling.

- **Though few responding administrators were aware of discriminatory employment practices, staff and faculty respondents reported observing these practices and indicated that they were most often based on race.**
  - Fourteen percent of respondents had observed discriminatory hiring, and eleven percent had observed discriminatory promotion practices.
  - Compared to less than one percent of administrators, thirty-one percent of staff and twenty-four percent of faculty had observed discriminatory hiring, and thirty-three percent of staff and thirty percent of faculty had observed discriminatory promotion practices
  - Of those who observed discriminatory hiring, race was believed to be the reason by forty-three percent of faculty and forty-nine percent of staff.
  - Of those who observed discriminatory promotion practices, race was believed to be the reason by fifty-six percent of faculty and forty-five percent of staff.
  - Compared with nine percent of White respondents, eighteen percent of respondents of color reported observing discriminatory promotion practices.
  
- **Many respondents feared sexual victimization and indicated a lack of College support if they were sexually victimized.**
  - Forty-two percent of respondents were not confident that the College community would provide support to them and take action on their behalf if they were sexually victimized.
  - Thirty-two percent of respondents feared sexual victimization on campus.
  
- **A notable percentage of student respondents felt that their classrooms were unwelcoming to members of underrepresented groups, and many more students and faculty of color felt this than their White counterparts.**
  - Forty-three percent of student respondents did not feel that the classroom climate is welcoming for students from historically underrepresented and marginalized groups.
  - Compared to twenty-one percent of White students, forty-two percent of students of color did not feel the classroom climate was welcoming for historically underrepresented and marginalized students.
  - Compared to twenty-seven percent of White faculty, forty-seven percent of faculty of color did not feel the classroom climate was welcoming for historically underrepresented and marginalized students.
  
- **Similarly, employee respondents felt that the workplace was unwelcoming to members of underrepresented groups, and many more employees of color felt this than White employees.**
  - Thirty-three percent of employee respondents did not feel that the workplace climate is welcoming for employees from underrepresented and marginalized groups.
  - Compared to five percent of White respondents, fifteen percent of people of color and eleven percent of sexual orientation minorities did not feel the workplace climate was welcoming.

### Institutional Actions

- The majority of the respondents (64%) believed that student organizations visibly foster diversity, in addition to faculty in their program (56%), and Student Government and the Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Office (51%).
- Sixty-four percent of respondents believed that Ramapo College values their involvement in diversity initiatives on campus. This is notably higher than similar studies.<sup>16</sup>
- Approximately half of all respondents felt that requiring all students, staff, and faculty to take at least one class that focuses on issues, research, and perspectives related to gender, ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation would improve the campus climate for these groups.
- Forty-four percent of respondents thought that including diversity related activities as a criterion for hiring and/or performance evaluations would improve the climate at the College.

### **Qualitative Findings<sup>17</sup>**

Out of the 2091 surveys received, between 27 and 38 percent of respondents contributed remarks to four open-ended questions. Respondents included undergraduate and graduate students, as well as administrators, faculty, and staff. A thematic analysis of these findings is available in Appendix D. Three of the four open-ended questions asked for general elaboration of personal experiences and thoughts, and two asked for specific information: (1) response to complaints and (2) comparison of experiences on-campus and in the surrounding community<sup>18</sup>.

Of the approximately one-third of respondents who made comments on these questions, they were about equally divided between whether attention to diversity was a positive or negative aspect of Ramapo College. Many praised Ramapo's efforts to create a welcoming atmosphere and asserted that the climate had improved in recent years, and suggested the campus would further benefit from further actions to promote diversity. However, others believed that diversity efforts are over-emphasized, or have led to

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<sup>16</sup> Rankin (forthcoming) is a national study examining the campus climate for underrepresented groups.

<sup>17</sup> The complete qualitative analysis is presented in Appendix D of the full report.

<sup>18</sup> The complete survey is available in Appendix A.

reverse discrimination. This indicates that many respondents believe not only that diversity efforts are unnecessary, but that diversity efforts are actively harmful.

While many respondents talked of positive experiences with diversity, some mentioned similar experiences of lack of proper action in response to specific types of complaints. It is not suggested that these experiences are typical, nor that the conclusions drawn by the commenter are accurate. Rather, these examples “give voice to” the experiences reported in the quantitative statistics. Another theme in the comments indicates that respondents would not report complaints because of perceived lack of support of the College.

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