

**Summary of Diversity Climate Survey  
Focus/Discussion Groups**

**Tarleton State University**

**Dr. Aziz Talbani  
Dr. Gilbert Hinga**

**July 2008**

The Center for Diversity Initiatives  
Tarleton State University

## **Acknowledgements**

We extend our deepest gratitude to students, faculty and staff who offered their feedback, suggestions and recommendations regarding diversity at Tarleton through the focus/discussion groups. We are also indebted to the following faculty and staff for their assistance in taking time during a demanding time of the year to help with the focus groups: Dr. Jane Dennis, Dr. Jason LaTouche, and Dr. Charlie Howard, for facilitating the focus/discussion groups; Ms. Darla Doty and Mr. Jim Looby for recording and summarizing the discussions from the focus groups. We also extend our appreciation to Dr. Dennis McCabe, President; Dr. Wanda Mercer, Vice President for Student Life; and Dr. Brad Chilton, Interim Provost, for their active support of this project.

## **Diversity Climate Survey Focus/Discussion Groups**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the focus/discussion groups was to obtain reactions and feedback from students, faculty and staff regarding findings from the Highlights from the Tarleton State University Diversity Climate Survey (2006-2007). The purpose was also to solicit recommendations and suggestions on ways that Tarleton could move forward vis-à-vis diversity. This report summarizes the substantive discussions and recommendations precipitating from these focus/discussion groups.

### **Approach and Methods**

Four (4) focus/discussion groups were conducted: one with faculty, one with staff, and two with students (one with minority students and the other with all students). An important goal for these groups was to encourage candid discussion germane to the particular constituent/focus group. It was felt that distinct rather than mixed groups of students, faculty and staff would be the best approach to achieve this goal. Three faculty members facilitated the focus/discussion groups. Both student groups were facilitated by one faculty member. Each focus group had one recorder whose role was to take notes and to summarize the discussions. Recorders had no role in facilitation and were not expected to participate in the discussions.

The decision to schedule a separate focus group with minority students warrants further deliberation here. Minority students were encouraged to participate in the focus group scheduled for all students. Nevertheless, offering students an option to attend a discussion group with others who identify themselves as minority was deemed important in order to (a) solicit feedback and recommendations from this group of students, and (b) to accommodate students who feel especially vulnerable to marginalization and for whom this particular group was likely to foster participation/to encourage them to speak up. Thus, the value of providing this alternative to, say, a gay or black student outweighed concerns that such an approach may be perceived by others as sending the wrong message about diversity and inclusion.

To encourage attendance, emails were distributed to all faculty, staff, and students on the Stephenville campus. Those unable to attend the focus/discussion groups were encouraged to send their feedback via email or to contact the Center for Diversity Initiatives (CDI) by phone. Officers from the Faculty Senate, Staff Council and Student Government Association were contacted to request their assistance in encouraging attendance from their constituents. Additional contact with various students, faculty, and staff was made by CDI to encourage attendance and participation.

Prior to the focus groups, a meeting with all facilitators and recorders was held to discuss the purpose and goals of the project, to congeal facilitator procedures, and to address any questions and concerns. In this meeting, the facilitators' key role in helping to create an atmosphere where all participants would feel encouraged to participate was underscored.

Although CDI was responsible for logistics (e.g. reserving meeting rooms, coordinating timetables and schedules, etc), the group facilitators were entirely responsible for managing their groups, from the time that participants arrived to the time that they adjourned. The authors of this project did not attend the discussion groups. Group sessions lasted about one (1) hour. After brief introduction (by facilitators) of the facilitators and recorders, the general purpose and ground rules for the discussions were reviewed. This included confidentiality and that no identifying information of participants would be recorded or reported. All facilitators posited similar discussion questions in their groups (see Appendix below). After the focus groups, notes and summaries from the recorders were forwarded to the Director of CDI for compilation, analysis and for the writing of this report.

Given that students are the focus of this project, this report first summarizes responses from the student groups, followed by those from faculty and staff respectively. Each summary, from each focus group, is preceded by the discussion question posed by the facilitator.

This report, and the Highlights from the Tarleton State University Diversity Climate Survey (2006-2007), will be forwarded to a Diversity Task Force (yet to be appointed). The Diversity Task Force will review the comprehensive data provided through these reports, and any other information the Task Force deems necessary, and will develop recommendations for a university diversity plan. These recommendations will be forwarded to the President for review and action.

We believe that an aggressive diversity plan is needed at Tarleton. In addition, we believe that the prioritization of diversity and the implementation of a diversity plan will be achieved most effectively through leadership and direction emanating from Tarleton's highest office.

## Focus/Discussion Group with Students

---

Diversity Climate Survey focus/discussion group – All Students

April 10, 2008, 3p.m.; TSC room 219

Dr. Jason LaTouche, Facilitator

Mr. Jim Looby, Recorder

Number of participants: 15

### **1. From your perspective, what were the most important or interesting findings from the survey? Why? What does each say about the climate of diversity at Tarleton?**

#### Comments:

- (a) (Referring to Table 10) There is a disappointing low number of faculty who report that Tarleton is ready to receive more minority students on campus.
- (b) (Referring to Table 2) Although about 79% percent of students report “I am knowledgeable about diversity,” Table 9 shows that students are the highest source (27%) of harassment/discrimination. If a high percentage of students are knowledgeable, then the harassment should be lower. There is a disagreement between what students think they know and what they actually do.
- (c) The survey does not define the terms “diversity” and “discrimination.” Diversity includes different upbringings and backgrounds; it is not just about Race. The report focuses on Race. Diversity is also about learning from each other.

### **2. Not all the recommendations from the 1998 diversity study were followed up. What are some potential barriers that may affect the implementation of recommendations from this survey and from these focus/discussion groups?**

#### Comments:

- (a) Having separate meetings for students is a barrier. Why have two separate meetings, one for minorities and one for all students/general population? If we are trying to get to the bottom of this issue, it would be better to get everyone together so that we can talk about it with each other/together rather than separately.
- (b) Things go on that we do not like to think about; we view the same thing from different points of view [so it is more difficult to find common ground]
- (c) Minority students experience discrimination that White students may not experience or see because it is not focused on them; you do not realize it until it happens to you. [This makes it difficult to address issues]
- (d) The MLK forum did not help. People walked away with hurt feelings [having forums like that would be a barrier].
- (e) Instead of focusing on “diversity,” which pulls us apart, we should focus on unity and inclusion. For example, although Tarleton is predominantly White and we are not changing that quickly (Referring to Table 5), the overwhelming majority of students feel safe here. Tarleton students as a whole are inclusive—we should focus on this even though there will be problems.
- (f) According to Table 5, minority students do not feel that their views are respected; they do not feel that they can express themselves.

- (g) Tarleton does not do enough to teach about different backgrounds.
- (h) You cannot change how people are raised; there are many “redneck” and “cowboy” standards and attitudes here [that are barriers to change].
- (i) A lot comes from family. Tarleton is doing a lot, but you cannot force it on students... unless it is a required class.
- (j) Dr. Talbani puts together events to educate and to expose issues.
- (k) Discrimination is not something that students seem to want to speak about; or it is something that students do not think is an issue.
- (l) Table 5 shows that although about 70% of White students say they feel a sense of belonging, only about 40% of minorities said they feel a sense of belonging. Obviously there is something going on here [that is a barrier].

**3. Given these survey results, and what you know about Tarleton, what should Tarleton do to move forward regarding diversity? What specifically should (students, faculty, staff) do?**

Comments:

- (a) We need more funds/budget for events.
- (b) Students need to be involved and engaged. We need to move students out of their comfort zones. A lot of students may still feel discriminated/harassed, but the hardest part is getting students who brought their three best friends from high school with them to get out of their rooms and get involved.
- (c) Table 5 shows we [students] isolate ourselves. We need to have more interaction. We need to find a way to show students that the social landscape is bigger and different than in high school. We need to break the ice at Duck Camp and at Texan-2-Texan.
- (d) We need to change how we recruit minority students to events and to organizations. [This needs to be an initiative done by other students].
- (e) There is an age gap. We [students/our generation] have been raised around the idea of diversity. However, although our professors and staff are concerned about success, they have not been exposed to the same things we have.
- (f) We need more open discussion in class.
- (g) Re-evaluate the DGS syllabus and curriculum. A campus tour in November as part of DGS is pointless. We need to address real issues like diversity in DGS.
- (h) Get RLL more involved. There are different levels of diversity in each dorm. Each hall environment affects diversity in some way. Develop hall mixers to encourage these different aspects of diversity. For example, a mixer during a meal time to break up the monotony of eating in the cafeteria. But this should not be something that only RLL would be responsible for because RLL already has a lot of responsibilities.
- (i) The “cowboy” attitude turns away minorities. Also, the perception is that we [minorities] are here only to play sports. To attract minorities to Tarleton, you have to present that “Tarleton has something for you,” to minority students. And Tarleton has to do this/seek out students not just athletes.
- (j) We need more marketing funds/money. We need to get Tarleton’s name out there. PR and recruiting (right now) is not good enough.

## **Focus/Discussion Group with Minority Students**

---

Diversity Climate Survey focus/discussion group - Minority Students

April 9, 2008, 3:30p.m., TSC Room 219

Dr. Jason La Touche, Facilitator

Mr. Jim Looby, Recorder

Number of participants: 10

### **1. From your perspective, what were the most important or interesting findings from the survey? Why? What does each say about the climate of diversity at Tarleton?**

#### Comments:

- (a) The faculty and staff seem to have higher response numbers than students
- (b) In Table 6, the level of comfort and discomfort that students feel in interacting across racial groups is interesting.
- (c) In Table 7, there is a difference in the percentage of students who report that they have experienced discrimination and the percentage who report that they have reported the discrimination.
- (d) There is less diversity at Tarleton than perceived/expected; I am surprised that diversity numbers [aggregates] are so low. For example, in Table 12, the ethnic diversity of faculty in departments is low.
- (e) Give Freshman a survey on diversity and then follow up that survey through their college years to gauge student's perceptions from start to finish. **(is this #3? Suggestion?)**

### **2. Not all the recommendations from the 1998 diversity study were followed up. What are some potential barriers that may affect the implementation of recommendations from this survey and from these focus/discussion groups?**

#### Comments:

- (a) Unfortunately, there is no class that one can take that will teach diversity. It is one of those things that is personal and comes from experience. Tarleton needs to help students learn more about diversity, but by focusing on their experiences.
- (b) A lot of students come from backgrounds that are not diverse. It is hard to implement change because this is something that has to come from individual motivation.
- (c) It is difficult to see how Tarleton can remove boundaries. Although Tarleton is trying to become more diverse, there is ignorance about other Races.
- (d) People need to be made more aware. As Tarleton grows, we need to find a way to make more people aware and to handle conflicts that can arise as you make more people aware.
- (e) The community is a big influence and can also be a barrier because we deal with community issues as well. This is not just a Tarleton thing.
- (f) One cannot change how people see others if they are not willing to change. Diversity is a hands-on (experience) thing that cannot be addressed by a class. Also, classes and seminars that address diversity are not on a large enough scale

- at Tarleton to make an impact. Also, few students would actually take the class voluntarily, but I do not think that a required class would benefit Tarleton, and students do not want to be required to have to take another class.
- (g) (Referring to Table 2, regarding whether the curriculum adequately represents the contributions of diverse peoples) Although there is one class that I have taken that maybe does adequately represents the contributions of diverse peoples because we have talked about ethnicity, overall the curriculum does not adequately represent the contributions of diverse peoples.
  - (h) In some majors, students have to talk about diversity, but every major should have to discuss diversity at least once.
  - (i) There are generational barriers in faculty; older faculty are less open to discuss diversity. There are younger professors who discuss diversity and it is partly because they are still living in the college environment and see diversity in other towns.
  - (j) The age difference does not matter (in disagreement to above point). Older faculty may have lived through issues of diversity, which is an advantage.

**3. Given these survey results, and what you know about Tarleton, what should Tarleton do to move forward regarding diversity? What specifically should (students, faculty, staff) do?**

Comments:

- (a) A course, something like AlcoholEdu could be a positive or a negative. I do not think the course would work unless it counted towards the major/graduation. A core course would just be taken to get through it. If we had a required course, the course would need to be “hands on” and not lecture/writing format. It would need to be an open setting where you can talk and discuss.
- (b) Tarleton needs more interaction. During my first semester here, we had the MLK incident. We talked about it in class but Tarleton swept it under the rug; we do not know what (discipline) happened. Some students transferred, and I thought about transferring.
- (c) There is a perception that all African-American students are athletes. I have been asked as often as at least once a week whether I am an athlete, sometimes by faculty and staff, not just by students. [We need to change this perception.]
- (d) Outsiders can only go by what they see and hear (at Tarleton).
- (e) RLL has been doing a lot regarding diversity but what they do seems forced and is “kind of lame.”
- (f) Before the MLK incident, nothing was happening regarding diversity; since the MLK incident, people have been implementing changes.
- (g) There is no class, no worksheet, that can change how people see one another. It is like ethics – you cannot just learn it, you have to experience.
- (h) Students have to come to college open-minded. Over a 2 to 3 year period at Tarleton, there is little choice for students but to get more diverse, unless they are close-minded.
- (i) Tarleton’s web-site is not appealing to minority students. When you click on the homepage, you do not see minority students represented (I don’t see people like me).

- (j) Diversity is obviously a forced issue at Tarleton.
- (k) Tarleton can start early, like at Duck Camp or Texan-2-Texan, to introduce diversity. That is the best time to start a program on diversity. You could have a program where students are asked to interview people from other places or cultures.
- (l) Diversity will not work if it is structured or forced. Diversity is about life experiences; people have to learn by making mistakes.
- (m) To me, Tarleton is not about family; I do not feel included. Tarleton does not have a full concept of what it means to be family because there is a lack of knowledge.
- (n) In group settings, I stick out like a sore thumb. The invitation is there for minority students to come to Tarleton, but those who do not feel comfortable will not come.
- (o) Involvement/interaction between students is needed. Private rooms need to be removed; that way, students are forced to get to know other people (e.g. “I don’t know my neighbors in my halls”).
- (p) Students have to want to get involved, but Tarleton needs to get people interacting. We need to get more resources to RLL so that they can have events and mixers that encourage interaction.

### **Focus/Discussion Group with Faculty**

---

Diversity Climate Survey focus/discussion group - Faculty  
 April 9, 2008; 3pm, TSC room 130  
 Dr. Charlie Howard, Facilitator  
 Ms. Darla Doty, Recorder  
 Number of participants: 38

**1. What were the most important or interesting findings from the survey? Why? What does each say about the climate of diversity at Tarleton?**

Comments:

- (a) Everybody thinks diversity is important, but nobody does it.
- (b) Importance of diversity is recognized here, but it is not mandated.
- (c) There is a major disconnect between what people think and how they behave.
- (d) There is a disconnect in the way different groups perceive diversity.
- (e) Although 60% of minority students favored a diversity course (Table 2), only 28% of white students do; one conclusion may be that White students think that they know it all [about diversity].
- (f) Some undergraduate students seem to be more inclusive now than in previous years.
- (g) The White population generally perceives the campus to be friendly, but minority students feel isolated.
- (h) Diversity is not clearly defined in the survey; we are still using traditional usage of this term—to refer basically to skin color and to women.

- (i) What constitutes a minority on this campus? We cannot classify minority in one category as the survey does.
- (j) It is difficult to define diversity; you do not want a definition to put “diversity” in a box that excludes other forms of diversity.
- (k) It would be a good idea to include international students’ responses in Table 5 under the question “I value interaction with students from diverse cultures”; it helps us think about creating a global culture.
- (l) There is a disconnect between white and minority faculty responses regarding whether departments have courses that address diversity (Table 12).
- (m) A quarter (¼) of all faculty feel that racial discrimination is a problem on campus (Table 10).
- (n) The white male western European perspective is what is being presented in the classroom.

**(2) Not all the recommendations from the 1998 diversity study were followed up. What are some potential barriers that may affect the implementation of recommendations from this survey and from these focus/discussion groups?**

Comments

- (a) Lack of funding is the biggest barrier. The bottom line is that we have to have funding to support efforts; we need scholarships, and funds to recruit and retain faculty.
- (b) Support should come from the top down.
- (c) The butterfly book came from the top, but there was no action plan.
- (d) The Butterfly book did more damage than good.
- (e) Does Stephenville have a climate that supports diversity? The university should take the lead in diversity.
- (f) The Legislature mandates classes like American Government, and History, but does not mandate [courses in diversity].
- (g) There is apathy. For example, there should have been more people at this focus/discussion group today. Also, the organizers of the focus/discussion group did not expect a larger crowd here today; they did not get a room that could hold more people.
- (h) People have a feeling that nothing is going to change or happen.
- (i) Minority faculty do not feel welcome; Tarleton needs to invest in attractive salaries for minority faculty and to work at making them feel welcome.
- (j) Students do not see how understanding diversity will benefit them.

**3. Given these survey results, and what you know about Tarleton, what should Tarleton do to move forward regarding diversity? What specifically should (students, faculty, staff) do?**

Comments:

- (a) Use a writing intensive model and implement diversity/inclusion in classes.
- (b) Infuse diversity across curriculum; to do this, faculty will need to attend workshops and have training in diversity.
- (c) Currently, Tarleton does offer four languages; and faculty members do incorporate diversity as much as possible.

- (d) Seek research grants for study in other countries and for faculty exchange programs.
- (e) We already have the courses in place that would make a minor if this would get approved.
- (f) Seek diversity-based mini grants.
- (g) Seek to develop faculty partnerships with public schools through grants.
- (h) Diversify what we already offer.
- (i) Utilize community business people who travel for business abroad in diversity activities at Tarleton. Programs could provide an international business perspective. These would positively affect both the Tarleton and the community climate.
- (j) We need to give our students credit because they are a lot more cosmopolitan than we give them credit.
- (k) We need a discrimination statement in the student handbook.
- (l) We need a glossary of terms in student handbook.
- (m) Actively recruit minorities and put our money where our mouth is.
- (n) Audit our degree options to make them more attractive to diverse populations.
- (o) Be more aggressive in recruiting international students.
- (p) Encourage faculty to work with study abroad programs as part of promotion and tenure.
- (q) Get research grants to support diversity experiences.
- (r) CDI has only two staff; the department needs more clout and should report to a higher administrative level.
- (s) We need more minority recruiters and we need to pay them more.
- (t) We need to recruit from more diverse places.
- (u) As part of the Diversity Action Plan, we must be intentional. Tarleton needs to be the leader in making minorities feel more comfortable on campus and in the community.

### **Focus/Discussion Group with Staff**

---

Diversity Climate Survey focus/discussion group - Staff  
 April 10, 2008; 12p.m., TSC room 130  
 Dr. Jane Dennis, Facilitator  
 Ms. Darla Doty, Recorder  
 Number of participants: 34

**1. What were the most important or interesting findings from the survey? Why? What does each say about the climate of diversity at Tarleton?**

Comments

- (a) There were big gap differences in survey results between white and minority respondents across the board.
- (b) Obviously there have been prior recommendations, but we do not know the extent to which they have been acted on systemically.

- (c) The demographics table (Table 1) shows a big discrepancy in the percentage of Black students at Tarleton and those who actually completed the survey. Why did more of them not complete the survey?
- (d) The survey gave no information on SES (social economic standards); it focused most on race and gender. Diversity is so much more than what came out in survey.
- (e) Survey was taken a year ago. We need to refresh our minds on what the questions actually are.
- (f) The report leaves out a lot of what was asked in the survey.
- (g) Surprised at results and in what was left out.
- (h) The survey had too much focus on race.
- (i) The MLK incident was mishandled. It tells us something that students went to the media first.
- (j) There was a sense of mistrust from the MLK incident; we missed a teaching moment/opportunity.
- (k) Tradition at Tarleton promotes an unwillingness to change the image that is out there.
- (l) We do not have equal punishment for offenses; the way that an academic integrity incident was handled about two years ago is not the way that the MLK incident was handled.

**2. Not all the recommendations from the 1998 diversity study were followed up. What are some potential barriers that may affect the implementation of recommendations from this survey and from these focus/discussion groups?**

Comments

- (a) People now have the perspective that since there was not a lot accomplished after the 1998 survey, it is not important to the university.
- (b) Time could be a barrier—we need to act quickly on this.
- (c) This time of year (April) may be a barrier to getting things done.
- (d) This has to be a priority from top-down and it needs to permeate every part of the university.
- (e) There is too much focus on race; what about religious diversity? There is too narrow a definition of diversity in the survey.
- (f) People do not understand the acronyms.
- (g) The new President and change of leadership may be barrier or opportunity.
- (h) Change in general can be a barrier because people are against change.
- (i) Focus group meeting for students should not have been broken down into minority and others.
- (j) There is a lack of resources and plan of action.
- (k) Support should come from the top down.
- (l) This needs clear ownership of diversity. There needs to be a directive from university leadership. For example, should this be under CDI or the International Programs Office?
- (m) There is a perception that things at Tarleton are swept under the rug and are not communicated to the public.

- (n) Our hiring practices are barriers. People tend to hire people with the same small town biases, which leads to ignorance begetting ignorance.
- (o) The believability, credibility, and reliability of this report may be tainted because of the info that was omitted.
- (p) The image of Tarleton and its traditions as “cowboy,” and “country” are potential barriers.
- (q) Are we selling what we really are? Are we presenting a realistic view of our diversity on campus, especially in our marketing pieces?
- (r) We need to put resources where they need to go.
- (s) Tarleton is not putting its money where the mouth is.
- (t) There is a sense of mistrust that there is a real desire for change. There is a belief that what has been done and what will be done are only window dressing.
- (u) This current report notes there has been progress from 1998. What has that been? The report does not provide all the information on this.
- (v) The community does not have resources to support under-represented populations.
- (w) The university should be the leader when it comes to diversity in this community.
- (x) If diversity is important to us, then we must demand resources.
- (y) We do not have the right people in place.
- (z) Most people are not aware of what we are teaching.
- (aa) These are specific barriers to minority faculty and Staff:
  - The Stephenville community.
  - Campus culture.
  - No support.
  - The community drives institution, not other way around.
  - University policies and procedures are prohibitive to conducting national searches for staff/faculty.
  - Traditions.
  - Hico is 30 minutes away.

**3. Given these survey results, and what you know about Tarleton, what should Tarleton do to move forward regarding diversity? What specifically should (students, faculty, staff) do?**

Comments

- (a) We need to increase exposure of diversity in all classes; diversity needs to permeate through every course.
- (b) There is a newly formed Academic Task Force on Diversity in the Classroom.
- (c) We need to incorporate diversity in classes.
- (d) With growing globalization of the world, we need to teach diversity to help our students get jobs and be more marketable.
- (e) We need more information i.e. what is the subtle discrimination that students felt? We cannot act on these issues unless we know what is going on.
- (f) People need to be informed.
- (g) We need to change the philosophy of diversity. Diversity needs to be driven from top leadership, not through programming.
- (h) We must create a 24/7 learning environment.
- (i) We need to challenge ourselves to stretch and to get out of the box we are in.

- (j) Staff needs to set the example regarding diversity.
- (k) We need to reconsider some traditions. For example, “Beauty and the Beast” really makes fun of transgender students. Also, the “Purple Poo” could relate to an image of the KKK.
- (l) We need to identify 1-2 key priorities and then dedicate funds and efforts around these priorities.
- (m) Diversity is an ongoing process [and needs to be approached this way].
- (n) Tarleton should address civility; a lot of diversity problems would be solved if we approached things this way.
- (o) International students are not given enough support once they get here.
- (p) The “cowboy” school image still abounds at Tarleton, we need to change this.
- (q) We need to promote other Tarleton strengths rather than the “cowboy” image.
- (r) People perceive Tarleton as a low-cost university. We need to make sure our students have resources to address basic needs.
- (s) Faculty and staff are not diverse enough; this needs to change; we need more minority faculty and staff.
- (t) In making changes in diversity, we do not need to be preachy or “teachy”; we need to walk the talk.
- (u) Devote resources for faculty and staff in education and training in diversity.
- (v) Our mission is to educate and produce citizens of the world; we need diversity to meet our mission.

## **Appendix**

### **Diversity Climate Survey Focus/Discussion Group Questions**

- (1) From your perspective, what were the most important or interesting findings from the survey? Why? What does each say about the climate of diversity at Tarleton?**
- (2) Given these results, and what you know about Tarleton, what should Tarleton do to move forward regarding diversity? What specifically should (students, faculty, staff, administrators) do?**
- (3) Not all the recommendations from the 1998 diversity study were followed up. What do you think Tarleton needs to do this time around so that the recommendations from this survey and from these focus/discussion groups will be followed up?**