Overview of April 2012 Focus Groups

The Campus Climate Survey administered in the spring of 2011 provided significant information and insight about the perceptions that students, faculty, and staff hold about their UVM experience. A number of findings emerged that indicated both positive and challenging experiences across all groups of participants. For example, there were some places on the survey where members of our community provided a positive response to a question, coupled with negative comments about their experience. As a result, a number of focus groups were formed to further analyze the survey results and to help explain some of the contradictory findings that emerged. What follows is a synthesis of focus group findings.

A select group of faculty, staff and students were invited to participate in 90-minute focus groups in April of 2012. The Chief Diversity Office sponsored six group interviews: two faculty-only groups, two staff-only groups, and two student-only groups, each ranging in size from 6-10 participants. Dr. Judith Aiken, Associate Professor in the College of Education and Social Services, and Dr. Lynne Bond, Professor of Psychology and Interim Chair of Anthropology, facilitated the interviews. The groups provided additional insight and recommendations regarding what they valued about UVM, the scope of any discriminatory or disparaging remarks they had encountered, and the things that they believe would make our community a better and more inclusive place for everyone.

Climate Concerns

Participants observed that in their experience, power and position impact voice. They perceive that privileged men on campus have the most voice, while individuals from a low social economic status or from other marginalized populations (LGBT, non-white, non-English-speaking) have less voice and fewer advantages, as do those with less formal education. The participants also reported that there were cases where discriminatory or disparaging remarks occurred with no consequence. While some participants shared that they had not personally been the target of such remarks, they knew of others who had, and so still believed that discrimination occurs.

Contributors to High Satisfaction with UVM

Despite these concerns, focus group members expressed that they were glad that more people seem to be rally for positive change, and that UVM overall is committed to such change. They discussed many positive experiences that contribute to their overall satisfaction with UVM, including personal relationships with their peers, serving on committees, cultural events, the availability of resources and knowledge about marginalized populations, and the prominence of diversity groups and safe places on campus (such as LGBTQ, ALANA, and the CDO).
**Suggested Improvements**

The focus groups shared many ideas about things that they felt would further improve the UVM community, including:

- Improving the selection and training of supervisors
- Providing consistent and fair staff evaluations
- Providing career paths and opportunities for staff
- Creating better work spaces
- Providing more opportunity for staff to impact important decisions
- Creating a mechanism for more cross-campus exchanges
- Improving supervisor and manager accountability
- Strengthening our infrastructure
- Creating more options to combat bullying and harassment
- Requiring ongoing training for supervisors
- Utilizing exit interviews
- Creating safe spaces for all voices to be heard
- Restructuring the Presidential Commissions and SIP
- Conducting shorter surveys more frequently, and utilizing resulting data at all levels
- Using a more democratic process to make important decisions
- Improving across campus connections
- Ensuring that department chairs are committed to diversity
- Identifying a point person to help direct individuals to resources that help resolve problems that are not necessarily a violation of a policy
- Improving diversity-related instruction and pedagogy
- Integrating diversity knowledge requirements into hiring processes
- Allocating more resources to diversity units on campus
- Creating more co-curricular activities and academic programs for students
- Adding professional development expectations to job descriptions