

Gray's Harbor College White Student Listening Sessions

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Overview

Twelve students (12) participated in the listening session. All of them spoke several times, addressing different topics in conversation. They seemed open to sharing their experiences and curious to learn more from one another.

I conducted polls (results attached), and then asked them the following questions regarding their answers. This summary includes themes that were spoken to often, as well as specific quotes and differences in perspectives.

From your perspective, in what ways does GHC support or fail to support a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB)?

- Because learning is remote, some students don't have a true sense of belonging or feel unaware of the ways the college may be supporting DEIB.
 - "They have support groups and I believe they have a room dedicated to diversity and equity which is really great. I am strictly remote, so I have not been to the college directly to know too much about how things go on."
- Welding and automotive courses are pushed out into the field and not included as much in campus activities.
- Most have felt included in class discussions.
- There are a few Spanish speaking staff, however, "I think we do need more translators. I work in the Welcome Center, and we have times where people come in and we can't communicate great with them."
- The College is "culturally pre-competent." They are trying to get started in DEIB but lack deeper understanding and have not taken much action. For a lot of people on campus, this is just about policy and they, "don't have deeper understanding or a personal connection to the issues."
- Looking at dynamics of campus staff, it seems very White. This may reflect who is available to come work here, who is applying or encouraged to apply, or employees of color may not feel welcome.
- The student diversity/equity center hasn't been functioning well and doesn't seem to be a bigger priority of the college.
- Two students with physical disabilities shared that the campus is not accessible. Auto doors don't work, parking is difficult, there's lots of distance across campus and construction interferes with navigating between buildings and parking lots, stairs don't always have ramps, there's no elevator if you park at the bottom of campus, and they didn't fit between tables in the classrooms. They were also concerned that people in their program would assume they wouldn't be able to do their job because they were in a wheelchair.
- There are only 2 gender neutral bathrooms, and a trans student has been late to class because they had to wait to use one of them.

- From a cisgender student’s perspective, professors are open to pronoun usage and demonstrate respect for students. A transgender student shared they had been misgendered quite often in class and when they brought up in discussions, they were told, “We don’t worry about pronouns in this program.”
- Support was expressed by many of the students to make the campus more welcoming and accessible for everyone.

In what ways have you witnessed or experienced prejudice or discrimination at GHC?

- Most have not witnessed prejudice in person at Grays Harbor.
- They did connect discrimination with people’s lack of access to use the gender-neutral bathrooms.

To what extent do your courses provide opportunities for you to learn about cultures, backgrounds, and experiences different from your own?

- Many believe their professors do a good job with this.
 - “In class and out of class we talk about different experiences. People are from different parts of the country and the world. We tell each other stories.”
 - Business management classes are teaching diversity and equity. “I want to make sure when I own a business all customers feel welcome and included. I want to be a nice person. This is authentic, not about just making money.”
 - “My English professor does an outstanding job of including diversity and equity issues in our reading materials.”
 - The Human Services program has a class on diversity that recognizes of multiple areas, not just ethnicity or gender.
 - In ASL classes, a core piece is learning deaf history.
- Students are learning from one another, especially when their classes are racially diverse.
- Some teachers are not talking about this at all, and students did not see why this would be included in technical course content, like a math class.
 - “Incorporating diversity into every course would be too much. I just need math to get my degree done.”
- They would like more courses with an explicit focus on diversity to be offered remotely, such as African American and Indigenous studies.
 - “The remote classes are very information based and there’s not a lot of discussion around subjects of diversity.”
- Trans students felt frustrated and unwelcome when discussion of trans and non-binary identity was not discussed.

To what extent do you feel a sense of belonging at Grays Harbor College.

- Students who agreed with this statement talked about how they were involved in clubs and organizations on campus that make it more welcoming. For example, one student

started the gaming club because they didn't feel like they belonged and wanted to connect with other students.

- "I think the college having more groups/clubs would be a really good thing to make more people feel welcomed as well, particularly LGBT people! I know that I would definitely attend and I am sure plenty of others would as well."
- Some identified that students don't get involved because they have to be self-starting and self-initiating. "They have to create and seek out."
- "The staff at the college makes me belong for sure, the staff here is so friendly. Everyone in the WC is welcoming and they are always trying to make you feel better. They always make sure your health comes first before work or anything else. We are one big family."
- Some feel staff members could do more to identify student interests and get the word out beyond putting up posters.
- Students identified their own anxiety and agoraphobia as barriers to participation in campus activities.
- One student spoke about feeling very welcomed. They had a hard time find a quiet space where the overstimulation they experienced because of their autism wouldn't prevent them from studying on campus. They had to work hard to find a quiet, dark environment. They were having a hard time making friends and felt like they weren't really part of the community.

What could the college do to improve the climate of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging at GHC?

- The students voiced interest in making GHC more welcoming. They asked for more information on requirements of starting clubs and what to do to run them. By the end of the session, several were exchanging contact information with one another in the chat.
 - "I'm incredibly busy to begin with, but I'd be happy to help run a group that would include me and make me feel more welcome and seen."
- They also named barriers to getting involved with clubs.
 - "Good ideas aren't able to get implemented with big processes. It was easier years ago."
 - They need more faculty advisors--they are over-worked.
- Students with children identified the need for childcare on campus. "I have gone to this college for 8 years off and on and every time it's been a no go for childcare."
 - They would like to have a little mom group. They don't have the freedom to hang out with friends.
 - It was challenging in the past for parents to attend college, but is so much easier with everything online and not having to worry about childcare.
 - "Mayhem was fun. I brought my family and made friends through having kids."
- The DE Center should be in a central location, more readily available for students.
- A lot stopped because of Covid.
- "We are a 2-year college. A lot of students graduate quickly. We can't expect the same processes as other colleges and have to reset our minds in how we do things."
- Elevators don't work and it is an issue for people in wheelchairs.

- More diversity in food options on campus for those with celiac disease would be helpful.

Because this group of White students had shared little about racial diversity, I asked them about their perspectives and experiences with this aspect of inclusion and belonging.

- Many shared that they didn't notice racial differences or pay attention to them, making statements such as, "I just see the person."
- Some didn't see the college having conversations about racism but felt they may be missing something because they are White.
- Several agreed with this comment in chat, "It would be nice to have a zoom meeting where POC voices of Grays Harbor are amplified, maybe with white people having their mics off so it creates a space for POC to just speak and for us to just listen without judgement."
- Some identified the issue that it may be difficult for students of color to speak up when they don't feel safe to share with the people who have historically persecuted them.