Response to the Climate Study
University Outreach Advisory Committee
November 13, 2017

The purpose of this document is to outline the University Outreach Advisory Committee’s recommendations for responding to the Campus Climate Assessment Project. We believe that University Outreach is an important part of UM-Flint’s Strategic Plan, and that our recommendations not only support a more welcoming climate, but also align with the new Strategic Plan. Specifically, the fifth high-level strategic priority speaks directly to the University’s role in the community as a reciprocal member of “the city, region, and beyond” where partnerships lead to “opportunities for student learning and academic research that has value for communities locally and around the world” (UM-Flint High-Level Strategic Priorities).

The following document is organized by (1) identifying the underlying connections between University Outreach, the Climate Study, and the University’s Strategic Priorities, (2) proposing action items that align with these foundational connections, and (3) connecting specific findings in the climate study with current research around community-engaged teaching, learning, scholarship, and service.

Summary of connections between University Outreach, the Climate Study, and the University’s Strategic Priorities

- Outreach has engagement at its core.
- Engagement requires interaction, acceptance, respect.
- Community-based and service learning facilitate/require engagement with the community, thus increasing diversity awareness.
- More interaction, acceptance, and respect lead to an improved climate.
- Outreach and community engagement promote fostering a caring community, leadership for constructive participation in a diverse, multicultural world, and engaged citizenship – key components of the UM-F mission.
- So, a focus on outreach in teaching, learning, scholarship, and service is congruent with the UM-Flint mission and with the goals of improving the campus climate by fostering diversity awareness, interaction, acceptance, and respect.

Proposed action items:

- Maintain Outreach’s mission in the community. Continue to demonstrate the relationship between the University and the community as a reciprocal partnership of mutual benefit.
- Re-instate the Boyer Program to support faculty who want to develop engaged teaching methodologies in their classes.
- Establish a mentoring program for engaged teaching and scholarship where experienced faculty who have a history of engagement can mentor faculty interested in expanding into this methodology.
● Create awards for excellence in engagement that recognizes faculty, staff, students and community partners.
● Ensure that Civic Engagement Grants are fully funded for those instructors whose engaged teaching requires financial resources to be effective (while also ensuring that the highest standards of civic engagement are being met).
● Have explicit policies in the T&P guidelines that demonstrate value for civically engaged teaching and scholarship. Include non-traditional publications and outcomes that benefit the community. Expand the value of community engagement in the T&P guidelines beyond service; include it in the sections for teaching and scholarship.

Connections between the Climate Study and research on community engagement
This section will discuss how to increase support for diversity focusing on civically engaged teaching and learning practices for faculty and students.

The introduction of the Executive Summary of the Campus Climate study states that:

_The University of Michigan-Flint (UM-Flint) campus community affirms that diversity and inclusion are crucial to the intellectual vitality of the institution, and that they engender academic engagement where teaching, working, learning, and living take place in pluralistic communities of mutual respect. Free exchange of different ideas and viewpoints in supportive environments encourage students, faculty, and staff to develop the critical thinking and citizenship skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. University of Michigan-Flint also is committed to fostering a caring community that provides leadership for constructive participation in a diverse, multicultural world. As noted in University of Michigan-Flint’s mission statement, “The University of Michigan-Flint is a comprehensive urban university of diverse learners and scholars committed to advancing our local and global communities. In the University of Michigan tradition, we value excellence in teaching, learning, and scholarship; student centeredness; and engaged citizenship. Through personal attention and dedicated faculty and staff, our students become leaders and best in their fields, professions, and communities” (Campus Climate Assessment Project, page i, emphasis added)._

As is demonstrated in the introduction, UM-Flint is dedicated to diversity, inclusion, mutual respect, critical thinking, engaged citizenship, and participation in a diverse, multicultural world. These outcomes can be achieved for students through teaching, particularly when that teaching includes community-engaged and experiential components. These can include service learning, community-based learning, and practica (Cress et al. 2005). As Cress at al. (2005) say, “colleges and universities would be educationally remiss if they did not teach students how to connect themselves to their communities” (p. 14). This can happen through all forms of community-engaged teaching and learning. Research demonstrates that students improve their diversity, social justice attitudes, and political awareness, as well as increase their appreciation of diverse backgrounds and change preconceived notions about the community (Simons et al. 2011; Simons & Cleary 2010). Teachers who use engaged pedagogies can also help students
learn to interact with people who are culturally different, discover commonalities, and develop tolerant attitudes toward cultural differences beyond the classroom (Simons & Cleary, 2010).

Integrating awareness of, engagement with, and acceptance of diversity is important. However, how to do this seems less clear. Survey results from the climate study were split on whether having diversity training would be a viable means to counteract prejudices.

*In the third theme, respondents discussed their concerns about diversity-related issues such as diversity training, the campus focus on diversity and inclusion, and discrimination based on identity. Several respondents offered up suggestions related to diversity including “celebrate various cultures festivals,” and “GREATER RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN FACULTY AND IN STAFF.” (Campus Climate Assessment Project, p. 276)*

A few respondents felt that there were more important things for the university to focus on. One respondent argued, “It seems to me that the administration is spending an inordinate amount of time on racial and sexual diversity/tolerance issues. I think your time would be better spent making sure that you have competent effective instructors and adequate resources for every student who is there seeking an education.” Another respondent shared, “Campus’ ongoing focus on ‘diversity’ has created excluded groups and this relentless focus on race, gender, sexuality and every other protected status has resulted in more focus on social identification than academics. Now you want to double down on this??...Why can't you just teach everyone to be learned, responsible Americans? How hard is this? TEACH. Stop campaigning. Put resources into helping EVERYBODY instead of looking for scape-goats and slapping on labels.” Another respondent stated, “Diversity and equality are only issues if you make them one as I see it the campus is actually really good with that stuff, and there are more pressing issues to deal with.” (Campus Climate Assessment Project, p. 277)

What this indicates is that while diversity training may be helpful for certain people, it will not reach everyone. In addition to diversity training, promoting and recognizing the value of community engagement in teaching would be one solid means for addressing climate issues around diversity, particularly for students. To effectively engage in community-engaged pedagogies such as service learning, a teacher must already have a good relationship in the community. This means being able to work effectively with a diverse population to achieve goals. Faculty may need training and mentorship to achieve democratic partnerships in the community that recognize social disparities (White, 2010).

Students also recognize the value of incorporating issues of diversity and cross-cultural competence into the curriculum:

*Eighty-one percent (n = 739) of the Student respondents thought that incorporating issues of diversity and cross-cultural competence more effectively into the curriculum*
was available at University of Michigan-Flint and 19% (n = 177) of Student respondents thought that it was not available. Eighty percent (n = 592) of the Student respondents who thought that incorporating issues of diversity and cross-cultural competence more effectively into the curriculum was available believed it positively influenced the climate and 70% (n = 123) of Student respondents who did not think it was available thought it would positively influence the climate if it were available. (Campus Climate Assessment Project, p. 270)

Not only does service learning and engaged teaching increase awareness of diversity, it can also help students feel less isolated. This is especially true for student who commute long distances.

A few respondents shared their desires for more ways to get involved in activities and organizations on campus. One respondent noted, “More clubs and organizations, more on campus job opportunity.” These desires often came from commuter or online students who felt isolated. One respondent wrote, “Honestly, as a person that drives back and forth from campus every day, there is no sense of involvement... How do you make people like me, the travelers, feel like they know more about the school to drive to for an hour or two, feel included and involved?” Another respondent requested, “I'd like for UM-Flint to provide more activities and club activities for online students, especially those living off-campus to feel more engaged.” (Campus Climate Assessment Project, p. 276)

Service learning’s effect on increasing retention has been documented by Simonet (2008). He argues that service learning creates greater student engagement, which in turn results in greater student retention.

Thirty-one percent (n = 254) of Undergraduate Student respondents and 25% (n = 46) of Graduate/Professional Student respondents had seriously considered leaving University of Michigan-Flint. (Campus Climate Assessment Project, p. 233)

Retention has been widely discussed on this campus as enrollments have dropped; it is clear that retaining students is something that the institution must address. Engaged teaching can help students feel more integrated into the community, making them more likely to stay at UM-Flint because they will feel that they are valued and belong here.

The English Language Program (ELP) is an excellent example of how to integrate service learning throughout the curriculum. This type of effort should be recognized and valued throughout UM-Flint’s policies, with foundational support for faculty and instructional staff who want to learn how to do this type of work. Faculty are unclear about whether such recognition and rewards are available for including diversity issues in the curriculum, but most believe that this would positively impact the institutional climate.
Sixty-two percent (n = 140) of the Faculty respondents thought that recognition and rewards for including diversity issues in courses across the curriculum were available and 38% (n = 87) of Faculty respondents thought that they were not available. Seventy-four percent (n = 103) of the Faculty respondents who thought that recognition and rewards for including diversity issues in courses across the curriculum were available believed that they positively influenced the climate and 68% (n = 59) of Faculty respondents who thought they were not available thought recognition and rewards for including diversity issues in courses across the curriculum would positively influence the climate if they were available. (Campus Climate Assessment Project, p. 234)

While there is good evidence for the value of service learning and other forms of civically engaged teaching for retention and success (Simonet, 2008), diversity awareness (Simons & Cleary 2010; Simons et al. 2011), understanding of social issues (Yorio & Ye, 2012), and cultural competence (DeBonis, 2015), there is limited recognition of this work in tenure and promotion policies. Those who practice engaged teaching spend additional time and energy building relationships with community partners. This additional expenditure of time benefits students while limiting the time available for other necessary work, such as writing and research. Additionally, most faculty who practice engaged teaching also do community-based participatory research. This is valuable because it integrates the faculty’s work into a comprehensive narrative. Sturm et al. (2011) argue that valuing public scholarship is particularly important for faculty of color because there is an inherent risk to this type of work: it’s time consuming, it may not be equally valued in the tenure process compared to more traditional research, and it often gets placed under service where the full value of the work is invisible. In UM-Flint T&P policies, engaged scholarship only counts if there are traditionally academic publications generated from this work. This can hurt the university’s standing in the community; if engaged faculty at the university do not receive tenure, the collaboration between the university and the community is weakened. As Rinaldo et al. (2015) demonstrate, community partners are indispensable stakeholders in service learning (and community-based research) and should not be disregarded in favor of the university partners.

Works Cited


