

Lower Columbia College

Student Listening & Feedback Sessions

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Facilitated & reported by

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March 2024

Background

In Spring 2023, I was contacted by Wendy Hall, Vice President of Effectiveness & College Relations, and Lower Columbia College's (LCC) Public Information Officer. She asked if I would assist with the development and implementation of listening sessions for faculty, students, and staff during the 2023-24 academic year. This work would supplement campus climate surveys conducted in recent academic years and directly support LCC's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) mission and DEI Strategic Plan (available at <https://lowercolumbia.edu/diversity-equity/>).

Faculty listening sessions which were held during Fall Quarter 2023, and a report on the findings from the faculty listening sessions was submitted in December 2023. The current report details the development, conduct, and results of the student listening and feedback sessions conducted during February 2024. Staff listening sessions are scheduled for Spring Quarter 2024.

Summary

The students' perceptions described in this report can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Overall, students suggest that LCC demonstrates a commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive environment through a range of programs, services, and initiatives that support the needs and identities of its student body.
2. While most students responded that they have not experienced or witnessed prejudice or discrimination at LCC, a few mentioned specific instances of prejudicial or discriminatory behavior they had witnessed.
3. Overall, the responses reflect a range of perspectives about how the college could further enhance its diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, with many students appreciating the existing efforts while also offering suggestions for improvement.
4. The closed-ended questions align with the student's responses to the open-ended questions:
 - ✓ 91% of the students interviewed for this project saw LCC as a place where they are provided opportunities to learn about the cultures, backgrounds, and experiences of students who are different from them.
 - ✓ 100% of the students interviewed for this project somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt a sense of community at the college.

Note that no identifying information was collected from students during these sessions so that they would feel completely comfortable regarding their anonymity.

Planning and Logistics

Previous experience has suggested that students are more comfortable talking about this sensitive topic in smaller groups or one-on-one. Thus, an approach was developed whereby several “interview rooms” would be identified on campus where students would sit with an interviewer and answer a limited number of questions. An interviewer, notetaker and a logistics person would be needed in each location. Students would receive a \$10 gift card for the approximately 10 minutes of their time the interview would likely take.

I created a protocol for the listening sessions, which was reviewed by college staff. To capture student responses in a standardized, electronic format, I also created a Survey Monkey form to be used by the interviewers during the listening session. In mid-January, I facilitated a training session for interviewers regarding the listening session staging, protocol, and guidelines. These folks were given an opportunity to ask questions and make any suggestions they might have about the listening session format or protocol.

All currently enrolled LCC students were invited to participate via the following communication channels:

- LCC website
- Digital reader boards (located across campus)
- Direct email campaign to students
- Social media
- Paper flyers placed across campus
- Direct email campaign to faculty and staff to encourage students to attend (including athletic coaches and supervisors of work-study students)
- On the ground recruiting on the days of the sessions

There were three sessions held during February as follows:

- 10 am – 12 pm, 2/22/24 – held in Student Center (private conference room adjacent to cafeteria).
- 1 – 3 pm, 2/22/2024 – held in private conference adjacent to Library/Learning Commons). This session was offered in English or Spanish.
- 11 am – 1 pm, 2/27/2024 – held in classroom located in same building as the gym and fitness center.

Two researchers were in the interview room: one asking questions, the other taking notes. Two to three people were stationed outside the room to handle the consent form process and gift card tracking. Students were instructed to go to the cashier's window to pick up their gift card as required by the LCC Finance Office. A Google sheet was used for tracking so students could pick up their gift cards immediately following their interview.

While student demographics were not collected as part of the listening session protocol, the researchers observed that there was a wide variety of race/ethnicities, ages, and genders for students who participated. Some international students participated as well.

Results from the Listening & Feedback Sessions

There were 32 entries from the student listening sessions in the Survey Monkey database from the listening sessions held on campus. The college met the expected number of participants because of sound planning and teamwork. As noted above, the responses described below were all from the on-campus listening sessions.

The first three questions were constructed as open-ended questions with the expectation students would provide a brief – but, hopefully, thoughtful – response. The last two questions were multiple choice items. These two questions and response options were read to the student being interviewed and the interviewer recorded their response in the Survey Monkey form. The response options were “Strongly Agree,” “Somewhat Agree,” “Somewhat Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.”

The results for each of the open-ended survey items are summarized below, followed by the student responses to the multiple-choice questions presented in tabular form.

Question #1: From your perspective, in what ways does LCC support a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion?

Students often mentioned that staff and faculty make them feel “comfortable” and “safe,” and that the college was doing a “good job” of providing opportunities for students. They stated that the college actively includes and represents diverse identities, including international students, LGBTQ+ students, and religious groups.

Students noted that LCC provides resources like counseling services, food pantries, lodging assistance, and emergency financial resources. They report that these support services are accessible to all students, regardless of background. For example, they stated that the college advertises clearly for all ethnic types and offers numerous scholarships and a “fantastic TRiO

program” to support students financially. Another student noted that it was “*refreshing*” that efforts were being made to help students for whom English was not their first language.

Students often mentioned events, clubs, and activities in response to this question. Students referred to a diversity and equity director (an international student) who organizes activities for international students. They specifically mentioned that LCC hosts events and activities for international students and makes considerable effort to keep them involved in campus life:

“They do a good job of getting international students and students of color together and inviting them to basketball games and stuff like that.”

“They had the student men of color conference...I was surprised they had it, and that it was fun, and how much I learned.”

“You got the flags.”

Students also observed that the college has a variety of clubs, such as SAGA (Sexualities Genders Alliance), that provide safe spaces for students to connect with others who share their identities. One student added that the college has “*a great vibe to it...like counseling help if you need to talk to someone about stuff like that.*” Many of the students also referenced the multicultural club. (A roster of LCC’s student clubs is available at:

[https://lowercolumbia.edu/student-life/clubs/.](https://lowercolumbia.edu/student-life/clubs/))

One student noted that “*doing things like this...having surveys to make sure they are doing a good job of it*” was another way the college supports diversity, equity, and inclusion.

While the college focuses on diversity, one student advocated for balance and inclusivity for all students, including those from non-diverse backgrounds.

Question #2: If you are comfortable sharing, in what ways have you witnessed or experienced prejudice or discrimination at LCC?

While some incidents were mentioned, the general sentiment was that the college promotes a welcoming and inclusive environment. Students stated that everyone at the college had been “*nice*” and “*respectful.*” Another common observation – this from a student relatively new to the college – was that “*Everyone has already been very nice. I haven’t even seen anything from students that would be considered racist, sexist, or anything of that sort.*”

A few students mentioned incidents they observed or heard about but didn't directly experience themselves. A couple of students mentioned incidents that appeared to be unintentionally negative. One student noted, based on their own experience, income-based discrimination regarding access to technology for online classes. Another student reported that they had seen “*students being mean to other students for racial reasons.*” One student

mentioned witnessing discrimination against a student with disabilities. Another noted similar behavior against a member of the gay community. These were, according to the students, reported to and addressed by the college.

One student felt that a flyer that referenced 'students of color' was, in fact, exclusionary. *"It seems ironic because you are trying to be inclusive. It seems a bit hypocritical to me."*

To the credit of the college, the negative observations were a small percentage of the total. As one student put it: *"Unfortunately, our society does still have some prejudices. But I don't encounter that here."*

Question #3: What should the college do to improve the climate of diversity, equity, and inclusion at LCC?

The responses to the question about how the college could be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive varied, with some students offering specific suggestions and others expressing satisfaction with the current environment.

Some students suggested having more activities and events where everyone can *"come together."* They were clearly interested in more opportunities for interaction and community building. A few students expressed interest in having events or groups specifically tailored to different cultures and races, like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) but for a more diverse range of backgrounds. Several students indicated that they wanted to see additional activities and events so they could learn more about other cultures and ethnicities.

One student asked: *"Do we have a diversity and equity club?"* While some students thought there was a diversity club, several concluded it was not active. There seemed to be some similar confusion about the diversity center as well.

There were comments about improving awareness of events and resources on campus through better advertising and promotion, especially for events related to diversity and cultural awareness: *"It is a small campus, but we have a lot of diverse people here. If we had more events [we could] make it known that there is a community here."*

Some students recommended increasing marketing efforts to raise awareness of the college's inclusivity and community-building initiatives, especially through social media and community outreach, adding, we need *"more people from LCC in the community to share information about how friendly we are and the opportunities we have for financial aid."*

A few students mentioned the importance of representation, both in terms of diverse student groups and in the broader college community, to ensure that everyone feels included. There were suggestions for creating support groups or forums where students can discuss their

experiences and advocate for themselves in a safe and supportive environment. Along those lines, another student proposed encouraging more seniors to audit classes to enhance diversity in the student population.

There was a suggestion to expand counseling services to reduce wait times and ensure accessibility for all students.

One student expressed reservations about focusing too much on specific identities, suggesting that it could be divisive rather than inclusive. There was a similar comment that many of the activities seemed focused on women. However, most students' sentiments were similar to this one: *"I think you guys are doing great...There is definitely effort there, and the effort is most appreciated."*

Question #4: To what degree do you agree that your LCC courses provide opportunities for you to learn about cultures, backgrounds, and experiences different from your own?

As shown in the table below, 91% of the students interviewed for this project saw LCC as a place where they are provided opportunities to learn about the cultures, backgrounds, and experiences of students who are different from them.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	27	50.0
Somewhat Agree	13	40.6
Somewhat Disagree	3	9.4
Total	32	100.0

Question #5: To what degree do you agree with the statement: I feel a sense of community at LCC.

As shown in the table below, 100% of the students interviewed for this project somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt a sense of community at the college.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	27	84.4
Somewhat Agree	5	15.6
Total	32	100.0

Observations

The student responses to both the open-ended questions in the listening sessions and the multiple-choice questions suggest that, in general, students feel a sense of community at LCC, and that the college supports and contributes to a diverse and inclusive environment. All the respondents reported they either strongly agreed (84%) or somewhat agreed (16%) that they “feel a sense of community at LCC.” During the interviews, students referred to the college as a diverse campus, one that is an open and welcoming place, with considerable support for students that is manifested in a variety of ways.

Responses to both the open-ended and multiple-choice questions indicate that most students believe they have opportunities to learn about cultures and experiences that differ from their own at celebrations and events, in clubs and in their courses. It was interesting to note, however, that students often suggested additional efforts should be made to include more and different cultures so they could learn from others.

The students identified a variety of ways for the institution to create a more welcoming and inclusive campus environment described on pages 6-7. These are, by far, suggestions to expand or increase the positive things the college is already doing to support DEI. While students acknowledged the college's efforts in promoting diversity and inclusivity, some suggested that progress is being made gradually over time.

While most students indicated that they had not experienced or observed an incident involving prejudice or discrimination, those few students that did share such experiences or observations reported those were in relation to disabilities, race, or gender identity.

- Note that the 32 responses were all from students who spent time on campus. It might be valuable in the future to attempt gathering information from students who access instruction and services primarily online to see if their perceptions align with students who are primarily on campus.