

# Discussion Guide

for

*Campus Diversity,  
Student Voices:*

University of Michigan,  
September 2002 – April 2003

## Introduction

This guide is for use by faculty, staff and student groups. The goal is to facilitate exploration of the sensitive social issues discussed in the film. We encourage you to use the questions that suit your goals. The primary objectives of these discussion questions are:

- to assist discussion leaders and groups who watch the documentary in investigating the concepts and terms raised in the film;
- to provide discussion participants with an opportunity to articulate their own views and experiences within a larger context;
- to promote self exploration and awareness among discussion participants.

## Background

The film *Campus Diversity, Student Voices* was produced in the academic year prior to the historic Supreme Court decisions in the University of Michigan affirmative action cases. The objective of the documentary is to consider what diversity means to students at the University of Michigan. It features undergraduate and graduate students from a variety of backgrounds who are enrolled in a wide spectrum of the University's programs. The students' opinions range from conservative to liberal and from unaware to engaged. The interviews were taped between September 2002 and April 2003.

*Campus Diversity, Student Voices* relays the complex meaning of students' experiences with diversity, and the significance of both the formal and informal opportunities the University provides to learn about, and learn from, others. The filmmaker believes that the film responds to the call by the University of Michigan's President Coleman, following the Supreme Court's decision in the admissions lawsuits, for our University to "take the lead in creating new ways to infuse our campuses with the myriad perspectives that fuel our strength."

The film is meant to present a snapshot of a wide spectrum of views and opinions. For a scientific sampling of University of Michigan undergraduate views on these issues, as well as how such views change over time at the University, please consult the *Michigan Student Study* originally conducted 1990-1994 and now being replicated for 2000-2004, along with alumni follow-up from the first cohort. Data from the current study along with that from the original study are available on line at [www.umich.edu/~oami/mss/](http://www.umich.edu/~oami/mss/) along with the survey instruments, publications, and other resources. Material from the study may be useful to supplement and contextualize discussions held in connection with the documentary.

This guide was developed by A.T. Miller and Diana Kardia at the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) at the University of Michigan. To locate a trained facilitator who can assist in developing and leading a program, or to explore other ways to use the film, contact Ernesto Mejia at 734.615.1291 or [divasst@umich.edu](mailto:divasst@umich.edu). For further information about using this film and discussion guide as a pedagogical tool in classroom settings, contact CRLT at 734.764.0505 or [crlt@umich.edu](mailto:crlt@umich.edu).

## Exercises

A. Plan to show the documentary at an event involving at least two different groups, such as two different floors of a residence hall, instructors from two different courses, programs, or departments, two different organizations, or two classes or sections meeting together. Having this experience with at least some individuals whose opinions and interactions are unfamiliar can add greatly to the consideration of the issues. In addition, having more than one “leader” or instructor present will help mitigate some of the issues of participants trying to satisfy what they perceive as a facilitator’s expectations or desired outcome.

B. Rather than have a “whole group” discussion, divide those present into smaller groups of 3, 4, or 5, ensuring that people are in groups with others they do not know. After answering several of the following questions, have people switch groups. Repeat this switching several times. When everyone comes back together in the large group, discuss the dynamics of their different discussions depending on the composition of their small groups. Did it make a difference when the gender balance changed, the ethnic or racial makeup of the small group, the type of political views present, the level of commitment of the participants?

C. A group of instructors might take turns focusing on each of the major student voices in the film and discuss how they would reach out to include each of them in a particular course or a common discussion of issues like these. Strategies then could turn to how to handle the mixed situation of having several of these views and students present in the same class, perhaps in disagreement with each other. Would the individual strategies work the same way in a mixed climate of opinion. Where do your own opinions fit in as an instructor?

D. Try showing the video twice—the first time straight through, and then a second showing where the viewing audience is allowed to say “stop” or “freeze” in order to raise a question or issue in response to particular moments or statements in the documentary. This strategy allows the whole group to contribute to decisions about setting priorities for the discussion. If using this technique, it is important for the facilitator to pay attention to balance in views regarding what issues are being taken up, who is asserting themselves to stop the film, and what context issues might be omitted in this procedure.

E. Use a “fishbowl” in which four or five individuals are asked to discuss some of the questions in the center of the room with the rest of the audience observing their discussion in an outer circle. Observers may be allowed to tap someone in the inner circle on the shoulder to replace them and participate in the inner-circle discussion. After a given amount of time, the observers then engage in a discussion of the process and dynamics they observed in the small group. There are also a number of variations one can use with the ‘fishbowl’ technique.

F. If it is for a class or organized seminar or reading group, assign the students to read some of the expert testimony that demonstrates that the presence of diversity is necessary, but not sufficient to gain the educational benefits of diversity. Have students consider the reality of these findings in the context of the student voices in the documentary and their own experience. They might also consider some of the important points about testing and other issues found in the expert testimony. The texts are available at [www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/expert/](http://www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/expert/)

G. Use selected clips from the film to provoke discussion around some of the questions below. Then show the entire film at the end of the discussion.

## Questions

- *Diversity as an issue*

1. In your own view, what is the value of diversity in education? How is your answer to this question similar to and different from the answers given by students in the documentary?
2. What sorts of things do you learn from views, attitudes, and perspectives that are different from your own?
3. Did you come to Michigan with the hope that you'd have a chance to interact with a different set of people than you knew before? If so, why was this important to you?
4. What is diversity? How did the various students in the documentary define this idea? How does this compare with your own definition? How does it compare with ways you see the University staff, administration or classroom professors define it?
5. What is a multicultural experience? Do you think you've had a multicultural experience, or multicultural experiences at Michigan? If so, did you know at the time that you were having one? Did it happen on purpose or just by happenstance? What were the necessary elements or circumstances?
6. How do money and social status affect the ways people interact (or don't) across racial/ethnic boundaries? What did students in the video think about this issue? What are your own thoughts? Does such status affect interaction across other boundaries as well?
7. Diversity is often defined in terms of social and identity issues within the United States. How does this compare with the effects of having both U.S. and international faculty and students together at Michigan?
8. Diversity is often associated with liberal politics, and yet the students in the video come from a wide array of political perspectives and still have many views in common. What is the relationship between politics and a commitment to diversity in education? How does your interest in and commitment to diversity issues relate to your own political identity?
9. How polarized is the discussion about diversity in your day to day experience? What are the extremes, how much are they representative of the opinions of the broad cross section of students?
10. How is diversity related to Michigan's high standards of academics, research, and the high expectations Michigan students have for their futures?
11. What makes diversity issues so hard to talk about?

- *Higher education and diversity*

12. How is the educational or campus environment similar to and different from the "real world"? What does it mean to utilize a college education as preparation for the "real world"?

13. In what ways have your childhood/pre-college experiences been similar to and different from the “real world”?

14. What preparation do you feel you need to be successful in the “real world”?

15. Students in the documentary talk about the roles of safety, comfort, and familiarity in their educational experiences. In what ways are these concepts important or not in your experiences of learning environments?

16. Who is responsible for creating a climate within the classroom so that all students can participate, learn, and get the benefit of their shared experience? How is this kind of climate created? What are some effective strategies?

17. Students in the video also talked about the effects on their learning process of honesty and guilt. What does it take to create an educational environment where people are honest about these topics? How do fear and guilt affect the learning process in these areas of diversity? What can be done about this?

- *Diversity as part of a course*

18. In the film, students listed both pros and cons about addressing diversity through courses. What were they? What has been true in your experience?

19. How is it different to learn about diversity in more informal contexts such as residence halls, sports, organizations, or events? What are the benefits and risks in these settings?

20. What is gained from learning about diversity in a setting that has diversity as an explicit part of the focus? How does this compare with learning about diversity through an experience that doesn't focus on diversity but involves a diverse group of participants?

21. What are the benefits and problems associated with requirements related to learning about diversity (e.g., the Race & Ethnicity requirement in LSA)?

22. How do grades affect the experience of learning about diversity issues? What benefits and risks are there to working on these issues in a graded environment?

- *Self-segregation*

23. Students in the video talked a great deal about the ways people end up segregating themselves on campus. What did they see as the benefits of this? What tensions did they identify? How does this relate to your own experience?

24. Are there some contexts where separation (or connecting primarily with those who are similar to you) is more understandable or appropriate than others? If so, what makes the difference?

25. There are many ways people gather together based on similarities in their identities. Is there a meaningful difference when people do this based on gender or race or religion or age or academic major or sexuality or nationality (or other factors)?

26. In the documentary, students talked about other factors that they saw as leading to divisiveness: inflexibility, the polarization of issues by leaders and the media, political action that stirs up controversy, unsupported opinions combined with lack of listening or lack of openness to other opinions. Which of these seem most important in your experience? What other factors promote divisiveness? What helps to counter divisiveness in any of these situations?

- *Stereotypes*

27. How and where do you see stereotypes reinforced in the university? How and where do you see them challenged?

28. How do institutional policies and/or legal considerations either promote or challenge the process of stereotyping?

29. In what ways can stereotypes threaten or interfere with students' experiences with learning and succeeding at Michigan, and with the ability of students to get along with each other?

30. Is there a difference between stereotypes that are developed as a protective mechanism (e.g., "I won't talk about my experience with that person because they just won't understand.") versus other types of stereotypes?

31. Give an example of a time you discovered you held a stereotype that you later reconsidered or changed. Give an example of a time you challenged a stereotype held by someone else. Give an example of a time you felt the effects of being stereotyped.

32. Students in the video talked about being faced with a choice between going to a given program that will offer important support but will result in other students possibly stereotyping their abilities or interests versus avoiding the direct stereotyping but then not receiving the support or participating. Have you been faced with a choice like this? How did you resolve it?

- *Personal identity*

33. What dimensions of your background affect who you are, what you think, what you know, and what you want to learn?

34. How is your background related to what you notice about others and what is important to you?

35. Most of these interviews were conducted with first year students and seniors. What differences did you notice in these two types of perspectives? How has your own perspective on these issues changed since you first came to Michigan? (This question provides a good connection to data from the Michigan Student Study noted in the introduction.)

36. What is the role of humor in the learning process? How does it help discussions of diversity? How and why does it sometimes create problems?

37. What happens when people with clear differences do get to know each other? What role do friendship and loyalty play as people learn about differences and diversity?

38. What did you think of the fact that the graduate student who worked in the lab had obviously employed undergraduate research assistants of the same gender and ethnicity as herself, even though the UROP program includes students of all backgrounds?

39. Whom did you identify most with in the film? How much is that identification based on the person's views and how much on their background or identity?