

Graduating Students of Color Exit Interviews 2011

A report prepared by the

Committee on Intercultural and Global Understanding

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This report summarizes student responses to questions asked during exit interviews of graduating students of color from the Class of 2011. All graduating students who self identified as students of color were invited to attend the exit interview sessions, and from there students self-selected to participate. Before the CIGU members began asking questions, each student was asked to introduce themselves and talk about how they chose to self identify. Winston Grady-Willis, Director of Intercultural Studies and CIGU chair, served as the facilitator, explaining that the goal of the group exit interview was to have students provide candid feedback about their experiences at Skidmore, particularly in relation to Goal II: Intercultural and Global Understanding. The facilitator explained that the intention, as was the case in previous years, was to summarize responses, protecting the anonymity of each student.

Two exit interview sessions took place on May 17, 2011, and each lasted two hours. Session 1 was attended by four students as well as CIGU members Herb Crossman, Winston Grady-Willis, Mariel Martin, and Dean Mendes. Session 2 was attended by eight students as well as CIGU members Winston Grady-Willis, Meg Hegener, and Mariel Martin. In terms of race and ethnicity, the 12 students self identified as African-American; Asian; Hispanic, black/white; Latino; multiracial (half-Japanese, half-white); Pilipino (a term, like Filipino, that refers to a person claiming heritage connected to the Philippine Islands); and South Asian. The groups included a mix of women and men, gay and straight.

Students were asked a series of questions (below) and Mariel Martin, Director of Student Diversity Programs, used digital recordings of the session to prepare transcripts of the group interviews. Information from both sessions was compiled into one document and edited for clarity.

RESPONSES

Question 1: Why did you choose Skidmore? What drew you here?

Summary: Some students were encouraged by their high school guidance counselors to apply to Skidmore even though they didn't know much about the college. Several students participated in Discovery Tour and indicated that it helped them to choose Skidmore. Students also talked about wanting to attend a college that was different from their high schools or hometowns. For others, financial aid packages were also a primary factor in their decision to attend Skidmore.

Student 4: Discovery Weekend. I hadn't planned on coming to school, but Skidmore flew me out here for free. At Discovery Weekend, I met so many awesome people and I

loved the campus. I talked to a few professors, and I thought they were cool. So I ended up falling in love with the school, and I couldn't see myself anywhere else.

Student 2: Discovery Weekend also sold it for me. I hadn't visited the campus beforehand, but I knew it was a good institution academically and I knew it was where I wanted to be, but I wasn't sure if it was the right social scene for me. As soon as I got here, everyone was very welcoming. Everyone wanted to show me a good time – my hosts were great. The campus was really aesthetically pleasing, and there was just a generally good vibe from the school, so I was totally sold that day.

Student 3: Coming from the city [New York City], I really wanted to do something completely different. And when I applied to my schools, I thought I wanted to go to a big university, so I applied to big universities as well as small liberal arts colleges, but I was able to come up here in my junior year of high school. I really liked it. It's a lot different because it is predominantly white and I went to a predominately African-American and Latino school, and I was actually ready to come somewhere where I didn't have to, you know [inaudible]... And, I thought I was ready for that.

Student 1: I wasn't going to come to Skidmore because originally I was going to go to City College and my guidance counselor said, 'You are going here.' So I applied. And I got the acceptance letter on April 1, I remember, and I thought it was an April Fools kind of joke thing.

Student 5: Discovery Weekend when I came up, I was really unsure where I wanted to go. I met Mariel and other students, and I guess I just liked the small atmosphere of the school [and that] everyone knew each other.

Student 8: Throughout high school, I was part of a college prep program and the director focused a lot on applying to private liberal arts colleges because they have money to give us. I came up three times and enjoyed it. I got to see it in the fall when it was gloomy and in the spring when it was beautiful. I remember how the tour guide drives through the east side [of Saratoga Springs] and the race track, and I remember thinking, these houses are gorgeous. I am coming here.

Student 9: I remember being really surprised by the environment. I'm from [California], and I remember taking that bus and these houses are so different. I'll be honest. I had no idea what Skidmore College was. I don't think a lot of people on the west coast know about it. I got a letter from the [athletic] coach and I wasn't really considering it until I was talking to one of my friends about my letter. One of my teachers happened to pass by and said, 'Wow, Skidmore College is a really prestigious school out in the east. You should definitely think about that; I think it would be a good fit.' I came here on Discovery Weekend and it was a beautiful day. Everybody was outside, hanging out on the green. What I really liked about Skidmore was its atmosphere – everybody seemed so open. The [athletic] team also greeted me with open arms. They introduced me to all their friends. Right then, I knew this was the place for me. I didn't really think about any other colleges after that.

Student 6: I had a somewhat similar experience. I had no idea what Skidmore was. A family friend recommended Skidmore. I came to visit after I got in. I was freaked out by how small the town was and how I got dropped off at [the Saratoga Diner]. And racially, this was such a different experience for me. The east coast, to begin with, was a different experience and then, coming to a small town in upstate New York, I didn't see anyone who wasn't white. I was really freaked out by the town and wanted to get out as soon as possible, but the moment I stepped onto campus and went on a tour, I fell in love with the vibe of the place. It felt like it was one of those schools where students could do what they wanted to do. I was deciding between NYU and here, but I wanted to be at a small school where there was a proper campus and have that kind of college experience. So, I chose here.

Student 7: The decision for me was much more limited. It was never a question of whether I would get into college; it was about whether we'd be able to afford it. So I applied to large schools, in state, where I would be guaranteed a scholarship and even that wasn't enough. I didn't even have money to visit schools outside of the state, so I never had that option. A high school counselor actually filled out an application for the math and science weekend here. I came here, and I loved how small it was and how it was exactly like home for me. The people I stayed with were very open, and I stayed with students of color and that was my first experience here. I just felt very comfortable. Furthermore, [I was eligible for] a full scholarship, so that was the deciding factor for me.

Questions 2: If you participated in the Discovery Tour, how was that experience for you? Did your impressions of Skidmore change once you arrived for classes, and if so, how?

Summary: Even though Discovery Tour helped many of the students in their decision making process, many shared that they felt Discovery Tour wasn't authentic and that it presented a false sense of diversity at Skidmore, especially when they later arrived on campus as new students and experienced the community as a first-year student. Some students indicated that Discovery Tour felt segregated and exclusionary rather than welcoming. Since this group of graduating seniors participated in a Discovery Tour program, Admissions has revised the program substantially to address the concerns expressed below, so further exit interviews will likely include different responses.

Student 4: I didn't know much about Skidmore, what the community was like. But, I think Discovery Tour gave a very false sense of diversity because you couldn't tell who was a student and who wasn't. So I thought, 'Oh my God! Look how diverse Skidmore is!' But in reality it's nowhere near what you saw that day.

Student 1: I agree with what Student 4 said.

Student 2: I actually made this realization recently. When I was on Discovery Tour, I was so happy because of how diverse it was. I came from a predominately black and Latino high school, so when I come here, it put me back in my comfort zone. So I got

here and this felt just like high school with people like me. But when I got here [for the fall semester], I was like, ‘Where’d everyone go?’ So it was definitely difficult because at that moment it hit me: I go to a predominately white school. In a lot of ways, I guess Discovery Tour didn’t let me become fully aware of that even though I kind of knew it.

Student 5: From my experience, being here for OP [Opportunity Programs] in the summer, that totally changed my view of Skidmore. We’re up here for a month and, at that point, I felt really comfortable with campus and felt like this is my home now. I already had met 50 people. That kind of did change it. Discovery Weekend and OP summer were kind of similar, except we were treated like we were 13 with OP. After a while, I did the Pre-Orientation with Mariel and felt like I could just meet more people and branch out.

Student 9: For my experience with Discovery Weekend, I participated in only a few events because I was mostly with my team. So instead of participating in an introduction to Skidmore, I was just put into the middle of a college atmosphere and participated in college events as opposed to what everyone else did. I don’t know if my view of Skidmore really changed between that weekend and OP summer. That weekend was more social and I learned about Skidmore’s social environment, whereas OP was just straight up college experience – studying and stuff.

Student 6: I didn’t come for Discovery Weekend. I don’t actually know why I didn’t come. I remember getting the notices.

Question 3: Please speak to your first few days and weeks on campus. How was that experience for you?

Summary: Students talked about the different experiences between students of color in the Opportunity Programs (OP) and other students of color who are not in an Opportunity Program. Students of color in OP made more connections with campus resources and other students, which they said made the transition to Skidmore easier. Students also talked about difficulties they had transitioning into and connecting with the community. Several shared experiences when they felt alienated because of their identity.

Student 4: We had a different experience because we had made these bonds over the summer. So, it’s very different for non-OP students because they didn’t have that coming into it, so [they were] trying to find those relationships outside of, or just by themselves, whereas we had a group that we came in with. I feel like we had a very different experience being an OP student because we had those friendships.

Student 3: I was able to come in with three people. They were in [the OP summer program], and I was able to be a part of the friendship group they already created. That made the transition easier for me than if I didn’t already have a clique to do things with.

Student 6: I took a year off before college, so I kind of came into Skidmore thinking I was better than a lot of people. I had a really hard time meeting my roommates and other

people who would stick together. Then I started wanting to do other things that were outside of our dorm group. I started to attend lectures and things that started talking about race more and more. One of the more painful experiences of my college career was being completely rejected when it came to anything race related because I was always talking about it. I was always the one who was discussing race. So I remember making a lot of friends I couldn't actually connect with. I was angry a lot.

Student 9: My experience was more wholesome in the sense that I already had a multicultural group of friends because of [the OP summer program], but being on the [athletic] team, I saw the other side of it – it's a lot less culturally diverse. I tried to integrate both groups, like I would invite my friends to hang out with the [athletic] team and the other way around. I tried to make the best out of both situations.

Student 8: For me, I was homesick starting in [the OP summer program]. It was difficult to transition from being nurtured and taken care of to being very independent and on my own. The responsibility was a lot to handle. In terms of studies, the first semester was my hardest semester here. I remember taking a Government 101 lecture course. The professor was amazing, but I wasn't accustomed to being taught in that way. But in my [Scribner] seminar course, my professor helped me understand my position here and how to cope with the differences. I remember feeling like I was forced in this bubble. I never left campus except to go to the bus station.

Student 7: My first confrontation with my identity was at the students of color dinner [during new student orientation]. I came from an area where race was ignored and it's all white, upper-middle class. No one talked about my race or socio-economic background. Suddenly, I got this invitation that set me apart from all the people I was trying to be friends with. I felt really uncomfortable because I never identified as a student of color. Either you are black or you're not, and if you're black, you are a student of color. So that was a big shock. Then I began to realize that a lot of students here didn't come from very diverse backgrounds. It felt like everyone was expecting me to be friends with all the other Asian kids. People would ask me, 'How do you speak English so well?' This was the first time I ever heard that. My [Scribner] seminar was all male and all white except for two other white women. I was the only student of color. That was not a good experience. Then in sophomore year, I met a group of friends and put it behind me and didn't think about it again until this year actually.

Student 5: Freshman year, I felt very comfortable here. My high school was a lot like Skidmore except it was all male. [The OP summer program] gave me a bigger shock. I never critically thought of my social identity before coming here. It wasn't until my Human Dilemmas course with [my professor] who made the entire class think critically about socio-economic identity. Then taking [SO-219] Race and Power second semester made me think of identities more. I started to critically think of who I am and how I see myself and how others see me. Academically it was more challenging. Socially I felt comfortable, but academically I really began to think critically.

Student 6: It's strange to think about how much your high school experience does affect your first-year experience. I grew up in a pretty racially diverse area and went to school in a pretty diverse school, but I think the culture of talking about social identity and those issues were so prevalent all the time. It wasn't necessarily like, 'Let's talk about race. You are black, you are white, you are Asian.' It was just in normal, everyday conversation we were discussing, not serious social justice issues. I think opposite from what [Student 7 was] saying. I felt uncomfortable coming here because that was a taboo, and back home it was so much more an everyday thing. My high school was racially diverse, but it was somewhat segregated academically and socio-economically. You saw a pretty big line of what people would say in front of the white and Asian kids and then in front of the black and Latino kids. Being part of that culture and always discussing it and then coming here and being completely shut off from any type of conversation is difficult. When you say something about somebody's race and it's like, don't go there. So, that's really what shaped my freshman year.

Student 8: I agree that it was discussed, but I wasn't able to see the internal discrimination that was in my neighborhood and in my school and in my own family. Living in it and then taking [SO-219] Race and Power, I remember coming back to my dorm and talking to my roommates and discussing our position here and just feeling closed off. But they were like, 'What are you talking about? That's not true.' I felt it was more difficult for me to talk to my friends who looked like me about the issues, and who came from the city versus the white majority. It was also interesting to see that in elementary and middle school everyone around was pretty similar to me, even teachers. Then in high school, the students were similar, but all the teachers were white. Then I came to Skidmore and the teachers are white and everyone else is white. Even OP, even though the teachers were mostly white, we were mostly a group of students of color. I thought it's just like high school, but then the semester started.

Question 4: Please speak to your experiences in the classroom. Specifically, how have these curricular experiences been helpful or a hindrance in terms of issues of diversity?

Summary: Students talked about the challenge of being the only student of color in many of their classes. There was a strong theme of feeling silenced and marginalized in some classroom settings, and this year's group specially mentioned courses in Management and Business and Economics. Stereotype threat, which is the fear or anxiety of potentially confirming a negative racial stereotype, seemed to be a major factor for many students expressing hesitation to participate in some classes. When they weren't silenced, students often felt like they were expected to 'represent' their race in many of their classes. In other classes, specifically Sociology courses about race, students said that they felt encouraged and empowered to participate more and they felt that they were seen and heard. Students also commented on the positive experiences having classes that focus on specific ethnic identities, such as African American and Asian American experiences.

Student 4: Being the only student of color in a classroom is very difficult at times. There are times that I wouldn't want to contribute because anything that comes out of my mouth is being judged. If I say something wrong, 'Oh, it's the dumb student of color in

the class.’ It would be attributed to my race. That’s even happened as late as last semester or this semester. There is this pressure when I raise my hand and I’m saying something, and if it’s not the right thing that it’s something attributed to my race. It makes it really difficult to be the only student of color in the classroom.

Student 3: I agree with you 100%. From when I first got here up until last semester, a lot of times I wouldn’t raise my hand because I’d be the only student of color in the class. In more difficult classes, I definitely wouldn’t participate because I felt I’m going to be judged and I won’t say the right thing. I guess fear of what people might think, when you get in a classroom and you’re the only student of color, and it’s like all eyes on you, it’s tough.

Student 4: It brings out all these insecurities.

Student 3: Yes, it does! Outside of the classroom, socially, I don’t care what these people think about me. But in the classroom, it’s totally different.

Student 2: I know for me the most uncomfortable experience I had was my first semester freshman year taking MB-107. There was a row of OP students and then everyone else in the class. My uncomfortableness came inside and outside the classroom. So many other students sounded like they have been doing business work their entire life, and they spoke eloquently and they really intimidated me to speak up in class because I didn’t feel like what I had to contribute was as substantial as what they were saying. So I didn’t participate very much in that class. I didn’t feel very comfortable speaking out. While doing the group project, I was incredibly uncomfortable. I’ve never felt so silenced before because everything that I said, they would not really pay attention to. It was a really negative experience for me. That eventually deterred me away from the business major. I hate to stereotype, but there is a feeling of superiority and power in the business classes that I have taken or general lack of understanding of diversity in the classrooms that makes it really uncomfortable. Professors don’t always address it appropriately. Being a Sociology major, I’ve had the opportunity to take amazing classes with amazing professors who have helped me understand myself and society in general. It’s helped me come out of my shell and feel more comfortable speaking up. In particular, [SO-219] Race and Power class and [SW-212] Social Work Values and Populations at Risk were the two classes that opened my eyes to a lot and helped me be a lot more comfortable with myself.

Student 4: I’ve had weird issues with professors. I had one professor, and I was sitting in her office and we were having a conversation and she was looking at my degree audit and she said, “Oh, you’re an OP student, but you’re so smart.” I was like, ‘What does that even mean?’ She tried to save herself by saying, “It’s just usually a lot of foreign students who can’t speak very well” and she went on about that. At this point, it was second semester of my junior year, so [I was wondering], one, ‘How did you not know I was an OP student’ and, two, ‘How do you not know what OP is?’ That’s a problem that all these professors and even students don’t know what OP is and what it means or what it means for the students who are a part of it. I’ve had very few conversations with

professors about race. There was one time this semester that I talked to [a professor in a science department]. We had the most incredible conversation about race. If only all the professors could be so proactive and so willing to have these conversations. This was a white professor, so I was very impressed when [they] did that. I was so glad that [they were] so willing to step out of that and feel comfortable enough to ask me those kind of questions.

Student 1: The only thing that really pisses me off is when I'm asked to be the representative of my race and identity. In a Sociology class my freshman year, anytime we talked about something Hispanic, the professor would always be like, "What do you think about this?" And I'd be like, damn, you put me on the spot. You can't do that. Not all Hispanics think the same way. So that just really pisses me off when people do that to me.

Student 5: Sociology and the Government department are totally different. And being a double major, it was something I had to confront. This semester I was taking [a government class] and [the professor] is a funny guy, but he's very heteronormative. He is totally different from professors in the Sociology department. This semester was probably my biggest challenge. Going into his class he would say, "I don't want to hear the words 'agency' or 'nature'." He was very much against that. Four years in and having learned what I learned and then having a professor who's not on that page is hard.

Student 6: I really enjoyed being able to take classes that had to do with social identities. IGR [Intergroup Relations] classes were great. Freshman year I was in [SO-219] Race & Power and that got me thinking that it was acceptable to discuss these kinds of things.

Student 7: An English class on Asian American literature was really helpful for me. That was the first class of any kind I had ever taken related to race or social identity. That was the class that turned my understanding of what my identity was. It really shaped the way I was able to approach it. Until then, I didn't know how to approach it. People were telling me what I was supposed to be and what I wasn't supposed to be. The exploration of identity through the literature was liberating. There were some classes that really hindered the foundation or the willingness to talk about inclusively and diversity—definitely the classes that I took in the Business and Economics Departments. In the Economics department, I was the only girl in my classes, or one of only a few. I think some stereotypes about those departments are true, but not completely. Having gone through those departments over the past four years, I see why those stereotypes are perpetuated. I see why they continue.

Student 6: I remember my English class [EN105: Poverty in America]. I loved being able to go and talk with [the instructor] outside of the classroom. I also enjoyed my Social Work class, [SW-212] Values and Populations at Risk. But, in that class there was a segregated line in the classroom with the students of color, the white girls and the white men who all, stereotypically, looked like business majors. Otherwise, the Psychology department was almost all white women so that was always a weird experience to be in those classes and the conversation could never go anywhere near race.

Student 5: I took [EN-105] Race, Writing & Difference and [SO-219] Race & Power. The English professor's way of teaching about race was really interesting mostly based on the literature. This semester was eye opening.

Student 8: Race didn't come up in my [Scribner] seminar course, but it was mostly about socio-economic status. I was nervous about participating and didn't feel like I could contribute. But my professor said, "I know the bull shitters in the class and you're not one of them, so speak up. Someone can sound pretty smart to you, but they aren't saying anything." From then on, if I had something to say, I said it. I was a Business Minor and decided to drop it because in those classes, I was silenced. I didn't feel comfortable so I didn't continue.

Questions 5: Please speak to your experiences outside the classroom. Specifically, how have these co-curricular experiences been helpful or a hindrance in terms of issues of diversity?

Summary: When discussing co-curricular experiences, students talked about experiences on campus and in Saratoga in which their sexuality and race were targeted. Some expressed the need for more resources (both on and off campus) for students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ), specifically LGBTQ students of color. Students also talked about the positive, though sometimes challenging, experiences they had as Office of Student Diversity Program (OSDP) club leaders.

Student 1: [Speaking about participating in an athletic team]: It's not really diverse. Everyone is white except for a few [students of color]. So it makes me feel self-conscious to be part of this team and some of my friends are not really supportive of it because it interferes with how much time I get to spend with them. I look around trying to find other [students of color], but I feel alone.

Student 4: I'm having trouble thinking of something positive. There have been a few times when I've been downtown and I'll leave early because I'll get comments from people saying "homo" and "fag" and things like that. They don't even yell it; they'll walk by and say something. To my knowledge it's never been a Skidmore student, just maybe a group of townies. There have been a lot of times when I left because I felt so uncomfortable and so unwanted. There are very few LGBT organizations or places you can go to in Saratoga Springs, which makes it even more difficult. You have to go to Albany to even do anything remotely related to LGBT affairs. Why? We have things on campus like the Pride Alliance, but that's not enough. Throughout my college experience, I felt that we are really lacking LGBT venues or places we can go to. I feel like the student body and the college in general should work harder to establish areas where LGBT students can go. I feel like with the number of LGBT students on campus, there is no presence, surprisingly. It's been a really weird experience.

Student 2: A lot of the negative stuff I've experienced here has been targeted toward my sexuality. The first thing that happened was when I was an HC [Hall Counselor] my

freshman year. After breaking up a party, I heard students say, "Oh, look at the faggot who told us to go home." Around that time period was the first time I started to come out to people, and I was and still I'm struggling with a lot of issues about sexuality. I was taken aback by it because it blindsided the crap out of me. I kind of shut down at that moment, but some of my friends saw me shortly after and they said, "You look so down. What happened?" I'm like, "I don't want to talk about it." One of my friends saw my duty log and read about what happened. He said, "Who are these people, let's talk to them. Who the hell are they to call you that?" The fact that people were ready to mobilize to protect me was kind of amazing. I'm forever indebted to those friends from that day. This year two similar incidents happened to me. One was coming from an off campus party and this guy was going around pointing at people saying, "You suck dick. You're a faggot." He said that to a lot of men, and when he pointed at me and I got really upset. The group of people I was around didn't seem to understand why I should be so angry about this. Nobody thought it was a big deal. But it affected me in a very profound way and for someone not to be understanding of that is painful. You're not validating how I'm feeling; you're just letting me know that it's not a big deal. And the other incident happened downtown at Club Shadow. I was dancing with another guy and some woman came up to me and said, "You're nasty, you're disgusting. This isn't a gay club. Get out of here." I was irate. But the same thing happened. I didn't get the response I needed at the moment from people, and it makes me not want to go downtown most of the time and people don't understand that. It's very uncomfortable being gay downtown. It's not something I can blame anyone for; it's just the nature of the way things are. I want to go out and for everything to be cool. But there are times that I step back and I just feel like I'm left out in the cold and I wonder how I navigate this world. I'm tired of navigating it; I don't want to. It's like Student 4 said; it's not like there are any LGBT spaces in Saratoga or at Skidmore. I'm not even integrated into the gay community at Skidmore anyway. So for me, it's like I'm an outsider within an outsider, and it gets difficult because I become a lot more self-conscious than I want to be on a Saturday night, you know?

Student 3: For me the OSDP clubs were a positive experience, though because of some of the issues that the clubs have had for years, it makes it difficult to actually want to do them all the time. Then you look around and you say, well, who else it going to do it. And you end up being one of those people who have to do it because nobody else will. I've been a part of [a club] since I was a freshman and I love it, but I wish that more people or even myself could have done more to make it what it truly can be. I'm glad Skidmore had clubs like Ujima, Raices, and Pride. It's just up to the students to make the experience what they should be. A negative experience outside the classroom would be when my friends and I got called 'niggers' downtown. This just happened this year. It was the first time I experienced anything that blunt, and it was really a wakeup call. In terms of race issues, this year has been very difficult and for that to happen at the same time made it more difficult for me to like to live here. I've been slowly disliking it, and when I think back to when I said I was ready to come to a predominately white school and I knew there was going to be a lot of white people and this was going to be a predominately white town and I thought I could handle it. But, I wasn't ready for that type of stuff. My family didn't prepare me for this. Not that they should have to, but

when I came here I learned that these things can happen. It does make it more difficult, and it's sad that it had to happen this way. I'm at the end of my college career, and I don't even want to come back to Saratoga Springs after this.

Student 2: I know for me the OSDP clubs have been one of the most rewarding things I've done at Skidmore. One of the most difficult things for me these past four years is that one of the only times I practice my Spanish is when I speak to my parents. And over the course of four years, I've spoken it less and less. It's incredibly frustrating because how can I not speak to my own parents in the language that I knew before I knew English? But through Raices, it's been a space for me where I can rekindle with that part of my culture and connect with people who are not only part of it, but are interested in it. It's been fun going through the creative process of trying to come up with general meeting ideas and getting speakers to come. It's allowed me to grow as a person and as a leader tremendously. It's something that I value a lot and I'm sad to leave it. I know that I played an important role being a part of it and that really defined my college experience in a lot of ways.

Student 3: I think I've learned more about my culture being here than back home. I grew up in a predominately black neighborhood. How do you learn more here? I think it's because you want to teach other people about your culture. I'm glad that I did [the student club] for as long as I did, but it's just unfortunate that I had to learn a lot about me here instead of at home. But, I'm thankful for it.

Student 1: I had the same experience with trying to talk Spanish as Student 2. It's kind of frustrating to talk to your parents and there is a cultural difference between what they did in their home country and what happens here. Also, if you're Hispanic, everyone assumes you speak Spanish. I work in Dining Services and something that really pisses me off is when people say '*gracias*' to me. I mean, are they saying '*gracias*' because I'm Hispanic or are they saying it because they are used to saying it? I also get, 'Can I have *uno* iced coffee, *por favor*?' I get some ignorant people. I mean what am I going to do? Am I going to challenge everyone who is ignorant? I could challenge a lot of people who are ignorant, but that would take forever.

Student 2: That's true. A lot of people assume, you're Hispanic, you speak Spanish. Help me with my Spanish homework. And it's like, first, no. Second, it's made me feel really self-conscious because my Spanish isn't as good as it should be. I mean, it makes me feel a certain way when a white person comes up to me and is correcting me on my Spanish.

Student 1: Sometimes I feel like you aren't even seeing me as an individual.

Student 2: Even yesterday on the bus to the boat [during senior week] and students were talking about the Beer Olympics and how you have to pick a country. People were like, 'Team Jamaica, let's go braid our hair.' I'm sitting there rolling my eyes and cringing and thinking, 'Are you serious? Let's be team Dominican Republic, let's braid our hair.' And on the bus, there were only a few people of color and how loosely people were talking was really uncomfortable. I didn't know what to do or say.

Student 8: I did a project, two years ago, examining race in Saratoga Springs. At the time, I was angry and felt a certain way about Skidmore and about how no one wanted to discuss social identities. That project helped me to understand it's not only Skidmore, but the community as well, and it does have an influence on the college campus. So it made me stop pointing the finger at Skidmore as a whole saying 'You guys suck' or 'You're not trying.' I was able to understand in the larger perspective that this is what's going on.

Student 6: I've been focused on race issues for such a long time that I had a hard time looking critically at class issues. I've been uncomfortable, racially, not being in a racially diverse area. I knew that I was getting a great scholarship to come here in comparison to some students who were paying full tuition. There is definitely a class disparity. But it wasn't until recently that it really hit me. Throughout four years, I've been going into town because I'm uncomfortable living in a bubble. So going into town is one of the best things for me to get away and be more in a city. I'm seeing Skidmore as extremely classist. I know that racism is everywhere, but the level of classism that exists with Skidmore students in relation to Saratogians is painful to me. So, the more I get to know Saratoga and the community members, the more I understand the huge class issues that exist. There is a huge polarized stereotyping with Saratogians saying 'Skiddy Kiddy' and Skidmore students saying 'townies.' I feel like so many people are so blinded by their wealth at Skidmore that they can't open up and realize that boutique shopping every day on Broadway is over the top or that I can't go out to dinner so easily sometimes.

Student 10: Along those lines, my first reaction to Skidmore was how many nice cars there were in the parking lots. My first year is a blur because you can't really relate. Over the four years, it's been a struggle because there is an image that is projected that Skidmore is an elite school. This is a liberal arts school and there is a lot of money.

Student 7: It took me a long time to realize how much money does float around this school, mostly because I'm used to people having more money than me. That's just a reality. I never knew how much more. I mean, there are students who fly home in private jets. It blows my mind.

Student 8: I remember freshman year, everyone walked around with their keys around their neck. I was working in the dining hall swiping cards, and I remember taking cards and seeing car keys to a Benz or BMW and knowing that they are freshman. And [I recall] conversations when people would be like, 'For graduation I got a car.'

Student 6: The worst part is that people don't realize it. 'I got a car for graduation' is something that is just said flippantly. It blows my mind the way people talk about it. That's become the norm of Skidmore, and to enter that and to try and have a regular conversation about money is so exclusionary. I can't be a part of that conversation because I can't say, 'Oh, yeah, I get everything handed to me as well.'

Question 6: Have you witnessed changes here in terms of the way Skidmore approaches issues of diversity, and if so, what are they?

Student 1: The one thing I really enjoyed this year was the Intersections [program]. The only negative side of that is that I wish the participation we got at Cornell West was the same at the other programs.

Student 2: The Sexual Misconduct Policy was really critical and definitely needed. I think when we talk about diversity, some things get overlooked, like gender identity and expression. I've always been interested in how powerful the LGBT movement has been with creating the gender neutral bathrooms in Case, in Wiecking, and around campus. I think that was pretty incredible because I heard about the push back from it and why it makes people uncomfortable, but for the school to respond so quickly – well, I don't know if they responded quickly. But those strides are positive.

Question 7: Please provide recommendations or suggestions on what, concretely, should change institutionally in terms of issues of diversity?

Summary: Several students suggested several curricular change, including incorporating a diversity-related component or an IGR course into the First-Year Experience. Students highlighted the need for more faculty of color, and they also suggested rethinking events like Discovery Tour and the Students of Color Welcome Dinner during new student orientation. Some students expressed negative views of the segregation associated with these programs.

Student 4: I think there should be a race course that's a component of FYE. I think first year students should be forced to take a course where they talk about race. I feel like when they take that course and develop that vocabulary, they are going to be more willing to have those conversations. I think until you do that, people are going to stick to what they know and stay away from [talking about race]. I know it's hard to come up with professors and getting that approved, but the impact that would have on student relations would be incredible.

Student 3: I agree. IGR was so great. It would be great if all of those classes could be the first-year seminar. That would be amazing for the students to have that when they come in. Making them take that first thing as opposed to once during your four years because then people wait until the last minute to take it. I think that would be perfect.

Student 1: Restructuring the Cultural Diversity and Non-Western courses.

Student 2: I think they should be expanded to other courses like gender, making it so it has to be taken within the first two years. Exposing students to issues earlier helps to give them the vocabulary to talk about these issues. Also, the school needs to hire more faculty of color. That's an obvious one. I think people don't see it as such a prominent problem as I think it is. It's a problem when you want to talk about certain issues, but you don't want to overburden the faculty of color who are already here. It limits who you can talk to. If I want to talk to a Hispanic professor, who am I going to talk to? There are no

Hispanic professors except if you are in the Foreign Languages department [or taking classes one or two other subjects].

Student 1: It hurts when you meet a faculty of color and they just leave. Like I took a class with [an American Studies Professor] and I really liked the guy, and the next thing I know, he's gone.

Student 5: I feel like the community wasn't as separated during my freshman year. There were problems, but everyone dealt with them together. There is a huge divide and not as many people in the middle. Maybe I feel that way because I'm more aware and entrenched. I don't remember a Bias Response Group, but I see that more, so that is good.

Student 6: That's the only thing I can really think of too. Maybe it's because I've gotten more involved, but the bias response started off with occasional reports and now there are so many more substantial reports.

Student 10: From my freshman year, race is more of an issue. There is still an inability for institutional change because a lot of the diversity programs are long-term processes. Compton's got muddled and that's not good.

Student 7: I see improvements in transparency. I wonder if I just know more because I'm more involved, like I'm in the loop now. I can see how the student body has no idea how the school works. If I weren't as involved, maybe I wouldn't see any changes.

Student 6: A lot of things need to change.

Student 5: There is such a resistance when you try to talk about these issues on campus. People feel like it's thrown in their face, but they have to be willing to talk.

Student 12: A lot of students feel that they have to represent a social identity themselves in that class because in some subtle way the professor has asked them to or in the way they have organized the class. That is one thing to reconcile. On the other hand, I've spoken with some students who don't feel like their perspective is included. It's challenging.

Student 6: Have faculty members be encouraged to make it part of their curriculum and learn how to discuss these issues. If a professor really knows their shit, they will be able to talk about a non-Western perspective and not put it on an international student to speak for their identity. There are a lot of things I would recommend for this institution and faculty involvement is one of them. The institutionalization of IGR is another. Getting the institution to properly define and use the term diversity because we throw that word around so much. Just saying 'you are diversity' has nothing to do with that person's social identity, so it would be an issue of representation, but it would also be about having a consistent conversation. Say what we mean. It's not just about race and students of color.

Student 11: I feel like Discovery Weekend is trying too hard to be inclusive, like, if you are a student of color, come this weekend. The Students of Color Dinner [during new student orientation] is a way for the school to say that you care so much. The school is trying too hard. If we are so much about accepting diversity, I don't know if things like that – the 'you are a student of color and you should hang out with a student of color to feel accepted' – should happen. I definitely feel there is fine line though.

Student 7: I've seen situations where that kind of attention to a particular group stirs resentment in another. But, I recognize the need for space and a place where people can go to feel comfortable.

Question 8: Would you now recommend Skidmore College to high school students?

Summary: The attendees, some with words of caution, indicated that they would recommend Skidmore to others.

Student 4: I had an incredible experience. I loved Skidmore. I had an amazing time. I would definitely recommend it.

Student 2: I love this school. I wouldn't do anything if I had no feelings toward the institution. I definitely do recommend Skidmore to people, but I do it with an air of caution. I let people know this is a great place, but you may experience x, y, and z, and here is how I think you can deal with it. I think the worst thing is when people try to sweep it under the rug and pretend it's not an issue. And then people get blindsided. If you prepare someone with the reality of *what could happen*, then if something does happen they can respond more appropriately to it.

Student 4: I think what we experience here, we can experience all over the country. You can experience it anywhere and if you can experience it with all the good things that come with Skidmore, then yes.

Student 3: I would definitely recommend this school to other people, especially to people who are from where I'm from. Skidmore has a lot of potential to do better. This was a really tough year for us, and I feel like it can't really get any worse – well, it could. This was tough, but we handled it a lot better than I thought. I love Skidmore, but there are just some things I don't love.

Student 10: It really depends who I'm talking to. That's the key. If it's someone who is similar to me and wants things that I want, then I would say no, I wouldn't recommend it. If it's someone that I could see being comfortable with what comes with the Skidmore community and being in Saratoga Springs, then maybe yes. It works for certain people; it doesn't work for other people. So it's yes and no.

Student 6: I agree completely. I've been thinking about this and if I'd ever come back to Skidmore. It's hard because Skidmore is such a great institution and it does so many things right. It is a really good opportunity for students to get a degree and learn things

about themselves. I loved it in many ways, but I hated it in so many other ways. For me, if I were to be recommending it to someone who wants to be at a place where they can be themselves and be comfortable at every stage of their life, to be able to talk about what they want to talk about and have a diverse group of friends, then I don't think this is the place for them – which sucks. At the same time, I'm not going to say that in the end to someone because maybe a smaller institution and maybe predominantly white is ok with them, or maybe a state school is better for them. I thought about, if I'm going to go back to school, I can't be at a small liberal arts school in a small town. I would be able to recommend this school to someone who's looking for something more academically creative. Socially it's a good place, too. It has a lot of interesting people and definitely caring people. But when it comes to caring about social identity issues, I think there aren't many in this community.

Student 8: What I've disliked about Skidmore has challenged me. I think I've grown from that. Due to that, I would want to do it again and I would want someone else to do it – at least if I'm thinking about someone who is very similar to the person I was at eighteen coming in here. I would not take anything back. God knows how many times I've said the "f-word" to Skidmore, but saying that has taught me and it's made me who I am today.

Student 7: I think the struggle has been...[well] you wouldn't think it would be as hard. It's not supposed to be this hard. I've never been in a place where I felt completely comfortable talking about anything about myself, so this is reality for me. Being here at Skidmore has been my life. That's just reality. That's taught me how to cope with reality. The struggle has helped me grow and given me the tools and given me the experiences to deal with it in the future. I mean, that's reality. That's what we are going to continue dealing with for the rest of our lives.

Student 8: If we went to a state school, we'd probably blend in, and here one of the main issues or topics has always been about how we stand out. Whether you want to believe it or not, you are [going to stand out]. Even if you don't address it yourself or you don't acknowledge it, someone else will.

Student 12: I was just thinking in terms of how I would recommend Skidmore as a place and how at the end of freshman year I was thinking of transferring. I was thinking how I could guarantee that the experience would be exactly what I wanted it to be at a completely different institution. I can't guarantee that it would be better if I had transferred somewhere because on paper it looked a certain way – I came to Skidmore because on paper it looked a certain way. There are a lot of things that I wish I could have done differently here at Skidmore. I think the experience that I've had here has given me certain tools and things that I know I wouldn't do again to make sure things. There is no way to guarantee that this is an institution you want to be at because I didn't even know I wanted to be here until the end of sophomore year. It's really hard to give that advice to someone; it depends on how you embrace the situation.

Student 5: I would absolutely recommend Skidmore. For the most part, Skidmore allows you to blaze your own path and to be yourself and you can take that in any direction you want. And yeah, for people of color and other minority groups, it is a lot more difficult just because you have these societal pressures. But I think for the most part, if you want to get somewhere at Skidmore, you can definitely cut down those trees and make that path. That is something that not many other campuses or schools offer. This place really lets you be who you are. That's always why I would recommend it.

Student 11: I totally agree. I think that I doing my own major and I'm amongst 20 other people in the same major, but even within the major we are all doing specific things on our own. I think the thing that got to me most though was that the challenge that you are talking about for me, was just frustrating. I overcame all those challenges and I feel grateful that I have grown as a person because of that. But those "challenges" – I mean challenge to me sounds like something you want to overcome whereas frustration is something you have to deal with. I wonder if I had gone to another school if the challenge idea was more of something I was excited to overcome instead of something I had to overcome. All these challenges and burdens became something I had to deal with and there was no other choice for me but to overcome them. When I did overcome them, I felt ten times better overcoming them than I did before, that's what challenges are obviously. But I think there is a different way to push what a challenge is and to really make it so you don't have to change to a different direction but to be a better version of yourself.

Question 9 (Session 1 only): When you reflect back on your time at Skidmore, what do you think is a legacy that students of diversity can look back on and say was accomplished?

Student 3: I'm part of the Step Team and I think that left a good impression on Skidmore. It's something totally different. When I came here, Ujima was already started, but to see a new club with so much interest is definitely something that will be remembered.

Student 1: I think in this class we had a lot of great leaders, in terms of OSDP. They have something that the students coming up behind us don't have. They don't want to take the reins of the clubs. The students coming up aren't as interested in OSDP clubs as we were when we came in. So I feel like that's a great legacy of leadership from our class.

Student 4: I remember coming freshman year and all of us were so excited about OSDP clubs and things and to see all these other underclassmen who aren't as excited. I mean, I don't think it's that they lack leadership; it's just that they lack interest.

Student 2: I think back to why we were so excited. I feel like there was a strong community feel to a lot of these clubs and amongst ourselves and a strong community among the students of color. There was like a presence of us there and made me excited to do Raices or Ujima, and I felt guilty when I didn't go, and that's what motivated me to go. That's what we've been trying to sustain for four years. In a small way, that's a legacy we leave behind. We were a pretty kick ass group.

Student 4: I'm so glad that I came to Skidmore at the time that I did. The group of people I came in with was so amazing. The conversations we have outside of the classroom, and I go home and I can't have that. I'm so glad I had that here.

Question 10 (Session 1 only): A couple of kids on Discovery Tour this year said that we talk a lot about race here. What advice can you give for us to talk about the racial climate on campus?

Student 4: These issues aren't unique to Skidmore. This is what we see across the nation. The fact that we do talk about it is a good thing because it means we are aware of it. And faculty members – well not faculty – administrators and students are really trying to talk about it.

Question 11 (Session 1 only): Do people use the resources?

Student 2: I do. You have Mariel and the Office of Student Diversity Programs, and that's an invaluable resource and I think for a lot of people that will be the first go-to person when things do happen. The Counseling Center is somewhat helpful. There are people who do care here. I know a lot of people who, myself included, utilize these resources. Even if it's just having a conversation with somebody on campus, people do take advantage of it.

Student 3: We have even turned into resources. A lot of freshmen come up to us and ask what's going on and how did you do it all four years here. Incorporating club leaders and OSDP into Discovery Tour is important because those are the people students come to.

Student 2: Maybe even having some sort of mentorship program established so that seniors and juniors can interact with the freshmen. I would have loved the opportunity to engage with them and get to know them. That would help foster that sense of community.

Question 9 (Session 2 only): Any final thoughts?

Student 7: I have mixed feelings about my experience at Skidmore. I spent the first two years wanting to get the hell out of here. I had the applications written. If I had the money and had the chance to leave, I would have. If I had the chance to do it over again, would I? I'm still struggling with that.

Student 11: I have mixed feelings about leaving too. But I wonder if the majority of people here have those mixed feelings or if they are just so sad to leave because they've had such an amazing time. There is something about Skidmore that makes you not 100% devastated to leave here. Maybe I wish I were sadder to leave here.