

Clark College

Faculty, Staff, and Student DEI Listening and Feedback Sessions

**Qualitative Research Study Results Report
Study Fielding March 2024**



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Prepared by Joanne Vega, MBA, and Karen Cash, MBA

Strategic Research Associates, LLC / Aspire - DEIB Consulting Services

29 W Pacific Ave, Spokane, WA

509-324-6960 x203, joannev@strategicresearch.net

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Project Summary

In March 2024, teams at Clark College (the college) and specific Clark College staff and faculty members dedicated to the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) initiative partnered with Strategic Research Associates to conduct a qualitative listening and feedback collection project to evaluate current lived experiences among faculty, staff, and students about racism, diversity, ethnicity, and equity topics experienced through their engagement with the college.

The college has been specifically tasked with conducting this research to meet the requirements of RCW 28B.10.147 (formally known as Washington Senate Bill (SB) 5227), which requires annual listening and feedback sessions on DEI to be conducted at institutions of higher education (IHE).

Our key focus of these listening sessions was to create a safe space to collect and learn from the lived experiences of faculty, staff, and students and their interactions with the college, exploring the following themes among the separate segments.

- Student Themes
 - Does Clark College have a strong commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEI)?
 - How does the campus climate add up in terms of student comfort interacting with different groups?
 - Importance of diversity in faculty, staff, advisors, etc.
 - Shared lived experiences with discrimination.
 - Culture of belonging; code-switching, community connection, and retention.
- Faculty and Staff Themes
 - Does Clark College have a strong commitment to DEI? Is the emphasis right? Are appropriate programs in place?
 - Hiring and retention of diverse faculty and staff; are the right programs in place?
 - Shared lived experiences with discrimination.
 - Culture of belonging; code-switching, community connection, and retention.

Our qualitative research study methodology for this project involved inviting staff, students, and faculty members to participate in one of 11 sessions hosted either in-person at Clark College or via Zoom during the week of March 5th, 2024.

Participants opted in and expressed interest in joining the sessions through the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion's website, where they submitted their interest in joining

through a web form. They were encouraged to submit their interest through outreach efforts conducted directly by the ODEI teams during their events held on and around campus between December 15th and the onset of the sessions on March 5th. Some were also invited via email encouragement sent to staff and faculty to their Clark College email addresses.

Website portal posting (<https://www.clark.edu/campus-life/student-support/diversity-and-equity/campus-climate-assessment>)

Clark College Listening Sessions

All members of the Clark College community are encouraged to attend and share their experiences at a listening session. Remote and in-person sessions will be scheduled during Winter Term 2024. Each session will have 8-10 people and will last approximately 1 hour. Refreshments will be provided at in-person sessions. Students will be compensated for their time.

To make Clark College a place where people feel successful and supported and as part of the Clark Cares initiative, we are using these listening sessions to understand what your experience is to inform changes and let us know what is currently working for students, faculty, and staff.

Through these concerted invitation efforts conducted by Clark College teams, 54 individuals opted in through the landing page. Strategic Research's teams then reached out to these individuals by email and phone to schedule them to participate in one of the 11 sessions hosted, offering each an option to join one of three specific sessions designed for their segment (students were offered a choice between one of seven scheduled sessions).

38 of the 54 (70% of those who opted in) were scheduled to join one of the sessions, and 33 of the 38 who were scheduled to join attended and participated in their scheduled listening session. Among those who expressed interest in participating in a listening session and opted to join through the website, 59.25% participated.

Individuals were invited to participate in the sessions first via email, leveraging Calendly for self-selection and affirmation of attendance to give session participants the volition to choose a venue and time that best worked for their schedules. Due to minimal sample sizes, all segments were also called by Strategic Research staff to encourage them to join the sessions and select a session time and venue that would work well for their schedules.

In-person session participants who joined the sessions on campus were provided with meals as a thank-you for sharing, and students were also provided with a \$40 gift card to offset time and any travel costs.

Sub-segment participation among systemically dominant and systemically non-dominant segments can be summarized as follows (note: Clark College identifies systemically non-dominant segments as *"Systemically non-dominant refers to membership outside of the dominant group within systems of oppression. Systems of oppression are created to provide benefits and assets for members of specific groups. The recipient groups are referred to as dominant groups because such advantages grant impacting levels of power, privilege, and status within social, economic, and political infrastructures of a society. For example, such frameworks are established to specify who is in control and who is not, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, and who will have access to resources and*

who will not. At Clark College, we define systemically non-dominant as people with disabilities, people of color, and people of the queer (LGBTQ2IA+) community.”)

Major segments (faculty, staff, students)

- A total of 11 who identify as faculty participated
- A total of 19 who identify as staff participated
- A total of 3 who identify primarily as students participated

Systemically dominant and systemically non-dominant (as self-identified by participants)

- Across all significant segments, a total of 14 who identify as systemically non-dominant participated
 - 4 systemically non-dominant faculty (4 of the 11 who participated/36.4%)
 - 7 systemically non-dominant staff (7 of the 19 who participated/36.8%)
 - 3 systemically non-dominant students (3 of the 3 who participated/100%)
- A total of 19 who identify as dominant participated in either the student, staff, or faculty session

Notably, participation among the student segment was very low, driven by a low initial opt-in rate (11 students in total opted in through the college's web form) and a low participation rate from scheduling. 8 of the 11 students who opted in were scheduled to join a session, yet only 3 participated.

Joanne Vega of Strategic Research Associates and Karen Cash of Aspire Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Consulting Services moderated the sessions. Each participant was asked to join the session in person, and some (students) were offered the option to connect to the sessions remotely using their phones or computers. Sessions were recorded for report development purposes only and used to develop this summary report.

Qualitative analysis, by nature, is designed to gain deep insights from a small group of people, unlike quantitative research (surveys), which often collect feedback from larger groups of people.

The findings in this report represent the feelings of those who participated in the listening sessions. In some cases, individuals can use these activities to grandstand and share a specific item they wish to advance. While the teams do their best to report on themes, specific quotes may reflect these special interests brought to the sessions by individuals.

While these opinions can be applied to many, given the total sample size, they must also be used carefully.

Executive Summary

Our research included feedback from current Clark College students (online students and campus students), Clark College employed staff, and Clark College employed faculty.

The invitation and scheduling process was one of our most significant challenges in conducting this research, which can indicate either a lack of cultural support for DEI discussions, an exhaustion with conversations about the topic, or a lack of engagement in DEI topics among these groups. Participation of systemically non-dominant segments was higher than among the dominant segments. It resulted in a higher representation of this segment in our listening sessions than is indicative of the population.

The discussions that ensued were immensely valuable to all who participated. Participants were open and engaged, sharing deeply personal stories with their listening session group and moderators, who reflected on their experiences at Clark College.

Many of our observations aligned with the findings of the HEDS Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey. Listening sessions revealed that most (faculty, staff, and students) felt comfortable interacting with different groups of people on and around campus.

Our discussions also revealed additional details as to the drivers behind a lower agreement among faculty and staff than students about “the campus environment is free from tensions related to individual or group differences.” Listening session participants expanded upon this feedback with stories about fear of retribution and experiences where they felt concerns voiced were not heard or acted upon.

Stories of instances of insensitive and disparaging remarks, often driven by political affiliations, disabilities, socio-economic backgrounds, and sexual orientation, surfaced at a higher rate among faculty and staff segments than among student segments – though both shared instances where they may have observed, or have personally experienced these types of remarks from others on campus. Few of our listening session participants had experienced either witnessing or being a victim of disparaging remarks.

Harassment and discrimination experiences shared by session participants told stories of racial identity discrimination, as well as discrimination by gender and sexual identity. These experiences, similar to those of survey respondents, were often instances of them feeling excluded and isolated, as well as feelings of being used as a token or example for others’ social equity gain.

For privacy reasons, we will not share specific details of these stories in this report, but the themes they contain are highlighted in more depth in the following segment summaries and narratives.

Faculty and Staff

Listening session participants shared similar stories between faculty and staff. Many shared similar experiences with inclusivity concerns, concerns about diversity policies in place and

their effect on hiring, and distress about how expressed concerns are addressed by college leadership.

Session participants shared that a diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environment was a **place that embodied people from a variety of backgrounds and was diverse in ways beyond race**. There was specific interest and attention paid to stories about inclusivity and equity services among the disabled populations, as well queer populations, gender divides, and neuro-diverse segments of the population they serve. Some shared that they felt that the current definition used on campus of a diverse work environment may be too narrow and that these types of groups should be actively pursued and included in efforts.

Some express that **the practices in place do more to create division among the different segments of the population than they do to unite them** under the banner of Clark College.

"In an effort to be inclusive, these DEI initiatives make the community feel more divisive. And the heightened sense of what is politically correct seems to give people permission to overact (on our behalf)." Systemically non-dominant staff member

They share that **these divisions can and have created discourse and a culture of silence within the college**. Some faculty and staff feel that their voices are unheard. While the policies and procedures are in place to protect them, they cited experiences where they have expressed concerns and have received little feedback or felt that their criticism was not acted upon.

"We talk about these structures of support. This system is set up to silence dissent, to keep you in your place." Systemically non-dominant faculty member

In sessions, some suggested that **the dominant monoculture (as inferred by participants) on campus is one defined by silence and acceptance, and it is not seen favorably within their groups to speak up to leadership in meetings or speak their truth in the workplace**. They suggest departments often silo themselves and create microcultures of support groups. Still, outside of these departmental segments of safety, they can feel at risk of retribution and unsafe to share their experiences. Some faculty members shared that they felt unsafe expressing their concerns and being authentic until they were tenured.

Staff and faculty **share feelings of exhaustion from not feeling heard** and from receiving responses from the leadership of "I've never seen this before [when referring to a filed complaint]" or "I was not aware of this issue", creating a feeling among faculty, more than others that their concerns are being dismissed. **They suggest that this is driving what they observe as a higher-than-expected turnover among systemically non-dominant new hires**.

In contrast to the high turnover mentioned by staff and faculty, they report that **Clark College has been doing a good job implementing DEI hiring best practices**. They share that they feel Clark College is more diverse than the general population of Clark County and more diverse than the hiring/employable population from which they may be selecting. They address that teams in the recruiting process have made concerted efforts to ensure that new hires are pulled from new and diverse segments of the population, allowing new voices to join the college.

One suggestion they make is to embrace and **improve onboarding for new hires**. Both staff and faculty felt that if onboarding included community-building activities and more training on Clark College's culture, the college could be more successful at retaining and attracting diverse new hires.

Participants also shared that DEI work added to their workload (and in some cases unpaid) and suggested that they would like to receive additional support to help them meet these needs. **Many shared they felt overworked or part of an army of one and did not feel they had the staffing support to shift their focus to inclusion issues when they are struggling to meet their day-to-day coursework and workload needs.**

Power, privilege, and inequity (PPI) training were discussed during the listening sessions by some of the individuals who had participated in them. **Some participants shared frustrations with the training and its implementation.** Specific complaints were around the topics and how they were presented in a "talked-at" manner, which caused them to express feelings of exclusion and not belonging, rather than a more engaging and learning manner, which they felt, if offered, would give them a better sense of inclusion in the conversations being held.

"Sessions feel like they go out of their way to "shame" people for not doing the 'right thing' versus 'educating' people. When diversity teams share cultural info, they truly go against what they teach about stereotyping; the nuances of each culture are so different." Systemically non-dominant staff member

Staff and faculty share that they **would like to see more opportunities to share and create a community or coalition among their peers and that these peer groups should be more significant than just one diversity segment.** They suggest that crossing implied boundaries of race, gender, age, or accessibility can help them broaden their discussion and feel as if they are on the path of implementing social change, which they all agree is an essential tenant of DEI's work and practices. Collaboration between sub-groups would be a welcome addition to the conversations on campus.

Students

Students shared far less awareness of Clark College's DEI programs than Faculty and Staff session participants. They did not specifically share stories of feeling targeted or out of place. This shouldn't imply that it does not happen, but more imply that the culture among the student body is reflective of the population, a group of individuals caught in a balance of working towards specific achievements and meeting the requirements of those they see as leaders, regardless of that leader's race or ethnicity.

We did not surface any stories from session participants about feeling out of place or marginalized. **Those with experience with on-campus programs shared delight in some of their interactions with those support groups,** like the support they received as veterans or as neuro-diverse people.

Overall, students share a positive experience with Clark College. They state **they feel safe** on campus, even at night, **and feel empowered to share and engage in the classroom**, whether online or in person.

Students also shared that they feel comfortable being their whole and authentic selves in person and in the classroom. **While some may mention and share critical experiences when engaging with the college as their whole selves, they feel that the actions taken by staff and faculty when complaints were received were appropriate and that they felt valued.**

One of the students who participated shared a story of a specific complaint that was raised about a faculty member's conduct. Similar to what we observed in the staff and faculty sessions, they also shared that the outcomes of this complaint were not shared with them. They attended meetings and discussed the issue, but ultimately, the faculty member continued their employment at the college. However, they feel that the faculty member was addressed as that faculty member discontinued the inappropriate behavior and treated them fairly going forward.

Online students were noticeably more disconnected from programs, counselors, and issues than those who participated in on-campus courses. Those who participated in our sessions, who were primarily on-campus students, expressed a higher awareness of on-campus events, outreach, and tools available to them to help them in their education process.

Having faculty and staff that look like them is nice for students, but they all share a love for their current faculty and don't feel they need to be replaced.

"I would say the majority of my teachers have been White males, but a few have been women and women, women of color as well. I'm just trying to think of all of them right now. They've been, they've been really supportive, though." Systemically non-dominant student

Some suggestions as to ways to have "more people like me" around Clark College's campus include providing and including, as part of the classroom instruction, guest speakers and engagement opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds.

Students, like their staff and faculty counterparts, were pointed out in expressing that **diversity is more than race to them. They also include gender, age, income, disabilities, and neurodiversities as issues to consider for inclusivity conversations.** They paid specific attention to **income disparities and age disparities** as they felt that these differences affected their fellow students' abilities to continue or complete their courses.

Findings and Recommendations

The focus group research reinforced assumptions and underlined opportunities for improvement on DEI topics within Clark College moving forward. Please note the themes below are based exclusively on the comments and feedback collected during the listening sessions.

DEI is about more than the policies in place, meeting metrics, and enforcing those policies. It is a conversation had by all and the responsibility of all to hold dear, implement, and live by.

Many expressed experiences with DEI policies at Clark College that made them feel as if they were part of a critical metric the college was measuring or that DEI practices were superficial and driven by tokenism.

Many among all segments expressed that they felt Clark College was diverse, but as we dove into equity, inclusion, and belonging topics, they felt the college needed to catch up on next-level measurements. The diversity checkbox has been met; it is time to focus on equity, inclusion, and belonging topics as Clark College continues its path forward.

Clark College's DNA includes a culture of advocacy and personal attention, which is embodied by the staff, faculty, and even students. Many express that they are "there for the students," which can be seen in policies like walking students to meet with someone they've been referred to and opening the door to create the first open engagement between strangers.

While many may infer that DEI work is to be done by the leaders of those spaces or by specific groups or systems, work in the space is work that all should embrace and put their effort into.

Clark College's community (staff, students, and faculty) can benefit from being empowered to take the social action needed to push forward DEI initiatives. Moving the responsibility beyond training, metrics, and policy enforcement to the embodiment of acceptance can be a valuable next step for the Clark College population.

Power, privilege, and inequity training focusing on White culture and White privilege issues curtail the conversation and can alienate those who wish to engage in social change.

Listening session participants shared that while many participated in the PPI trainings and had a desire to engage in the topics shared during these trainings, they felt that

they were often too driven by White culture and White privilege topics and missed the mark on other issues surrounding nuanced topics that are part of the educational system like tenure and classism.

Many of the experiences shared about their training highlighted that the training strongly emphasized awareness of past inequity issues that have surfaced in society. However, they failed to provide participants with tools to challenge taboos and assumptions or act through social, systems, and policy changes and lacked sensitivity towards individuals whom the conversations may have been making them feel excluded or out of place due to hidden histories of associations with the topics being discussed.

Thinking about the topics focused on in these trainings with staff and faculty and finding topics relevant to the population (topics related to classism, gender equity, disability inequities, and neurodiversity issues), as well as creating conversations about addressing people's histories and backgrounds, whether obvious or hidden, would be a welcome enhancement to the programs that are currently in place.

Communication, silos of groups and information, and a lack of trust between groups surface as a significant undercurrent below equity insecurity.

Staff and faculty participants shared many stories and experiences in which they felt they were not listened to or communicated with by leadership, peers, and even co-workers at Clark College. While there are many policies in place and the pathways for reporting are clear and utilized, they feel that if they were to submit a complaint, they often do not know or see that they were acted upon.

Some suggest that "while the policies are there, the action falls short. The forms act as hypocritical lip service." Many suggested that creating and supporting a more collaborative culture could be a welcome addition to Clark College's environment.

Among faculty and staff populations, equity, diversity, and inclusivity are relevant to race, sex, and gender, while students see different barriers.

Staff and faculty participants from all walks of life shared recent experiences where they felt judged, held back, or belittled due to their race, ethnicity, sex, and/or gender. Students had much fewer experiences of this and shared that their experiences were very inclusive and that they felt like they belonged at the college.

Students' main issues revolved around access equity, such as becoming aware of the available support groups and services. They all admit that support services are available, but the initial awareness can be difficult for some, especially those who choose not to be heavily engaged with the college process.

Faculty and staff suffer from a greater hierarchical caste system that has been well established within union groups and is driven by a cultural tenure and class system engrained into the college education system. Many expressed concerns about issues with communication between leadership that are driven by the unwritten actions of people in leadership positions throughout the college.

Opportunities for improvement and future work for Clark College and Clark College's population to consider.

Staff DEI work is multifaceted and is a weight that is taken on by not only the institutions themselves but also the individuals within them. DEI is complex and impacts all facets and all programs.

At the administration level, Clark College may consider the following steps to address DEI concerns or re-assess and refocus them if they are already being implemented:

- Develop, implement, and share a multi-year DEI roadmap.
- Conduct a tenure analysis.
- Modify the tenure process to ensure a systemically non-dominant applicant has at least one (1) person on the advisory committee who also identifies as systemically non-dominant.
- Provide demographic information to Clark College personnel and students annually.
- Invest in the “invisible forces” such as employee engagement and psychological safety.
- Re-examine the effectiveness of common practices and workplace systems with a DEI lens (e.g., onboarding, tenure process, performance reviews, feedback loops, etc.).

Onboarding examples that came up in our sessions to consider re-examining:

- Define what the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion mean at Clark College and how they are actuated.
- Highlight portions of the employee handbook or policies specific to DEI, such as your zero-tolerance discrimination policy or your equity statement.

- Include an introductory training session explaining DEI efforts at Clark College so new employees know what to expect and what's expected of them.
- Connect new hires with employee resource groups (ERGs) or other support groups to create safe spaces to aid in personal or career development.
- While already occurring, consider re-providing Clark College-specific DEI training with competency expectations and anonymous feedback loops for continuous improvement. Consider reporting the modifications made due to the received feedback.
- Consider creating Talking Circles or re-promoting existing Employee Resource Groups/Affinity Groups for employees. There is a desire among session participants to continue these DEI-related conversations in a safe and non-judgmental environment.
- Utilize offboarding/exit interviews to help measure and assess if DEI efforts are being implemented successfully.
- Ensure information about DEI opportunities and events, like those provided by the college, are shared with everyone to increase awareness of the variety of programs available on campus.

Additionally, this work is also done by individuals; the community members of Clark College can consider their role and responsibility to advocate and advance social change and embrace diversity, equity, and inclusivity topics through their actions and can consider:

- Education and awareness are essential. Enrolling and attending PPI trainings about topics that are new to them or as a refresher because different attendees add new perspectives.
- Act as accountability experts for themselves and reflect upon their language and actions with a DEI lens, introspection, and finding opportunities for improvement.
- Support and attend the college's numerous DEI offerings and events to foster inclusive spaces, build new connections, and strengthen existing partnerships.
- Embrace the DEI journey because it requires commitment, patience, humility, and continuous learning.

We have included additional analysis and comments by market segment through the narrative on the following pages.

Segment Summaries, Notes, and Themes

STUDENTS

Students who participated in our listening sessions shared experiences of feeling included and a general satisfaction with how people like them are represented on and off-campus at Clark College. When they look out to the student population, they see many people like them and feel at home.

*“Do students of color really want or need to see other people of color to feel like they belong? I have never seen so many people of color in one place in Vancouver as we have on the Clark campus.”
Systemically non-dominant student*

While they address that their faculty and staff may not be “like them,” they share that they feel the faculty and staff are all well-positioned to help them well, even if they are not from their cultural background.

“I would say the majority of my teachers have been White males, but a few have been women and women, women of color as well. I'm just trying to think of all of them right now. They've been, they've been really supportive, though.” Systemically non-dominant student

When considering how they can be themselves in the classroom and feel comfortable in their learning spaces, our student participants shared that they felt included and part of the conversation, regardless of their personal challenges.

“Yes, I do think that I can be me at this school, but only because of people who know me; I had since when I saw I had never had my professional so questioned at all, and I shall constantly baggy ripped jeans shirt, so say basically F-12 just different words. And then because I couldn't mask my emotions, 100 percent, 95% wasn't OK. A student questioned my professionalism, but based on trying to question it at the military level. So, it is not easy for many people to be themselves on an individual basis because they will get shut down. They will get told, like, be quieter, like we're supposed to do this, don't do this. Why are you like, OK, but you couldn't just be quiet, just get the new turn.” Systemically non-dominant student

In reference to discussing with students if they felt they did or did not need to code-switch and feel like they can be their authentic selves in class, they continued to share positive affirmations.

“I can [be myself], which is amazing because often I cannot. In society, I find I often have to code-switch and have to mask because I'm Latina and I'm neurodivergent, but I don't feel like I have to do here, which is great because there is a lot to talk about. At least in my program, there is a lot of talk about diversity, inclusion and a lot of work we are doing as students in it.” Systemically non-dominant student

Thinking about opportunities for improvement in diversity, students do express that it would be good for them to see themselves represented in the classroom. While this may not mean to them replacing faculty and staff with people like them, they suggested having guest speakers, or content in their classes that is relevant to them. They do not suggest that it needs to be also presented by someone like them.

"I think for the program I'm in would be really good to it would be great to have somebody's perspective, especially because we're dealing with learning how to navigate engaging with families and diverse families and handling diversity and culture with children. It would be great to have more of a variety [of instructors], but at the same time, I love the professors I have, so I wouldn't want to change them. If I had a professor who was my same race, I think that would be good, but I don't feel like, well, maybe we would connect more because my sister actually had a math professor who's also Japanese, and they did things like they would call her like Hana San or whatever, like using the cultural terms. So I think I would value that connection, but I love all my professors right now, so I'm more just curious as to how it could be different." Systemically non-dominant student

Students shared that their experiences at Clark College has led to them being able to find the accessibility apps they needed in order to be successful. While some shared that they wish others were as well-versed as them in how to find these tools, or that they were available to everyone in a form that was almost given to them, they do share that they have the tools they need, when they need them.

"I just thought of my accommodations for my disability. So that's on; I have the Glean app, so I can fully record all my lectures and read transcripts, which is amazing. Honestly, I don't know why everybody doesn't have this, besides the cost, but like it's so helpful. Like it's next-level helpful, right." Systemically non-dominant student

"I've heard of the accessibility; it's great to get accommodations that are not difficult to find. I haven't attempted to get them for myself because there are a lot of universal accommodations already built in, which is amazing." Systemically non-dominant student

One challenge with equity that students shared in multiple sessions was concerns about equity in class scheduling, class scoring, and grading as it relates to working students. They feel that the college supports many non-traditional students who may be working on multiple things in their lives, and ensuring that students don't fail their courses due to personal and outside-of-school pressures is important to their fellow student body.

*"We're in a low-income area doing like, it feels like our society likes to, well, you know, we're all wearing rose-colored glasses, and we kind of take them off and go oh ****. But then it feels like we keep them on purposely just to pretend it's [income disparity] not a thing, and that's like students are dropping out. Students are losing funding because they work during the day and then try to do these like heavy, heavy course loads and fail. And like I understand the academic requirement, absolutely. But if you don't set it up, or the school doesn't set it up so it's actually achievable, then what is the point?" Systemically non-dominant student*

“But yeah, but mainly my thing with Clark is just for them to be more mindful of those working folks because it is a Community College, and that’s why you know that. That’s the main thing I feel like it’s and that it’d be accessible to everybody.” Systemically non-dominant student

Of the students who participated in our listening sessions, none had experiences they could share where they felt marginalized, or less than. However, on reflection, some shared some experiences and struggles with this element when they first began classes. These struggles were around finding their footing and accessibility and finding out where to find the help they needed to continue in their coursework.

“No, I mean other than when I was like, I can't do this class or whatever. I was like, I'm too old to access this. I need help. But I eventually did get help, and I know that, for example, if I encounter that, most likely if I do message the professors, they would have to figure they will figure hopefully something out.” Systemically non-dominant student

The themes noted here are highlights from our sessions that help us illustrate the story heard during the listening sessions conducted among Clark College’s student population. The quotes summarized are not exhaustive and were chosen to illustrate the themes observed by the moderators during the hours of live discussion.

FACULTY AND STAFF

Faculty and staff at Clark College shared similar experiences with our team as we worked to uncover their stories and lived experiences with the college's culture. Their commitment to student success and adoption of the college's inclusivity programs were universal.

One theme that was mentioned in multiple sessions was an undercurrent regarding how Clark College is meeting DEI principles through metrics, but they feel that the execution may still be a work in progress.

"I think we're very committed to that both sort of on paper in our, you know, mission statements and things, and overall it feels like, you know, leadership and a lot of folks are really committed to that. But then sort of translating that into what I hear from folks is that that still isn't how it feels on campus. We may be getting, you know, some of those numbers to better places where, you know, we still don't represent as faculty and staff our students as well as we could or our community. But even as we're sort of working on that, it still feels like I'm hearing from those systemically non-dominant people that they're not always feeling welcomed, like they belong, or like their voices are heard and valued. And so it's challenging to feel this disconnect between we seem so committed to this and focus on our decisions being equity-minded and yet we're not there and So what is it that we need to do different So, so I think sort of in some parts of that diversity Clark is doing that and in other ways, we still need to figure some things out." Faculty member

"In an effort to be inclusive, these DEI initiatives make the community feel more divisive. And the heightened sense of what is politically correct seems to give people permission to overact (on our behalf)." Systemically non-dominant staff member

"For instance, in a recent hiring, we were doing, we almost had to conduct a new search and make new choices because our final set of choices didn't meet the diversity requirements, even though our original pool did. We made our initial selections for interviews, told the applicant pool they did not progress, and then had to go back to some applicants and let them know again that, no, wait, you do get to progress. And, you know, the state said that we need to hire a workforce that is racially diverse and reflects the community, but the person they forwarded to us to re-include was White presenting and White identifying. The whole process, in this case, was a joke because whom we hired was part of the original pool, not among the people that were added to meet the selection pool requirements." Systemically non-dominant faculty member

"When I've been on the hiring committees, there's always a diversity question, and there is much weight given to the diversity question. But there isn't really the understanding that, like not everyone coming in, understands this work and the terminology. And so, like, you know, they might have a knee-jerk reaction of like, well, I work with everybody, and it's like it's not that they aren't committed to working with others and supporting others. They don't have the terminology that we're looking for specifically. And therefore, they get somehow dinged for that, and it's like so that's not really the opportunity for them to grow or like, you know, understand, or maybe they just don't have the wording that we want to hear, and we might, you know, make them, not a priority candidate just because of that. It seems silly to have those expectations of them [people on hiring committees] coming in knowing all of this, the DEI stuff." Staff member

The execution of diversity, especially among those who represent racial subgroups, is highlighted as a "one to represent the many" situation, with one or two metric-meeting hires in each staff or faculty department who may be indirectly asked to be the sole representative of their sub-group.

"I am 1 of a dyad, and there's a lot of siloing. Except for in ODEI, which is the only place where you'll find you know more than one right now. Everywhere else is pretty much a silo, one per department, one per program. And that puts me at risk and always puts me at a disadvantage emotionally, right? Makes me more susceptible to needing therapies." Systemically non-dominant faculty member

"So for me, when I talk about visual diversity, it is the opportunity not to be the only space starting with that, because if you are not the only you can form, there's more of a chance to own coalition and community and to have whatever your experience is validated. If you speak up and say, hey, something you know is wrong or here's how I see it, and someone else, there's greater opportunity for that not to be discounted or dismissed or devalued." Systemically non-dominant faculty member

Listening session participants shared that, similar to the findings on the Climate Culture Survey, representation among systemically non-dominant populations among staff and faculty groups does not match that seen among the student populations.

"I believe strongly that representation is important, and I don't think that Clark, the numbers reflect the representation needed for our students to feel seen and heard. And I believe I work on a very diverse campus in terms of the stories that people bring to the table around their experiences. And I would welcome the opportunity to learn more stories from people rather than reflecting on numbers all the time, not and again, believing very strongly in representation." Faculty member

Focusing on communication, openness, and inter-group dialogue came up among both staff and faculty groups. Both segments shared that they wanted to work collaboratively between groups to help advance Clark College. The PPI programs were explicitly mentioned by participants in all three of the staff sessions and among all faculty sessions that contained systemically non-dominant participants (the one session of faculty which included only dominant participants did not mention this) as programs that added questionable or conflicting value to many as they felt they were too narrowly focused on some issues without context or inspiration.

"I might have a little answer. I used to work at [another local community college] and helped implement it there, and I want to start at Clark, at least in student affairs next year, which is intergroup dialogue. I feel like I've given this feedback in writing, so I'll say it here so it gets heard again. I love our PPI training. Privilege, power, and inequity. And they feel really theoretical and very academic and/or kind of pop culture-y to me, but they're not about us. And so, they rarely address our student population or our employee population. And I have found that, you know, the most meaningful connection I've had is sitting with a Ukrainian refugee who's a student worker. And I'm like, what do you experience, you know, tell me your story?" Systemically non-dominant staff member

"Sessions feel like they go out of their way to "shame" people for not doing the 'right thing' versus 'educating' people. When diversity teams share out cultural info, they truly go against what they teach

about stereotyping; the nuances of each culture are so different.” Systemically non-dominant staff member

Staff and faculty participants shared stories regarding how complaints and experiences with issues (implying issues about discrimination, harassment, inclusivity, and equity) that arise can be filed with the college. Some shared that they often feel they do not see the outcomes of their submissions or that the outcomes are not shared in a manner that they feel provides a resolution. They expressed a desire for more open communication and follow-through when they submit a complaint or even a suggestion for improvement.

“We talk about these structures of support. This system is set up to silence dissent, to keep you in your place.” Systemically non-dominant faculty member

“On paper, I feel like Clark is good, but when it comes down to it like when there are actions from faculty and staff, it doesn't really feel like there is an action taken on that. So a student complains about how they're treated in a classroom or things like that, it's like yes, they filled out a form, yes, there's an awareness, and that teacher's going to teach next term. So again, on paper, it feels like we're inclusive. But the reality is, I don't know, I don't know.” Staff member

“I feel like [our complaints] are unprioritized or don't matter. If it's a student complaint, we are all over it. We can change everything. But if it's an employee complaint, well, you guys are just complaining. That's really how it comes across.” Staff member

Much of this feedback about the lack of action is tied to conversations about continual leadership challenges in the VP suite at Clark College and the fear and confusion that this constant turnover creates in the workplace.

“You know the [redacted PII] right now denies [that there is any substantial turnover among systemically non-dominant faculty and non-representation] and this is the Clark data. You can look at Clark's data, and it says that faculty and staff of color are on an exodus, yet out of his mouth have been statements about that; no, that's not true. That's not true at all.” Systemically non-dominant faculty member

“I want to believe, and if I had to say, I would say I'm 90% sure the [redacted PII] truly has no idea. I'm like, how do you not know? But I do generally believe that they are not aware. I do feel like this has to do with some of our former leadership. I don't know if there was a culture of punishment and retribution before my time and people being promoted into leadership positions who weren't prepared, trained, and ready. I don't know, but it is likely. But in at least two instances that I'm aware of, they have stated that they were not aware of issues that I know had been brought up between faculty and student affairs.” Systemically non-dominant faculty member

A staff member shared a statement that resonated with their fellow listening session participants and summarized the feedback we received in other sessions quite succinctly. Their feedback surrounded how they felt that Clark College's actions in the DEI space felt perfunctory but that the actions and experiences they felt on campus were contradictory. Training is provided, and metrics are tracked; staff and faculty attend training and participate in the required training activities to improve their understanding and relationship with DEI. However, they perceive little action and outcomes from the work being done.

"I think it's a Clark way to look at the checkbox and tick it off like we're doing these things. We're accomplishing a goal instead of looking at those different opportunities to engage differently again. And I think it goes back to when we all went to training, but if we're just being talked about, it's not like one really gets anything from it. I don't really like the word training because, like, I don't want training. If we're just being talked at, how are we embracing it, understanding it, and putting it into action?" Staff member

Meeting hiring metrics and diversity requirements in hiring pools was an active topic of conversation among participants. Many shared experiences and exasperation with the process while acknowledging that the requirements were "right." They also shared frustrations with the number of failed searches due to not meeting these requirements. They shared that they have seen some light at the end of the tunnel as they have been working on posting opportunities in new places and collaboratively recruiting people with various lived experiences.

"I never thought of myself as a person of color, and nor have I felt the need to have people from my culture around to feel fulfilled professionally. Never have I felt more singled out racially in my entire 30-year career since I started at Clark. Even to participate in these sessions, I was asked, "Do you identify yourself as ..." and I did not check any of the boxes because I don't identify myself as any specific group." Systemically non-dominant staff member

One element of inclusivity that came up across the sessions was focusing on segments of the population that are systemically non-dominant by means aside from race. Neuro-divergency was mentioned often, as well as the blind and deaf. Clark College enjoys a healthy population of these types of students and a large veteran student population where these non-race-driven segments rise up in the student population. Staff and faculty see this population and are aware of their needs and challenges as they work to meet these students' needs.

"We have a very large and ever-growing neurodivergent population of students across this campus. Those students commented to us that they were struggling with this or that this instructor was not helping me or identifying with me. We do have some instructors on campus who are much more willing to work with these students and recognize that there are things they can do and say to help them along with their learning strategies. However, there are few instances of these instructors. The thing is, when we focus on representation, we often focus on the physical, but the conversation is about more than that here on this campus." Systemically non-dominant staff member

Referencing other comments about how staff and faculty experience Clark College's policies to ensure a diverse, equitable, and inclusive work environment, some listening session participants shared that they observe a disconnect between the policies and the actions they see at the college.

"In the previous conversation, I think, alluded to the fact that there's this kind of veneer of, you know, safety and support, and yet that real deep level is kind of like what actually happens on a day-to-day, day-to-day basis, isn't there? And you know, my, my colleagues of color tell me that." Faculty member

While diversity among segments of the college is seen, and as participants mention, there is representation at Clark College, they also feel that they continue to have fears for their safety due to the aggression they see. Much of these concerns are of aggression from students to staff and faculty, and their concerns about their protections as their previous experiences have shown them that little is done when they submit concerns to leadership.

"But you know I very much take, you know [another session participant] mentioned the word safety, and this is not a safe campus. This is an incredibly unsafe campus to be on. Not just from colleagues you know. We have had an epidemic, I would say, of students, especially since Trump's election first go around, who have been more brazen in their overt racism and challenge their professors who look like me and we've had this happen to female teachers and a large number of these, you know, are events of students cursing at the professors, yelling at the professors, physically getting into the space of professors." Systemically non-dominant faculty member

Some of the racially systemically non-dominant groups express experiences about how their opinions don't align with what Clark College teaches in its DEI training and initiatives. They express a desire to be hired based on their qualifications and not just to be a "diversity hire," among other concerns.

"I think we make a lot of bad assumptions about what all people of color want. Not all systemically non-dominant people want or need to be called out as a person of color or otherwise, especially to be a statistic in hiring. We do not feel offended by everything that is labeled tokenism, White privilege, microaggression, or otherwise (by White people). It feels like perhaps what one group wants is projected onto all the other subgroups of people." Systemically non-dominant staff member

A lasting theme in multiple sessions among staff and faculty was the feeling of being siloed or isolated in their being and identity or even in their roles. Driven by a lack of inclusion in discussions and open communication, this siloing had many shares that they felt alone in their struggles on campus.

"We're so siloed. We don't talk to each other. We don't, you know, we're not looking at solutions together in a holistic manner. And I do think that maybe introducing that community building. But I also worry that there are mechanisms within the college that cause kind of that cannibalistic mentality of where if my department isn't going to be doing good, then I'm not seen as on top. And I feel like that's kind of like a, we're competitive with each other, but we should be growing community together. And I feel like that would help at least break down the silos." Staff member

The themes noted here are highlights from our sessions that help us illustrate the story heard during the listening sessions conducted among Clark College's faculty and staff. The quotes summarized are not exhaustive and were chosen to illustrate the themes observed by the moderators during the hours of live discussion.

Appendix I

Supporting Documentation, Moderators Guides, Participant Lists, Transcripts, Archival Videos, etc.

Qualitative Research Study Results Report Study Fielding March 2024

Please note that any transcriptions are raw and have not been reviewed for proper terminology, and will contain errors due to naturally occurring errors with the AI in our transcription tools.

View/Download Files Using the Following Links

Moderators Guide - Faculty and Staff -

<https://strategicresearchassociates.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/EXKrRdDCyXtOhSRA6H4ruicBbmu4CEEA2W6iUDNyY2f4Qw?e=KJxpXH>

Moderators Guide - Students -

<https://strategicresearchassociates.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/EeKl9amUdqxDg1FJfizQeXIB3CaG4Q0nJ7WjleUMZeV3qw?e=0jo7wu>