

**RU Engaged 2009-2010**  
**Broadening Our Horizons: Perceptions of Campus Climate**  
**January 27, 2010**

Approximately 38 participants attended the third conversation of the 2009-2010 RU Engaged series in Eynon Ballroom on Wednesday afternoon January 27<sup>th</sup>. At the request of several members of the Rowan community, this session was a repeat of the one held on November 9, 2009. The session on perceptions of campus climate at Rowan University was facilitated by Drs. Carmen Jordan-Cox, Jim Newell, DeMond Miller and Christy Faison. Dr. Faison opened the session by providing a summary of the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 series that resulted in input into the University's strategic plan and a newly approved definition of shared governance. She reminded those in attendance that RU Engaged is intended to provide a venue for every member of the Rowan family to have input and share in conversations that affect the future of Rowan.

Dr. Carmen Jordan-Cox then asked all participants to respond to the general statement, "**Rowan is a comfortable place for faculty, staff and students**" by indicating their level of agreement using the provided iclickers. The responses to the survey question were not revealed.

Dr. DeMond Miller facilitated the next segment in which participants seated at tables were asked to react to a series of statements. The groups were given fifteen minutes for discussion, and then tables were asked to report out.

**Statement 1 - At Rowan openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals are able to express sexual identity without negative repercussions (ostracism, harassment, bullying, teasing).**

*Response 1* – There is not a lot of openness on this campus – no open discussions. Students feel lonely and isolated. Students in classes feel free to make homophobic statements. From Safe Zone training we learned there are issues in Athletics. Our table disagrees with Statement 1.

*Response 2* - There are biases at Rowan. Not violence, but harassment and bullying. Everyone should treat each other with respect...recognize each other as individuals. We need a GLBT Center at Rowan. Male athletes can't come out as easily as female athletes.

*Response 3* – Our group was perplexed. No one felt they knew enough to respond to the statement. That in itself is very telling.

*Dr. Miller* – There is more awareness of ethnic and racial bias than GLBT issues.

*Response 4* – What does the statement mean by 'openly'? Individuals aren't open for fear of repercussions.

*Dr. Miller* – Let me rephrase it – Does Rowan foster an environment where gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals are able to express their sexual identity without fear of negative repercussions?

*Response 5* - As a newcomer, I feel this is an issue at Rowan. Rowan doesn't provide a space where GLBT individuals feel comfortable.

*Dr. Miller* – Both 'space' and 'place'

**Statement 2 - Students from all socioeconomic classes feel welcomed at Rowan.**

*Response 1*– A participant recounted a story about a student who arrived at a class without the textbook. The student was chastised and asked to leave. The student was the only African American in the class. The participant thought the situation could have been handled differently.

*Dr. Miller* – More work is needed on the part of faculty. There are many misperceptions. We are all impacted by these economic times.

*Response 2*– Many students have to work. Office hours are not accommodating for those students.

**Statement 3 - On the surface, different racial groups often seem to get along at Rowan, but underneath there is a considerable amount of racial tension and separation among the various racial groups.**

*Response 1* - From a student perspective, there is separation, but I don't associate that with tension. In other instances you see individuals from many racial/ethnic groups interacting.

*Response 2*– NJ has one of the most segregated K-12 systems in the US. Breaking down these barriers won't happen automatically on this campus. A purposeful plan needs to be adopted.

*Response 3* – I work with many student groups in Fine & Performing Arts. I find the statement true. Students don't venture out of their comfort zones. Something needs to be done.

*Response 4* – There is separation among students and employees on this campus. We self-segregate. When there is racial tension, it's never that simple. It's not just one thing...it's interpersonal skills, it's rudeness, it's world view, etc. The conflict is more situational.

*Response 5* – There is not a lot of diversity in attendance at events.

*Response 6* – Sometimes rudeness is predicated on bias (SES, race, etc). Discrimination involves counseling – that's work. It's easier to ignore the truth. Your life is enriched when you interact with people different from yourself.

*Response 7* – I met the person at my table just now. She is from Africa. We had very different perceptions of each other's lives.

*Response 8* – I feel as though if I were sitting at a table with other African American students and a Caucasian student joined in, we would welcome him. But if I joined a group that was all white, I would get the cold shoulder.

*Response 9* – I didn't think there was any tension, but the opinion at my table differs. At events on campus, they are usually separated by races.

*Response 10* – I detect tension in the residence halls. If someone from one race joins a group from another race, people leave.

*Response 11* – As a graduate student, I feel the tension when I work in groups. People assume that people from Africa are stupid. People laugh at students who speak with an accent.

**Statement 4 - Women at Rowan have the same opportunities as men for advancement, participation, and recognition.**

*Response 1* – Our table focused on participation and recognition. We wondered if what we (women) say in meetings gets the same respect/recognition as if it were said by a male counterpart.

*Response 2* – I don't think it's taken into account that women bear the majority of the responsibility for childcare. For example, moving the free period to Friday afternoon impacts my ability to participate because I have to pick my children up from school. I've been advised not to speak to my dean about it.

**Statement 5 - Rowan is open and accommodating to people with disabilities.**

*Response 1* – We are open but not accommodating. We have areas in fine & performing arts that can't be reached by people with disabilities.

*Response 2* – How many faculty are able to make accommodations for students with learning disabilities?

*Response 3* – I live in Triad. At elevators they have Braille, but it's covered with glass. Obviously there were good intentions, but there's a lack of understanding.

*Response 4* – The bottom line is human dignity. How do we provide it for ourselves and others? "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." We have to be intentional and work at it everyday to help students be more a part of each other's lives.

Dr. Jim Newell then presented the following scenario and asked the audience to indicate their responses using the iclickers.

*Scenario*

*A newly hired Mexican-American female enters a staff meeting and finds three Caucasian American males planning a major project. She initially sits quietly nearby and listens as the group debates issues related to the project. Overall, the group seems to defer to one male on most issues. When the group seems stumped by a particularly challenging problem, she volunteers what she is sure is a viable solution. The lead male says "That won't work."*

*She then asked why not? He replied, "We've all worked here for 20 years. We know what we're doing." She responded, "It's too bad that you don't know enough to recognize the right answer when you hear it" and she left the room.*

The audience used iclickers to respond to the following statements. Results are shown in parentheses.

**Race/ethnicity played a significant role in this interaction.**

A - Strongly Agree (25%)

B - Agree (45%)

C - Disagree (25%)

D - Strongly Disagree (5%)

**Gender played a significant role in this interaction.**

- A - Strongly Agree (85%)
- B - Agree (10%)
- C - Disagree (5%)
- D - Strongly Disagree (0%)

**Being a new hire entering into an established group played a significant role in this interaction.**

- A - Strongly Agree (40%)
- B - Agree (55%)
- C - Disagree (5%)
- D - Strongly Disagree (0%)

**Everyone behave appropriately.**

- A - Strongly Agree (0%)
- B - Agree (0%)
- C - Disagree (26%)
- D - Strongly Disagree (74%)

**It would have been different if the newcomer had been a white male and the larger group had been Hispanic females.**

- A - Strongly Agree (0%)
- B - Agree (72%)
- C - Disagree (6%)
- D - Strongly Disagree (17%)
- E - (6%) *This was not an option!*

Dr. Newell pointed out how given the same exact scenario, participants perceived the events differently. That is the point that this session wanted to highlight.

Dr. Carmen Jordan-Cox then polled the audience again on the opening general statement, **Rowan is a comfortable place for faculty, staff and students.** The pre- and post survey results are shown below:

**Pre**

- A - Strongly Agree 19%
- B - Agree 65%
- C - Disagree 12%
- D - Strongly Disagree 4%

**Post**

- A - Strongly Agree 0%
- B - Agree 47%
- C - Disagree 41%
- D - Strongly Disagree 12%

Dr. Jordan-Cox asked what precipitated the change in the pre- and post responses.

*Response 1* – The stories of how the students have been treated really changed my view from agree to disagree.

*Response 2* - I think the discussion impacted the results. It could also be that some of the people have left the room.

*Response 3* – The conversation made me less comfortable. The open discussion puts issues into perspective.

*Response 4* – Are student/faculty issues similar or different?

*Response 5* – The issues are similar.

*Response 6* – Faculty and staff have a way out. We don't live here 24/7 the way the students do.

*Response 7* – The issues are the same. Just the names, faces and ages change.

*Response 8* – I'm somewhat saddened. I've been here since the 1970's and I thought we had moved much further. We need to be better at dealing with students who have earned the right to be here. I'm saddened to hear some of the statements today.

*Response 9* – We live in an unjust world. Social justice is not the law of the land. We should be uncomfortable with what's happening on campus.

*Response 10* – We put a face on the indignities and we can no longer ignore it. I'm uncomfortable enough to act.

Dr. Carmen Jordan-Cox thanked all for their participation. Notes from the RUEngaged series are posted on the web. Future sessions include:

February 9, 2010, "Awareness: How Inclusive are we?" 3:15 -4:45pm in the Eynon Ballroom

April 19, 2010, "Creating an Inclusive Environment", 3:15-4:45 pm in the Eynon Ballroom

### Written Comments

Not openness

- No discussion
- Not overt behaviors
- Not a lot of support

Lonely

Students feel OK to have homophobic comments

Students will sometimes share in private, but not in public

Sexual activity sometimes different from identification

Prejudice against people in lower socio-economic classes

Political correctness has pushed things undercover

Not physically accommodating

Need campus-wide re-education