

# **Study Circles on the Compelling Interest of Diversity**

**University of New Hampshire  
February – March 2004**

*How should UNH meet its educational and civic responsibilities to foster an inclusive campus community?*

## **Introduction**

Since the fall of 2002, the University of New Hampshire has hosted three Study Circle opportunities: University or Polyversity? The Promise of Conflict in the UNH Community; The Impact of Alcohol on the UNH Community; and The Compelling Interest of Diversity. The University community has begun to see these opportunities as a valuable tool for community problem solving. While each Study Circle entertains a particular framing question and topic, connections between various solutions have inevitably been made. For example, The Promise of Conflict led us to two more specific dialogues for which conflict is central: alcohol and diversity. We focused this Study Circles topic on diversity for two other important reasons.

Firstly, the June 2003 Supreme Court decisions regarding affirmative action in admissions reaffirmed the roles and responsibilities for higher education relative to the “compelling interest” of society. Issues of diversity not only raise questions of morality, politics and economics related to inclusion and equal opportunity, but they also are critical to determining the quality of education offered at colleges and universities across the country. In its pursuit of academic excellence, UNH has a responsibility to establish a diverse workforce and cadre of leaders.

In addition, the University of New Hampshire Academic Plan (2003 to 2008) includes, in its core values, the themes of community and diversity. As we moved forward in achieving and meeting the goals set out for us under the themes of community and diversity, a community dialogue about this very topic became critical.

## **Past and Current Efforts**

Since the early 1970s, the University of New Hampshire has committed institutional resources to issues of inclusion. In 1971, UNH developed the first draft of an Affirmative Action plan and program. The next year, the President’s Commission on the Status of Women and an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Committee was established. In fall of 1979, the first UNH Handicapped Student Services Office opened its doors.

Following the establishment of the UNH Affirmative Action Office in 1989, academic departments began developing five-year affirmative action goals and plans for achieving said goals. In 1991, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) began serving as a safe haven for students from racial and ethnic minority groups. In 1992, the University System added sexual orientation to its non-discrimination policy and assessed the campus climate for sexual orientation-related issues. The UNH Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment Policy has included sexual orientation since 1996, and discrimination has been prohibited for ten initial categories since before that time. In addition, TRIO programs and the Center for Academic Resources have had missions grounded in outreach and service to first generation and low-income students since they were created.

After much success over the years, UNH recognizes the continued need to create and ensure equal opportunities, an inclusive climate and a diverse community. Courses, offices,

organizations, programs, committees, commissions, and working groups proactively address the following issues and populations: women, people of color, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people; socioeconomic class; people with disabilities; religious diversity; gender identity and expression; ethnicity and nationality, and other underrepresented groups.

As UNH works to increase understanding of how best to create an environment that is inclusive, diverse, and equitable, a new focused and strategic effort is taking shape. The Study Circles on the Compelling Interest of Diversity is one way in which the community was called upon to voice its concerns, priorities and creative ideas.

Below is the summary of recommendations regarding The Compelling Interest of Diversity: How should UNH meet its educational and civic responsibilities to foster an inclusive campus community?

## **Participants**

In Fall 2004, participants were recruited from the UNH community to participate in these Study Circles. Faculty, staff, administrators and students received invitations to participate; these invitations included letters, emails and posters. Many students were recruited through their contact with various faculty members. In addition, particular constituency groups were targeted for participation based on their focus on diversity and equity. The participant group included 28 students (.2% of students), 72 staff (3% of staff), 19 faculty (2% of faculty) and 2 community members. These participants met in twelve groups for two hours weekly over a four-week period. UNH staff volunteers and one student co-facilitator team facilitated the Study Circles groups. The facilitators went through a brief training process led by Michele Holt-Shannon and Mary Taylor.

## **Themes and Recommendations**

On March 25, 2004, participants, facilitators and guests met in a final Action Forum to discuss the conclusion and ideas generated in their four-week process. Each group gave a brief summary of its discussions, listed the main themes that were addressed, and gave examples of significant issues and recommendations for action. The common themes that emerged in the discussion across all twelve groups included needs for:

- A systemic, integrated, and synergistic community approach to diversity
- Community-building
- A diversity statement
- Ongoing diversity education
- Accountability and responsibility for everyone in the community
- More resources for diversity efforts
- Recruitment and retention of students
- Recruitment and retention of faculty
- Recruitment and retention of staff
- Collaboration with the Durham community

The Action Forum and the individual group reports, in addition to providing specific recommendations, offered a general sense of the needs and broad vision for an inclusive community. Participants expressed confusion and disappointment about the lack of knowledge

that community members had about the issues. Despite these barriers, participants expressed a sense of excitement and commitment to the value of inclusion at UNH. The specific recommendations are detailed below. Despite the diverse experience and thought that made up the participant group, there were a number of common ideas and recommendations.

## **Summary of all Group Reports**

In each of the reports, the need for *a systemic, integrated, synergistic community approach to diversity* was the dominant issue. There are many important initiatives and activities taking place on this campus, but better coordinated efforts could lead to more effective outcomes. Some key components of this potential approach include:

- Institutional leadership
- Clearly articulated goals
- A common language around diversity
- An understanding of the campus climate
- An examination of our policy and organizational structure
- Accountability and responsibility of all community members
- Resources of all kinds
- Education about these issues
- Collaboration with the town of Durham

In order to better understand the framing question, each group took a critical look at our approach to diversity. The groups were then asked to comment on the characteristics of the issue of diversity, causes of the problems surrounding this issue, and possible resolution to the problem.

### Characteristics

- Diversity affects us all
- Diversity and inclusion are very broad topics
- Traditional and stereotypical categories and definitions of diversity are still being used
- UNH has some work to do on this issue, but we are moving in the right direction
- We all must be torchbearers for this issue
- UNH has a role of preparing students for a diverse world
- Different types of diverse individuals are affected by this issue differently – thus we need to be cognizant of the variety of experiences
- We have students, staff and faculty who are openly hostile or exhibit indifference to the issues of diversity

### Possible causes

- Lack of clearly articulated values and goals for UNH
- Lack of follow-through on past recommendations
- Lack of community at UNH
- Lack of knowledge, skills, and action around diversity
- Lack of accountability
- Unwelcoming climate
- Lack of diversity and value for it at the state level

- Apathy of community members, especially students and faculty, to engage in this topic

#### Needs

- A public commitment and support from the institutional leadership; and the development of an integrated, systemic approach which may include a strategic plan outlining the goals, obstacles, and measurable objectives
- A common language that we all understand
- Individual increased awareness, skills, and action
- Accountability for promoting a diverse, equitable and inclusive community
- Build community for ALL at UNH
- Continuation of recruitment AND retention of faculty, staff, and students in order to reach a critical mass and provide visibility and combat isolation

Each group answered the question, “What recommendations does the group have for more constructive responses to fostering this inclusive community (e.g., in the curriculum, in governance, in co-curricular activities, in group interactions)?” The following themes emerged from that question.

#### Build Community

- Create opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to connect as groups (many possibilities listed below)
- Foster individual, one-on-one connections so people can learn from each other
- Diversity as a focus of University Day in the Fall (when we have the University Picnic and the address from the President) so that community = inclusion and it can have an educational, as well as social, feel
- Promote bystander responsibility
- NOTE: everything listed below will also help to build community

#### Create a diversity statement

- Utilize a shared process to create a highly visible diversity statement that articulates our goals, responsibilities, commitment, and action towards diversity and inclusion for all community members
- The statement should concretely describe what people can do to make UNH a more supportive/inclusive environment - confront actions and attitudes, use inclusive language, recruit diverse students and staff, etc.
- The statement should include accountability or the consequences of intolerance, exclusion and inequity.
- Have student senate, faculty senate, PAT council, OS council, and other governing bodies pass resolutions supporting this statement or vocally support it
- Conclude the creation of a diversity statement with the development of a diversity strategic plan

#### Provide ongoing diversity education

##### *Curricular*

- First-year seminar that would address diversity
  - Make diversity an option for inquiry

- Incorporate diversity in all orientations for new faculty, staff, and students
  - Discuss institutional values, purposes, responsibilities
  - Raise awareness, develop skills, and promote action
    - Provide faculty training that relates to meeting needs of students in the classroom in the key areas of inclusion, risk management and professional development
    - Encourage more faculty to use the Bias-free Language Guide in their classes
  - Incorporate diversity into the curriculum, not delegate it to one department, major, etc.
    - Review how other schools address diversity in the curriculum
    - Promote speakers in classroom
    - Promote conversation in classroom
    - Promote that these ideas are complex and merit lengthy discussion
    - Incorporate themes in English 401 and writing intensives
    - Incorporate diversity into Discovery courses and as course options
    - Assign literature that promotes high level examination of the issues; infuse curriculum
    - Review course materials to ensure they are diverse in content and are from diverse individuals and perspectives
- Provide summer grants for faculty for research or course development that is diversity-focused
- Explore the possibility of a diversity requirement
- Provide more resources for the promotion of exchange/study abroad programs
- Provide diverse experiences for UNH students who can then bring back and share their experiences with other students
- Create a center that studies diversity/inclusion thus making diversity a research issue, as well as a curricular issue, and an institutional highlight (details available by request)
- Create an academic Social Justice Education Program within the Education Department where students can actually major in social issues
- Have a common first-year reading in English 401 that involves diversity in some way. Address the book, its contents, its author, etc. in relation to diversity
- Create and promote specific opportunities for students to research diversity right here at UNH

#### *Co-curricular*

- Coordinate co-curricular program with diversity themes
- Create a centralized calendar for programming
- Foster departmental, ongoing, cross-campus dialogues offered for everyone in the UNH community
- Provide nonacademic places for faculty, staff, and students to have “chats” on diversity outside of class (e.g., lounges, seminar rooms)
- Provide course releases/professional development opportunities for research/teaching/other activities with a diversity focus

- Expand campus lecture series to focus on diverse topics and/or speakers
- Call on faculty to do one-time programs on diversity around campus (the telling of their stories and having chats on them)
- Provide more Safe Zones programs in order to improve the campus climate for GLBT community members
- Sponsor trips to visit ethnic, international events and programs
- Do more outreach by establishing awareness regarding disabilities, sexual orientation, color, gender, age, etc., and by having more celebrative programs involving food customs, etc.
- Offer more classes involving other cultures and customs (e.g., salsa dancing)
- Utilize WUNH's (UNH's student-run radio station) strengths by offering and promoting diverse programming
- Bring more diverse performers to the Whittemore Center and promote them
- Incorporate training into requirements for all recognized student organizations
- Provide incentives to student organizations who offer or participate in diversity programs
- Provide opportunities which force students/staff/faculty to be in uncomfortable situations (e.g., Dare To Be Different program)
- Create/fund a team of diversity trainers that can be used on campus
- Create diversity-based residential colleges where diversity-related coursework is expounded upon in the residence halls
- Generate a comprehensive list of Experiential Diversity Education (EDE) opportunities that the University already offers, such as Alternative Break Challenge, Study Abroad, Diversity Peer Education, etc.
- Work to promote the GLBT Conference (coming to UNH next year) to the ENTIRE campus population
- Promote a student summit on diversity
- Explore and implement experiential education models for diversity
- Provide incentives for students to attend these programs

#### Foster accountability and responsibility for everyone in the community

- Develop a Diversity Strategic Plan that sets measurable goals and outcomes and has a basic timeline for what we can achieve
  - Assess the climate and needs of community
  - Assess progress and provide this feedback to the administration so the strategic plan can be altered appropriately and outcomes can be publicly reported
- Establish standards of behavior for all members of the community with the expectation that we can and should diversify
  - Promote Zero Tolerance - with specific guidelines for behavior that also balance First Amendment rights
  - Delineate consequences for certain behaviors
- While value for and experience with diversity is a basic requirement, operate using incentives and rewards rather than punishments
- Empower others to stand up for their values and act with integrity (e.g., bystander responsibility)

- Create centralized processes to gather feedback regarding incidents/negative experiences from students, faculty and staff so that they are recognized and the problems are addressed
  - Provide clear and accessible avenues for reporting incidents of bias, harassment and hate; utilize public service announcements and other types of publicity
  - Require departments to create an affirmative action plan for every employment search
  - Incorporate the promotion of diversity/inclusion into all evaluative processes (for example, course evaluations, promotion and tenure, annual performance evaluations)
  - Include a clause in the tenure contract stipulating service in the area of diversity
  - Make the promotion of diversity should be part of everyone's job, not an added task or responsibility
- The President:
  - Gives periodic progress updates around her goals for increasing diversity
  - Discusses diversity in State of University address
  - Holds other offices and departments accountable
  - Actively responds to and implements recommendations from the three Presidential Commissions and the Diversity Study Circles
  - Adds a commission for the inclusion of people of disabilities
  - Focuses some fund-raising efforts on diversity
- Trustees: Has person(s) involved with this topic at the trustees level
- Faculty:
  - Have a diversity value statement included with tenure approval
  - Hold academic departments accountable for not reaching recruitment for underrepresented groups—lose funding
  - Establish yearly goals for departments and faculty to include trainings on diversity
- Students:
  - Adhere to clear guidelines for behavior that still provide for First Amendment rights
  - *The New Hampshire* promotes diversity through the stories they cover and promotes responsible writing that contains bias-free language and accurate reporting free of stereotypes
  - Promote Greek involvement in diversity efforts
  - Explore the relationship between UNH hockey and diversity
    - Stop using inappropriate language during games
    - Do not play “Old Black Betty” at hockey games (the NAACP called for a boycott when the song was released)
    - Ask both Coach Dick Umile and the Men's Hockey team to get more actively involved in diversity promotion since they are some of the most significant role models on campus
  - Create an “Admissions Diversity Agreement” (a copy of the University's Diversity Statement) to be included on the UNH application. Potential students would need to indicate their agreement to abide by the statement during their time at UNH and then sign their name to it

### Create/provide resources

- Create a provost-level position responsible for diversity
- Begin a capital campaign for diversity
- Hire people (experts) for consultation (e.g., hire a Faculty Fellow to help faculty integrate diversity in the classroom)
- Provide guidelines for dialogues, curriculum, diversity infusion, videos, and faculty resources
- Encourage more faculty to use the Bias-free Language Guide in their classes
- Create a diversity resource library
- Create a “Diversity at UNH” Web page linked from the UNH home page
- Address financial barriers for students (e.g., target students from low socioeconomic status background)
- Provide more financial support for the recruitment and retention of underrepresented groups
- Work with the UNH Foundation to develop a financial resource base for these issues
- Establish a center for religious pluralism; OMSA could coordinate with this center

### Recruiting students

#### *Establish Pipelines*

- Target current “sending” high schools
- Connect with church groups, inner-city community colleges, middle schools
- Utilize summer bridge programs to recruit students
- Include current students in recruiting effort to link to their high schools and communities

#### *Other*

- Give more financial aid to graduate students
- Talk with students to find out why they do or don’t attend
- Demystify UNH for students who may not be familiar with college
- Train recruiters in awareness of diversity, skills in dealing with diversity, and action in promoting diversity
- Talk to parents since they are a large influence
- Actively recruit individuals with disabilities
- Require an essay on the UNH entrance application that focuses on diversity
- Explore issue of legacy admissions (students that are admitted simply because their parents are alumni)

### Recruiting, retaining faculty and staff

- Have competitive salaries
- Create faculty and staff lines for minority candidates
- Add relevant curriculum to attract diverse faculty
- Create pipelines with graduate schools
- Hire a Black or Hispanic president or other upper-level administrator
- Recruit continuously through networking

- Provide mentors to junior faculty and staff, especially from underrepresented groups
- Actively recruit individuals with disabilities
- Supplement the affirmative action guide for hiring needs with data and information about each particular department to give perspective and provide motivation for recruitment
- Promote the value/experience with diversity (for majority and diverse individuals) as a requirement for hiring rather than an “added bonus”
- Within recruitment process, account for why a department is not hiring XYZ and also what recruitment methods were being utilized
- Provide a recruitment specialist to help departments recruit diverse individuals
- Target recruitment to minority groups as is done with students
- Utilize exchange programs with historically black colleges and universities to raise awareness of opportunities at UNH
- Promote domestic partner benefits and other resources to faculty and staff (make known what is available).

#### Collaborate with Durham community

- Open more ethnic businesses, restaurants, hair stylists, cosmetics, etc.
- Establish more accommodating businesses and amenities in town (e.g., declines on the sidewalks for wheelchair access)
- Improve our image so that it is more inclusive and communicates that diversity is a core value (e.g., bookstores, eating places)
- Recognize the community contributions of affirmative action hires

### **Study Circles Evaluation**

Participants completed an interest survey at the beginning of this process and an evaluation at the end of the process. Individual comments are included in the appendix of this report. Overall, participants evaluated the Study Circles experience highly and reported that the program met their expectations. However, some participants were disappointed in the experience, and this should be investigated further. Of those who reported being disappointed, some said that they are eager to try another Study Circle, while others said that they were not sure if they would participate again. Dissatisfaction was largely dependent upon an instance of poor facilitation. In the evaluation, participants said that they learned things that they hoped to take back to their classrooms, offices and residence halls.

Participants were asked what they learned; five themes emerged from the responses to this question.

- Diversity is inclusive of a variety of identities
- There is value in community and connecting with others
- People have a commitment and concern for this issue
- We need to keep moving forward
- Didn't learn anything at all

Another three themes were culled from comments to the question “what did you like about your study circle?”

- Interacting with others

- Facilitation
- Open discussion

Participants were finally asked what could be done to improve the study circles. These themes included:

- More students and faculty in groups
- More time to discuss the issue
- Facilitation
- Clarification of the process goals
- Increased attendance at sessions by those who are participating

On the individual and small group level these study circles were effective. Some areas of improvement were also identified.

## **Conclusion**

The participants of The Compelling Interest of Diversity Study Circles were encouraged by the leadership and participation of our administration in these conversations. The current process of developing a university statement on diversity is a reassuring sign that the recommendations of these Study Circles will be seriously considered for action. In addition to the suggestions and recommendations that resulted from the process, participants are making five specific requests of the university leadership.

### *1. Develop a diversity strategic plan*

As recommended in this report, a diversity strategic plan is an important next step in moving us forward. This is timely as the University's Academic Plan, which functions as the primary force driving major decisions and actions, can provide the overarching context for a diversity strategic plan. This plan will focus our goals into actionable, achievable steps as well as hold vice presidents, deans, and directors accountable for making progress toward achieving the university's goals of diversity, inclusion and equity. It will also be important to charge an individual, office or organization with the responsibility of monitoring progress made on the goals of the plan. The process of developing and implementing this plan should include collecting and organizing data in order to systematically and effectively assess progress and align/realign our programs to achieve our goals.

### *2. Systematically assess the status of and climate for underrepresented groups on campus*

Ensuring equity and creating a campus climate that values diversity are neither easily nor quickly achieved. The campus reflects the general attitudes of the surrounding community and the country, and it is well known that public attitudes are shifting. Nonetheless, across the University, considerable effort must go into developing and implementing initiatives designed to make diversity an ongoing item on everyone's agenda. The issue of retention was raised again and again in the Study Circles discussions and an inclusive climate, or lack thereof, is key to retaining faculty, staff and students at UNH. While much data is collected at a university on a regular basis, specific inequities can only be addressed when they are reported. Systematic assessment of the status of underrepresented groups and the campus climate for these groups is another recommendation from the Study Circles effort.

### *3. Educate campus community members regarding issues of diversity*

One important way in which a more inclusive campus climate can be created is to educate and train those who are currently members of our community. Educating our students is critically important, and there are many great efforts to do so. Time and resources must also be committed to educating our faculty and staff. Participants shared story after story of unacceptable interactions with faculty and staff on issues of diversity. Understanding that it is difficult, in the context of an academic environment to mandate trainings on diversity, efforts must be made to increase the cultural competency of our community members. The values we profess in our Academic Plan are made real only by the actions of our community.

*4. Commit resources of time, money, and people to recruitment efforts of underrepresented peoples on campus*

The presence of a “critical mass” of underrepresented peoples is another point of entry into a more inclusive campus climate. More resources need to be focused on recruitment efforts. These resources include time, money and people. The path to a more diverse community is not an unknown; the resources just need to be committed to make it happen.

*5. Clearly articulate the University’s progress in the area of diversity*

Lastly, many of the participants expressed frustration with the lack of institutional change on diversity issues. Some described their perception of UNH’s diversity efforts as “much talk and no action”. In order to address this pattern and address any future misperception, the participants have requested clear communication about the progress of any actions that will take place as a result of this effort. It is requested that this communication occur both with the Study Circles participants directly and with the community at large.

Please consider these recommendations as a way to focus our next efforts. Many look forward to the reaction and response of the University leadership. We look forward to working together as we make UNH a better place for everyone.

## **Appendix**

### **Diversity Study Circles Evaluation Summary**

In an ongoing attempt to refine the use of study circles at UNH, the planning team developed both an interest survey and an overall evaluation of the process for participants. The intent of the interest survey was to understand any changes that may occur with group members as a result of their participation in the study circles. The evaluation was used to understand outcomes of the discussions. The surveys were emailed to all participants for whom emails were held.

#### **Interest Survey**

Participants were asked to predict, on a scale of 1-10 (10 being highest) their overall satisfaction with the study circles, how worthwhile it was of their time, and how important the discussions are to UNH. There were also four open-ended questions participants were asked to complete: What do you hope to learn, what do you think you will like about the study circle, why did you get involved, and where did you hear about the study circles. There were a total of 72 participants in the diversity/inclusion study circles of which 55 returned interest surveys. This is a 43% response rate. The responses were representative by university affiliation.

Approximately 21% of the respondents had participated in a study circle before. About 55% had one meeting at the time they completed the interest survey. This is important to know because it could affect their answers to the responses on the interest survey since they had a “taste” of the experience. It was hoped to get the survey out prior to the first meetings of the groups, but this did not happen.

The predicted satisfaction responses had a mean of 7.4, on a 10-point scale, with a standard deviation of 1.9. The predicted “worthwhileness” was 7.4 with a standard deviation of 1.8. The importance rating for the study circles averaged 8.6 with a standard deviation of 1.9

When asked what they hoped to learn, respondents' answers converged into four categories: *learn about others at the university and their perspectives on diversity, learn what's being done and what could be done, learn how to work together, not sure what I'll learn*. The categories are listed with most responses to least responses. By far, participants wanted to learn from others.

Two related themes emerged in regard to what participants think they will like. The large majority responded with a statement that fell into the category *talking with and meeting other people*. Participants were also anticipating *open and frank discussions*, which of course fosters learning. This would suggest that there is a distinct need, at least on the part of these respondents, to connect with other people in the greater UNH community.

Responses collapsed into four themes when respondents were asked why they got involved. The most frequently cited type of response focused on *personal commitment to diversity*. The second most cited response was that their *involvement was recommended or required*. Other people mentioned *wanting to become engaged with the UNH community*. The fourth most cited response related to *ensuring that voices were included in the conversation*. Clearly these were people who saw themselves as stakeholders.

In regard to hearing about the study circles, most people mentioned *bulk email* invitations. Others stated that they received a *personal email*. Some people got *invitations directly from individuals, their supervisor, or faculty members*. It seems that the personal connection really made a difference in getting people involved.

## **Evaluation**

Shortly after the action forum, respondents received a survey asking them to evaluate the study circles. This was based on the interest survey with the questions from the evaluation mirroring the interest survey. Respondents were asked to rate, on a 10-point scale (10 being highest), their overall satisfaction, how worthwhile of their time the discussions were, and the importance of the study circles to UNH. They were then asked three open-ended questions: what did you learn from your study circle, what did you like about your study circle, and what would you change with your study circle.

Sixty-eight participants responded to the survey. This was a 56% response rate. Students were underrepresented and staff were overrepresented in the responses. Twenty-three percent of the respondents had participated in study circles before. We did not make an attempt to link an individual's interest survey with an evaluation. All comparisons between the interest survey results and evaluation are based on the cohort of responses.

The mean response for overall satisfaction was 7.4 with a standard deviation of 2.4. This is the average that participants predicted on the interest survey. But there was a larger range of responses, from 1-10.

In regard to "worthwhileness," the average (7.8) was a little larger than the predicted "worthwhileness". Again, the range of responses was larger for the evaluation, from 1-10.

Participants' view of importance did not change at all. The mean for the evaluation was 8.6 and the standard deviation 1.9, with a range of 4-10. These data would indicate that in general people had the type of experience they expected.

Five themes emerged from the responses to "what did you learn." The most popular by far was *the diversity of diversity*. People learned a lot from others' perspectives. They also began to understand that this is an extremely complex issue. The second most popular response reflected the *value of connecting and community with others*. Talking with others is not only important in order to share ideas and perspectives, but people get a chance to meet others they didn't know and build community. The third theme was the *commitment and common concern for diversity*. Participants realized that there were many people extremely committed to this issue and this is shared by many others. I think it was reassuring for some who may have felt alone in the cause. *Need to keep moving in the right direction* was the fourth theme. While some realized how much work needs to be done at UNH in regard to diversity, others did take notice of how far we have come and echoed the need to continue the positive movement and try to speed up the progress. The final theme was *didn't learn anything*. This was a surprising theme. This was really rooted in two issues. One is that there are a few people who have been working on the issue for a long time. They entered the study circles with a great deal of knowledge and didn't have much more to learn. I also think that there was another small set of individuals who didn't have a good study circle experience at all and this inhibited learning.

Based on these responses, the study circles met most of the expectations of the participants. It doesn't seem as though they learned what was already being done, though. While that topic may not have been covered, other things were learned that participants didn't expect to learn.

When we asked participants what they liked, the clearest theme was *interacting with others*. This was what people were looking forward to and it was what they like the most. This has been the case in other study circles as well. People really enjoy meeting and talking with others that they normally don't talk with. As a process, study circles build community and fill a need for that lack of connection. *Facilitation* was the second most popular theme. Good facilitation seemed to be key to success. Participants talked about how the facilitator created a positive environment promoting effective discussion. The third and final theme was *open discussion*. This was also discussed in the interest survey. People enjoy the honesty with which people share.

Five themes emerged as ways to improve the study circle experience. As with other study circle evaluations, *group composition* was the most cited issue for improvement. Participants wanted more students and more faculty participants. *Lack of time* was the second most popular theme. Groups were coalescing around the fourth meeting thus fostering fantastic discussion. Other people mentioned that the topic is very complex and needs more discussion time. The third most cited concern was *facilitation*. As can be seen with comments to the previous question and this question, facilitation can make or break an experience. It can foster or inhibit learning. Additionally, some students felt that they weren't listened to and felt devalued during their study circle. A good facilitator could have likely remedied this. For future study circles focus should be placed on selecting and training facilitators. The level of skill may also be dependent upon the topic. I believe that diversity/inclusion is a topic that is more difficult than alcohol to facilitate. The fourth theme was *clarification of themes and goals*. People are uneasy about the lack of

direction. I think we are so accustomed to being told what to do, that we don't know how to proceed without very clear direction. Finally, people were concerned about *attendance*. It was very disruptive to discussion if even one person missed one week. The group needed to spend time catching someone up or lacked the input of a valuable member of the group.

## **Summary**

Overall, the study circles were evaluated highly. They met people's expectations. But there were some instances of great disappointment, which should be investigated further. While one disappointed person is eager to try another study circle, another is not sure if she/he will participate again. It seems that dissatisfaction was largely dependent upon poor facilitation. Participants learned some great things that they will hopefully take back to their units. So on the individual and small group level these study circles were effective. It was also discovered that there is room for improvement.