

Assessing Climate for Diversity in the Psychology Classroom: Development of the Classroom Diversity Climate (CDC) Scale

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Increasing student diversity has prompted increased awareness of the importance of faculty engagement in culturally responsive teaching. In fact, research suggests that creating positive and inclusive classroom environments is likely related to better student engagement and learning outcomes, particularly in students of underrepresented backgrounds. The current article describes our departmental action research efforts to design, test, and implement a brief assessment of classroom inclusion. Our collaborative process involved considering existing related measures, creating possible items, and collecting both quantitative and qualitative student data. The resulting 5-item Classroom Diversity Climate (CDC) Scale shows promising psychometric results. The CDC is now fully integrated into our departmental teaching evaluation process.

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, classroom climate, teaching evaluation

The collegiate classroom continues to diversify. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the total college enrollment rate for young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 rose from 35% in 2000 to 41% in 2016 (NCES, 2018). A significant portion of this increase was driven in part by increases in the numbers of women, students of color, and students from other traditionally underrepresented groups (Larke, 2013). For example, Hispanic student enrollment between 2000 and 2016 more than doubled, as did the number of students who identify as two or more races (NCES, 2018). The number of female students has increased as well; female students outnumbered male students in every racial category by the fall of 2016 (NCES, 2018). Other nontraditional or otherwise underrepresented student populations have also been on the rise, including queer students (Renn, 2010). At our own

institution, a private midsize liberal arts university in an urban setting, the percentage of first-generation students and students of color has grown over the past two decades, with our most recent first-year class being approximately 25% students of color (Office of Institutional Research, 2019).

Such increasing student diversity has prompted institutions of higher education to reckon with a number of changes and challenges both inside and outside the classroom (Golom, 2018). One of the challenges within the teaching context has been helping faculty engage in culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching requires instructors to “develop a cultural diversity knowledge base, design culturally relevant curricula, demonstrate cultural caring while building learning communities, develop cross-cultural communication skills, and be able to develop cultural congruity in classroom instruction” (Larke, 2013, p. 39). Faculty who engage in this way, for example, attend to the symbolic aspects of their curriculum (i.e., the pictures, stories, and images used to teach course concepts) to ensure that they include broad representations of demographic diversity. They also recognize that students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds

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may have different approaches to participating in class discussions (passive-receptive vs. active-participative) and use a wide range of culturally relevant examples with their students to anchor and explain course concepts (Gay, 2002). In a higher education context, the ability to use underrepresented students' concrete life experiences and diverse perspectives as "conduits" for their own learning is a particularly critical element of teaching in a culturally sensitive manner (Larke, 2013).

When striving for culturally responsive teaching, instructors should pay special attention to the classroom environment. In fact, cultivating positive classroom environments that are both supportive and inclusive (Gay, 2002; Larke, 2013) is likely to produce better student engagement and learning outcomes (e.g., Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). Such positive effects may be particularly pronounced for students from a variety of underrepresented backgrounds, including low socioeconomic status students (Berkowitz, Moore, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2017) and religiously affiliated students (Craft & Yang, 2019). Moreover, a recent study found that queer students who had better perceptions of the campus climate reported higher ratings of academic success than those who perceived poorly their campus environments (Garvey, Squire, Stachler, & Rankin, 2018).

Given the increasing student diversity in higher education and the positive effects of supportive climates on student engagement and learning, the ability to infuse multicultural content into our courses and create a diverse and inclusive learning environment have become both pedagogical and strategic imperatives. In our own department, student requests for increased attention to diversity and multicultural issues have grown in recent years, with both our undergraduate and graduate students calling for faculty to include more multicultural content in their courses and use more inclusive teaching practices (e.g., using a range of assignments designed to accommodate learning style preferences, incorporating explicit knowledge of different cultural and sociodemographic groups into course lectures and activities, and facilitating direct classroom discussions around issues of diversity, privilege, and power). Similar to many higher education institutions (Golom, 2018), our initial response to such requests was

to hold a number of diversity-themed trainings, department meetings, and reading groups focused on infusing multicultural content into our courses and creating inclusive classroom environments. As a department, we also wanted to evaluate the impact of these initiatives in the classroom as well as offer individual faculty members metrics that could be used both formatively and summatively. Thus, assessment became a critical next step in ensuring that all faculty were moving toward culturally responsive teaching and the creation of inclusive classroom climates. We were inspired by a departmental conversation on best practices of teaching evaluation to create a brief measure of classroom diversity climate that could be included in our student ratings. By departmental consensus, we were authorized to work as a committee on this goal, with the understanding that we would routinely report back to the larger department for input.

Existing measures often focus on multicultural competence among instructors, counselors, and students (e.g., Prieto, 2012); it was difficult to locate educational assessments that were geared toward measuring the downstream climate implications of instructor multicultural competence, especially as part of an overall student course evaluation. Because we were particularly interested in creating a measure of diversity climate that could be adapted by the department and used locally, we engaged in action research (Coghlan, 2019) to select, evaluate, and design our short classroom diversity climate scale that could be incorporated into our existing student course evaluation form. The major aim of this article is to delineate the process of developing the scale, including (a) finding and selecting relevant measures related to climate for diversity and inclusion, (b) using those measures to guide the revision and adaptation of a pool of possible items for use in the college classroom, and (c) pilot testing those items in both quantitative surveys and student focus groups. It is our hope that other psychology departments consider both the process of inquiry and the resulting five-item measure as a part of their efforts to ensure classroom climates that are supportive and inclusive of all students, particularly those from underrepresented groups.

Our Process

Historically, our department has used the Student Instructional Report–II (SIR-II) to collect data on student ratings of courses. The SIR-II is a nationally normed pencil-and-paper instrument developed by the Educational Testing Service that provides comparative data based on scores collected from 4-year colleges and universities around the country (most recently, comparison data were collected from 48,999 classrooms and 957,152 students in 2000; [Cen- tra, 2006](#)). Students rate courses on a scale of 1 to 5 across six domains (i.e., Course Organization/Planning; Communication; Faculty/Student Interaction; Assignments, Exam, Grading; Course Outcomes; Student Effort/Involvement) and an overall evaluation. Higher scores represent greater levels of effectiveness (or much more than most courses) in that domain. What follows is a brief recounting of our efforts to identify course evaluation items pertaining to diversity course content and classroom inclusion that we could add to our existing course evaluations. Our all-volunteer working committee comprised four psychology faculty members from a variety of disciplines (clinical, counseling, industrial/organizational, social) and three clinical psychology graduate students who were part of a student-led group focused on diversity issues. Committee members varied in race, ethnicity, gender, age, and sexual orientation. We spent one semester (spring 2018) reviewing the literature and identifying and adapting items. We piloted 10 items at the end of that semester. Over the summer, we analyzed the data and revised the scale to five items. In fall 2018, we presented the five-item scale to the larger department for discussion. The department en-

dorsed the scale, and the items were added to our teaching evaluations in spring 2019.

Phase 1: Looking to the Literature

To begin our search for a measure, our first step was to look to the empirical literature for measures assessing cultural diversity and climate. We engaged in both a broad search that considered the educational and general psychology literature, as well as a focused search of the literature relating to clinical and counseling supervision and workplace diversity and inclusion. Although we could not locate any existing teaching evaluation measures that assessed diversity course content and classroom climate for inclusion, we were able to identify several related measures (see [Table 1](#) for list of reviewed measures).

Phase 2: Identifying and Adapting Items

Once we had a collection of related measures, our second step was to meet as a group to review these measures and generate ideas for possible items for our scale. As our department was working on integrating diversity-related content into our courses and becoming more aware of the importance of an inclusive climate in the classroom, we worked to develop items that could assess these areas. After much debate and editing, we developed 10 pilot items (see [Table 2](#)). All items were worded positively and designed for students to rate on a 5-point Likert scale, consistent with our existing course evaluation measure (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). These initial items were shared with the larger department for feed-

Table 1
Existing Diversity Related Measures Reviewed

Measure	Authors
Climate for Inclusion	Nishii (2013)
Diversity Climate Perceptions	McKay et al. (2007)
Diversity Climate Scale	McKay, Avery, and Morris (2008)
Diversity Perceptions Scale	Mor Barak, Cherin, and Berkman (1998)
Multicultural Supervision Competencies Questionnaire	Wong and Wong (2003)
Multicultural Teaching Competencies Inventory	Prieto (2012)
Multicultural Teacher Dispositions Scale	Jensen, Whiting, and Chapman (2018)
Organizational Climate for Diversity	Yeo (2006)
Perceptions of Campus Climate	Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn (1999)

Table 2
Ten Initial Pilot Items

Item
1. The instructor created a welcoming environment for all students, including diverse or underrepresented students.
*2. The instructor created a supportive environment for all students, including students from underrepresented groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status).
*3. The instructor showed openness, receptivity, and respect for culturally different students.
4. I felt safe and comfortable in this class.
5. The classroom climate allowed equitable participation of all students.
*6. The instructor encouraged students to express different views and perspectives.
7. The instructor made an effort to understand the cultural context of students.
8. The instructor encouraged students to increase their understanding of diversity issues.
*9. The instructor included course content related to diversity when appropriate.
*10. The instructor demonstrated an awareness of and responsiveness to diverse perspectives.

Note. Starred items were retained for the final scale.

back; no changes were made to the wording of the items. At this point, we proposed a pilot study to investigate the relation between the 10 items and our existing evaluation. We were particularly interested in whether these items assessed an additional dimension of evaluation or if these items would be redundant with our existing assessment.

Phase 3: Piloting 10 Possible Items

As the third step, we conducted a pilot study at the end of the spring 2018 semester. We asked for faculty volunteers to include the additional 10 items to their end of semester course evaluations. We ensured that individual course data would be confidential and not be used in any sort of teacher evaluation. We accepted the first volunteers to fulfill a quota of two undergraduate-level, two master's-level, and two doctoral-level psychology courses. In addition, we gathered qualitative feedback on these new items from a focus group of six undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in the participating courses.

Quantitative results. A total of 83 students across the six courses completed both the SIR-II and the pilot diversity items. Four additional students did not complete all of the survey items fully and were not included in the analyses. Inspection of means and standard deviations revealed that all diversity items were endorsed at relatively high levels that ranged from a low of 4.45 ($SD = 0.71$) to a high of 4.76 ($SD = 0.48$), consistent with departmental mean values across the SIR-II dimensions. The responses to the pilot items were then analyzed to determine

Cronbach's alpha, which resulted in a high value of .88 (95% CI [.83, .91]).

To determine if the pilot items were capturing content different from the SIR-II, a principal components factor analysis was conducted on all SIR-II items and the 10 pilot diversity items utilizing a varimax rotation. The data were appropriate for dimensional reduction, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) = .91 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) chi-square = 4,388.23, $p < .001$. Results revealed 12 meaningful factors accounting for 77.46% of the variance. Importantly, the pilot items loaded on three separate factors, with no SIR-II items loading on these factors. Factor 1 consisted of pilot Items 3, 2, 1, 5, and 4 (factor loadings of .86, .86, .77, .51, and .50, respectively). Factor 2 consisted of Items 9, 10, 8, and 7 (factor loadings of .88, .81, .80, and .55, respectively). Factor 3 consisted of Item 6 (factor loading of .65). Correlations were then examined to see if the three factors were related to the six domain scores and Overall Evaluation score of the SIR-II. Factor 1 correlated moderately with the seven SIR-II scores (mean $r = .35$), Factor 2 correlated weakly with the seven SIR-II scores (mean $r = .20$), and Factor 3 correlated weakly with the seven SIR-II scores ($r = .27$). In addition, results revealed that Factor 1 correlated weakly with the Overall Evaluation rating, $r(80) = .23$, whereas Factor 2 and Factor 3 did not correlate statistically with the Overall Evaluation rating, $r(80) = .02$, $p = .877$, and $r(80) = .21$, $p = .065$, respectively. These three factors were then examined to determine whether they were related to various

demographics, including gender, student status (undergraduate vs. graduate), and expected grade (A, A– vs. B+ and lower). None of the demographics were related to any of the three diversity factors.

To further examine whether the pilot items captured separate aspects of the course evaluation, an additional principal components factor analysis utilizing the three factors and the six SIR-II summary scores was conducted. Results revealed three distinct factors with all three diversity factors forming their own factor (distinct from the six SIR-II summary areas). In sum, initial analyses indicated that the 10 items appeared to assess a construct distinct from our other course evaluation dimensions. In addition, the 10 items were unrelated to a variety of student demographic variables.

Qualitative results. Qualitative analysis of student interviews was conducted separately from the quantitative analysis; however, we were pleased to note that student opinion complemented the above analyses. Four undergraduate and two graduate students volunteered to discuss their experience with the pilot items. All students interviewed reported that they appreciated our efforts to assess inclusion-related factors in the classroom. When asked about specific items, all students positively reviewed Item 2 because of the examples of underrepresented groups. One student suggested that we add religion to the list of examples since our school is a Jesuit Catholic institution that strives to be welcoming to students of all religious backgrounds. Students also positively reviewed Item 3 (“important,” “Like this one”), Item 6 (“I felt like this was one of the most important questions to add to the evaluations”), Item 9 (“This is my favorite,” “really like this one”), and Item 10 (“Really like this item”). In contrast, students actively disliked Item 4 because of the use of the word *safe*. Several students stated that they thought about physical safety (e.g., in response to a potential school shooting) instead of classroom inclusion. The remaining items received mixed or neutral reactions: Item 1 (“Not a huge fan of ‘diverse’ in this item”), Item 5 (“This one if fine,” “Don’t like this one,” “This one could be related more to student factors than instructor skill”), Item 7 (“Not a realistic expectation”), and Item 8 (“OK, but not my favorite item”).

Phase 4: Pilot Testing the Five-Item Scale

Based on the above pilot results, the committee decided to retain the first two items from Factor 1 and Factor 2 along with the single item in Factor 3 (pilot Items 2, 3, 6, 9, and 10); these five items also reflected students’ feedback as described above. The results of the pilot study, along with the recommended items, now called the Classroom Diversity Climate (CDC) scale, were presented to the full department in fall 2018. At that time, the department endorsed the scale, and the CDC scale items were added to the SIR-II for the department’s 96 classroom-based courses (i.e., undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral) in spring 2019. A second pilot was conducted on the spring 2019 data to ensure that the reliability and factor-analytic results from the first study were replicated. Three courses at each program level were randomly selected, for a total of nine courses. Data from the SIR-II and the CDC scale were analyzed in SPSS.

Complete course evaluation responses from 141 students were included in the second pilot study. Inspection of means and standard deviations revealed that diversity items were endorsed at relatively high levels that ranged from a low of 4.33 ($SD = 0.92$) to a high of 4.49 ($SD = 0.88$), consistent with departmental mean values across SIR-II dimensions (see Table 3). Mean values reflect a relatively high level of endorsement with a moderate level of variability. Internal consistency of the responses to the five items yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .95 (95% CI [.94, .97]). The overall mean score across the five items was 4.41 ($SD = 0.85$) with 49.6% of the students responding with 5s for all of the five diversity items. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity both revealed that the data were appropriate for dimensional reduction, $KMO = .89$ and $BTS \text{ chi-square} = 765.73, p < .001$.

A principal components factor analysis of the five CDC items resulted in a single factor that accounted for 84.45% of the variance. Factor loadings for the five items ranged from a low of .87 (Item 4) to a high of .96 (Item 5). The total CDC scale score was examined to determine the extent to which it was related to the demographic variables. A one-way analysis of variance utilizing the Brown–Forsythe statistic was

Table 3
Classroom Diversity Climate Scale

Item	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Corrected item-total correlation
1. The instructor created a supportive environment for all students, including students from underrepresented groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion).	4.43 (.93)	.89
2. The instructor showed openness, receptivity, and respect for culturally different students.	4.49 (.88)	.89
3. The instructor encouraged students to express different views and perspectives.	4.40 (.96)	.84
4. The instructor included course content related to diversity when appropriate.	4.33 (.92)	.80
5. The instructor demonstrated an awareness of and responsiveness to diverse perspectives.	4.38 (.96)	.93

Note. $N = 141$.

statistically significant, $F(2, 101.60) = 9.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Post hoc Games–Howell’s comparisons demonstrated that the undergraduate students ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.66$) and the doctoral students ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.85$) did not differ from one another, but both were statistically higher in mean scores than the master’s students ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.10$). There was no difference between male ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.71$, $n = 14$) and female students ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.89$, $n = 105$) on the total CDC score, $t(117) = 0.44$, $p = .663$. Furthermore, the correlation between the CDC score and overall expected grade was not statistically significant, $r(136) = -.05$, $p = .537$.

A principal components factor analysis including the five CDC scale items and the SIR-II individual items was conducted, $KMO = .91$ and BTS chi-square = 4,388.23, $p < .001$. The analysis resulted in six meaningful factors accounting for 74.30% of the variance. All five CDC scale items loaded the highest on the second factor; factor loadings for the CDC scale items ranged from a high of .87 for Item 2 to a low of .77 for Item 3.

Another principal components factor analysis was then conducted including the CDC scale total score and the six summary SIR-II area scores, $KMO = .86$ and BTS chi-square = 733.64, $p < .001$. Two factors emerged from this analysis accounting for 79.60% of the variance. The first factor consisted of five summary SIR-II area scores along with the CDC scale total score: Communication (.89); Course Organization/Planning (.88); Faculty/Student Inter-

action (.86); Assignments, Exam, Grading (.84); and CDC scale (.74). The second factor consisted of two summary SIR-II area scores: Student Effort/Involvement (.95) and Course Outcomes (.75). The final analysis examined the correlations among the CDC score and the six summary SIR-II area scores and the single-item overall course evaluation score (see Table 4).

In sum, the CDC scale appears to assess a unitary construct that is related to, but distinct from, the constructs assessed by our current student-report teacher evaluations. Both pilot investigations also suggest that the CDC scale is unrelated to several demographic variables (e.g., student gender, expected course grade).

Current Use of the CDC Scale

Results of the second pilot were presented to the full department faculty in fall 2019. Although there was some concern that CDC scale Item 4 (“The instructor included course content related to diversity when appropriate”) had lower factor loadings than the other items and might be assessing a slightly different construct, the faculty chose to retain this item. First, although the loading for Item 4 was slightly lower than other items, it was still well above acceptable factor loading standards for retaining items (Field, 2017). Second, as the original working group set out to develop an assessment of both diversity content and climate for inclusion, the department felt that retaining Item 4 was appropriate. Thus, the faculty agreed by unanimous

Table 4
Intercorrelations Among Total Classroom Diversity Climate Score and Student Instructional Report–II Domains and Overall Teacher Evaluation

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. CDC score	—	.60**	.60**	.73**	.62**	.54**	.35**	.63**
2. Organization		—	.85**	.73**	.73**	.61**	.27*	.71**
3. Communication			—	.77**	.73**	.64**	.28**	.73**
4. Interaction				—	.66**	.60**	.28**	.70**
5. Assignments					—	.51**	.28*	.65**
6. Outcomes						—	.65**	.65**
7. Effort							—	.32**
8. Overall teacher evaluation								—

Note. $N = 141$. CDC = Classroom Diversity Climate.

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

consent to include these items as a standard part of our course evaluation form moving forward. Starting in the 2019–2020 academic year, the items were included in course evaluations and will be used to inform faculty annual evaluation, as well as tenure and promotion decisions, consistent with recommended practice in the organizational and higher education literatures around assessing and rewarding strategic behavioral change (e.g., Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Golom, 2018). They can also be used to monitor the aggregate impact of the department's recent diversity and inclusion initiatives in the classroom, track changes or trends over time, and adjust our pedagogical practices as necessary. Finally, the CDC scale and its development were shared with faculty outside the psychology department at our institutional Teaching Enhancement Workshop (fall 2019).

Conclusion

As the U.S. higher education population becomes increasingly diverse, it is essential for all instructors to develop ways to be culturally responsive in their teaching (Castillo-Montoya, 2019). When instructors infuse up-to-date culturally relevant information and cultivate safe and supportive climates in their classroom, positive learning outcomes are more likely to be achieved, especially for those students from underrepresented groups on campus. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching is particularly relevant to those who teach psychology because “Ethical and Social Responsibility in a Diverse World” is one of the five major goals in the American Psychological Association (APA)

Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major (APA, 2013). While many faculty assert that they engage in culturally responsive teaching and several measures of multicultural teaching competence already exist (Prieto, 2012), a tool to assess the impact of such practices on students' perceptions of the climate for diversity in the psychology classroom has not been developed. The current article detailed our collaborative process of generating an assessment tool to measure students' perceptions of classroom climate for diversity as part of the department-wide course evaluation process.

The results of two pilot studies support the initial psychometric properties of the five-item CDC scale. Across both studies, not only did responses to the five items demonstrate very high levels of internal consistency, but they also clustered together to form a unique dimension of assessment that appears to be conceptually distinct from the existing dimensions on the SIR-II measure. Additionally, qualitative feedback from students revealed generally positive reviews of the final CDC scale items, as well as an overall appreciation for department efforts to assess progress on various diversity-related initiatives while providing a data-based mechanism for faculty accountability. Future research could further examine the CDC scale by investigating correlations with other non-course-related indicators of instructor multicultural competence (e.g., peer evaluations of teaching) and demographic differences in responding between students from majority and underrepresented groups. In addition, future studies could examine the relation between different teaching approaches and CDC scores.

Finally, our investigation is not without limitations. First, as an action research project, the goal of the present article was to produce an assessment of classroom climate for diversity for local use, to facilitate instructor and department evaluation of classroom diversity climate. To that end, we engaged in a structured, research-informed collaborative process of discovery to address a specific need or challenge for our home department, not to conduct a traditional instrument design or validation study. Although we encourage other departments of psychology to consider adopting the CDC scale in their end of semester student course evaluations, the process by which we developed that scale may also provide considerable use to other departments seeking to assess the impact of various diversity-related pedagogical initiatives. Second, the analyses provided in this article were limited by the restricted demographic information available on the existing SIR-II measure, which does not ask students to self-report on a range of demographic variables, including race and ethnicity. Thus, we are limited in our ability to determine how student and instructor demographic characteristics might influence responses to the CDC scale or its underlying factor structure. We encourage others to continue to collect information that can be used to further refine the reliability and validity of this measure.

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