

Why we did the survey

(Slide 1) In 1963 – when the University of Alabama campus was about to be integrated, a couple of sociologists with great foresight, Dr. Don Muir and Dr. Don McGlamery, had the idea to conduct a survey of student opinions before it happened. So they went to a representative selection of classes and asked this basically white student body about their attitudes toward having African American students on campus. In that first survey, they collected 676 completed questionnaires from the students.

They continued to conduct student surveys every few years over the next 25 years publishing their results in scholarly journals, describing the progress of race relations at the University of Alabama. The last of these surveys was conducted in 1988. Neither of those sociologists are still with us, but their research is.

Two years ago, Dr. Michael Hughes called me. He had been an undergraduate here in the 1960s and worked with Drs. Muir and McGlamery on the survey. He is now a professor of sociology at Virginia Tech. He said he had the data from the old surveys and wondered if anyone here at UA would be interested in collecting some new data.

It sounded like an intriguing possibility, so I contacted a few other people – the other UA people you see here on this panel– everyone was interested in the idea of collecting some new data to extend this line of research.

We were a little slow to get things going, but last fall when we were coming up on the 50th anniversary of desegregation of the student body, we thought the timing was great and decided to get the research going so that discussions of it might contribute to the commemoration activities this year.

What we did

One of the main points for conducting this research was to compare the current campus climate and attitudes with those of the past to see what things had changed. And because we wanted to be able to compare with the past results, we decided we needed to try to replicate the methodology they had used from 1963-1988, that is, a written survey conducted in a selected sample of classes; but that's rather labor intensive, have to get the cooperation of faculty members and ask them to give up class time, need people to administer it, make copies, and scan or enter the data before doing any analysis. (this is a good time to thank all the people who did help us administer the survey – **Slide 2**)

So we also wanted to try an online survey, since that is so much more efficient as a methodology and also gives everyone an opportunity to participate instead of a selected sample.

(Slide 3) We started in January 2013, at the beginning of the spring semester, gaining the cooperation of a large number of the faculty and we went to 51 different classes to distribute the written survey. These were upper and lower level courses in all colleges and across many majors, so that we could obtain a representative sample of undergraduate students. From this we got about 2100 completed surveys. In those 51 classes we had an overall response rate of about 74%, so about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the students enrolled in those courses completed the survey. Beginning with the first day of classes, January 9, this took us about $3\frac{1}{2}$ weeks, finishing February 1. The survey was administered to students who represented, proportionally, both the range of academic majors offered and the range of class standing (freshman through senior).

Then about 10 days later we started the online version. We included every undergraduate enrolled in on-campus classes that semester (about 24,500) who had an email address in the student directory. Initially, an invitation to participate was sent to this entire group, and it also requested anyone who had completed the earlier paper-and-pencil survey not to participate this time. We started sending these first emails on February 12. On February 21 we began sending a reminder to everyone. Since the surveys were anonymous, of course, we just sent a reminder to everyone, because we didn't know who had or who had not completed it. After the initial invitation and that one reminder, we received 2311 responses. And after accounting for those who had already done it in class, the response rate was about 10%. The survey took 10–12 minutes to complete.

Overall, we have a total sample of over 4400 students, representing approximately 18% of the undergraduate population of students.

Questionnaires

To develop the questions, we looked at all the old surveys and we looked at questions about racial attitudes that are routinely asked on national surveys such as the American National Election Survey and the National Survey of American Life.

We wanted to ask about behaviors and about attitudes; things that were specific to this campus, also things that had a broader context. We wanted to collect new data on many of the same questions that had been asked in the past so we could compare them, but we also wanted to add some new ideas.

There were many questions we would have liked to be able to ask, but we also had to keep it reasonable in terms of length, otherwise, no one would want to finish it. So we had to leave out many interesting things. There were also some we might have worded somewhat differently, but if we changed them we wouldn't be able to compare with the past.

Basically, the 6 of us conducting the study looked at this big pool of questions we wanted to include and worked together to pare it down and try to assess as many of the issues and concepts as we could.

We developed a few of the questions ourselves about local issues, but the majority of them came from these other surveys that have been used before.

We employed multiple-choice formats and various rating scales to ask about experiences, opinions, and perceptions involving race and interactions between racial groups.

When we finished, the survey had 78 questions, plus a space to make comments.

One of the things we wanted to do with the results was to have this symposium, where the data would be presented and discussed for the local community, for those who participated; where we would invite some national scholars to come and talk about their work and help us put our results into a larger context or framework in terms of what is happening in the rest of the country and in the scholarly literature. There will be some other ways, too, in which we present of the data, especially in research or scholarly journals – but here we are at the symposium .

Representativeness of the sample (Slide 4)

Is our sample of over 4000 undergraduates a reasonable representation of the student population? In terms of basic demographics, it is. 77% of respondents were white, 14% were African American, 3% were Asian, and 5.5% were another race or mixed race. 4% were Hispanic. These percentages roughly mirror the racial makeup of the overall undergraduate student enrollment at UA in spring 2013, which was 79% White, 12% African American, 4% Asian 5% another race or mixed race, with 3% Hispanic. We had 58% females in the survey, compared to 53% in the student population, so it was a little higher in that regard.

In terms of class level – we had 23% freshmen, 24% sophomores, 27% juniors and 25% seniors; compared with the overall student body of 23% freshmen, 25% sophomores, 24% juniors and 27% seniors.

We also had a proportional representation across all the colleges: Arts & Sciences, Business, Communications, Engineering, Education, Human Environmental Science, Nursing and Social Work.

So, the sample matches the full population on these and other demographics, so we hope it is similar in terms of the attitudes and perceptions expressed.

Conclusion

We thought the interesting part of this project would be in the results – and we will talk about some of those in a little while.

But the process of doing the survey was interesting, too. So before turning to the results, we want to tell you a little about the student reactions to the survey – both from students who didn't do the survey, but shared an opinion about it, and from students who did do the survey and also shared an opinion about it.