

A More Inclusive U

A look at the prevalence of bullying, relational aggression, and exclusion among undergraduate students—and what we can do about it.

Introduction

How do undergraduate students at the University of Minnesota treat one another?
 Is bullying a problem?
 What forms does it take?
 Who is bullied?
 Who does the bullying?
 And why?

These are some of the questions our team asked students, staff who work with them, and researchers with expertise in bullying to explore with us in an effort to understand the frequency, severity, and characteristics of bullying within higher education and, specifically, here at the University of Minnesota.

The students we spoke with described a spectrum of behaviors from gossip and insensitive language to relational aggression and exclusion, but they shied away from the word “bullying.” It was one of a number of findings outlined below.

Our goal: to provide insight into this issue and offer next steps.

Methodology

Our team used a multi-method approach to examine this issue:

Literature review: We began our work by reviewing the literature on bullying as well as interviewing University of Minnesota faculty members with expertise on bullying among American youth.

Environmental scan: We also conducted a scan of recent news media on the topic of bullying to gauge whether this topic has a presence in popular media discourse. An environmental scan was conducted of the Big Ten universities, including the University of Minnesota, to learn and document what, if any, programming or policies existed relating to the topic of bullying.

Semi-structured Interviews & Focus Groups: In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with University staff and also focus groups with undergraduate students to learn whether and how bullying is a problem at the University of Minnesota.

Recommendations

Survey undergraduate students to get a more complete snapshot of bullying and exclusion on campus. Use the results to develop best practices and guidelines.

Adopt a University-wide honor code that articulates values that support inclusion.

Get students thinking, talking about and taking responsibility for shaping—exclusion, inclusion and campus culture early in their University experience.

Team

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The term “bullying” does not resonate with undergraduates, but the broader concept of exclusion does.

Those experiencing bullying or exclusion and those doing the bullying depend on the context.

The U of M (and other Big Ten schools) does not have a comprehensive approach.

What students had to say:

What staff had to say:

What researchers had to say:

class
 residence halls
 campus in general
 WHERE

HOW
 rumor/gossip
 verbal
 text/facebook/twitter

Bullying is about power and control while exclusion happens around identity and “difference.”
 A sense of belonging mitigates feelings of exclusion.