Valuing Wholeness Achieved Through Difference
Narratives from the University of Puget Sound Campus Community

During 2009–10 academic year, members of the Puget Sound campus community were asked to participate in interviews about their experiences of diversity on campus, and in turn, to interview others. These narratives have provided important feedback as we work together to set and meet our goals for a diverse and inclusive campus. A few examples of the more than 1,000 responses appear below.

“In my freshman year, a very enlightening experience occurred for me around the holidays in Todd-Phibbs. Being raised Catholic, I had never experienced any other holiday besides Christmas, so when Hanukkah came around, I was very curious. I happened to be in our lounge when about six of our Jewish residents came in and had a small ceremony to celebrate these eight joyous days. It was amazing to see the unique traits of their respective religion, and how despite a difference in scriptures we can all gather together during the holiday to celebrate each other’s presence.”

“I am currently enrolled in Spanish 211 and my professor is from Argentina. She is incredibly lively and very passionate. She has really sparked my interest in the Spanish language and culture. As I have never had a native-speaking Spanish professor before, this is a great experience. I hope to learn more about her customs and culture as the semester progresses.”

“I work as a cashier in the school cafeteria. Last spring there was an exchange group here from Cambodia. Every morning for two weeks the groups would come through my line. They didn’t speak English very well, so getting them through the line was interesting. The last day that they were here, one of them walked up and gave me a postcard of Cambodia. She said she really appreciated how I had helped her and the rest of the group out. Before this I hadn’t realized how much of an impact just smiling and being friendly can be on someone when they are in a foreign environment.”

“Growing up in a high school of 200 kids, I wasn’t really exposed to people of a different color, or socioeconomic status. As a freshman, living in the dorms was my first experience of spending time with people of a different race. However, the person that has had the greatest impact on me has been a friend of mine that suffers from a terrible birth defect. He has truly shown me that even though disabled, he has become one of the main faces at Puget Sound. And never hesitates to say hello or remain upbeat every day.”

“In my religion class I took last semester, I got the chance to interact with and learn from my peers about their own faith backgrounds. It was an extremely enriching and interesting experience to learn directly from other students who had lived their faith, and had powerful stories to go with the teachings of their religion. I in particular remember a girl who is of the Baha’i faith. Never having met someone of her faith background, I was glad my class gave me the opportunity to learn about her religion in such an open and accepting environment. This experience has truly enriched my college experience and has given me perspective and a broader knowledge of the faiths of the world.”
“One of my good friends on campus is a Chinese student. She’s excelled in college mixing academic success with social leadership. She always brings a different perspective to the table and is full of life. It’s impossible not be happy when she is around, and has made my college experience more positive.”

“I went to lunch with my roommate the other day and we got to talking about religion. I asked her about what she believed and she said she was Unitarian, a religion I knew zero about. So I asked a lot of questions about what they thought and how they practiced, and it sounded absolutely beautiful. I felt really good afterwards for learning so much and understanding my friend better. I am now interested in attending a Unitarian service to learn more.”

“I came from a very limited, religious background in Southern California. As a result, I felt like I had very limited experience with people of different backgrounds, particularly with race. As a freshman in college, I was introduced to two new roommates, one of whom was an African American student from California. Over the course of the semester, we learned that we actually had several things in common, and that we also had similar tastes in music, movies, food, and areas of study. We also could both share stories about growing up in California. By the end of the year, we had become good friends, and we remain in close contact to this day. I also enjoyed meeting and befriending someone from a completely different background, ethnicity, and lifestyle. It taught me that as long as I keep an open mind, certain characteristics like race, culture, and socioeconomic class no longer become separating factors, but that we all can learn quite a bit from each other.”

“In my time at Puget Sound, I have made many friends from different backgrounds and ethnicities. One experience that sticks out in my mind was when I met a guy who is from Hawai’i and he invited me to Lua’u. I was a little hesitant at first but I decided to attend and I got to witness what Hawaiian culture was bringing to the table. I left Lua’u with the newfound knowledge of their culture and beliefs.”

“Before I got to Puget Sound, I had never spent any considerable time with anyone who had a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. I had no hard feelings or prejudices; I simply was not used to interacting with those of different sexual orientations on a daily basis. After a year and a half, though, I now consider many to be good friends. My eyes have been opened to social issues confronting the LGBT community, and I feel as if I have a greater passion for their causes. My current understanding and compassion is a result of the diverse community at Puget Sound, and while at times it was uncomfortable, I am a better person because of it.”

Join the conversation.

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UNIVERSITY of PUGET SOUND

Kim Bobby, Ed.D., Chief Diversity Officer
1500 N. Warner St. #1019
Tacoma, WA 98416-1019
253.879.3991
kbobby@pugetsound.edu