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# The Diversity Research Group (DRG): An Informal Retrospective

George Mason University

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DRG Mtg. # 14



**Where Innovation Is Tradition**

# Rationale for the DRG

1. We are one of the most diverse universities in the country and possibly in the world.
2. Our diversity is relatively fluid and along multiple dimensions:
  - Extraordinary diversity in the geographic origins of newcomers
  - Broad religious diversity
  - Interesting comparison groups of newcomers and first generation migrants, perhaps especially Asian groups (e.g., Chinese, Indians, Koreans)
  - Some variability by age and class, with both female and male returning students (including many veterans) – also some interesting work on disability
  - Reasonable representation in terms of traditional racial/ethnic categories.
3. By at least some measures (retention, student attitudes), we are relatively successful with diversity.



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## *Therefore*

1. Our experience should be on the record.
2. We should be in the vanguard of the national discussion of diversity and education including:
  - Diversity in interaction and in cognition
  - Diversity as it affects education, is a topic of education, and is itself shaped by education
3. We can only do that by:
  - Working across disciplinary and administrative lines
  - Working beyond our own university
4. What we can provide to the broader discussion includes:
  - A valuable setting – and a relatively unusual one
  - Perhaps some distinctive organizational resources and processes
  - Some apparent success (e.g., minority retention)

# What we have done so far

## *1. A continuing conversation on who's doing what*

## *2. Topical reviews and discussions on:*

- The university's quantitative data
- Student views of diversity
- Methodology (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed)
- Integrating research about education and research as a part of education (i.e., what the new QEP aims to do)
- Basic dimensions of diversity
- Integrating the different parts of the university (a little anyway)

### *3. Academic/practitioner panels at:*

- ACE in Phoenix (2005) – double panel that included both the practical and academic sides
- Conference on College Composition and Communication in New Orleans (2008)
- Eastern Sociological Society
  - New York (2008) – mix of faculty and student papers
  - Baltimore (2009) – student papers and posters (graduate and undergraduate)
  - Boston (2010) – student roundtable and posters (graduate and undergraduate)
- Society for Applied Anthropology
  - Santa Fe (2005) – specifically on Mason experience
  - Tampa (2007) – comparison with a West Coast university

#### 4. *Articles (see list on web at [drg.gmu.edu](http://drg.gmu.edu))*

#### 5. *Research projects:*

- Student views of diversity (several focus groups and a set of sixteen free-form student essays)
- Non-native speakers (extensive material and interviews from the Writing Center)
- Series of student ethnography-of-diversity projects highlighted in the 2009 *Diversity at Mason* volume
- Returnees (exchange students, “third culture” kids, returning veterans) – 23 interviews to date by faculty and student interviewers
- Hispanic students (at beginning stages)
- Immigrant and native-born South Asian students (series of interviews for which only the analysis is available)
- Iranian immigrants (a few interviews, but interesting)

## 6. *Diversity at Mason volumes:*

- *Student Reflections* (2006)
- *Valuing Written Accents* (2007)
- *The Fulbright Experience* (2008)
- *Student Research on Student Identity* (2009)



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# So what's next?

*1. Continuing the round-the-table discussion (it's probably the only place this happens)*

*2. More topical reviews and discussion:*

- Certainly another round on the university's quantitative data and what could be done with it
- Certainly a round on census (and ACS) data and how we can integrate statistical analysis of George Mason and the region
- Perhaps discussion with NOVA on what kinds of data pooling might be interesting
- Perhaps a similar discussion with the public school systems in the region



**3. *More sessions at professional meetings:***

Easily done, but probably requires interdisciplinary fora

**4. *More articles and conference presentations:***

May require interdisciplinary outlets and some collaboration

**5. *More research projects:***

- Partly contingent on funding for the Ethnography of Diversity Project
- Perhaps a wish list is needed for what will fill in key gaps
- Possible QEP connection

## 6. *More Diversity at Mason volumes:*

- *The Mason Model* – a review of how Mason actually deals with diversity and the ways that might constitute some kind of national model or reference point
- *Mason through Foreign Eyes* – working from the kind of insights already gathered on the Chinese 1-2-1 students
- Another *Student Research* type volume
- A *Faculty Reflections* type volume (mirroring the *Student Reflections* of the first volume)

## 7. *On to books:*

- A jointly authored book on the Mason experience
- An edited book on the Mason experience
- Some collaborative comparative book with another university (or two).
  - East Coast/West Coast approach might work
  - International comparisons might be most interesting of all for:
    - Parallel institutions (e.g., York University in Toronto)
    - Institutions coming to international education from different perspectives (e.g., the internationalized universities in East Asia)

**8. *On to conferences and workshops:***

Well, we have a conference center now . . .

**9. *On to comparative research:***

Well, once we have a conference or workshop . . .



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# A book?

*Perhaps something like:*

## **The Education-Diversity Nexus**

1. Diversity and higher education
2. A diverse university
3. But what is diversity?
4. Sex, gender, and sexual orientation
5. Race and ethnicity, language and culture
6. Diversity of body and spirit
7. Experiential diversity
8. About diversity, from diversity, and for diversity