Introduction/Overview

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee was formed in part, out of student interest, to more thoroughly examine the issue of domestic diversity at MIIS. We worked throughout the fall 2014 and spring 2015 semesters to form focus groups so we could hear the thoughts of the MIIS community and then make appropriate recommendations to the administration. We had an overwhelming amount of interest in the focus groups and moved forward with four group topics this past spring (1) Privilege (2) LGBT, (3) Religion, and (4) People of Color. This term, we will proceed with additional topics - Gender, First Generation College Students, Age, and Students with Families.

For the spring LGBT and People of Color focus groups, the committee asked participants to self-identify into one of these two groups in order to participate. The reason for this was to provide a safe-space where in-group communication could lead to genuine conversation on diversity and inclusiveness at MIIS. These two groups have historically faced issues concerning personal safety and we thought it was essential to provide an environment where genuine dialogue can happen without the fear of physical or emotional repercussion.

The biggest challenge and accomplishment with this committee has been driving it to the point of executing the focus groups. As a committee, we wanted to address various diversity issues around "privilege" that arose throughout the spring semester. As the Chair of the committee, my initial approach was to stress the importance of staying focused on our primary goal of developing a comprehensive campus-wide analysis of diversity. However, through productive conversations the committee members decided to integrate this salient issue into our analysis and create a “privilege” focus group. Ultimately, this was one of the most pressing issues that people wanted to discuss; this substantiated the need to have more dialogue around this issue.

In addition to a campus-wide assessment on diversity issues, we felt that it was important for the committee to have an action component so that we were not perceived solely as a “think tank” committee who simply gather and dialogue. A very successful representation for how the committee translated dialogue into action was the launch of the Dia de los Muertos event during the Student Council’s Fall Festival. Our hallmark program for the year was the Pocho Joe performance. His performance focused on ethnicity and identity and how that intersects with being a MIIS student.

At the beginning of the spring semester, the committee and a few other students, staff and faculty participated in a lunch at the President’s residence to discuss diversity and inclusion. This not only signified that the issue of diversity and inclusion is important and on the radar of the administration, it was a great opportunity for students to express their concerns to the administration. Several students told me that they really appreciated that opportunity and that it motivated them to continue the work we are doing.

This following analysis will examine, in greater detail, both the programming efforts as well as the focus group conversations. Additionally, further anecdotal conversations and research will be presented and integrated, leading to primary and secondary recommendations for consideration.
Programming Initiatives

Dia de los Muertos (October 2014)

This was the first programming effort by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee and we made it part of Student Council’s Fall Festival. The altar display and face painting were immensely popular and a majority of students attending interacted with the Dia de los Muertos celebration. Students running the display had a lot of meaningful interactions and provided an opportunity to educate the campus community on the holiday. Additionally, this was only supposed to go from 1pm-3pm, but it was kept up until 5pm, due to popularity.

Checking Assumptions (January 2015)

This is an activity that was added into January New Student Orientation Community Building activities. This exercise presents a case study in which language and intercultural communication create a perplexing situation. I was able to sit in on a few of the Community Building groups and this exercise seemed to generate the exact type of dialogue I was hoping for. Participants discussed appropriate behavior, creative solutions, cultural understanding, stereotyping, and communication.

Pocho Joe (April 2015)

This was our major program initiative for the academic year. We booked Pocho Joe Hernandez-Kolski to come to campus for a performance and diversity training. 85 people were in attendance. Faculty attendance was significant. One of our committee members and Student Services GA’s led a student team who took the lead on all the event planning and logistics. Joe was very engaging and spent a lot of time with students, staff, and faculty. The workshop was really popular among those that attended including two faculty members. His use of narrative and humor were uncanny. And he artfully used his writing and performing skills to create something unique and spontaneous.

Community Building (June-August 2015)

Throughout the summer, Netta Avineri, Visiting Professor GSTILE and ICC Chair, Maria Osorio, Student Services Associate, and I met weekly to revamp the community building session that takes place during New Student Orientation. A significant part of this rebuild was creating a case study that presents the participants with various scenarios related to diversity and inclusion. In order to keep it salient, we created the case study from actual issues that have arisen at MIIS. The case study also challenges the participants to think about how they would respond to diversity issues in a variety of settings including face-to-face, online, and social media.
Supplemental Research

Ashleigh Edelsohn and Danyelle Mitchell, two students in the IEM program, approached both Ashley Arrocha and me at the beginning of the spring semester. They wanted to do a project for their International Education Design and Assessment class that examined domestic diversity. We determined that they could assist in the efforts of the already existing Diversity and Inclusion Committee (D&I). The D&I committee was moving toward having focus groups later in the spring semester to discuss the state of domestic diversity as well as gather recommendations for moving forward.

Additionally, they assisted the committee with focus groups and worked on collecting hard data from the Institute that allowed us to look at our current domestic diversity numbers. They also wrote a baseline diversity assessment that was sent out to the MIIS community. Furthermore, they conducted interviews with key administrators and staff. Their work is integrated throughout this report and gave me much more salient data to include. The following are some of their key findings.

Meetings with key stakeholders including the Vice President as well as representatives from Enrollment, CACS, and Records revealed that they feel that domestic diversity and inclusion are not adequately addressed. The overwhelming emphasis is on increasing International diversity at MIIS. The Vice President and other administrators also felt that there is a need for sensitivity trainings for staff and faculty. Overall, they expressed a desire to help create an inclusive campus environment for current and incoming students. They also hoped that they ultimately would be viewed as allies who can support all MIIS students, as well as create a more welcoming environment.

Notable Survey Findings
This survey was distributed to the MIIS community toward the end of the spring semester which we estimate to be about 700 students, leading to a response rate of about 29%. Below you will find charts and brief analysis conducted by Ashleigh and Danyelle as supplemental research. This information was extracted directly from their report.
There’s no denying that MIIS is a predominantly White/Caucasian campus, but of the 212 respondents, 83 (a little over 40%) self-identified as People of Color. This number is really inspiring because MIIS is growing every year, and there is a high possibility that the percentages could come close to being even within the next couple of years. Additionally, the People of Color demographic, when broken down into specific ethnic backgrounds, is incredibly diverse, and it indicates that the campus is more diverse than it may first appear.

This chart deals with respondent satisfaction with the on-campus multicultural experience and environment. As evidenced by the graph, the majority of respondents have reached a basic - albeit completely subjective - level of satisfaction. Nevertheless, there is still a healthy number of individuals who are NOT satisfied with the multicultural experience on campus. Upon further
number-crunching, it was determined that only 27 of the respondents who marked “Neutral/Dissatisfied/Very Dissatisfied” were People of Color, which is 32% of the entire campus population of People of Color. This number is by no means insignificant, but it also means that dissatisfaction regarding on-campus multiculturalism is spread across the board when it comes to ethnicities.

![Feeling of Belonging or Community at MIIS](image)

Finally, this chart represents respondents’ feelings of belonging and/or community at MIIS. As this is such an international school, and as the respondents come from a myriad of ethnic backgrounds, it would be plausible to assume that not very many individuals would feel a sense of community at MIIS. However, the results displayed above were highly encouraging given the disconnectedness often mentioned in the focus groups. Nevertheless, it is the goal of this project to encourage open communication, spark change, and increase domestic diversity at the Institute. Therefore, as the student body grows, and as more professors are hired to teach, it is the hope of the consultants that the number of students, staff, and faculty - despite the increase of the campus population - who do not feel a sense of belonging or community will have the opportunity to experience it in the coming semesters.

**Priority Recommendations**

The following priority recommendations are taken from the comments made most frequently in focus groups and participatory research conversations. This list is intentionally short as the initiatives listed are significant and the effort it will take to fully implement them should not be underestimated. These are the items that should be acted on initially to move MIIS more toward an inclusive, domestically diverse environment.

- Declaring a pursuit of increased domestic diversity.
  - Essential to increase awareness; each office and department must understand this and know that it is of seminal importance
  - Defining key words in the mission statement such as immersive, collaborative learning, global, diversity and inclusion, as it relates to domestic diversity.
Prioritizing diversity and inclusion in enrollment, staff and faculty recruiting and hiring and on-campus. A lot of thought would have to be given to the operationalization of this effort, but it would likely include training and creating resources for reference.

- Sensitivity, Awareness, & Diversity Trainings-
  - This was a consistent theme from focus groups as well as the interviews done with administrative stakeholders by Ashleigh and Danyelle.
  - Holding mandatory sensitivity and diversity trainings for faculty and staff prior to the start of the fall semester.
  - Include sensitivity and diversity trainings in new student orientation activities.
  - Offer workshops that are open to all throughout the semester

- Space
  - This was suggested in every focus group.
  - There is a desire for “safe space” where students will know it is safe to share their identity and discuss issues around diversity and inclusiveness without fear of judgement or retribution.

Secondary Recommendations

These recommendations were mostly extracted from focus group data. They are all items that were mentioned repeatedly and that groups spent a significant amount of time discussing. These recommendations vary in their complexity and potential implementation efforts.

- More awareness and education on how LGBT issues are viewed internationally, especially before students depart for an international location.
  - A rainbow (gay pride) flag displayed among the flags on campus. It is an international symbol and would show support and representation for LGBT community.

- Increased integration of multicultural and diversity issues into the teaching curriculum.

- An office that is specifically charged with promoting and handling issues around diversity and inclusion.
  - A person whom students can discuss ad hoc diversity and inclusion issues with as they arise. This would likely follow an advisor format. Many students disclosed in focus groups that when issues around diversity and inclusiveness arise, such as microaggressions, they have nowhere to go for support and discussion.

- Increased MIIS monitoring of social media, particularly Facebook as well as upholding the social media policy. Students felt that certain comments were left on Facebook for too long a period of time before the administration acted and removed either the post or the person from the group.

- A bulletin board that connects students with local religious communities. Participants in the Religion focus group overwhelmingly felt that the resources at MIIS, for students of faith, was lacking. This was purposed as a simple way to inform those in the MIIS
community of the various religious resources available to them. Student Services does maintain a webpage, but perhaps something more visible would be an improvement.

Next Steps for Diversity and Inclusion Committee

1. Recruit a representative membership for the 2015-2016 academic year. Throughout the focus groups, many students voiced that they would like to be part of the committee in the future. I have already outreached to those students. It is essential to get some faculty on the committee this year. The committee just got too busy in the first year to properly recruit faculty. Some faculty have already identified themselves as being interested in participating.

2. Continue focus groups that we were not able to conduct in the first year- Gender, First Generation College Student, Age, & Students with Families-and write an analysis. These additional groups are important as it will help us gain a fuller understanding of diversity and inclusion at MIIS.

3. Increase programming efforts to raise more awareness around issues of domestic diversity and inclusion. This can be done through more passive programming and simple events, like an open-mic or poetry night. The key is to increase the information and allow more space for conversations about diversity to occur.

Conclusion

The work of the Diversity and Inclusion committee in its inaugural year was substantial. This report shows the overwhelming need for increased examination and analysis of domestic diversity and inclusion at MIIS. People in the community were eager to share their thoughts and experiences through various mediums including focus groups, surveys, programs and interpersonal conversations. The significant amount of interest in participating in focus groups, particularly one on the topic of privilege, shows that the MIIS community is concerned with many of the same issues as the Diversity and Inclusion Committee. The significant data collection, as well as, the numerous conversations and participatory research done provides a meaningful first step in creating a more domestically diverse and inclusive community. It is essential to continue the work of the committee to build upon what we have learned through this process as the value and importance of having a community where everyone feels safe and welcome has never been greater.