

# Unspoken Discrimination Experiences of International Students at UC

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## BACKGROUND

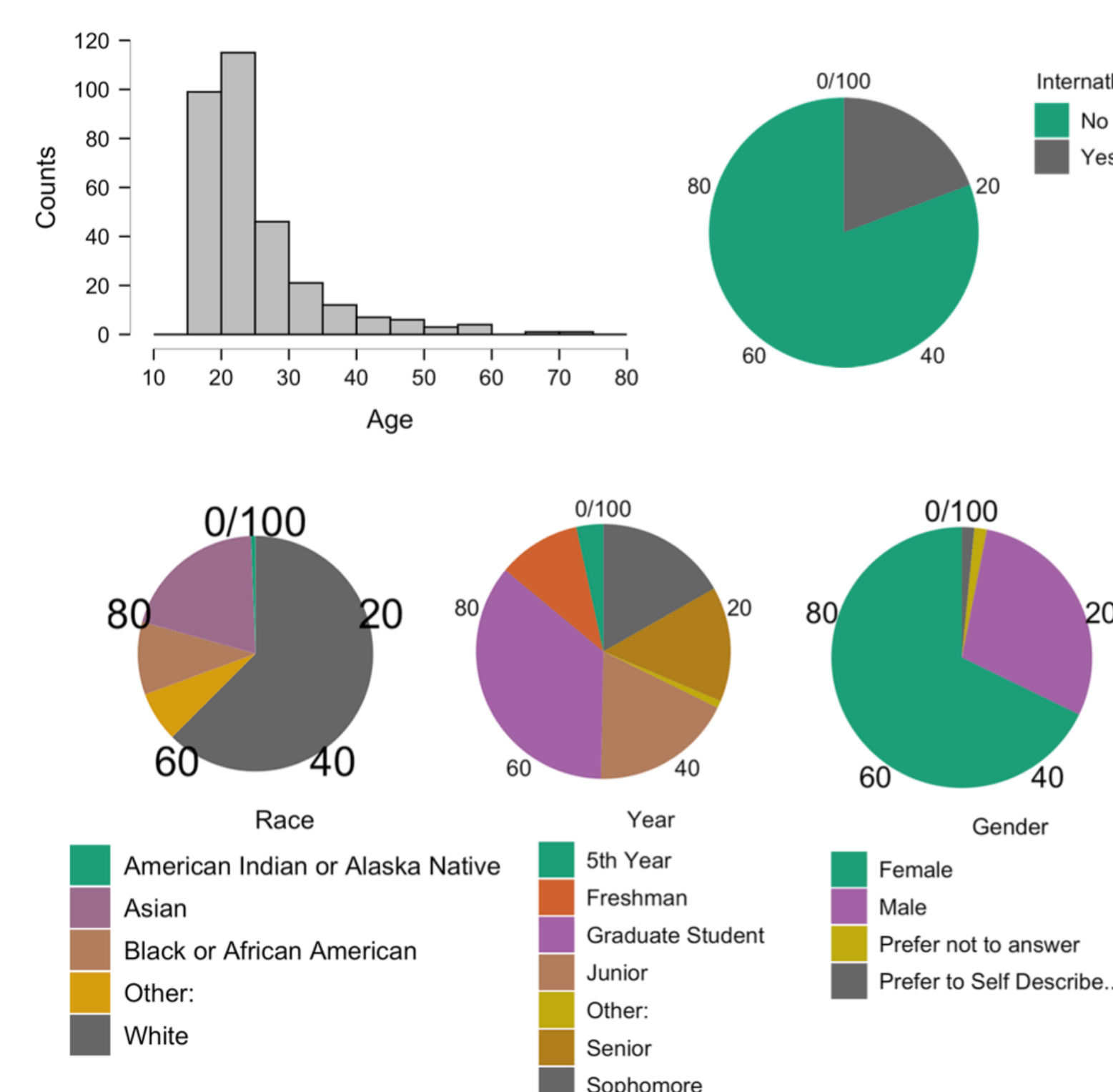
Postsecondary students who belong to non-dominant groups experience discrimination that includes both subtle microaggressions and overt acts of bigotry and prejudice. There is growing evidence of the cumulative effects of perceived racial discrimination and stereotyping on the daily functioning, mental health, and academic outcomes of international students (Musues, Lambe & Ryan, 2015; Wei, Heppner, Ku & Liao, 2010; Schmader, Major & Gramzow, 2001).

The primary purpose of this concurrent mixed methods study is to shed light on how UC international students experience bias or discrimination on campus and the effect that discrimination has on students' stress levels. Diversity research typically investigates race, gender, and sex and does not emphasize the international status of students.

According to Levi and Askay, stereotypes are generalizations about social groups (beliefs), prejudice is attitudes toward social groups (emotions), and discrimination is how people are treated differently because of their social groups (behaviors) (2021).

## METHODOLOGY

Demographic data were obtained from 327 UC students, 18.96% identifying themselves as international students, 79.51% identifying themselves as non-international students, and 1.53% did not indicate their international/non-international status. Participants came from different years in school: freshman (0.40%), sophomore (16.51%), junior (17.74%), senior (14.37%), 5th year (3.36%). The majority of participants were White (61.16%), with almost 10% identifying as Black or African American, nearly 20% as Asian, less than 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native, and almost 7% identifying as "other". The age range is 18 to 71.



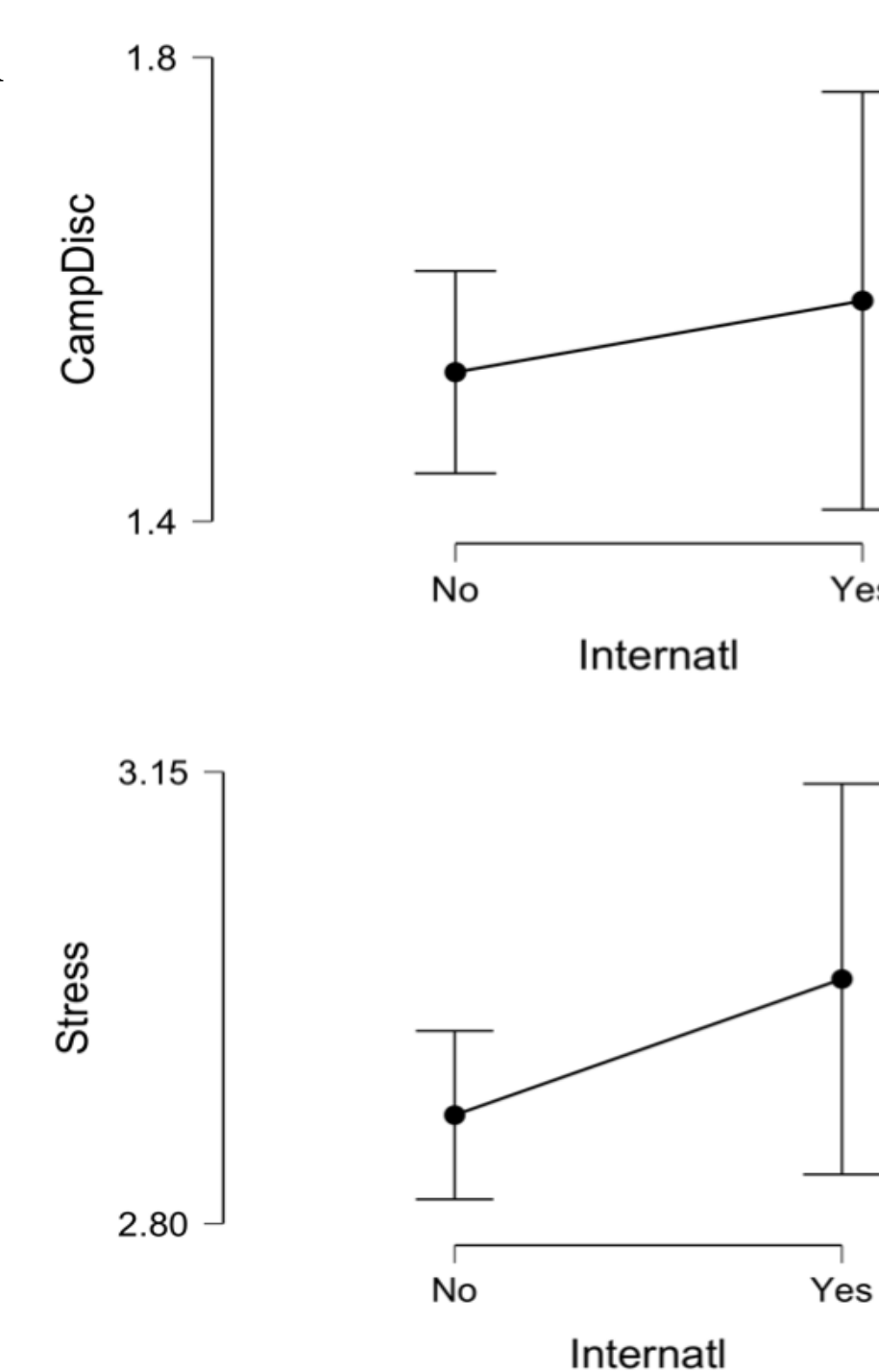
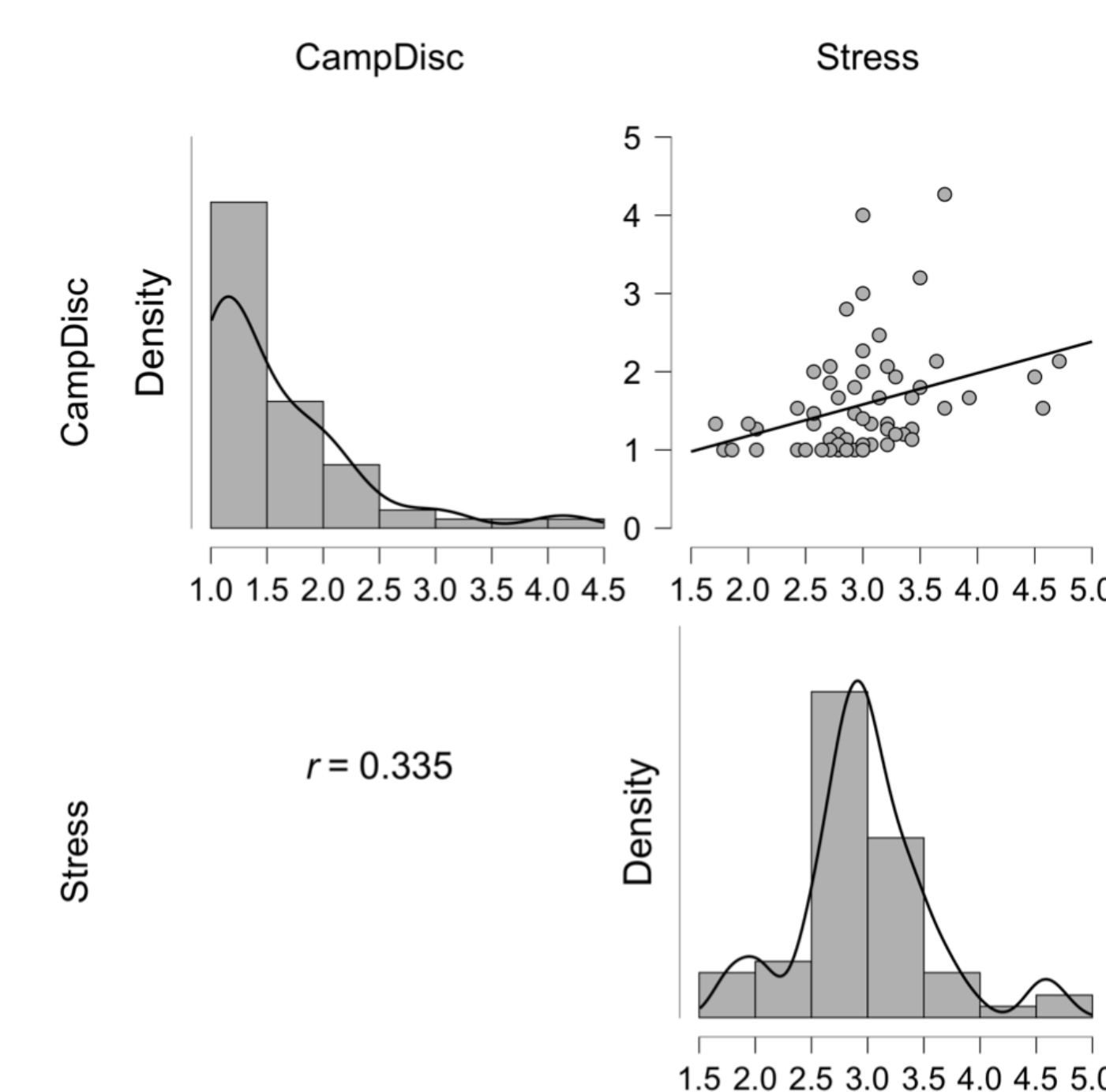
This study focuses exclusively on international students. So, of the 62 international student sample, there are freshmen (1.61%), sophomores (4.84%), juniors (16.13%), seniors (4.84%), 5th years (1.61%), and graduate students (70.97%). Participants were from diverse backgrounds, with 8.06% identifying as White, 1.61% Black or African American, 77.42% Asian, 11.29% other. The age range is from 19 to 46.

Experiments use both qualitative and quantitative data. A survey was created with three sections, predictors, outcomes, and demographics. The purpose of the survey was to investigate UC students' experiences of inclusion and discrimination.

Survey questions focused on students' past experiences with discrimination and bias, their reactions and responses, and the consequences of inclusion/exclusion. Survey data was analyzed to identify common themes and to evaluate predicted relationships among constructs. The survey took the participants approximately 20-40 minutes to complete. Participants enrolled on a rolling basis (e.g., consent and complete the survey) rather than waiting for other participants to be enrolled.

## RESULTS

To compare rates of discrimination between international students and non-international students, an independent sample t-test was conducted. The results indicate that international students ( $M = 1.59$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) do not experience significantly more discrimination than non-international students ( $M = 1.53$ ,  $SD = .71$ ),  $t(93) = -0.61$ ,  $p > .05$ . To compare stress levels of international students and non-international students, an independent sample t-test was conducted. Results indicate that international students ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = .59$ ) do not experience significantly higher stress than non-international students ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = .53$ ),  $t(84) = -1.28$ ,  $p > .05$ . However, while results did not reveal significant differences between stress levels of international students and non-international students, qualitative data demonstrates a need to address the unique instances international students' experiences on college campuses.



To investigate the effects unique experiences of discrimination that international students face on college campuses has on students' stress levels, initial correlation tests were conducted. Results indicate a positive correlation between discrimination rates ( $M = 1.33$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) and stress levels ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ),  $r(61) = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### Campus Discrimination

#### Race and Ethnicity

- Just felt I did not get certain jobs on campus because of my race.
- ...I and other 2 Asian girls didn't have one, we tried to join in the existing groups, but no one replied.
- ...I had a tough TA class to take, and some students looked at me as if I am someone from a totally different planet

#### Gender

- I was playing basketball... a bunch of guys... asked if we wanted to play with them... they made it awkward for me because they wanted to say no to me as soon as my guy friend left.
- There have been times where my male group members did not think I was equal.

#### Immigrant Status

- A coworker believed that everyone from the country who is in the US is rich. Mentioned that we need to go back to our country after our education instead of pursuing employment in USA, so that more jobs become available for US citizens.

#### Origin

- An individual assumed I was from a specific region/country when I was not.
- People assume I'm from India when I am not.

#### Language Barriers

- Professor rejected... my project paper since she thinks I'm not good at English writing.
- A student corrected my pronunciation in English.

#### Excluded From Group Activities

- During class activities... often enough my opinion is ignored...
- In a group competition my opinions were not appreciated or considered not even minutely.

### Prior Discriminatory

#### Race and Ethnicity

- ...On a rare occasion I get attacked verbally due to my ethnicity.
- Called terrorist due to my color and for having beard.
- ... men saying mean racial things if I turned them down...
- People would make assumptions about my intelligence because of my Asian background... realized the harm in internalizing biases of any kind towards anyone due to their race/ethnicity.
- ...sometimes some people call me tan or brown...

#### Culture's Gender Standards

- My home country has a patriarchy society... being a woman... I sometimes receive sexual harassment... the conducts might or might not be already seen as normal in our society...

#### Language Barriers

- ...professors not calling on me in class because they couldn't pronounce my name...
- ... I find it harder to land a job possibly because of my language barriers as non-Americans.

#### Immigrant Status

- ...I had been shouted when I walked on the street. An American just asked me to go back to my country...
- ...A certain group of people at work don't appreciate diversity...
- ...I carry my Indian driving license but recently I went to buy some port for cooking, and I was not allowed to buy it as they did not accept my license as a proof of identity.

## DISCUSSION

Most people consider race and ethnicity when discussing diversity and inclusion, but international status is often overlooked, even though someone may be the same race but from a different country. As demonstrated in our qualitative research, the experiences of discrimination that international students experience are different from overall race or ethnic discrimination. International students must experience the adjustment to a new culture and society, from theirs to "ours." They often have to adjust to our norms, lifestyles, language, and more, which can affect them socially, mentally, and academically. We must acknowledge these differences in challenges that international students may face versus categorizing them with individuals of the same race, but from the United States.

Comparing the responses from their prior discriminatory experiences and their discriminatory experiences while on UC's campus, there were some differences. No participants listed experiencing discrimination because of their religion while on campus, but participants did list some discrimination experiences were because of their religion prior to being on campus. Another factor that was different between the two categories is that more participants listed more prior experiences of discrimination based on their gender than they did on campus. This may be the case due to the college's work to prevent any discrimination when it comes to religion and gender by including Title IX and placing repercussions for any prejudices shown against others. One similarity between the two circumstances is that race/skin color was the most frequent reason for discrimination.

Looking at the results of the t-tests, international students do not experience any more discrimination or stress levels compared to non-international students, due to the fact that the non-international students still go through a good amount of discrimination which resulted in the t-test not being significant. Furthermore, the correlation test showed the positive relationship between the discrimination rate and stress level of international students. In other words, international students feel more stressed when they get more discrimination from others. A way that we can decrease these negative experiences, not just for the international students but also for the non-international students, is by providing a required equity and inclusion training for all professors and staff, as well as creating a course where students can learn more about how they can make this university a safer and friendly environment. Another factor that will help implement an all-embracing environment is creating more surveys to hear what all the students at UC have to say about their experiences on campus and how to make it better. Listening to what each student goes through can help bring to light matters that have not been talked about before and can help both the faculty and students solve the issues efficiently.

Even though international students do not experience a significant difference in discrimination or stress levels when compared to non-international students, there about 42% of international student participants that still do not feel included on this campus which shows that we still have a lot of work as a university to help decrease that number and provide a more inclusive environment. The Center of Organizational Leadership Lab is committed to promoting diversity, inclusion, and creating a safe educational and work environment for all by providing and developing needed toolkits and surveys. For more information, please contact Dr. Donna Chrobot-Mason.

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