

Unity



in

Diversity

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Key Issue Overview

Students at BYU-Idaho from diverse backgrounds often feel **lonely, isolated,** and **unsupported** due to limited inclusive resources, language barriers, and occasional experiences of racism. Current efforts like Cultural Night are **not enough** to foster year-round inclusion and belonging.

“One student, who wishes to remain unnamed, recalled his experience with **racism**. On an evening walk with his wife, several vehicles rolled down their windows and shouted **racial slurs** at him. Upset by this, he felt **hate** and **anger**.”

Over the years, there has been an increasing need to raise awareness about the importance of embracing cultural diversity within both religious and university settings. One meaningful way to promote this awareness is by exploring the possibility of offering church meetings, such as wards, branches, Relief Society, Elders Quorum, Come, Follow Me, or Book of Mormon study groups in students' native languages or languages they are learning. Through data collection, campus administrators, religious leaders, and students interviews, and a published article in Scroll, this awareness seeks to advocate for a more inclusive campus culture that reflects unity, respect, and the principles of disciple leadership.

Main Challenge

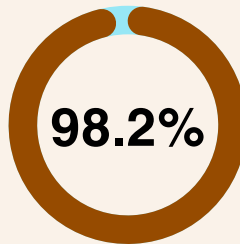
According to the **BYUI enrollment statistics**, the **total population** of **on-campus** students this semester is **17,582**.

The majority of students on campus are Caucasian. Hispanics account for 13.29% of the total student population and are of Latin descent. The next largest group is Asian/Asian American, making up 2.12% of the total population, followed closely by Black/African American students at just under 2%.

With this in mind, it's important to recognize that cultures can sometimes be **misrepresented**, which is why **awareness** and **appreciation** from the **entire campus community** are essential.

BYU-Idaho Student Survey

In what **other language** would you like to see BYU-Idaho offer church services?



Survey result:

-Spanish

Unfortunately, making new wards and branches cannot be done overnight, but rather requires higher authority than students, BYU-Idaho faculty, bishops and stake presidents in Rexburg have. This implementation would require approval from the Area Seventy, the Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency. In the meantime, BYU-Idaho and the city of Rexburg can improve resources and events that can help us connect and belong better as a community.

Interviewed Participants

Several leaders and students were interviewed:

Leaders:

- Bishop in Rexburg, Idaho, Erick McPherson, from Idaho
- Bishop in Provo, Utah, Arnoud Noot, from Netherlands
- Stake President in Rexburg, Idaho, Mark Skinner, from Idaho
- Public Affairs Communication Manager and Public Speaking Professor, Perry Rockwood, from outside of Seattle, Washington
- Accessibility Service Office, Senior Missionaries, Elder and Sister Smith, from Idaho
- International Studies Society President, Ernest Alaelua, from Australia

“It is comforting to be able to speak in your own language and to have the same cultures and beliefs that you have to be able to share in your testimonies in church,” said Erick McPherson, the Bishop in the Rexburg Young Single Adult 97th Ward in the YSA 5th Stake.



Students:

- Tiffany Rodriguez Rico, her family is from Mexico, but she grew up in Virginia
- Agustin Casares, from Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Tessa Warner, from Emmett, Idaho
- Charleigh Wilson, from the west of Phoenix, Arizona
- Nixon Lala, his from Fiji, but moved to California
- Emma Lala, from Bryan, Texas
- Andrea Ayaviri Redin, from Santa Cruz, Bolivia
- Laura Jazmine Vargas, from Mexico
- Jewellia Hartvigson, from Hemet, southern California
- Angeles La Fuente Rodriguez, from Bolivia
- Jaymen Parker, from Bentonville, Arkansas
- Junior Tovar, from Bolivia
- Priscilla Aror, from Nigeria, western part of Africa
- Keithlin Cabrales Meneses, from Sonora, Mexico
- Tyler Rockwood, from Marshfield, Missouri
- Coby Dallyn, from Luxembourg
- Student from BYU-Provo, Kenneth Alexandar Orantes, from Houston, Texas
- Student from BYU-Hawaii, Michaela Kapuahelani Megumi Horito, she's from Utah and lives in Hawaii
- Student from BYU-Hawaii, Billy Brown, from Prescott, Arizona

Suggestions for Improvement

These **suggestions** were gathered from the **BYU-Idaho Student Survey**, which was created to collect student input on how the university can **enhance** its **resources** and **events** to better support cultural inclusion.

- **Cultural clubs and societies**
- **Spirit Week**
- **Student Life events** like celebrating **Cultural holidays**
- **Rexburg community activities**
- **Letters proposing solutions** to church and campus leaders
- **Host Stake and Ward potlucks** and **cultural events**

Stake President Mark Skinner in the 5th Stake said, "I think it starts with leadership in the stake. I think it starts with bishops who care, and it probably starts there and then really listening to what students feel are the biggest challenges ... Then maybe we could take up some baby steps towards things that would help people feel more safe, more included, less isolated ... Several different activities throughout a semester that where we learn about cultural and traditions and food. You know, people always show up for food, yes, but it's fascinating to try different things, right?"



Ernest Alaelua, a senior from Australia majoring in International Studies and the International Studies Society President said, "I think it's a great idea, I know for Portuguese speaking, or at least for that part, there is a branch, but off campus, and for most students, it's not as easily accessible. So I guess in a way, we can also provide language wards within the school, not just outside where you have to travel, and a lot of students don't have cars ... Our mission is to give the tools to our students to become culturally competent leaders, students that are well versed in the culture throughout the world. And so we're trying to think of activities. Maybe in two weeks, we're going to have a culture spotlight activity where we're going to have a presenter to showcase the culture. And it's something we want to do every week is have one student just to show their culture within the society. And I think that's a good way to introduce people to different cultures. We haven't started yet, but it's something we want to do.

Directed to the Decision-Maker

The following **leaders** and **organizations** have the potential to **influence** and **implement** the suggested ideas mentioned in page 7:



- Dean of Students (Campus Administrators)
- General Authorities
- International Service Office
- Rexburg Community
- Societies
- Spirit Week
- Student Council
- Student Life (Campus Life)

"I feel like diversity means accepting everyone for who they are and accepting everyone's culture, because everyone's beliefs, traditions and whatever [they] align [themselves] with, are so different," said Priscilla Aror, a junior from Nigeria majoring in Biology and works in the Alumni team at the Career Center. "So diversity means inclusion, especially the language inclusion ... You can't live in your own mindset. You have to embrace other people's mindset."



Biography

Gracie Romero

She is a passionate and driven communication professional with a focus in Strategic Organizational Leadership Skills and Public Relations.

A senior at Brigham Young University–Idaho, Gracie brings strong experience in leadership, team collaboration, and relationship-building. She is committed to fostering inclusive, positive environments where individuals feel valued and supported. With a talent for effective communication, a heart for service, and embracing cultural diversity.

Gracie thrives in dynamic team settings and is dedicated to making a meaningful impact in both academic and professional spaces. Originally from Houston, Texas, she is eager to continue developing her skills in roles that align with her values of integrity, collaboration, and growth.



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