



Rankin & Associates, Consulting

Assessment • Planning • Interventions

Kent State University

Campus Climate
Research Study
Executive Summary

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Introduction

Kent State University affirms that diversity and inclusion are crucial to the intellectual vitality of the campus community. It is through freedom of exchange over different ideas and viewpoints in supportive environments that individuals develop the critical thinking and citizenship skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. Diversity and inclusion engender academic engagement where teaching, working, learning, and living take place in pluralistic communities of mutual respect.

Kent State University is dedicated to fostering a caring community that provides leadership for constructive participation in a diverse, multicultural world. As noted in Kent State University's mission statement, "We transform lives and communities through the power of discovery, learning and creative expression in an inclusive environment."¹ In order to better understand the campus climate, the senior administration at Kent State University recognized the need for a comprehensive tool that would provide campus climate metrics for Kent State students, faculty, and staff.

To that end, members of Kent State University formed the Climate Study Steering Committee (CSSC) in 2014. The CSSC was composed of faculty, staff, students, and administrators. Ultimately, Kent State contracted with Rankin & Associates Consulting (R&A) to conduct a campus-wide study entitled, "Kent State University Assessment of Climate for Learning, Living, and Working." Data gathered via reviews of relevant Kent State literature, focus groups, and a campus-wide survey focused on the experiences and perceptions of various constituent groups. Based on the findings of this study, strategic action initiatives will be developed.

¹<http://www.kent.edu/strategicvisioning#mission>

Project Design and Campus Involvement

The CSSC collaborated with R&A to develop the survey instrument. In the first phase, R&A conducted 17 focus groups, comprised of 87 participants (44 students; 43 faculty and staff). In the second phase, the CSSC and R&A used data from the focus groups to co-construct questions for the campus-wide survey. The final survey instrument was completed in November 2015. Kent State's survey contained 104 items (20 qualitative and 84 quantitative) and was available through a secure online portal from March 8 to April 8, 2016. Confidential paper surveys were distributed to those individuals who did not have access to an Internet-connected computer or who preferred a paper survey.

The conceptual model used as the foundation for Kent State University's assessment of campus climate was developed by Smith et al. (1997) and modified by Rankin (2003). A power and privilege perspective informs the model, one grounded in critical theory, which establishes that power differentials, both earned and unearned, are central to all human interactions (Brookfield, 2005). Unearned power and privilege are associated with membership in dominant social groups (Johnson, 2005) and influence systems of differentiation that reproduce unequal outcomes. The CSSC implemented participatory and community-based processes to generate survey questions as a means to capture the various dimensions of power and privilege that shape the campus experience. In this way, Kent State University's assessment was the result of a comprehensive process to identify the strengths and challenges of campus climate, with a specific focus on the distribution of power and privilege among differing social groups. This report provides an overview of the results of the campus-wide survey.

Kent State University Participants

Kent State University community members completed 8,454 surveys for an overall response rate of 19%. Only surveys that were at least 50% completed were included in the final data set for analyses.² Response rates by constituent group varied: 14% ($n = 4,685$) for Undergraduate Students, 16% ($n = 1,056$) for Graduate/Professional Students, 55% ($n = 1,632$) for Staff, 34% (n

²Seventy-nine surveys were removed because they did not complete at least 50% of the survey, and 81 duplicate submissions were removed. Surveys were also removed from the data file if the respondent did not provide consent ($n = 80$). An additional 3 responses were removed due to illogical responses.

= 940) for Faculty, and > 100% ($n = 141$) for Administrators with Faculty rank.³ Table 1 provides a summary of selected demographic characteristics of survey respondents. The percentages offered in Table 1 are based on the numbers of respondents in the sample (n) for each demographic characteristic.⁴

³Respondents were provided the opportunity to self-select their position status, as such the sample n may not reflect the overall N of the Kent State University population.

⁴The total n for each demographic characteristic may differ as a result of missing data.

Table 1. Kent State University Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Subgroup	Population		Sample		Response Rate
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Gender Identity ^a	Woman	27,006	60.5	5,570	65.9	20.63
	Man	17,637	39.5	2,751	32.5	15.60
	Genderqueer			55	0.7	N/A
	Transgender			16	0.2	N/A
	Other/Missing/Unknown			62	0.7	N/A
Race/Ethnicity ^b	Alaskan/Native American	86	0.2	9	0.1	10.47
	Asian/Asian American	699	1.6	115	1.4	16.45
	Black/African American	3,197	7.2	525	6.2	16.42
	Hispanic/Latin@/Chican@	1,206	2.7	128	1.5	10.61
	Middle Eastern			24	0.3	N/A
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	30	0.1	12	0.1	40.00
	White/European American	33,722	75.5	6,529	77.1	19.36
	Two or More	1,088	2.4	421	5.0	38.69
	Missing/Unknown/Not Specified/Other	1,321	3.0	134	1.6	10.14
International	3,294	7.4	575	6.8	17.46	
Position Status ^c	Undergraduate Student	32,213	72.2	4,685	55.4	14.54
	Graduate/Professional Student	6,752	15.1	1,056	12.5	15.64
	Faculty	2,615	5.9	940	11.1	35.95
	Administrator with Faculty rank	109	0.2	141	1.7	>100.0
	Staff	2,954	6.6	1,632	19.3	55.25
Citizenship ^d	U.S. Citizen	40,810	91.4	7,830	92.6	19.19
	Permanent Resident	394	0.9	92	1.1	23.35
	Visa Holder	3,209	7.2	474	5.6	14.77
	Other Status			9	0.1	N/A
	Unreported/Missing	230	0.5	49	0.6	21.30

Note: The total *n* for each demographic characteristic may differ as a result of missing data.

^a $\chi^2 (1, N = 8,321) = 144.1, p < .001$

^b $\chi^2 (7, N = 8,436) = 361.32, p < .001$

^c $\chi^2 (4, N = 8,454) = 3736.36, p < .001$

^d $\chi^2 (3, N = 8,445) = 35.61, p < .001$

Key Findings – Areas of Strength

1. High levels of comfort with the climate at Kent State University

Climate is defined as the “current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning the access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential.”⁵ The level of comfort experienced by faculty, staff, and students is one indicator of campus climate.

- 79% ($n = 6,641$) of the survey respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at Kent State University.
- 69% ($n = 1,871$) of Faculty, Staff, and Administrator with Faculty rank respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their departments/work units.
- 84% ($n = 5,578$) of Student and Faculty respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their classes.
- 80% ($n = 4,431$) of Women respondents, 77% ($n = 2,121$) of Men respondents, and 72% ($n = 72$) of Transspectrum respondents were “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the overall climate at Kent State University.
- 79% ($n = 5,504$) of Heterosexual respondents, 78% ($n = 642$) of LGBTQ respondents, and 76% ($n = 331$) of Asexual/Other respondents were “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the overall climate at Kent State University.

2. Faculty Respondents – Positive attitudes about faculty work

- Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that the tenure/promotion process was clear (71%, $n = 301$).
- 79% ($n = 322$) of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that their point of view was taken into account for course assignments and scheduling.
- 78% ($n = 212$) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that their point of view was taken into account for course assignments and scheduling.
- Non-Tenure-Track respondents felt that the renewal of appointment/promotion was clear (68%, $n = 188$).

⁵Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264

- 71% each of Faculty respondents felt valued by faculty in their department ($n = 756$) and their department head/chair ($n = 740$).

3. Staff Respondents – Positive attitudes about staff work

- 89% ($n = 1,433$) of Staff respondents thought that Kent State University was supportive of staff taking leave.
- 72% ($n = 1,127$) of Staff respondents thought that their supervisors were supportive of flexible work schedules.
- 81% ($n = 1,297$) of Staff respondents indicated that Kent State University provides them with resources to pursue professional development.
- 71% ($n = 1,121$) of Staff respondents noted that their supervisors provide them with ongoing feedback to help them improve their performance.
- Staff respondents felt valued by coworkers in their work unit (77%, $n = 1,299$).

4. Student Respondents – Positive attitudes about academic experiences

The way students perceive and experience their campus climate influences their performance and success in college.⁶ Research also supports the pedagogical value of a diverse student body and faculty for improving learning outcomes.⁷ Attitudes toward academic pursuits are one indicator of campus climate.

- 77% ($n = 4,377$) of Student respondents felt valued by faculty in the classroom; 64% ($n = 3,619$) felt valued by other students in the classroom.
 - Additionally, 43% ($n = 172$) of Asian/Asian American Student respondents “strongly agreed” that they felt valued by faculty in the classroom.
- 69% ($n = 3,945$) of Student respondents believed that the campus climate encouraged free and open discussion of difficult topics.
- 72% ($n = 4,121$) of Student respondents indicated that they had faculty whom they perceived as role models.

⁶Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005

⁷Hale, 2004; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2004

5. Student Respondents – *Perceived Academic Success*

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the scale, *Perceived Academic Success*, derived from Question 12 on the survey. Analyses using these scales revealed:

- Woman Student respondents had greater *Perceived Academic Success* than Men Student respondents.
- Heterosexual Student respondents had greater *Perceived Academic Success* than LGBQ, including Pansexual, Student respondents.

Key Findings – Opportunities for Improvement

1. Members of several constituent groups indicated that they experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

Several empirical studies reinforce the importance of the perception of non-discriminatory environments for positive learning and developmental outcomes.⁸

Research also underscores the relationship between workplace discrimination and subsequent productivity.⁹ The survey requested information on experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

- 17% ($n = 1,408$) of respondents indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.¹⁰
 - 23% ($n = 325$) noted that the conduct was based on their position status at Kent State, 19% ($n = 262$) felt that it was based on their gender/gender identity, and 19% ($n = 261$) felt that it was based on their age.
- Differences emerged based on various demographic characteristics, including position, race, gender identity, and age. For example:
 - A higher percentage of Administrator with Faculty rank respondents (29%, $n = 41$) than Staff respondents (27%, $n = 442$), Faculty respondents (24%, $n = 225$), Graduate/Professional Student respondents (14%, $n = 142$), and Undergraduate Student respondents (12%, $n = 558$) indicated

⁸Aguirre & Messineo, 1997; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001

⁹Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008; Waldo, 1999

¹⁰The literature on microaggressions is clear that this type of conduct has a negative influence on people who experience the conduct, even if they feel at the time that it had no impact (Sue, 2010; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).

that they had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

- Black/African American respondents (51%, $n = 58$) were significantly more likely, than all other ethnic identity respondents, to believe they had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct because of their ethnicity.
- A higher percentage of Transspectrum respondents (39%, $n = 39$) than Women respondents (17%, $n = 940$) and Men respondents (15%, $n = 418$) indicated that they had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.
- Significantly higher percentages of respondents ages 49 through 65 years old (27%, $n = 356$) and 35 through 64 years old (22%, $n = 260$) indicated that they had experienced exclusionary conduct than did other respondents.

2. Several constituent groups indicated that they were less comfortable with the overall campus climate, workplace climate, and classroom climate.

Prior research on campus climate has focused on the experiences of faculty, staff, and students associated with historically underserved social/community/affinity groups (e.g., women, people of color, people with disabilities, first-generation students, veterans).¹¹ Several groups at Kent State University indicated that they were less comfortable than their majority counterparts with the climates of the campus, workplace, and classroom.

- Differences by racial identity:
 - Black/African American respondents (68%, $n = 375$) were significantly least likely to be “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the overall climate at Kent State University than were Hispanic/Latin@/Chican@ respondents (74%, $n = 95$), Multiracial respondents (76%, $n = 331$), Asian/Asian American respondents (77%, $n = 359$), Other People of Color respondents (77%, $n = 87$), and White respondents (81%, $n = 5,323$)

¹¹Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Norris, 1992; Rankin, 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008

- Differences by disability status:
 - Multiple Disabilities respondents (63%, $n = 157$) were significantly less likely to be “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the overall climate at Kent State University than were both Single Disability respondents (74%, $n = 488$) and No Disability respondents (80%, $n = 5,958$).

3. Faculty, Staff, and Administrator with Faculty rank Respondents – Challenges with work-life issues

- 62% ($n = 265$) of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents, 55% ($n = 593$) of Unclassified Staff respondents, 51% ($n = 72$) of Administrator with Faculty rank respondents, 47% ($n = 261$) of Classified Staff respondents, 47% ($n = 132$) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents, and 35% ($n = 80$) of Adjunct/Part-Time Faculty respondents had seriously considered leaving Kent State University in the past year.
 - 49% ($n = 681$) of those Faculty, Staff, and Administrator with Faculty rank respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of financial reasons (e.g., salary, resources).
- Faculty and Staff respondents observed unjust hiring (25%, $n = 661$), unjust disciplinary actions (12%, $n = 318$), or unjust promotion, tenure, and/or reclassification practices (31%, $n = 826$).
- Only 43% ($n = 585$) of Staff respondents and 38% ($n = 388$) of Faculty respondents felt that Kent State University senior administrators were genuinely concerned with their welfare.

4. Faculty Respondents – Challenges with faculty work

- Less than half of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents (44%, $n = 179$) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that tenure standards/promotion standards were applied equally to all faculty.
- Just half (50%, $n = 210$) of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that their service contributions were important to tenure/promotion.

- 49% ($n = 136$) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt pressured to do service and research.
- Less than half of Faculty respondents (44%, $n = 414$) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they felt that their research was valued.

5. A small but meaningful percentage of respondents experienced unwanted sexual contact.

In 2014, *Not Alone: The First Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault* indicated that sexual assault is a significant issue for colleges and universities nationwide, affecting the physical health, mental health, and academic success of students. The report highlights that one in five women is sexually assaulted while in college. One section of the Kent State survey requested information regarding unwanted sexual contact.

- 4% ($n = 304$) of respondents indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact while at Kent State University.
- 251 of the 304 respondents who experienced unwanted sexual contact were Undergraduate Students
- 216 of the respondents who experienced unwanted sexual contact were Undergraduate Women.
- These respondents rarely reported to anyone at Kent State University that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact.

Conclusion

Kent State University campus climate findings¹² were consistent with those found in higher education institutions across the country, based on the work of R&A Consulting.¹³ For example, 70% to 80% of respondents in similar reports found the campus climate to be “comfortable” or “very comfortable.” A similar percentage (79%) of all Kent State University respondents reported that they were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at Kent State

¹²Additional findings disaggregated by position status and other selected demographic characteristics are provided in the full report.

¹³[Rankin & Associates Consulting, 2015](#)

University. Likewise, 20% to 25% in similar reports indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. At Kent State University, a smaller, but still meaningful, percentage of respondents (17%) indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. The results also paralleled the findings of other climate studies of specific constituent groups offered in the literature.¹⁴

Kent State University's climate assessment report provides baseline data on diversity and inclusion, and addresses Kent State University's mission and goals. While the findings may guide decision-making in regard to policies and practices at Kent State University, it is important to note that the cultural fabric of any institution and unique aspects of each campus' environment must be taken into consideration when deliberating additional action items based on these findings. The climate assessment findings provide the Kent State University community with an opportunity to build upon its strengths and to develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. Kent State University, with support from senior administrators and collaborative leadership, is in a prime position to actualize its commitment to an inclusive campus and to institute organizational structures that respond to the needs of its dynamic campus community.

¹⁴Guiffreda, Gouveia, Wall, & Seward, 2008; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2004; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Sears, 2002; Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006; Silverschanz et al., 2008; Yosso et al., 2009

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