



Rankin & Associates, Consulting

Assessment • Planning • Interventions

Kent State University  
Kent Campus

Campus Climate  
Research Study  
Executive Summary

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

Kent State 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 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."<sup>1</sup> In order to better understand the campus climate, the senior administration at Kent State 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.

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<sup>1</sup><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'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'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 - Kent Campus Participants**

Kent State University - Kent Campus community members completed 6,867 surveys for an overall response rate of 21%. Only surveys that were at least 50% completed were included in the final data set for analyses.<sup>2</sup> Response rates by constituent group varied: 18% ( $n = 3,714$ ) for Undergraduate Students, 15% ( $n = 1,040$ ) for Graduate/Professional Students, 56% ( $n = 1,399$ )

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<sup>2</sup>Sixty-nine surveys were removed because they did not complete at least 50% of the survey, and 21 duplicate submissions were removed. Surveys were also removed from the data file if the respondent did not provide consent ( $n = 80$ ). An additional 2 responses were removed due to illogical responses.

for Staff, 36% ( $n = 640$ ) for Faculty, and >100% ( $n = 107$ ) for Administrators with Faculty Rank<sup>3</sup>. The percentages offered in Table 1 are based on the numbers of respondents in the sample ( $n$ ) for each demographic characteristic.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Respondents 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 – Kent Campus population.

<sup>4</sup>The total  $n$  for each demographic characteristic may differ as a result of missing data.

Table 1. Kent State University - Kent Campus Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Subgroup	Population		Sample		Response Rate
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Gender Identity <sup>a</sup>	Woman	19,225	59.7	4,482	65.3	23.31
	Man	12,965	40.3	2,288	33.3	17.65
	Genderqueer			45	0.7	N/A
	Transgender			14	0.2	N/A
	Other/Missing/Unknown			38	0.6	N/A
Race/Ethnicity <sup>b</sup>	Alaskan/Native American	52	0.2	6	0.1	11.54
	Asian/Asian American	567	1.8	94	1.4	16.58
	Black/African American	2,517	7.8	471	6.9	18.71
	Hispanic/Latin@/Chican@	915	2.8	93	1.4	10.16
	Middle Eastern			22	0.3	N/A
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	20	0.1	11	0.2	55.00
	White/European American	23,122	71.8	5,176	75.4	22.39
	Two or More	804	2.5	346	5.0	43.03
	Missing/Unknown/Not Specified/Other	959	3.0	94	1.4	9.80
	International	3,234	10.0	554	8.1	17.13
Position Status <sup>c</sup>	Undergraduate Student	21,190	65.8	3,714	54.1	17.53
	Graduate/Professional Student	6,732	20.9	1,040	15.1	15.45
	Faculty	1,752	5.4	640	9.3	36.53
	Administrator with Faculty Rank	91	0.3	107	1.6	>100.0
	Staff	2,425	7.5	1,366	19.9	56.33
Citizenship <sup>d</sup>	U.S. Citizen	28,567	88.7	6,272	91.3	21.96
	Permanent Resident	311	1.0	80	1.2	25.72
	Visa Holder	3,167	9.8	466	6.8	14.71
	Other Status			8	0.1	N/A
	Unreported/Missing	145	0.5	41	0.6	28.28

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

<sup>a</sup>  $\chi^2 (1, N = 6,770) = 118.76, p < .001$

<sup>b</sup>  $\chi^2 (6, N = 6,845) = 5,454.86, p < .001$

<sup>c</sup>  $\chi^2 (5, N = 6,867) = 2,229.76, p < .001$

<sup>d</sup>  $\chi^2 (3, N = 6,859) = 72.27, p < .001$

## **Key Findings – Areas of Strength**

### **1. High levels of comfort with the climate at Kent State University - Kent Campus**

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.”<sup>5</sup> The level of comfort experienced by faculty, staff, and students is one indicator of campus climate.

- 79% ( $n = 5,387$ ) of the survey respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at Kent State.
- 68% ( $n = 1,431$ ) of Faculty and Staff respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their departments/work units.
- 83% ( $n = 4,540$ ) of Student and Faculty respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their classes.

### **2. Faculty Respondents – Positive attitudes about faculty work**

- 72% ( $n = 229$ ) of Tenure and Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that the tenure/promotion process was clear.
- Tenure and Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that Kent State was supportive of the use of sabbatical leave (75%,  $n = 229$ ) and that their departments were supportive of them taking leave (79%,  $n = 233$ ).
- 80% of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that their points of view were taken into account for course assignment and scheduling.
- 72% ( $n = 519$ ) of Faculty respondents felt valued by faculty in their department.
- 83% ( $n = 581$ ) of Faculty respondents felt valued by students in the classroom.

### **3. Staff Respondents – Positive attitudes about staff work**

- 89% ( $n = 1,189$ ) of Staff respondents felt that their supervisors were supportive of their taking leave.
- 88% ( $n = 1,176$ ) of Staff respondents felt that Kent State is supportive of staff taking leave.

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<sup>5</sup>Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264

- 76% ( $n = 990$ ) of Staff respondents indicated that they had colleagues/coworkers who provided them with job/career advice or guidance when they needed it.
- 80% ( $n = 1,091$ ) of Staff respondents felt valued by coworkers in their work unit.

#### **4. Student Respondents – Positive attitudes about academic experiences**

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

- 76% ( $n = 3,592$ ) of Student respondents felt valued by faculty in the classroom and 63% ( $n = 2,991$ ) felt valued by other students in the classroom.
- 72% ( $n = 3,406$ ) of Student respondents indicated that they had faculty whom they perceived to be their role models.
- 73% ( $n = 3,456$ ) of Student respondents indicated that they had advisers who provided them with advice on core class selection

#### **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 Undergraduate Student respondents have greater *Perceived Academic Success* than LGBQ Undergraduate Student respondents.

### **Key Findings – Opportunities for Improvement**

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

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<sup>6</sup>Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005

<sup>7</sup>Hale, 2004; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2004

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

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

- 17% ( $n = 1,150$ ) of respondents indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.<sup>10</sup>
  - 22% ( $n = 250$ ) noted that the conduct was based on their position status at Kent State University - Kent Campus, 20% ( $n = 250$ ) believed that it was based on their gender/gender identity, and 18% ( $n = 208$ ) believed that it was based on their age.
- Differences emerged based on various demographic characteristics, including position status, gender/gender identity, and age. For example:
  - A higher percentage of Administrator with Faculty Rank respondents (29%,  $n = 31$ ) and Staff respondents (27%,  $n = 369$ ) indicated that they had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct compared to all other position statuses.
  - A higher percentage of Transpectrum respondents<sup>11</sup> (42%,  $n = 33$ ) than Women respondents (17%,  $n = 757$ ) and Men respondents (16%,  $n = 354$ ) indicated that they had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.
  - Significantly higher percentages of respondents ages 49 through 65 years (27%,  $n = 261$ ) indicated that they had experienced exclusionary conduct than did respondents of other ages.

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

<sup>9</sup>Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008; Waldo, 1999

<sup>10</sup>The 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).

<sup>11</sup>Per the CSSC, gender identity was recoded into the categories Man ( $n = 2,285$ ), Woman ( $n = 4,479$ ), and Transpectrum ( $n = 79$ ), where Transpectrum respondents included those individuals who marked “transgender,” “genderqueer,” and other for the question, “What is your gender/gender identity (mark all that apply)?”

Respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. Nearly 600 respondents from all constituent groups contributed further data regarding their personal experiences of exclusion, intimidation, and hostility at Kent State University - Kent Campus. Two themes emerged from narratives provided in these data: 1) conduct grounded in bias, and 2) discrimination, bullying, and intimidation, which respondents indicated led to a culture of disrespect. Employee respondents expressed that either their supervisor or an upper level administrator was perceived as the source of the exclusionary conduct they experienced. Student respondents who offered qualitative comments, expressed that they often experienced exclusionary conduct in the classroom or academic environment. Both Employee respondents and Student respondents offered detailed descriptions of their experiences of exclusionary conduct.

**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).<sup>12</sup> Several groups at Kent State University - Kent Campus indicated that they were less comfortable than their majority counterparts with the climates of the campus, workplace, and classroom.

- Differences by disability status:
  - Multiple Disabilities respondents (60%,  $n = 111$ ) were significantly less likely to indicate that they were “very comfortable”/“comfortable” with the overall climate at Kent State University - Kent Campus compared to Single Disability respondents (73%,  $n = 380$ ) and of No Disability respondents (80%,  $n = 4,869$ ).
- Differences by racial identity:
  - Black/African American and Latin@/Hispanic/Chican@ respondents (68%,  $n = 411$ ) were significantly less likely to be “very comfortable” or

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<sup>12</sup>Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Norris, 1992; Rankin, 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008

“comfortable” with the overall climate at Kent State University - Kent Campus than were Multiracial respondents (75%,  $n = 269$ ), Other Persons of Color respondents (77%,  $n = 419$ ), and White respondents (81%,  $n = 4,234$ )

- Differences by sexual identity:
  - LGBTQ Faculty and Student respondents (79%,  $n = 487$ ) were less likely to be “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the climate in their classes than were Asexual/Other Faculty and Student respondents (83%,  $n = 245$ ) and Heterosexual Faculty and Student respondents (84%,  $n = 3,687$ ).

### **3. Faculty and Staff Respondents – Challenges with work-life issues**

- 65% ( $n = 208$ ) of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents, 46% ( $n = 82$ ) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents, 36% ( $n = 50$ ) of Adjunct/Part-Time Faculty respondents, and 55% (516) of Staff respondents had seriously considered leaving Kent State University - Kent Campus in the past year.
  - 47% ( $n = 515$ ) of those Faculty and Staff respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of financial reasons.
- Faculty and Staff respondents observed unjust hiring (26%,  $n = 553$ ), unjust disciplinary actions (13%,  $n = 262$ ), or unjust promotion, tenure, reappointment, renewal of appointment, or reclassification practices (32%,  $n = 656$ ).
- 52% ( $n = 327$ ) of Faculty respondents thought that their department provided adequate resources to help them manage work-life balance

### **4. Faculty Respondents – Challenges with faculty work**

- Less than half of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents (48%,  $n = 149$ ) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that tenure standards/promotion standards were applied equally to all faculty in their schools/division.
- Less than half (49%,  $n = 154$ ) of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that their service contributions were valued.

- 54% ( $n = 375$ ) of Faculty respondents indicated that they performed more work to help students beyond those of their colleagues with similar performance expectations.
- 57% ( $n = 100$ ) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents indicated that they felt pressured to do work and/or service without compensation.

Faculty respondents were provided the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences regarding faculty work. Faculty respondents felt their workload as faculty members was, at times, too much. Faculty drew specific attention to the teaching loads of faculty at the Research II institution. Other faculty expressed that they felt research was not completely valued at Kent State University - Kent Campus, particularly because of the focus on teaching loads. Faculty respondents also drew attention to salary and benefits as points of contention. However, many of the concerns for salary hinged on the excessive teaching load of faculty, with Faculty respondents indicating that they could receive more money to do less work at other institutions.

##### **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 survey requested information regarding sexual assault.

- 4% ( $n = 290$ ) of respondents indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact while at Kent State University - Kent Campus.
- 242 of the 290 respondents who experienced unwanted sexual contact were Undergraduate Students; 211 were Undergraduate Women.
- These respondents rarely reported to anyone at Kent State University - Kent Campus that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact.

Respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on why they did not report unwanted sexual contact. Three themes emerged among Kent State University - Kent Campus respondents

who explained why they did not report unwanted sexual contact. The primary rationales for not reporting these incidents were a result of a lack of understanding or desire to report, fear of repercussion for reporting, and feelings of shame about the incident.

## **Conclusion**

Kent State University - Kent Campus climate findings<sup>13</sup> were consistent with those found in higher education institutions across the country, based on the work of R&A Consulting.<sup>14</sup> 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 - Kent Campus respondents reported that they were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at Kent State University - Kent Campus. Likewise, 20% to 25% in similar reports indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. At Kent State University - Kent Campus a smaller, yet telling, 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.<sup>15</sup>

Kent State University - Kent Campus’ 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’s environment must be taken into consideration when deliberating additional action items based on these findings. The climate assessment findings provide the Kent State University - Kent Campus community with an opportunity to build upon its strengths and to develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. Kent State University - Kent Campus, with support from senior administrators and collaborative leadership, is in a prime position to actualize its

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<sup>13</sup>Additional findings disaggregated by position status and other selected demographic characteristics are provided in the full report.

<sup>14</sup>Rankin & Associates Consulting, 2015

<sup>15</sup>Guiffreda, 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

commitment to an inclusive campus and to institute organizational structures that respond to the needs of its dynamic campus community.

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