

Open letter from President Gast to community on the climate survey results

Facing the challenges ahead of us.

Lehigh has taken an important step toward better understanding the climate for individuals and groups on our campus. Identifying and addressing our problems is the first step toward finding solutions for them. The survey provided the opportunity for everyone in the Lehigh community to be heard, and now is the time for each of us to listen, learn and act. The climate survey, which included many thoughtful personal accounts from community members, provides part of our understanding. Together with the hard work of many students, faculty and staff, the survey results provide a framework for sustainable change.

The results of this survey, presented to us this week by Dr. Sue Rankin, show us a stark reality of the disgraceful experiences of our friends and colleagues that cannot be tolerated. One of the most disturbing findings from this survey is that we each experience a different Lehigh based on our own lenses of race, religion, socio-economic standing, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender and position on campus. It is striking to see how variable the climate is for individuals in non-majority groups. We pride ourselves on a friendly environment, often referring to ourselves as the "Lehigh Family," yet clearly we have much work to do to achieve this for our whole community.

Among many important survey findings, Dr. Rankin noted issues around:

- Offensive, hostile, or intimidating conduct, especially related to one's position in the campus community
- Race, especially for students of color
- Concerns pertaining to women's safety as exemplified by reports of sexual assault

Although these are similar to the challenges at other campuses and in society in general, we cannot tolerate shameful and degrading behavior in the Lehigh community. We are actively seeking sustainable approaches to making Lehigh University a productive and collegial

place where we can be ourselves. We need to redefine the culture and promote mutual respect.

We must recognize that at this time, our community is not united on this issue. We must, therefore, work hard to bring about change that bridges that gap and brings us together. It is essential that we work collaboratively on sustainable change to make Lehigh an outstanding learning and living environment in which students, faculty, and staff are respected for their work, their scholarship, their opinions, and who they are.

Through our campus dialogue, and the results of the assessment, we will determine the actions necessary to address the challenges we face. Dr. Rankin's presentation from the climate survey town meetings will be posted on the diversity Web site within the week, and an executive summary reflecting survey results and the dialogue and feedback from the town meetings will be available to the campus community in mid-March, followed by the full report which will be made available to the campus community as well. We will work collaboratively with Dr. Rankin on recommendations for actions that will produce sustainable change at Lehigh.

My hope is that each year going forward, we will look back and see a new reality we can all be proud of. I am confident that our success will be in the substantive and enduring change we create rather than in reports we write.

The only way that this will become a reality is if we are all committed to change. This is the challenge for our whole community, and one that I ask you to join me and all of your Lehigh colleagues and peers in today.

Alice P. Gast
Lehigh University President

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