

Climate Survey Recommendations from the Survey Developers

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Preface: We designed the climate survey to provide a rich and complex picture of the current climate on campus, how it is changing over time, what the underlying mechanisms for change might be, and how these processes vary across groups. We have reviewed the climate survey report and are pleased that the survey results represent a very wide range of experiences and opinions about the climate at Lehigh. In our opinion, the survey report itself is a good start to representing this richness and complexity, but it also leaves a lot of important questions unanswered. Therefore, our recommendations for next steps primarily focus on additional analyses of the data that will help to clarify how different groups experience the social and academic climate at Lehigh. We think a more complete analysis of the data (and potentially additional data collection) is an important prerequisite to proposing broader changes in policy or programming.

1. There is no discussion in the report of the fact that 22% of students see a negative climate, and no breakdown of who these students are. We would suggest looking at the climate question, and the question relating to the principles of equitable community, and looking at those numbers as a function of gender, ethnicity, and people who report having experienced an incident of harassment versus those who have not. And doing this breakdown for students, staff, and faculty to see who is experiencing the negative climate. In addition, there is a separate question that asks people not their own view of the climate, but what others in their groups likely feel about the climate. Here, the number is even higher -- students say 29% of others would see the climate as hostile. Who is it that feels others would see it this way? Is this majority students thinking minority students would say it is bad? Is this the same people who report their own sense of the climate as bad?
2. There is no examination in the report of what students say about the curriculum. Close to 50% have taken no courses on topics relating to social justice. Who are these 50%? Breakdowns by ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender would be important. Also, about 50% say they would not enroll in a certificate program if offered. Who are these people? The same breakdown information should be provided.
3. Many of the measures included in the survey represented potential effects of being targeted or of being a minority person on campus, including satisfaction, performance (GPA), expectation of completing degree, stress, depression, reasons for contemplating leaving Lehigh. The report does not break any of these variables down by group membership (race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation). We would recommend doing so. Also, does group membership interact with whether one has previously been targeted in some way (harassment, micro-aggressions) in determining these outcomes/effects? We also note that the report as written does not address an important part of the OCR mandate (i.e., to assess the effects of harassment and discrimination) because none of the measures are broken down by those who reported experiencing harassment and discrimination vs. not. This analysis should be performed separately for target and non-target group categories (e.g., people of color and White people).
4. A number of the measures in the survey were designed to tap into attitudes about social hierarchy, beliefs about the flexibility of racial bias, identification with valued groups, and motives to control prejudicial behavior. These kinds of measures represent some of the mechanisms by which prejudice and discrimination persist (as suggested by the research literature) and, therefore, suggest some possible avenues to improving the climate. We would recommend looking at how responses to these scales predict other measures in the survey, such as perceptions of the overall climate, beliefs about the experiences of members of target groups at Lehigh, and effort to engage with members of other groups.
5. Each respondent group (students, faculty, staff) were asked to rate agreement with statements like "In my opinion, Lehigh shows more concern about the treatment of [racial minority groups, women, people of different sexual orientation] than is warranted by their experience". Depending on the respondent and target groups, somewhere between 10 and 25% of respondents indicated that they agree or strongly agree with these statements. These are important sub-samples to pay attention to because they are likely resistant to further change initiatives, and it would be useful to understand a bit more about who they are and their underlying motives.

6. Related, each respondent group was also asked to rate the "opinion of most Lehigh [faculty, staff, students]" on the same items. These appear to reveal self-other discrepancies, such that people tend to over-estimate other people's agreement with these statements. That is, the percentage of people who actually agree with them is lower than the percentage of people that respondent expect to agree with them. This may also be important because perceptions of social norms (in this case, perceptions that a sizable proportion of the community might be resistant to further change efforts) can themselves be an inhibitor of change.
7. There are obvious and large discrepancies between percentages of respondents reporting that they have personally experienced "offensive, hostile or intimidating conduct that has interfered with your ability to work or learn at Lehigh" (e.g., 7.6% of student respondents) and the percentage that indicate they reported these incidents to campus authorities (e.g., 0.9% of student respondents). These are discrepancies that warrant further attention and could yield specific recommendations.
8. The results indicate a number of important findings in the domain of reporting. Across all three surveys, respondents report a greater willingness to report a hypothetical incident of harassment or discrimination than is indicated by their reports of reporting actual instances of harassment or discrimination (where the rate is only about 20%). What is the nature of this discrepancy? Is it the case that the individuals who experienced harassment or discrimination are systematically lower than others on willingness to report, or do the data suggest other barriers to reporting? Second, respondents indicate a greater willingness to report on behalf of someone else than to report their own experiences of harassment or discrimination, again suggesting some barriers to reporting. Third, students seem to be generally lower in awareness of policies related to harassment and discrimination and willingness to report than faculty and staff, suggesting that one fruitful recommendation might be to educate the student body on these issues. Related to reporting, it would be useful to have access to the open-ended responses on reasons for not reporting to a campus authority.
9. Many of the open-ended comments suggest that people's experience of the climate at Lehigh is very local – grounded in the people they interact with daily – rather than some global impression of the university as a whole. If the data bear out this observation, then it would suggest that some future interventions might be targeted rather than university-wide. One first step might be to break down the faculty and student (and perhaps staff, but the sample size might be relatively low) data by college and see whether people's experiences differ in meaningful ways across these boundaries.
10. Although a systematic analysis of the open-ended responses has not yet been conducted, a number of interesting trends is apparent. One recurring theme (in response to the question of feelings about being the only member of one's racial group in a group interaction) is that many individuals report being generally introverted and/or social anxious, such that they are reserved, anxious, or feel awkward when interacting with anyone unfamiliar, regardless of group membership. If this is true (it does seem consistent with the "Lehigh look-away" phenomenon), this general awkwardness could be perceived as a micro-aggression by members of target groups (particularly those who have experienced harassment or discrimination). Further investigation of this phenomenon is warranted. We recommend that the university commit substantial resources to conducting a thorough qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses, including licensing qualitative research software (e.g., NVivo).