Rankin & Associates, Consulting

Assessment • Planning • Interventions

Penn State
College of Engineering

Assessment of Climate for Learning and Working
Executive Summary

August 2016

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Introduction

The Pennsylvania State University College of Engineering (PSU COE) affirms that diversity and inclusion are crucial to the intellectual vitality of the campus community. It is through freedom of exchange of 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.

PSU COE is dedicated to fostering a caring community that provides leadership for constructive participation in a diverse, multicultural world. As noted in PSU COE's mission statement, the College's goal is "To nurture and train world-class socially aware, globally connected, diverse engineers, educators, and researchers with rigorous core knowledge and problem-solving skills, who understand complex, interacting engineering and societal systems."[1] In order to better understand the climate of PSU COE at University Park, the senior leadership at PSU COE recognized the need for a comprehensive tool that would provide campus climate metrics for University Park PSU COE students, faculty, and staff.

To that end, members of PSU COE formed the COE Planning Committee (COEPC) in 2015. The COEPC was composed of faculty, staff, students, and administrators. Ultimately, PSU COE contracted with Rankin & Associates Consulting (R&A) to conduct a college-wide study entitled, "The Pennsylvania State University College of Engineering Assessment of the Climate for Learning and Working."

Project Design and Implementation

The COEPC collaborated with R&A to develop the survey instrument. The final survey instrument was completed in January 2016. PSU COE's survey contained 113 items (21 qualitative and 92 quantitative) and was available via a secure online portal from February 8 – March 4, 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.

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[1] http://www.engr.psu.edu/strategic-plan/

The conceptual model used as the foundation for PSU COE'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 survey items covered the following:

- Perceptions of the climate in PSU COE and of practices, policies, and procedures related to the climate.
- Perceptions of academic success and challenges to academic success (students only)
- Experiences and observations of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive and/or hostile conduct
- Incidents of unwanted sexual contact
- Awareness and perception of actions to improve the climate.

This report provides an overview of the results of the college-wide survey. All results reported are significant unless otherwise noted.

PSU COE Participants

PSU COE community members completed 2,466 surveys for an overall response rate of 25%. Only surveys that were at least 50% completed were included in the final data set for analyses.[2] Response rates by constituent group varied: 20% ($n = 1,596$) for Undergraduate Students, 30% ($n = 422$) for Graduate Students, 69% ($n = 238$) for Staff, and 45% ($n = 210$) for Faculty.[3] Table 1 provides a summary of selected demographic characteristics of survey respondents. The

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[2]Twenty-seven surveys were removed because they did not complete at least 50% of the survey, and 20 duplicate submissions were removed. Surveys were also removed from the data file if the respondent did not provide consent ($n = 31$).

[3]Please note that results for groups with a small number of respondents are not reported in order to maintain confidentiality. For this reason, Post-doctoral Scholars are not reported as a separate category. As per approval of the COEPC their responses were combined with Faculty responses for the analysis of the survey data.

percentages offered in Table 1 are based on the numbers of respondents in the sample (*n*) for each demographic characteristic.[4]

Table 1. **PSU COE Sample Demographics**

Characteristic	Subgroup	*n*	% of Sample
Position status	Undergraduate Student	1,596	64.7
	Graduate Student	422	17.1
	Faculty	210	8.5
	Staff	238	9.7
Gender identity	Man	1,663	67.8
	Woman	779	31.8
	Transspectrum including other	9	0.4
Racial identity	Underrepresented Person of Color	176	7.3
	White	1,626	67.7
	Asian/Asian American/South Asian	483	20.1
	Multiracial	117	4.9
Sexual identity	LGBQ	100	4.2
	Heterosexual	2,281	95.0
	Asexual/Other	20	0.8
Citizenship status	U.S. Citizen, birth	1,792	73.1
	Non-U.S./Naturalized Citizen	658	26.9
Disability status	No Disability	2,319	94.5
	Single Disability	86	3.5
	Multiple Disabilities	48	2.0
Military status	Military Service	98	4.0
	No Military Service	2,351	95.3
Faith-based affiliation	Christian Affiliation	1,157	48.0
	Other Faith-Based Affiliation	310	12.9
	No Affiliation	836	34.7
	Multiple Affiliations	106	4.4

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

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

Key Findings – Areas of Strength

1. **High levels of comfort with the climate at PSU COE**

   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.

   - 81% ($n = 1,997$) of the survey respondents were "comfortable" or "very comfortable" with the climate at PSU COE.
   - 76% ($n = 663$) of Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Student respondents were "comfortable" or "very comfortable" with the climate in their primary department/work unit/research group.
   - 81% ($n = 1,801$) of Student and Faculty respondents were "comfortable" or "very comfortable" with the climate in their classes.

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

   - Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that teaching (80%, $n = 88$) and research (91%, $n = 100$) were valued by their departments.
   - Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that teaching (66%, $n = 40$) and research (77%, $n = 49$) were valued by their departments.
   - 60% ($n = 123$) of Faculty respondents felt that their teaching was valued.

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

   - 60% ($n = 142$) of Staff respondents reported that they were able to complete their assigned duties during scheduled hours.
   - 63% ($n = 147$) of Staff respondents believed that they were given a reasonable time frame to complete assigned responsibilities.
   - 55% ($n = 129$) of Staff respondents felt that they were included in opportunities that would help their careers as much as others in similar positions.

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[5]Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264

- 62% (n = 169) of Staff respondents believed that PSU COE provided them with resources to pursue training/professional development opportunities.
- Staff respondents believed that they had supervisors (61%, n = 146) and colleagues/coworkers (71%, n = 168) who gave them job/career advice or guidance when they needed it.

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.
   - 62% (n = 1,255) of Student respondents felt valued by PSU COE faculty; 61% (n = 1,233) felt valued by PSU COE staff; and 50% (n = 998) felt valued by PSU COE senior administrators (e.g., department heads, deans).
   - 68% (n = 1,359) of Student respondents felt valued by faculty in the classroom, and 68% (n = 1,352) felt valued by other students in the classroom.
   - 60% (n = 1,200) of Student respondents had faculty whom they perceived as role models.

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.

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[6]Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005
[7]Hale, 2004; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2004
[8]Aguirre & Messineo, 1997; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001
[9]Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008; Waldo, 1999

- 11% ($n = 260$) of respondents indicated that they had personally experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.[10]
    - 25% ($n = 65$) indicated that the conduct was based on their position at PSU COE, 22% ($n = 57$) noted that the conduct was based on their gender/gender identity, 17% ($n = 45$) felt that it was based on their academic performance, and 14% ($n = 45$) felt it was based on their ethnicity.
- Differences emerged based on various demographic characteristics, including gender identity, ethnicity, and age. For example:
    - Staff respondents (25%, $n = 59$) were more likely to indicate that they had experienced this conduct compared to Faculty respondents (18%, $n = 38$), Graduate Student respondents (12%, $n = 49$), or Undergraduate Student respondents (7%, $n = 114$).
    - A higher percentage of Women respondents (15%, $n = 119$) than Men respondents (8%, $n = 134$) indicated that they had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

Respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct at PSU COE. Three themes emerged from the 138 respondents who contributed personal narratives: (1) exclusionary behavior towards various identities, (2) hostile environment, and (3) a lack of a sense of belonging and support.

2. **Several constituent groups indicated that they were less comfortable with the overall college climate, workplace climate, and classroom climate.**
   Prior research on campus climate has focused on the experiences of faculty, staff, and students associated with historically underrepresented social/community/affinity groups (e.g., women, people of color, people with disabilities, first-generation students,

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[10]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).

veterans).[11] Several groups at PSU COE indicated that they were less comfortable than their majority counterparts with the climates of the college, workplace, and classroom.

- Differences by position status:
  - o Greater fractions of Undergraduate Student respondents (30%, n = 471), Graduate Student respondents (28%, n = 117), and Faculty respondents (26%, n = 54) reported being "very comfortable" with the overall climate at PSU COE than Staff respondents (19%, n = 46).

- Differences by gender identity:
  - o 82% ($n = 1,361$) of Men respondents and 80% ($n = 620$) of Women respondents were "very comfortable" or "comfortable" with the overall climate at PSU COE. A significantly higher percentage of Men Faculty and Student respondents (31%, $n = 490$) than Women Faculty and Student respondents (24%, $n = 148$) felt "very comfortable" in their PSU COE classes.

- Differences by racial identity:
  - o Underrepresented Respondents of Color (72%, $n = 127$) were less likely to be "very comfortable" or "comfortable" with the overall climate at PSU COE than were White respondents (82%, $n = 1,343$), Asian/Asian American/South Asian respondents (82%, $n = 394$), or Multiracial respondents (79%, $n = 93$).

- Differences by citizenship status:
  - o U.S. Citizen Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Student respondents (31%, $n = 489$) were more likely to be "very comfortable" with the climate in their PSU COE Classes than Non-U.S./Naturalized Citizen respondents (24%, $n = 152$).

- Differences by first-generation status:
  - o First-Generation Student respondents (23%, $n = 100$) were significantly less "very comfortable" with the climate in their PSU COE classes than were Not-First-Generation Student respondents (30%, $n = 467$).

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

3. **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 this scale revealed:

- Undergraduate White Student respondents scored higher on *Perceived Academic Success* than Undergraduate Student Asian/Asian American/South Asian respondents.

- Undergraduate Student respondents with No Disability had higher *Perceived Academic Success* scored than Undergraduate Students with Single or Multiple Disabilities.

- U.S. Citizen Undergraduate Student respondents experienced higher *Perceived Academic Success* than Non-U.S./Naturalized Citizen Undergraduate Student respondents.

- Low-Income Undergraduate Student respondents had lower *Perceived Academic Success* scores than Not-Low-Income Undergraduate Student respondents.

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

Faculty, Staff, and Post-doctoral Scholar respondents were asked questions about their experiences regarding working in PSU COE. Analyses based on these questions revealed:

- 50% ($n = 104$) of Faculty respondents, and 53% ($n = 125$) of Staff respondents had seriously considered leaving PSU COE in the past year.
  - By military status, 72% ($n = 18$) of Military Service employee respondents and 50% ($n = 204$) of No Military Service employee respondents seriously considered leaving the College.
  - By disability status: 85% ($n = 17$) of employee respondents with at least one disability and 50% ($n = 207$) of employee respondents with no disabilities seriously considered leaving the College.
  - 46% ($n = 106$) of those Faculty and Staff respondents who seriously considered leaving did so due to financial reasons and 42% ($n = 97$) because of limited opportunities for advancement.

- Faculty and Staff respondents observed unjust hiring (15%, $n = 67$), unfair or unjust disciplinary actions (7%, $n = 29$), or unfair or unjust promotion, tenure, reappointment, and/or reclassification (19%, $n = 84$).

- 48% ($n = 114$) of Staff respondents and 22% ($n = 45$) of Faculty respondents thought that PSU COE provided adequate resources to help them manage work-life balance.

- 23% ($n = 44$) of Faculty respondents and 32% ($n = 74$) of Staff respondents indicated that child care benefits were competitive.

- 36% ($n = 84$) of Staff respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the performance evaluation process was clear and 19% ($n = 45$) believed that the performance evaluation process was productive.

- Over half (55%, $n = 129$) of Staff respondents felt that a hierarchy existed within staff positions that allowed some voices to be valued more than others.

5. **Faculty Respondents – Challenges with faculty work**

- Slightly more than one-third (35%, $n = 38$) of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents believed that they were burdened by service responsibilities beyond those of their colleagues with similar performance expectations.

- 36% ($n = 73$) of Faculty respondents felt that their research/scholarship was valued.

- Just over half (52%, $n = 56$) of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents and 41% ($n = 26$) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents thought that they performed more work to help students than did their colleagues.

- Approximately one-third (32%, $n = 35$) of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents and of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents (32%, $n = 20$) felt that faculty opinions were taken seriously by senior administrators.

- Less than half of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents (42%, $n = 27$) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the criteria used for contract renewal were clear. Only 21% ($n = 13$) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents indicated that the criteria used for contract renewal was applied equally to all faculty.

Faculty respondents were provided the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences regarding faculty work (renewal, teaching, and research). The themes that emerged revolved around the lack of salary equity and workload balance.

6. **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 PSU COE survey requested information regarding sexual assault.

   - 1% ($n = 24$) of respondents indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact while a member of the PSU COE community.

   - Subsequent analyses suggested that Women and Transspectrum respondents and respondents with Disabilities experienced unwanted sexual contact at higher rates than their counterparts, but the results were not statistically significant due to the small overall number of respondents.

   - Of respondents who indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact, almost none of them reported the incident(s).

Respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on why they did not report unwanted sexual contact. Two themes emerged from the data. Shame/Embarrassment was the dominant theme, reflected in almost half of the responses. A lack of understanding in terms of thinking they had somehow encouraged it to happen was often mentioned in tandem with shame. The second most common theme was self-blame.

Conclusion

PSU COE college climate findings[12] 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 (81%) of PSU COE respondents reported that they were "comfortable" or "very comfortable" with the climate at PSU COE. In other studies conducted by R&A consulting, 20% to 25% of the respondents indicated that they had personally experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. At PSU COE, a smaller percentage of respondents (11%) 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]

PSU COE's climate assessment report provides baseline data on diversity and inclusion, and addresses PSU COE's mission and goals. While the findings may guide decision-making in regard to policies and practices at PSU COE, 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 on action items based on these findings. The climate assessment findings provide the PSU COE community with an opportunity to build upon its strengths and to develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. PSU COE, with support from senior administrators and collaborative leadership, is in a prime position to actualize its commitment to an inclusive college and to institute organizational structures that respond to the needs of its dynamic college community.

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

[13]Rankin & Associates Consulting, 2015

[14]Guiffrida, 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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