Oakland University Climate Survey

Executive Summary

September 2013

Overview

The Oakland University Climate Survey was conducted in the early part of 2013, by the Office of the Senior Advisor to the President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the Office of Inclusion at Oakland University, under the direction of President Gary Russi. It was designed to assess perceptions of inclusiveness, friendliness, cooperation, professionalism, recognition, support and opportunities for advancement and academic success at Oakland University. The UIC Survey Research Laboratory (SRL) assisted with the survey.

All faculty, staff, and students at Oakland University were invited to participate in this study. There was a separate questionnaire for faculty, staff and students, responses to which were collected online. The original frame included approximately 22,000 students and employees. Of these, 2,207 completed the questionnaire, for an overall response rate of 9.2%. The response rate varied from a low of 6.9% among students to a high of 34.7% among staff employees.

Results

Highlights of the results are presented below with a much richer set of results available in the full reports.

Overall Climate

Computing an Outcome Variable: Overall Climate. For each stratum—faculty, staff, and students—an outcome variable was created based on questions from each survey instrument that best captured respondent opinions of the overall climate.

- For faculty and staff, the outcome variable included five items: overall climate on campus, overall climate in their department, overall climate in their school/college/major administrative unit, satisfaction with Oakland University as a good place at which to work, and recommendation of Oakland University to others.
- For students, the outcome variable included two items: overall climate on campus and recommendation of Oakland University to other students.

Mean Ratings on Overall Climate All groups—faculty, staff, and students—provide ratings on overall climate that are above the mid-point of a 5-point scale. The faculty, staff and student groups have overall climate scores of 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7, respectively, on a scale where 1 is least favorable and 5 is most favorable. Note, however, that faculty provide the lowest rating and students provide the highest rating.

Among faculty and staff, the ratings on overall climate are lower among those who identify as "other" gender or who did not respond to the question about gender, those who report an "other" sexual orientation, and those with some type of disability (mean ratings for these groups range from 2.9 to 3.3). Similarly, among students, the lowest ratings are evident among those among those who identify as "other" gender or who did not respond to the question about gender, those in the "Queer or other" sexual orientation category, and those with some type of disability (mean ratings range from 3.1 to 3.5).

Predictors of Overall Climate

Deriving Explanatory Components. Next, to understand which specific aspects of climate help explain the variation in the overall climate ratings, SRL first used a standard technique known as principal components analysis to organize the large number of items on the questionnaire into fewer groups—components—based on their correlations with each other. There were six such explanatory components for faculty, eight plus one individual item for staff, and seven plus two individual items for students. A score was computed for each component by averaging responses to the items within each.

Priority-Performance Grids. To understand the relationship between the outcome variable— overall climate—and these components, SRL conducted a regression analysis. The results of this analysis made it possible to order the explanatory components in terms of most to least predictive of the outcome variable.

We then used the results of the regression analysis in combination with the mean ratings on each component to identify areas that were primary and secondary areas of strength and primary and secondary areas for action. The regression analysis results were used to designate a component as primary (more strongly associated with overall climate) or secondary (less strongly associated with overall climate). The mean ratings were used to designate a component as a strength (higher mean ratings) or an area of concern (lower mean ratings). Thus each explanatory component could be designated as a primary strength, a secondary strength, a primary area of concern, or a secondary area of concern. The same sort of classification in terms of priority and performance was also performed for each individual item within a component.

Explanatory Components and Items: Areas of Strength and Concern

Faculty and Staff

- For both faculty and staff, a component termed "Professional work environment" emerged as a key driver of overall climate ratings. This component measures mainly satisfaction with relationship with supervisors and/or leadership at the university, recognition for work done, and career advancement. In each group, this component is a primary area of concern, as it is strongly associated with overall climate ratings, but overall ratings on this component are relatively low.
    - Within this component, primary areas of concern for both faculty and staff are career advancement, growth, and recognition for work.
    - Ratings are lowest among those in the "other or missing" category of gender, in the "other" sexual orientation category, and among those with some type of disability. Ratings are highest among those who have been employed at the University for the least amount of time.
- For faculty, the other primary driver of overall climate is a component termed "Campus-wide Diversity," and it is another area of concern with a mean rating of 3.3 on a 5-point scale. This

component includes judgments of how beneficial actions of various entities on campus are with respect to promoting diversity, commitment of various entities to student diversity, and how well the campus meets the needs of those with disabilities. The mean ratings on all of these items are below 3.5, making them all areas of concern.

- For staff, the other primary driver of overall climate ratings is a component termed "Personal Identity and Belongingness." This component is a primary strength for Oakland with a mean rating of 3.6. It includes primary strength areas such as low frequency of instances of intimidation and disrespectful remarks, comfort with expressing one's personal identity, relative lack of feelings of isolation, and fairness of recruitment policies, and one primary area of concern which is confidence in being able to voice complaints without fear of negative consequences.
- While confidence in being able to voice complaints without fear of negative consequences fall into different components for faculty and staff, it emerged as an area for concern in both groups. The mean rating on this item was 2.6 among faculty and 2.7 among for staff.

Students

- Among students, the primary component associated with overall climate ratings is called "Belongingness and Personal Identity" and includes primary strengths issues such as relative lack of isolated feeling, friendliness of campus, comfort expressing personal identity, and treatment by other students on campus. That these are strength areas is a relevant as the literature indicates that a sense of belonging is a desired outcome resulting from students' experiences with academic and social integration as it affects how well students adjust to college life and their academic success (e.g., Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997).[1] However, this component also includes several areas of concern including satisfaction with social and cultural activities and academic activities that reflect one's identity, and a perception that campus is more excluding than including.
- For students, the other two primary components associated with overall climate ratings are termed "Respect for Diversity" and "Academic Support." These are areas of strength, too, with mean ratings above 3.5. The former component includes respect for diversity by staff and faculty, and satisfaction with diversity in the classroom and the student center. The latter includes items asking mainly about faculty assistance to students in academic matters.
- On all components, student ratings are generally low among those in the "other or missing" gender category and among those in sexual orientation categories other than straight/heterosexual. Ratings are generally highest among the oldest students and among students in categories other than 'undergraduate.'

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[1] Bollen, K. A., & Hoyle, R. (1990). Perceived cohesion: A conceptual and empirical examination. *Social Forces*, *69*, 479–504.
Hausmann, L. R. M., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in Higher Education*, *48*, 803–839.
Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, *70*, 324–345.

Conclusion

The purpose of the Climate Survey was to assess the perceptions of climate among faculty, staff and students across the University. Results indicate that while the climate is rated generally positive, there are areas that can be reviewed for improvement.