

U of S Campus Climate Survey: How welcomed, supported and respected do students feel?

Summary Report

Institutional Planning and Assessment
November 2014



U of S definition of campus
climate:

*“How welcomed, supported and
respected students feel at the
University of Saskatchewan”*

Campus climate can affect:

- ❖ learning outcomes
- ❖ developmental outcomes
- ❖ student retention rates

Why Examine Campus Climate?

Included as a priority area in *Promise and Potential*, the third integrated plan, the Campus Climate Survey project was initiated in the spring of 2013. The project was a collaborative effort between Institutional Planning and Assessment and Student and Enrolment Services Division.

In light of a diverse campus community at the University of Saskatchewan and past research highlighting the relationship between campus climate and outcomes for students, it was important to obtain a clear picture of students' experiences and perceptions of what it is like to attend the University of Saskatchewan. Results of the survey will assist with determining how to address identified issues and to build on our successes.



Who Participated?

- ✦ **21,027** students were invited to participate.
- ✦ **5,205** students completed the survey, representing a **25%** response rate.
- ✦ The survey sample was largely representative of the student population and represented the diversity of students at the U of S.

Description of Participants

Demographics	Categories	#	%
Gender	Female	2,682	62%
	Male	1,621	38%
Age (average = 24)	Under 20	1,044	24%
	20-25	2,238	52%
	26-40	891	21%
	Over 40	117	3%
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	3,579	92%
	Sexual Minority	310	8%
Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	3,050	70%
	Visible minority	914	21%
	Aboriginal	367	9%
Religious/Spiritual Affiliation	Non-affiliated	1,583	37%
	Christian	1,991	47%
	Other than Christian	702	16%
Political Views	Liberal/far left	1,596	38%
	Middle of the road	1,768	42%
	Conservative/far right	844	20%
Parental Status	No children	3,922	92%
	Children (under 18 yrs)	354	8%
Disability Status	No disability	3,502	87%
	Physical disability	187	5%
	Learning disability	159	4%
	Mental health condition	269	7%
International Student Status	Domestic student	3,875	89%
	International student	486	11%
Program Level	Undergraduate	3,595	82%
	Graduate	789	18%

The Survey

The Campus Climate Survey (CCS) was developed based on an extensive literature review of the topic and of campus climate surveys implemented at other post-secondary institutions.

The online survey included questions pertaining to five main areas:

- Overall campus climate (e.g., sense of belonging, institutional commitment to diversity, etc.)
- Campus experiences (e.g., witnessing/experiencing insensitive behaviour, exclusion, harassment and discrimination)
- Classroom experiences and interactions with staff/faculty
- Helpfulness of support services
- How to improve campus climate

The survey mainly included closed-ended questions but there were also many opportunities to provide additional comments.



Key Findings: Areas of Strength

1. Satisfied with overall campus climate

- 76% of students felt the U of S was committed to the issue of diversity and many partook in activities promoting diversity.
- The majority of students felt safe (71%) and comfortable (79%) on campus.
- 76% of students were satisfied with their academic experience and 80% were likely to recommend the university to others.

"I've been here for 7 years and I have seen incredible growth regarding inclusion, multicultural opportunities, and a proactive approach to diversity in and outside the classrooms."

"I can still remember my very first day at the U of S - it was the only place I had ever felt like I belonged. I still feel that way. It's my home and where the people I love to be around are."

2. Positive experiences in the classroom and interactions with staff and faculty

- 77% of undergraduates and 79% of graduate students reported they felt comfortable/very comfortable in the classroom.
- The majority of students felt they were treated fairly by staff (90%), professors (89%) and teaching assistants (84%).
- Undergraduates and graduate students had very positive experiences with their thesis advisors. For example, 88% felt that they were treated with respect by their thesis advisor.

3. Low incidence of experiencing negative behaviours on campus

- Very few students indicated they experienced harassment (6%), exclusion (11%), or discrimination (11%).
- A minority of students (15%) believed sexual harassment and sexual assault are a problem at the U of S.

4. Satisfaction with support services

- All student centres received a rating of 3.5 (out of 5) or higher, suggesting students were satisfied with the services they utilized.
- Of the other services asked about, library services received the highest rating (4.3 out of 5).



"[Name of professor] is an amazing person to have on campus. She is an excellent mentor and persistent in her efforts to make this campus a better place for Aboriginal students, both academically and otherwise."

"The climate of the program has always been sensitive toward diversity. The material we learn emphasizes being aware of potential discrimination or bias toward a person because of their race, sexuality, education, [socioeconomic status], etc. The professors always modeled acceptance and sensitivity."

"It is a pleasure working with my supervisor because he is extremely knowledgeable in my topic area and is renowned for his work, but also because he is a fair and kind man who respects me, other students and staff, and my work."

Key Findings: Areas for Improvement

1. Some students in minority groups had less positive experiences when compared to their counterparts, especially some Aboriginal students, other visible minority students, sexual minority students, and some students with a disability. On average, those indicating a mental health condition generally had fewer positive experiences than all other students.
 - 57% of those with a mental health condition reported they either considered leaving or did leave the U of S.
 - Those with a mental health condition and sexual minority students were twice as likely to report experiencing insensitive behaviour, exclusion, harassment and/or discrimination as compared to the overall survey population.
 - Negative behaviours were most often experienced and/or witnessed based on race/ethnicity and English language proficiency.
 - Those with a mental health condition were most likely to feel sexual harassment and sexual assault are issues at the U of S (27% and 28%, respectively).
 - Sexual minority students and those with a mental health condition were more likely to report having negative experiences in the classroom.

“People I know who have experienced discrimination or harassment have not known the process of reporting this behaviour and have not wanted to investigate for fear of being found out and being on the receiving end of reprisals.”

“Most insensitive behaviour that I have seen has been in jokes and language that people use. It almost seems as though people say such things without thought of how their words are affecting others.”

“...mental health concerns are still deeply stigmatized and students are not encouraged to discuss these matters when they are affecting their academic performance.”

“Faculty and Staff VERY often presume that an individual is heterosexual which is problematic. When one discovers an individual is not heterosexual, the typical response is “you’re gay...you don’t seem gay!” as if that somehow constitutes a compliment.”

2. Some students were unsure of where to go for help or were afraid of negative consequences if they reported an incident.
 - When asked how they reacted to negative behaviours, students most often ignored it or talked to a friend (45% to 54%). Very few indicated they reported the incident(s) (2% to 8%).
 - Just under half of students reported they would know where to go for help if they or a friend were sexually harassed or sexually assaulted.
 - Only 19% of students understood the U of S’s formal procedures for addressing complaints of sexual harassment or sexual assault.
 - Nearly one-third of students were unlikely to turn to their professors or staff for help with personal matters.

(continued)

Overall, the campus climate was perceived positively by most of the survey respondents.

However, it was also found that:

- some students in minority groups had less positive experiences
- some students were unsure of where to go for help or were afraid of negative consequences if they reported an incident
- feelings of reverse discrimination were expressed



3. **Feelings of reverse discrimination and special treatment of minority groups were expressed by some members of the majority group.**
- Additional comments were provided pertaining to the belief that minority groups receive additional supports and academic advantages.
 - Some participants felt they were victims of reverse discrimination on the basis of gender and ethnicity/race.

Key Findings: Enhancing Campus Climate

- From a list of five options, survey respondents were most likely to endorse providing diversity training for staff and faculty (59% agreed/strongly agreed) and least likely to endorse providing diversity training for students (47% agreed/strongly agreed).
- Other suggestions for enhancing campus climate centered around the university providing more opportunities to interact with other students, to better inform students of existing services and groups, and to provide additional supports.

“Have a multicultural week celebrating the diversity of all students at U of S. It can include fashion/talent show, dances, cultural displays, etc. from all ethnic clubs at the university. This was done at my previous university every year with great success promoting multiculturalism and was fun to watch.”

“Have a campus community club night where all clubs gather to show new and current students what groups they could belong to if they want. It would help others appreciate the diversity we see on campus.”

What’s Next?

In order to address the findings of the campus climate survey, the following steps are necessary:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of minority group students, paying particular attention to those with mental health conditions.
- Examine how the process of reporting incidents is communicated to students and address beliefs that reporting will lead to negative repercussions.
- Further examine the experiences of majority group members and help ensure reverse discrimination and the belief that minority group students receive special treatment are addressed.
- Develop a plan of action in relation to the identified issues.
- Continue implementing campus climate surveys to determine the success of initiatives and to identify emerging issues facing students.
- Include staff and faculty in future iterations of the campus climate survey.

To learn more about the Campus Climate Survey project and to view the full report visit:
http://www.usask.ca/ipa/assessment/campus_climate_survey/index.php