

University of Wisconsin at La Crosse Student Campus Climate Survey Report

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Summary

In the Fall of 2004, UW-L conducted a "Campus Climate Survey" of 8832 undergraduate and graduate students via an email survey. The survey yielded a 29.7% response rate for a final sample of 2630. Of those respondents, 25.4% were men, 73.5% women; 5.19 % identified as members of races other than white, 9.0% preferred not to identify their race.

Four broad areas of concern were identified: students' experience of dangerous situations, retention, communication, and the university's record on diversity. An area of interest is civility. In addition, data representing the experiences of disadvantaged groups and particular concerns for students with disabilities are discussed. The process for distributing the survey's results is also discussed.

Background

In the fall of 2004, UW-L conducted a "Campus Climate Survey" of all students, including undergraduates and graduate students. The survey originated from Chancellor Hastad's charge to the Women's Advisory Council and from Dean John Magerus' charge to the College of Liberal Studies Diversity Committee to study the campus climate through a survey. Dr. Deb Hoskins, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Ms. Sharie Brunk, Academic Advising Center, and Dr. Sara Sullivan, Psychology Department, co-chaired a committee that united the two charges and developed the survey.

In a recent report to the Board of Regents on Plan 2008, "Briefing Paper: Campus Climate as a Factor in Student Retention," the University of Wisconsin System Office of Multicultural Affairs provided this definition of "campus climate":

"'Campus climate' may be viewed as an amalgamation of the collective characteristics of an institution that affect the behavior, academic, and professional performance of individuals and the community (Wells, 2000). In less formal terms, campus climate is a complex set of factors that determine a student's relationship to the institution in social and academic terms. It plays a crucial role in determining whether the student experience is successful, and whether the student is retained and graduated."¹

The UW-L questionnaire focused on overall inclusiveness, campus environment, trust and respect, and communication, reasons to consider leaving UW-L, experiences of dangerous situations, and perceptions and experiences of discrimination both on and off campus. The committee chose questions that would supplement, rather than repeat, results from UW-L's participation in the National Student Survey on Engagement.

Method

In the fall of 2004, UW-System's Market Research sent a link to an on-line campus climate survey to 8832 undergraduates and graduate students, and collected the anonymous responses. The response rate to this survey was 29.7%, for a final sample of 2630. Survey researchers consider response rates of 30% "good." The email survey was chosen for budgetary reasons. Of those respondents, 25.4% were men, 73.5% women; 5.19 % identified as members of races other than white, 9.0% preferred not to identify their race; 93.7% were undergraduates, 6.3% were graduate students; 26.4% were first-year,

20.8% were second-year, 19.0% were third-year, 19.6% were fourth-year, and 14.3% were fifth-year or beyond; 96.2% were full-time students, 3.8% part-time; 43.4% live in a residence hall, 48.5% in an off-campus rental unit, and 8.2% live at home.²

The survey included attitude questions assessing student experiences of the university and the community to which participants responded with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” A sample question reads “UW-L is committed to educating students to function well in an increasingly diverse society and workplace.” Other questions aimed at the experience and consequences of climate issues. Participants indicated whether they had considered leaving UW-L and indicated their reasons for such consideration, whether they had been in a dangerous situation and if so where, indicated whether they had experienced other kinds of climate issues over the past year (such as “Had your contributions belittled or not taken seriously”) and if so, what about them they thought was being targeted, and with whom they discussed the incident. Participants indicated the extent of their coursework on diversity issues and whether their attitudes on various groups had changed since arriving at UW-L. Finally, participants provided demographic information. Two open-ended questions solicited suggestions to improve the campus climate. Four-hundred-ninety-five respondents commented on the first question, on historically-excluded populations, for a response rate of 18.9%. Four-hundred-twenty respondents commented on the second question, on the individual’s own situation, for a response rate of 16.0%. Questions 1a-d, 2 a-e, 3a-f, and 4a-d were chosen in order to parallel the Faculty/Staff Campus Climate Survey conducted in the spring semester of 2004.

Analysis

System Market Research conducted the initial analysis, comprised of descriptive statistics indicating the percent of the participants selecting each response option per item. For instance, in response to the question “UW-L is committed to educating students to function well in an increasingly diverse society and workplace,” 2% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 9% disagreed, 14% were neutral, 48% agreed, 9% strongly agreed, and an additional 18% were “unsure or unable to judge.” The System Market Research report is attached.

In order to identify the areas of concern, two criteria were established. The first was to pay attention to legally significant issues, such as the physical safety of students and the university’s compliance with laws such as the Americans With Disabilities Act. On other issues, this report adopts the 10% rule traditionally employed by survey researchers: 10% of a population needs to mention a topic (in response to open-ended questions) to justify pursuing additional analyses. This report considers any survey question problematic if System Market Research’s report indicated that at least 10% of the sample responded negatively. On most items, negative response was defined as indicating an attitude of “disagree” or “strongly disagree” to an attitudinal item or selecting “yes” to a question about experiences. Although the standard of 10% could be debated, it is merely a device to identify the most problematic areas.

In addition, the raw data, excluding the responses to the open-ended questions, were provided to Dr. Carmen Wilson, Dept. of Psychology, who conducted additional analyses to identify differences among subgroups. The primary analyses consisted of analysis of variance (ANOVA - a statistical test that assesses differences on an interval level variable between two or more independent groups by comparing the means and standard deviation of each group). In addition, if differences among three or more groups were found, a statistical test was performed to indicate which groups differed significantly from one another (Student-Newman-Keuls). Dr. Wilson’s results are attached.

Ms. Sharie Brunk analyzed the written responses to the survey’s two open-ended questions by identifying common themes. Where applicable, results from the open-ended questions are provided along with the statistical analyses. Ms. Brunk’s common themes are also attached.

Results and Discussion

Using the 10% standard described above, four major themes arose as areas of concern for students in general: dangerous situations, retention, communication, and the university's record on diversity. An area of interest is civility. Each area is discussed separately below.

The experiences of historically-disadvantaged populations (including students of color, LGBT students, and students with documented disabilities) constitute another set of concerns for the university.

Finally, students with significant disabilities may be an additional area of concern.

The instrument can be viewed at www.uwlax.edu/aadc.

Dangerous situations:

13% of participants reported having found themselves in a "dangerous situation." 15% reported having feared for their personal safety. Parties, apparently predominantly off-campus, were the most likely location for the former experience (selected by 55% of those indicating they had been in a dangerous situation), but students flagged other locations as well, both off campus and on. Participants could select more than one location in response to this question.

A set of questions asking about off-campus experiences indicate that physical safety was the most important issue, with 21% indicating that they had feared for their personal safety at least once. Actual assaults off-campus are rarer but more serious: 3% reported having been physically assaulted or injured, 4% reported having been sexually assaulted. Between 10% and 15% of respondents had experienced some other kind of incident off-campus, such as "received hostile or threatening comments or gestures" or "been the target of offensive humor." Of those who had experienced an incident off-campus, 54% indicated that their sex had been the target, 37% indicated their appearance, 23% their age, 19% their body size, 12% their politics, and 10% their race, ethnicity, or skin color. The most likely places for these incidents were on the streets (53%), at a retail establishment (46%), or in a private home (28%).

Subgroup analyses (question 6 on the survey asked if respondent had found him/herself in a dangerous situation)

Sexual orientation made no difference.

Race made no difference.

Gender made no difference.

Respondents with a disability were more likely to have found themselves in a dangerous situation than those who had no disability.

Written comments suggested improving the lighting on campus and in the neighborhoods near campus.

Retention:

Although most respondents appear to be happy at, or at least adjusted to, UW-L, 33.4% have considered leaving. Of those, 32% were very or extremely seriously about it, and an additional 31% were moderately serious. Those who have considered leaving were asked to indicate their reasons; participants could select more than one response.

For some, UW-L itself has been a factor, including such issues as "UW-L does not have the major I wanted" (22%) and "My advising on course selection was inadequate" (16%). A substantial number of students indicated that the university's lack of diversity entered into their thinking. Thus, 23% selected "UW-L lacks the diverse student presence that I want from my college experience," 17% selected "UW-L lacks the diverse campus environment that supports my lifestyle, values, and choices," 12% were "uncomfortable participating in some of my classes," 10% selected "UW-L lacks the diverse faculty that I want from my college experience," and 9% selected "UW-L lacks the diverse staff that I want from my college experience."

Respondents also indicated a range of personal issues contributing their consideration of leaving. 29% thought that a "school closer to home might be more comfortable," 19% were "unable to establish friendships," 19% indicated that "personal problems" had contributed, 14% reported inadequate finances

and 12% unstable finances, 12% could not decide on a major, 12% experienced conflict with a roommate, 11% reported that their GPA had dropped, 9% had trouble “juggling work and school.” A substantial proportion chose “other” (23%) and provided a written response; most of the comments on this question described a personal problem.

Subgroup analyses (question 5 on the survey asked respondents if they had considered leaving UW-L)

Those who identified as non-heterosexual were more likely than those who identified as heterosexual to have considered leaving UW-L

Those who identified as of color were more likely than those who identified as white to have considered leaving UW-L

No significant differences appeared on gender.

Those who identified as having a disability were more likely than those who identified as without a disability to have considered leaving UW-L

Written comments

The written comments in this section often explained how students dealt with personal problems, usually either by simply waiting them out (ie, homesickness) or by talking them through (usually with a parent or a friend).

Several students identified particular staff or faculty who had helped them address a problem with UW-L.

Communication

Since not knowing where to find assistance for a problem is a disincentive to seek assistance (albeit only one), students’ knowledge about available services is a common area of inquiry in campus climate surveys. Not knowing how to find information about the available services is an additional communication problem.

While most UW-L respondents feel free from harassment at UW-L, 43% did not know or were unsure “where to find information on discrimination and harassment policies and reporting procedures.” 35% would not or were unsure that they would report discrimination or harassment that they witnessed or experienced. At least 50% of survey respondents indicated that they “would not hesitate” to seek accommodations if they developed a disability. Yet 40% either did not know or were unsure where to go to inquire about disability accommodations, and 31% would not or were unsure whether they would seek accommodation for a disability that affects their ability to function.

Respondents indicating that they had experienced an incident on campus also reported discussing the situation with a university employee far less often than with friends or parents. Respondents discussed situations with peers first, with parents next, and with university staff last. This could be a function of the severity of the problem – e.g. university staff are the last resort and reserved for issues that cannot be resolved via other means – but it could also result from students not knowing what kind of help they can request or how to request it. This issue needs further study.

Subgroup analyses (questions 4 a-d on the survey measured perceptions of communication about university policies)

None of the subgroups analyzed were significantly different from each other in their perceptions of communication.

Written comments

Civility issues were raised in many comments and wrapped around either electoral politics or around religious stances on LGBT populations or gay marriage.

Some comments make it clear that students may not be able to distinguish between discrimination or harassment on the one hand and insensitivity or incivility on the other.

Civility

Respondents did not flag Issues of trust and respect between students and staff (questions 3a-f in the survey) as an area of concern using the 10% standard. However, an area to monitor in informal on-campus interaction that emerges from other survey questions and from written comments can be characterized as civility. The issue emerges from responses to questions about incidents that may not necessarily reach the level of discrimination or harassment, such as a single negative comment on a person's appearance or body size, or an angry reaction to an individual's expression of religious or political views.

Incidents of incivility appear in the written comments perhaps more than any other issue, sometimes asserting discrimination. Respondents who had indicated experiencing one or more incidents were asked why they thought they had been targeted. The top target categories most often selected by respondents were appearance (27%), politics (20%), age (18%), body size (18%), and religious beliefs (15%).

The university's record on diversity

In general, a substantial minority of participants view the exploration and study of social and cultural differences as an important aspect of a university's mission, and they are concerned about how well UW-L serves that mission. As noted under "Retention," the proportion of respondents who indicated that they had considered leaving UW-L because it lacks diversity among, especially, students and faculty indicates the seriousness of this issue for participants. Concern over UW-L's record on diversity arises elsewhere in the survey as well. 29% either disagreed that the university was "committed to educating students for a diverse society and workplace" or were unsure or unable to judge this commitment. Only 9% strongly agreed that the university was committed. 20% did not agree that administrators "vigorously promote diversity on campus." 56% agreed that the university should increase access for persons with disabilities, 54% agreed that the university should "have more art, music and cultural events that recognize distinctive cultures," 49% agreed that the university should "make a greater effort to increase the numbers of minority students, staff, and faculty," and 43% agreed that "the university should allocate more resources toward addressing diversity issues."

The review of diversity content in courses indicated that a significant proportion of respondents had not studied several diversity issues even as a unit in a course (unweighted for year at UW-L). The proportion of respondents indicating "not at all" by topic area were particularly high (over 40%) on the elderly and aging (47%), disability issues (46%), views of non-Christians (44%), and sexual orientation (42%). The lowest proportion responding "not at all" was on race (19%). On international topics, 62% reported never having studied outside the US, and 58% reported never having studied a language other than English (unweighted for international students or students whose first language is not English).

Overall, respondents reported either no change in their comfort level or feeling more comfortable around every group listed. 10% or more of respondents reported feeling less comfortable with two groups: socially conservative people (10%) and rich people (11%). Academic assessment is needed to determine levels of performance on specific learning outcomes relevant to education about human differences and social systems, but 20% of respondents disagreed that "UW-L's curriculum adequately reflects the lives, perceptions, and contributions of diverse peoples," and 36% agreed that UW-L should "add additional diversity course requirements."

Subgroup analyses (questions 1 a-d on the survey = inclusiveness; question 11 a-g on the survey = diversity emphasis)

Respondents who identified as non-heterosexual or preferred not to identify saw UW-L as less inclusive than those who identified as heterosexual. Respondents who identified as non-heterosexual saw a greater need for emphasis on diversity than those who identified as heterosexual or who preferred not to identify.

Respondents who identified as a person of color saw UW-L as less inclusive than those who identified as white or who preferred not to identify. Respondents who identified as a person of color saw a greater need for emphasis on diversity than those who identified as white or who preferred not to identify.

Respondents who identified as transgendered, intersex, or preferred not to identify saw UW-L as less inclusive than those who identified as either male or female. Respondents who

identified as transgendered, intersex, or preferred not to identify saw a greater need for emphasis on diversity than those who identified as male. Those who identified as female fell between the other two groups.

Respondents with a disability saw UW-L as less inclusive than those without a disability.

Respondents with a disability were no more likely to see a greater need for emphasis on diversity than those without a disability.

Written comments

Written comments support the substantial desire of respondents for a more diverse student body and faculty.

Upper-level administrators came in for some criticism on communication about diversity at UW-L.

By far, most respondents who commented on how to improve the campus climate for historically-disadvantaged populations argued that “educating people” was the key.

A prominent pattern in the suggestions for how to educate cast members of historically-excluded populations in roles as servants to the majority population, for example by asking them to serve on panels in classes or to organize special events on campus.

Most other comments advocating education focused on curriculum. While some comments praised the course that the largest number of students take for General Education in the Minority Cultures or Multiracial Women’s Studies category, by far more comments suggested improving that course, either in terms of format, content, approach, or all three.

Some students are unaware that General Education currently requires one course in Minority Cultures or Multiracial Women’s Studies.

Many comments suggested requiring additional courses on other aspects of human diversity.

Some comments argued that religious organizations were very aggressive in their opposition to some groups, especially gays and lesbians and that this created a hostile environment.

Some comments argued that nothing more was needed for historically-underserved groups.

Experiences of historically-disadvantaged populations:

In addition to the differences in perceptions discussed in the sub-group analyses above, respondents from historically-disadvantaged populations were often more likely to have been a target of discrimination, harassment, or insensitivity both on and off campus than were other respondents. Respondents who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer were more likely to have been a target (both on and off campus) than were respondents who identified as heterosexual or who preferred not to answer. Respondents who identified as a person of color were most likely to have been a target, those who preferred not to identify on race were in the middle, and those who identified as white were least likely, both on and off campus. Gender was not significant for either on- or off-campus experiences.

Of those who reported an incident of harassment, discrimination, or insensitivity, 67% of those indicated that the incident came from another student, while 19% indicated that it came from a faculty member.

Subgroup analyses (questions 2 a-e on the survey measured perceptions of the campus environment; questions 7a-q on the survey measured experience of discrimination, harassment, or insensitivity on campus; 8a-h measured experience of discrimination, harassment, or insensitivity off campus)

Respondents who identified as non-heterosexual viewed UW-L as less hospitable to them than those who identified as heterosexual or preferred not to identify. Respondents who identified as non-heterosexual were more likely to have experienced discrimination, harassment, or insensitivity both on and off campus than those who identified as heterosexual or preferred not to identify.

Respondents who identified as a person of color viewed UW-L as less hospitable to them than those who identified as white or preferred not to identify. Both on and off campus, respondents who identified as a person of color were the most likely to have experienced discrimination, harassment, or insensitivity; those who preferred not to identify were the next most likely; those who identified as white were the least likely.

Respondents who identified as transgendered, intersex, or preferred not to identify viewed UW-L as less hospitable to them than those who identified as male or female. Gender made no significant difference in the likelihood of experiencing discrimination, harassment, or insensitivity either on or off campus.

Respondents with a disability viewed UW-L as less hospitable to them than those without a disability. Respondents with a disability were more likely to have experienced discrimination, harassment, or insensitivity both on and off campus than those without a disability.

Written Comments

The most prominent comment in this area related to the role of student organizations on campus. Several comments indicated that the Diversity Organizations Coalition group needed better support but was the best avenue for students to work on issues. Several comments indicated that some student religious organizations caused them extreme discomfort.

A reasonable inference to draw from the written comments is that students are far more concerned with the issues they face on campus than in the community.

Students with significant disabilities

The survey inquired about disabilities that affect a students' ability to function at UW-L, and also asked whether students had documented a disability with Disability Resource Services. The largest area of concern is psychological issues, with 3% of respondents indicating that they have been affected.

Another area of concern is the difference between those who have documented the disability with the university's services agent (2.4%), and the numbers who indicated an effect. Because respondents could mark more than one item on this list, further study is needed to determine the extent to which students who have a disability receive the services that allow them to function.

Respondents with every kind of disability had not documented their disability with Disability Resource Services, but of particular concern are students with a psychological disability, and students with a learning disability. While other disabilities might be controlled by medication or be temporary in nature, this population needs additional study.

Campus Climate Assessment Process

The intent of the survey designers was to devise an instrument that could be administered every four years as a means of monitoring change and/or new initiatives. This survey thus provides a baseline of information. The recent creation of the Academic Advising Center, completed after the survey was administered, is one example of change that can be monitored through a survey.

A copy of this report and the appendices will be provided to the Chancellor, the Dean of CLS, the Provost, and the Affirmative Action and Diversity officer. Two business days after, it will go to the charged committees (Women's Advisory Council and CLS Diversity Committee) as well as to Affirmative Action and Diversity Council (AADC), the membership of which draws broadly from across the campus and thus functions as a clearinghouse of information and collaboration on diversity issues, broadly defined. AADC will host an initial discussion of the results with its Advisory Board at a meeting on May 20th. Also at that time, the report and appendices will be posted on the AADC website (www.uwlax.edu/aadc), and the campus will be notified of their availability. A second announcement will go to students again at the beginning of the fall semester, 2005.

AADC will review this report, coordinate work on particular issues with the Campus Climate Coordinator and other appropriate groups and offices, including student organizations, and collaborate with other appropriate groups and coordinators. Other initiatives to address other issues should come from other sectors of the campus.

¹ The Briefing Paper and the Plan 2008 Report were reported to the Board of Regents, Oct. 2001, University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire. These definitions appear on p. 4 of the Briefing Report. See <http://www.uwsa.edu/bor/agenda/2001/october.pdf>

² The following chart describes UW-L's student population on the Official Day of Record (10th day of classes) for Fall 2004. The survey was conducted after this date.

Student Classification		Freshman	Sophomores	Juniors	Seniors	Total Regular Undergrads	Special Undergrads	Total All Undergrads	Graduate Students	Total All Students	
All Students		Count	2036	1756	1561	2261	7614	230	7844	1192	9036
By Gender	Female	Count	1187	1074	909	1388	4558	131	4689	784	5473
		Percent of Total	58.3%	61.2%	58.2%	61.4%	59.9%	57.0%	59.8%	65.8%	60.6%
	Male	Count	849	682	652	873	3056	99	3155	408	3563
		Percent of Total	41.7%	38.8%	41.8%	38.6%	40.1%	43.0%	40.2%	34.2%	39.4%
By Ethnicity	Undeclared	Count	27	4	11	12	54	8	62	29	91
		Percent of Total	1.3%	0.2%	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%	3.5%	0.8%	2.4%	1.0%
	White	Count	1834	1633	1469	2130	7066	162	7228	1100	8328
		Percent of Total	90.1%	93.0%	94.1%	94.2%	92.8%	70.4%	92.1%	92.3%	92.2%
	African American	Count	24	10	13	16	63	5	68	7	75
		Percent of Total	1.2%	0.6%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%	2.2%	0.9%	0.6%	0.8%
	Native American	Count	9	19	9	10	47	2	49	5	54
		Percent of Total	0.4%	1.1%	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%
	Asian Pacific Islander	Count	47	21	17	27	112	7	119	14	133
		Percent of Total	2.3%	1.2%	1.1%	1.2%	1.5%	3.0%	1.5%	1.2%	1.5%
	Hispanic	Count	34	29	18	32	113	2	115	8	123
		Percent of Total	1.7%	1.7%	1.2%	1.4%	1.5%	0.9%	1.5%	0.7%	1.4%
	Southeast Asian	Count	40	22	16	28	106	0	106	2	108
		Percent of Total	2.0%	1.3%	1.0%	1.2%	1.4%	0.0%	1.4%	0.2%	1.2%
	International	Count	21	18	8	6	53	44	97	27	124
		Percent of Total	1.0%	1.0%	0.5%	0.3%	0.7%	19.1%	1.2%	2.3%	1.4%
By Traditional/Non-Traditional Status (Undergrads Only)	Traditional Undergraduate	Count	2012	1688	1493	2056	7249	84	7333		7333
		Percent of Total	98.8%	96.1%	95.6%	90.9%	95.2%	36.5%	93.5%		81.2%
	Non-Traditional Undergraduate	Count	24	68	68	205	365	146	511		511
		Percent of Total	1.2%	3.9%	4.4%	9.1%	4.8%	63.5%	6.5%		5.7%
By Regular/Continuing Ed Status (Graduates Only)	Continuing Education Student	Count								524	524
		Percent of Total								44.0%	5.8%
	Regular Student	Count								668	668
		Percent of Total								56.0%	7.4%

Thanks to Ms. Teri Thill for these data.