



AN ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS

OVW Interview with Dr. Felicia E. McGinty, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Rutgers University

Why did your institution decide to conduct a campus climate survey?

In 2013, the Title IX Coordinator and the Director of Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance approached the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs to discuss conducting a climate survey. Our goal was to improve the response process and access to resources for students who experience sexual violence. We knew that we had a good process in place to respond to reports of sexual violence, and that we had many resources available for students, but we also knew that students were not necessarily reporting to the university or using our formal process when sexual assault occurred. We hoped that a climate survey could help us understand what students knew and didn't know about making reports and accessing resources at the University, and also help us to identify ways to improve these processes and services for our students. We reached out to faculty with expertise in this area to develop a proposal for the survey, which became the framework for the survey we conducted.

Did anything about the survey results surprise you?

Many of our results were similar to those at other institutions and were not necessarily a surprise to those who have worked in this field for many years. However, certain results were notable, such as finding that 1 in 4 undergraduate females reported experiencing sexual violence before coming to Rutgers, and that students who identified as part of the LGBTQ community were twice as likely to be victims of sexual violence. We also uncovered that most survivors who did tell someone about sexual violence told a friend. Additionally, we learned that a majority of students who took the survey did not know what resources are available to victims of sexual violence or how to report an incident to the University, but they wanted to learn more. We have used, and will continue to use, all of this information to enhance services for students and improve our methods of sharing information.

Did you engage with student advocates during any part of the campus climate survey process? How so?

Yes, student advocates were integrally involved in the planning, development, and promotion of the survey instrument, and also participated in focus groups. The research team that led the climate survey project met with student leaders and advocates to discuss the purpose and implementation of the survey and sought feedback from those groups throughout the survey process.

How would you describe the value that student advocates brought to the process?

Student involvement was invaluable to the process. We offered some incentives, but students embraced the project and created their own social media campaign to promote the climate survey. The videos they created were posted on YouTube and shared on Twitter and Facebook. Endorsement from student leaders added to the legitimacy and credibility of the survey for students and helped increase participation rates in the survey and in focus groups.

If you were a student who wanted to advocate for your institution to conduct a campus climate survey, what would your first steps be?

Students should first reach out to advocates at other schools to find out what, if any, role they played in lobbying for a campus climate survey at their school, and ask those advocates for advice. Also, they should thoroughly research the value and purpose of climate surveys, different options and methods for conducting surveys, and the results that other schools have achieved in conducting surveys, so that they can be well-educated on the topic before approaching school officials. Lastly, they should seek out professionals at their own institution, such as the Title IX Coordinator, victim advocates, and other staff whose daily work is focused on sexual violence or related issues. These staff and administrators can serve as important allies, can provide insight and guidance, and will likely have similar goals to student advocates with respect to conducting a climate survey.

What would your advice be to a student advocate who wanted to know how to most effectively engage with administrators on this issue?

Thoroughly research and educate yourself on the topic so you can present real information to administration on the benefits of doing a climate survey. Talk to them about how the information collected can help the entire campus community, including students, staff and faculty. Let them know the survey is not an opportunity to just talk about what is wrong but an opportunity to gain real insight into the community and a challenge to make things better. If possible, provide examples of cost-effective tools that other schools have used to successfully conduct surveys, and offer meaningful examples of how students can help with the survey process.

Did your institution change any of its institutional responses to campus sexual assault as a result of the survey?

Absolutely. We already had in place robust and comprehensive prevention and response programs, but the information gained from the climate survey allowed us to pinpoint opportunities to enhance and provide broader access to these programs. We created an action plan to address the five key findings from our climate assessment. This included, in part: designing and launching a centralized website (endsexualviolence.rutgers.edu); creating public service announcements with involvement from school officials and student leaders; launching new training programs for students, staff and faculty; designing and disseminating resource brochures to every on-campus resident, and to staff and faculty and local off-campus students; widely promoting the University's Student Policy on Sexual Misconduct; hiring additional staff to focus on men's engagement; enhancing counseling support for survivors; and engaging all departments within the division of student affairs in a year-long campaign to raise

awareness and develop programs related to sexual violence. We are now working on initiatives for next year to continue the work we started this year.

Is there any other advice you would give to students?

Despite what is often highlighted in the media, most colleges and universities want to do right by their students. Student advocates should frame the issue for staff and administrators – particularly those working within student affairs – that the outcome of the climate survey will help students. If student advocates approach the issue as an opportunity for collaboration with staff and administrators, rather than as an adversarial situation, they will get more support.