

Social Climate Survey shows many positives, some room for improvement ^[1]

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By Jay Dedrick | *CU system*

The University of Colorado has a tolerant, respectful social climate, according to a recent systemwide survey requested by the Board of Regents, though some areas present opportunities for improvement.

The board was presented with the Social Climate Survey results on Thursday, June 26, during the first day of a two-day meeting at CU Denver on the Auraria Campus.

McLaughlin & Associates conducted the survey in April and May, and provided a summary presentation of results at the meeting. John McLaughlin provided an overview.

“In looking at this environment of respect you’re creating, you’re doing pretty well across the board, but you have some areas with room for improvement,” McLaughlin told the board.

The report’s executive summary indicated that the survey was successful, with 9,301 total respondents, representing more than 12 percent of the CU community (1,984 faculty, or 13 percent; 2,247 staff, or 28 percent; and 5,070 students, or 10 percent).

Across the campuses, the majority believe CU promotes on-campus environments that respect students, faculty members and staff. Students were most in agreement, with 82 percent indicating that belief, followed by faculty (75 percent) and staff (74 percent).

Among the key positive findings:

Respect on campus: Most students, faculty and staff that reported that CU promotes an environment of respect regardless of social identity.

Respect within units: The majority of students, faculty and staff reported that their particular academic or work unit promotes an environment of respect regardless of social identity.

Diversity of population: Survey results demonstrated broad ranges of diversity across many social identities, including race and ethnicity, age, religious affiliation, gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation and political philosophy.

Among the findings that identify areas with room for improvement:

Perceived prejudice and discrimination: The overwhelming majority of the CU community reported that they have not been subject to prejudice or discrimination, though “significant numbers of respondents reported that they have experienced prejudice or discrimination ‘sometimes’ or ‘frequently.’”

Bases of prejudice and discrimination: Among those who reported they had experienced some time of prejudice or discrimination, the types of discrimination varied. Students indicated gender (34 percent) and religion (32 percent) most; faculty responded gender (48 percent) and age (33 percent) most; staff responded age (44 percent) and gender (41 percent) most.

Political affiliation and political philosophy: CU is unique in recognizing political affiliation and political philosophy as protected characteristics under the Laws of the Regents, McLaughlin said.

“Although in the minority, significant numbers of students, faculty, and staff, particularly students on the Boulder campus, disagreed with the premise that they are respected regardless of their political affiliations and political philosophies,” the summary reports.

Knowledge of complaint mechanisms: On average, 61 percent of students across all campuses indicated they would not know how to make a complaint of discrimination.

McLaughlin said this first survey of its kind establishes valuable benchmarks that can be used for comparison in the future. Potential follow-up questions might address who engages in prejudicial or discriminatory conduct, where the conduct occurs and what constitutes such conduct.

“This provides us a baseline – that’s what’s really important,” said Regent Irene Griego, D-Lakewood. “This survey gives a message to our entire community that we care about these areas.”

The board is recommending that CU conduct a Social Climate Survey every two years to track progress over time.

Said Regent James Geddes, R-Sedalia, “I’m glad to see how responsible our faculty has been with their conduct in the classroom and with their students. That’s a real feather in the cap of this university.”

Geddes asked for figures on the political affiliation reported by faculty; across the system, McLaughlin said, 42 percent of faculty self-identified as Democrats, 9 percent as Republicans.

With the survey complete, the board now is asking the campuses and system administration to analyze the data and report on any efforts being made to address findings of concern. In the executive summary, the Board of Regents encourages the campuses to share the data with campus constituents and to invite discussion on how to improve the campus culture and how to increase diversity in all forms.

The summary also lists several points of contact for the reporting of instances of discrimination and prejudice. “The Board of Regents encourages any member of the University of Colorado community who has experienced prejudice or discrimination in an educational or employment setting to report their experience to the officials charged with

investigating these allegations. There are also counseling services and other resources available to members of the University of Colorado community.”

The Social Climate Survey originated last September with a regent resolution, which passed unanimously. While surveys have been conducted previously on campuses, this was the first to measure progress on a systemwide basis.

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