Executive Summary

College campuses are complex social systems. They are defined by the relationships between faculty, staff, students, and alumni; bureaucratic procedures embodied by institutional policies; structural frameworks; institutional missions, visions, and core values; institutional history and traditions; and larger social contexts (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, Alma, & Allen, 1998).

Institutional missions suggest that higher education values multicultural awareness and understanding within an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Academic communities expend a great deal of effort fostering climates that nurture their missions with the understanding that climate has a profound effect on the academic community’s ability to excel in teaching, research, and scholarship. Institutional strategic plans advocate creating welcoming and inclusive climates that are grounded in respect, nurtured by dialogue, and evidenced by a pattern of civil interaction.

The climate on college campuses not only affects the creation of knowledge, but also affects members of the academic community who, in turn, contribute to the creation of the campus climate. Several national education association reports and higher education researchers advocate creating a more inclusive, welcoming climate on college campuses (Boyer, 1990; AAC&U, 1995; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Ingle, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

The University of Wisconsin System has a long history of supporting diversity initiatives¹ as evidenced by the System’s support and commitment to this climate assessment project. In 2005, a taskforce committee of the UW System Inclusivity Initiative was formed to search for consulting firms that conduct climate assessments in higher education. Rankin & Associates (R&A) was identified as leader in conducting multiple identity studies in higher education. In 2006, R&A presented a proposal to the UW System Provosts and various constituent groups, which resulted in the formation by UW System administrators of the Climate Study Working

¹ For more information on UW System diversity initiatives see http://www.uwsa.edu/vpacad/diversity.htm
Group (CSWG)\(^2\) and subsequent contract with R&A to facilitate a System-wide climate assessment.

Because of the inherent complexity of the topic of diversity, it is crucial to examine the multiple dimensions of diversity in higher education. The conceptual model used as the foundation for this assessment of campus climate was developed by Smith (1999) and modified by Rankin (2002).

Fact-finding groups were held in September 2007 to discuss with University of Wisconsin System students, staff, and faculty their perceptions of their campus climate. Informed by these fact-finding groups and by previous work of R&A, the CSWG developed the final survey instrument template that would be administered to the five participating institutions in spring 2008.

UW-River Falls was one of the four UW System institutions participating in the climate project in fall 2009. A Diversity Leadership Committee (DLC) was created at UW-River Falls to assist in coordinating the survey effort on campus. The DLC reviewed the survey template and revised the instrument to better match the campus context at UW-River Falls. The final survey contained 93 questions, including open-ended questions for respondents to provide commentary. This report provides an overview of the findings of the UW-River Falls campus-specific assessment, including the results of the campus-wide survey and a thematic analysis of comments provided by survey respondents.

All members of the campus community (e.g., students, faculty, academic staff, and classified staff) were invited to participate in the survey. The survey was designed for respondents to provide information about their personal experiences with regard to climate issues, their perceptions of the campus climate, student and employee satisfaction, and respondents' perceptions of institutional actions, including administrative policies and academic initiatives.

\(^2\) The CSWG included 2 representatives from each of the five participating institutions. The Provost from each institution was requested to appoint the two representatives.
regarding climate issues and concerns on campus. A summary of the findings, presented in bullet form below, suggests that while the UW-River Falls has several challenges with regard to diversity issues, these challenges are found in higher education institutions across the country.3

Sample Demographics

2,290 surveys were returned representing the following:

- 31% response rate
- 1,722 (75%) undergraduate students, 89 (4%) graduate students, 176 (8%) faculty, 125 (5%) academic staff, and 127 (6%) classified staff
- 164 (7%) People of Color;4 2,073 (93%) White respondents
- 40 people (2%) who identified as having a physical disability
- 52 people (2%) who identified as having a learning disability
- 53 people (2%) who identified as having a psychological condition
- 129 people (6%) who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer; 18 (1%) who were questioning their sexuality; 2,096 (93%) who identified as heterosexual
- 1,518 (67%) women; 741 (33%) men; 9 (>1%) transgender5
- 688 people (31%) who identified their spiritual affiliation as other than Christian (including those with no affiliation)

---


4 While recognizing the vastly different experiences of people of various racial identities (e.g., Chicano(a) versus African-American or Latino(a) versus Asian-American), and those experiences within these identity categories (e.g., Hmong versus Chinese), Rankin and Associates found it necessary to collapse some of these categories to conduct the analyses due to the small numbers of respondents in the individual categories.

Quantitative Findings

Personal Experiences with Campus Climate\(^6\)

- Some of respondents believed\(^7\) they had personally experienced offensive, hostile, exclusionary, or intimidating conduct that interfered unreasonably with their ability to work or learn on campus (hereafter referred to as harassment)\(^8\) within the past two years. University status\(^9\) was most often cited as the reason given for the perceived harassment. People of Color and sexual minorities\(^10\) perceived such harassment more often than White people and heterosexual respondents, and many of them felt it was due to their race or sexual orientation. Perceived harassment largely went unreported.

  - 17\% (n = 381) of respondents believed they had personally experienced offensive, hostile, exclusionary, or intimidating conduct that interfered unreasonably with their ability to work or learn on campus. The percentage of respondents experiencing harassment at UW-River Falls is lower than the percentage of respondents who experienced harassment in studies of other institutions.\(^{11}\)
  - The perceived conduct was most often based on the respondents’ their university status (30\%, n = 116), gender (26\%, n = 100), age (22\%, n = 83), and educational level (17\%, n = 65).
  - Compared with 15\% (n = 316) of White people, 31\% (n = 51) of People of Color believed they had personally experienced such conduct.
  - Of Respondents of Color who reported experiencing this conduct, 49\% (n = 25) stated it was because of their race.
  - Compared with 16\% (n = 121) of men, 17\% (n = 256) of women respondents believed they had personally experienced such conduct.
  - Of the women who believed they had experienced this conduct, 32\% (n = 81) stated it was because of their gender.

---

\(^6\) Listings in the narrative are those responses with the greatest percentages. For a complete listing of the results, the reader is directed to the tables in the narrative and Appendix B.

\(^7\) The modifier “believe(d)” is used throughout the report to indicate the respondents’ perceived experiences. This modifier is not meant in any way to diminish those experiences.

\(^8\) Under the United States Code Title 18 Subsection 1514(c)1, harassment is defined as "a course of conduct directed at a specific person that causes substantial emotional distress in such a person and serves no legitimate purpose" (http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/vii.html). In higher education institutions, legal issues discussions define harassment as any conduct that has unreasonably interfered with one’s ability to work or learn on campus. The questions used in this survey to uncover participants’ personal and observed experiences with harassment were designed using these definitions.

\(^9\) University status was defined in the questionnaire as “Within the institution, the status one holds by virtue of their position/status within the institution (e.g., staff, full-time faculty, part-time faculty, administrator).”

\(^10\) Sexual minorities are defined, for the purposes of this report, as people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

\(^11\) Rankin’s (2003) national assessment of climate for underrepresented groups where 25\% (n = 3767) of respondents indicated personally experiencing harassment based mostly on their race (31\%), their gender (55\%), or their ethnicity (16\%).
Compared with 15% (n = 322) of heterosexual respondents, 32% (n = 41) of sexual minority respondents believed they had personally experienced such conduct.

Of sexual minority respondents who believed they had experienced this conduct, 46% (n = 19) stated it was because of their sexual orientation.

Compared with 17% of all respondents, 35% (n = 14) of respondents with physical disabilities, 23% (n = 12) of respondents with learning disabilities, and 40% (n = 21) of respondents with psychological conditions believed they had personally experienced such conduct.

Between 57 and 58% of those respondents with disabilities who believed they had experienced harassment said the conduct was based on their disability.

15% (n = 58) of participants made complaints to UW-River Falls officials, while 20% (n = 75) did not know who to go to, and 15% (n = 56) did not report the incident for fear of retaliation.

A small percentage of respondents believed they had been sexually harassed or sexually assaulted.

7% (n = 169) believed that they had been touched in a sexual manner that made them feel uncomfortable or fearful while at UW-River Falls.

50 respondents (2%) believed that they had been sexually assaulted during their time at UW-River Falls.

Of these, 22 respondents (44%) believed they had been assaulted off-campus and 25 respondents (50%) believed they had been assaulted on campus.

Transgender respondents, women, bisexual respondents, heterosexual respondents, and people with learning disabilities were more likely than other groups to believe that they had been sexually assaulted.

Most of the respondents who believed that they had been sexually assaulted were UW-River Falls students (39 people), female (46 people), heterosexual (43 people), and White (45 people).

The alleged perpetrators of the perceived sexual assaults against students were most often other students (n = 26), strangers (n = 9), acquaintances (n = 8), or friends (n = 8).

Satisfaction with UW-River Falls

79% (n = 335) of UW-River Falls employees were “highly satisfied” or “satisfied” with their jobs at UW-River Falls. 66% (n = 278) were “highly satisfied” or “satisfied” with the way their careers have progressed at UW-River Falls.

Classified staff members were less satisfied with their jobs than were academic staff and faculty.

Classified staff members were much less satisfied than faculty and academic staff members with the way their careers had progressed at UW-River Falls.

Women, Employees of Color, and LGB respondents were least satisfied with the way their careers have progressed at UW-River Falls.
• 86% (n = 1,550) of students were “highly satisfied” or “satisfied” with their education at UW-River Falls, while 73% (n = 1,290) were “highly satisfied” or “satisfied” with the way their academic careers have progressed at UW-River Falls.
  o A lower percentage of Students of Color, men, and sexual minority students were satisfied with their educations and with the way their academic careers have progressed at UW-River Falls than were other students.
  o Higher percentages of women students, White students, and heterosexual students were satisfied with the way their academic careers have progressed than were men students, Students of Color, and sexual minority students.

• 41% (n = 929) of all respondents have considered leaving UW-River Falls.
  o Among employees, 61% of men and 59% of women thought about leaving UW-River Falls.
  o 54% of Employees of Color, in comparison with 60% of White employees, have seriously considered leaving UW-River Falls.
  o 72% of sexual minority employees, compared to 59% of heterosexual respondents, have seriously thought about leaving the institution.
  o Among students, 35% of women and 39% of men considered leaving the University.
  o 56% of Students of Color and 34% of White students thought about leaving UW-River Falls as did 44% of LGB students and 35% of heterosexual students.

Perceptions of Campus Climate

• Most respondents indicated that they were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the overall climate at UW-River Falls (86%, n = 1,960), in their departments or work units (83%, n = 1,889), and in their classes (86%, n = 1,738).
  o Compared with 88% of White people, 70% of People of Color were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the overall campus climate.
  o Compared with 84% of White people, 74% of People of Color were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their departments or work units.
  o Compared with 85% of White people, 65% of People of Color were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in classes.

• Slightly less than one-third of all respondents indicated that they were aware of or believed they had observed harassment on campus within the past two years. The perceived harassment was most often based on race and ethnicity. People of Color and sexual minorities were more aware of perceived harassment.
  o 31% (n = 714) of the participants believed that they had observed or personally been made aware of conduct on campus that created an offensive, hostile, exclusionary, or intimidating working or learning environment.
  o Most of the observed harassment was based on race (41%, n = 295), ethnicity (40%, n = 282), sexual orientation (30%, n = 215), gender (22%, n = 156), gender expression (21%, n = 153), and gender identity (21%, n = 147).
Compared with 31% (n = 631) of White respondents, 39% (n = 63) of Respondents of Color believed they had observed or personally been made aware of such conduct.

Compared with 30% (n = 632) of heterosexuals, 50% (n = 64) of sexual minorities believed they had observed or personally been made aware of such conduct.

Compared with 28% (n = 506) of students, 47% (n = 58) of academic staff, 45% (n = 56) of classified staff, and 44% (n = 77) of faculty believed they had observed such conduct.

These incidences were reported to an employee or official only 7% (n = 53) of the time.

With regard to campus accessibility for people with mobility and visual impairment, more than half the respondents felt the various aspects of UW-River Falls campus (e.g., buildings, classrooms, physical accessibility, course instruction/materials) and the community of River Falls beyond the campus were accessible.

Some employee respondents believed that they had observed discriminatory employment practices and indicated that they were most often based on UW-River Falls status and gender.

25% (n = 107) of employee respondents believed that they had observed discriminatory hiring.

13% (n = 56) believed that they had observed discriminatory employment-related disciplinary actions at UW-River Falls (up to and including dismissal).

23% (n = 98) believed that they had observed discriminatory promotion practices.

Institutional Actions

More than half of the respondents (52%, n = 1,140) “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the Chancellor provided visible leadership that fosters inclusion of diverse members of the campus community while 8% (n = 177) “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed.”

53% (n = 1,062) of all respondents believed that diversity initiatives are relevant to their work.

64% (n = 1,299) felt welcome at campus diversity events.

45% (n = 180) of employee respondents thought providing tenure clock options with more flexibility for promotion/tenure for faculty/staff with families would positively affect the climate.

66% (n = 264) thought it would be a good idea to train mentors and leaders within departments to model positive climate behavior.

59% (n = 234) thought offering diversity training/programs as community outreach would positively affect the climate.

74% (n = 291) of employees felt providing on-campus child care services would positively affect the climate.
More than three-quarters of all employees thought the following initiatives would also positively affect the climate on campus: improving, and promoting access to quality services for those individuals who experience sexual abuse (76%, n = 296), providing mentors for minority faculty/students/staff new to campus (72%, n = 281), and providing a clear protocol for responding to hate/hostile incidents at the campus level (82%, n = 320) and departmental level (80%, n = 313).

**Qualitative Findings**

Out of the 2,290 surveys received at UW-River Falls, 1747 different respondents contributed remarks to one or more of the open-ended questions. No respondents commented on all open-ended questions. Respondents included undergraduate and graduate students, as well as faculty, academic staff, and classified staff. The open-ended questions asked whether their campus experiences differed from experiences in the surrounding community, for general elaboration on personal experiences and thoughts,12 to name three things the respondent would like to see changed on campus and three things they would like to see remain the same, and to describe the current classroom and campus climates.

Three hundred and forty four respondents offered suggestions for how to improve the climate at UW-River Falls. Several individuals thought the climate at UW-River Falls was very welcoming and needed no improvement. A handful of respondents’ comments seemed resentful of the University’s efforts to create a more diverse campus community. Several respondents asked for higher level administrators to provide leadership around issues of diversity and inclusiveness, to actively address and implement new initiatives around those issues, and to be accountable to the campus community. A number of individuals advocated for open classroom discussions and required courses which address topics of diversity and community. Some people offered specific suggestions for making the campus more accessible for people with disabilities. Quite a few respondents thought UW-River Falls ought to actively increase the diversity of the student body and faculty and staff ranks.

---

12 The complete survey is available in Appendix C.
One of the open-ended items queried, “Are your experiences on campus different than those you experience in the community surrounding campus? If so, how are these experiences different?” Several respondents indicated their experiences were similar on campus and off campus. Of those people whose experiences differed, most called the campus “more accepting and more diverse” than the surrounding area. Some students said they had limited time off campus, and so felt more “included” on and “knowledgeable” about the campus. Some students also felt they were “stereotyped” off campus and that the surrounding community had some negative inclinations towards students. A few respondents said they had more positive experiences in the surrounding community than at UW-River Falls.

Another of the open-ended items allowed respondents to elaborate on any of their survey responses, further describe their experiences, or offer additional thoughts about climate issues. Respondents commented on UW-River Falls shared governance policies, LGBTQ issues, perceived lack of ADA compliance, “trouble” with some fraternities, poor food quality in the dining halls, the lack of women in leadership positions, smoking on campus, discrimination against “overweight” people, religion on campus, discrimination based on UW-River Falls college, racism, and salary issues, among others. Several people chose not to elaborate or simply stated the climate was “fine.”

Question 88 asked respondents “Do you feel that since you arrived at UW-River Falls that you have been represented in campus activities and publications?” Of the 2,290 respondents, 61% felt represented. Further analyses indicate that 62% of White respondents and 54% of Respondents of Color agreed or strongly agreed. Likewise, 62% of heterosexual respondents and 58% of LGB respondents, 62% of non-disabled respondents and 46% of respondents with disabilities agreed or strongly agreed. Sixty-one percent of women, 62% of men, and 25% of transgender respondents felt represented.

Question 89 asked respondents to elaborate on their answers. A number of respondents said they “fit the UW-River Falls majority demographic” and it would be “hard NOT to be represented” in campus activities and publications. Athletes and students involved with Greek Life and
Residence Life felt represented. Respondents indicated there was a dearth of activities and publications in support of non-Christian beliefs, sexual identity/orientation, Hispanic culture, non-traditional students, students with children, commuter students, ideologically conservative people, etc. Some respondents felt a few individuals (certain People of Color and people with physical disabilities) were overrepresented in publications to make UW-River Falls appear more diverse than it is.

Question 90 and 91 asked respondents whether they felt their work was valued by the campus community and why they felt that way. Fifty-seven percent of all respondents felt their work was valued. Fifty-eight percent of White respondents, 44% of Respondents of Color, 58% of heterosexual respondents, and 53% of sexual minority respondents agreed or strongly agreed. A slightly higher percentage of men (60%) than women (56%) agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, 58% of non-disabled respondents and 47% of respondents with disabilities agreed or strongly agreed. Among employees, 60% of faculty, 72% of academic staff, and 76% of classified staff felt their work was valued by the campus community.

Their comments suggested that some people were told by others in the campus community that their work was valued and they were acknowledged for that work. Others said they knew their work was intrinsically valuable, even though they had not necessarily been told by other people about the value of their work. Some respondents said the majority of people did not know what their work entailed; therefore, those people did not value the work. Some respondents felt their work was not valuable and ought not to be recognized. Others said selected departments or programs were considered more valuable than others. Some employees said their low salaries were indicators of being undervalued at UW-River Falls.

Similar to the two previous questions, the last two survey items queried respondents whether they felt that they, as individuals, were valued by the campus community. Sixty-two percent of all respondents felt valued as individuals by the campus community. Sixty-three percent of White respondents and 46% of Respondent of Color agreed or strongly agreed, as did 63% of heterosexual respondents and 51% of sexual minority respondents. Again, similar
percentages of women (61%) and men (63%) agreed or strongly agreed, which were much higher percentages than the percentage of transgender respondents (29%) who felt valued by the community. Sixty-two percent of non-disabled and 55% of respondents with disabilities agreed or strongly agreed. Sixty percent of students, 68% of faculty members, 74% of academic staff, and 64% of classified staff felt valued, as individuals, by the campus community.

Several students felt they were valued by UW-River Falls, their peers, and their professors. Others said they felt like “just another number” and that the school only valued them for their money. Many employees felt valued by their colleagues, their departments, and sometimes the administration. Most of those respondents who did feel valued indicated they went out of their way to make an impact, help others, or better the University and campus.

In addition, a few respondents commented on the survey and process itself. Some applauded the University’s participation in the study and wanted to make certain that the results of the survey were made public and used to better UW-River Falls. Several respondents insisted that UW-River Falls leadership share with its constituents the climate assessment findings and initiatives instituted as a result.
Summary of Strengths and Potential Challenges

Two strengths/successes emerged from the quantitative data analysis. These findings should be noted and credited. First, more than half of employees were highly satisfied or satisfied with their jobs at UW River Falls (79%, n = 335) and how their careers have progressed (66%, n = 278). Additionally, high percentages of students were highly satisfied and satisfied with their education at UW River Falls (86%, n = 1550) and how their academic careers have progressed (73%, n = 1,290). Second, 86% (n = 1,960) of employees and students reported that they were very comfortable and comfortable with the climate at UW River Falls, and 83% (n = 1,889) with their department or work unit. Eighty-six percent (n = 1,738) of faculty and students were very comfortable and comfortable with the classroom climate. These quantitative results were also supported by various voices offered in response to the open-ended questions. These voices echoed positive experiences with the UW River Falls’ campus climate. However, disparities existed where respondents from underrepresented groups typically reported less satisfaction and comfort with the overall campus climate, their department/work unit climate, and their classroom climate at UW River Falls then the majority counterpart respondents. These underrepresented groups include People of Color, LGBTQ people, people with a disability, and classified staff.

Three challenges were also revealed in the assessment. The first challenge relates to racial tension. Twice as many Respondents of Color (31%, n = 51) reported personally experiencing exclusionary (e.g., shunned, ignored), intimidating, offensive and/or hostile conduct (harassing behavior) that has interfered with their ability to work or learn at UW-River Falls when compared to their White counterparts (15%, n = 316). Forty-nine percent (n = 25) of Respondents of Color said the harassment was based on their race, while only three percent (n = 8) of White respondents indicated the basis as race. People of Color were also more likely to indicate racial profiling, graffiti, stares, feeling isolated or left out when working in groups, feeling isolated or left out because of their identity, being singled out as the “resident authority” regarding my identity, fearing getting a poor grade because of hostile classroom environment, and fearing for their family’s safety as the form of experienced harassment when compared with their White counterparts.
Respondents’ observations of others being harassed also contributed to their perceptions of campus climate. People of Color were also more likely than White people to observe offensive, hostile, exclusionary, or intimidating conduct. Of those who observed harassment, 41% (n = 295) believed it was based on race.

People of Color were less comfortable than White respondents with the overall climate for diversity at UW-River Falls, the climate in their departments/work units, and the climate in their classes, with the largest difference in the classroom. Disparities also existed between Employees of Color and White employees when they were asked to rank the degree to which they agreed with certain statements. Employees of Color were more likely than White faculty and staff to report that colleagues expect them to represent “the point of view” of their identity. Employees of Color were more likely to believe their colleagues have lower expectations of them than of other employees and that they have to work harder than their colleagues do in order to be perceived as legitimate. Employees of Color were also more likely than White employees to believe they had observed discriminatory hiring practices and discriminatory employment-related disciplinary actions.

The experiences shared by LGBQ respondents’ calls attention to the second challenge at UW River Falls: homophobia and heterosexism. LGBQ respondents were more than twice as likely as heterosexual respondents to believe that they had experienced harassment. Of those who believed they had experienced this type of conduct, 46% (n = 19) of LGBQ respondents versus two percent (n = 7) of heterosexual respondents indicated that this conduct was based on sexual orientation. A much higher percentage of LGBQ respondents believed they had observed offensive, hostile, exclusionary, or intimidating conduct than did heterosexual respondents (50% compared with 30%). Heterosexual respondents were more comfortable than LGBQ respondents with the overall climate for diversity at UW-River Falls, the climate in their departments/work units, and the climate in their classes. LGBQ employee respondents were less likely than heterosexual respondents to believe the workplace climate was welcoming based on sexual orientation. Finally, 72% of sexual minority employees, compared to 59% of heterosexual
respondents, have seriously thought of leaving the institution, while 44% of LGB students and 35% of heterosexual students seriously considered leaving.

The final challenge relates to differential treatment by university status at UW-River Falls. For those who reported they experienced harassment, university status was the most common basis. Of those respondents who believed that they had observed discriminatory hiring, discriminatory employment-related disciplinary actions, and discriminatory practices related to promotion, respondent’s status was indicated as the most common basis for discrimination.

Classified staff shared differential treatment from that of their academic staff counterparts. For example, classified staff members were less satisfied with their jobs and much less satisfied than with the way their careers have progressed when compared with academic staff. Classified staff members (17%) were more likely than faculty members (13%) and academic staff members (7%) to believe they had observed discriminatory disciplinary actions. And, classified staff members (27%) were more likely than faculty members (23%) or academic staff (19%) to believe they had perceived unfair promotion.