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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

**2013 Campus Climate Study
Executive Summary**

This document provides an executive summary of the findings for the WMU Campus Climate Study conducted during the 2012-13 academic year. Although the executive summary does not provide a detailed and technical set of findings for the numerous analyses and findings from the data, it offers some broad brushstrokes that reflect the most important outcomes. Readers are referred to the primary report of findings for additional detail.

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Major Findings

Overall the campus climate at WMU was reported by respondents to be more positive than negative. Average ratings on the campus climate variables for (a) diversity climate, (b) general climate, and (c) equity climate were above the mid-point on the rating scales used to measure these variables. Nearly 92% of respondents positively endorsed (i.e., “somewhat agree,” “agree,” or “strongly agree”) the item, “Overall, diversity and inclusion are respected and appreciated at WMU.” A smaller but still sizable percentage (80.5%) of respondents positively endorsed the item, “I believe that the leadership at the university-level supports diversity and inclusion on campus.”

In contrast, a large percentage (28.5%) of the survey participants reported “personal experiences of discrimination” based on endorsement of one or more of the four items used to measure this variable. Furthermore, among the 367 individuals (6.5% of the entire sample) who indicated that they had experienced unfair or inequitable treatment, only 111 (30.2% of those reporting unfair or inequitable treatment) indicated that they made an official complaint regarding one or more of those incidents. In addition, among the 104 individuals offering a response to the items regarding the outcomes of those reports, only

21 (20.2%) indicated that they believed the report was handled with fairness, and only 10 (9.6%) indicated that the complaint was resolved to their satisfaction.

Thus, whereas the survey findings were generally positive regarding overall perceptions of “diversity climate,” “general climate,” and “equity climate” based on ratings from the entire sample, there were a number of negative findings specific to experiences of discrimination at WMU and issues related to experiencing and reporting unfair and inequitable treatment. Moreover, focus group findings broadly highlighted concerns regarding personal experiences of discrimination and issues in reporting unfair or inequitable treatment.

Preliminary analyses revealed that there were significant and meaningful differences between faculty, staff, student and administrator groups in their perceptions of the various climate variables. Based on these preliminary analyses, it was determined that subsequent analyses designed to address the central research questions should be conducted separately for faculty, students, staff and administrators.

Research Question #1: To what extent and in what ways do faculty, staff, and students perceive that diversity on campus is recognized, honored, and appreciated?

Dependent variable: Diversity Climate

Whereas students, staff and administrators were statistically equivalent on their ratings of Diversity Climate, faculty consistently rated the Diversity Climate at WMU lower than the other three groups. In addition, within the student group, there was a significant difference between graduate students and undergraduate students in which graduate students rated the climate similarly to faculty. A number of important demographic differences emerged on this variable, in particular for race/ethnicity in which White only participants tended to rate the Diversity Climate at WMU more positively than other racial-ethnic groups. Personal Experiences of Discrimination (i.e., experiences of harassment, bullying or intimidation; unfair or inequitable treatment; experiences of tokenism; and/or experiences of being devalued as a member of the WMU community) was a strong negative predictor of Diversity Climate consistently across all status groups, uniquely accounting for 23.3 – 33.4 percent of the variance in this variable. Zero Tolerance Climate (i.e., the degree to which students, faculty, staff and administrators are perceived to express zero tolerance for harassment, bullying, and/or intimidation) and

Diversity Engagement Climate (i.e., the degree to which students, faculty, staff and administrators are perceived as engaging in efforts to improve relations and understanding of diversity and inclusion on campus) were positive predictors of Diversity Climate for all four groups.

There were mixed reactions in the focus group interviews to the relatively positive findings for perceptions of Diversity Climate at WMU ($M = 5.18$, $SD = .96$ on a scale from 1 to 6.75). Most participants were pleased about the generally positive direction of the findings and also expressed some level of surprise that the findings were more positive than anticipated. Focus group discussions tended to reflect efforts to make sense of these survey findings that went against their expectations. A number of focus group participants expressed concern that the more positive findings could be promoted in a way that overshadows or supplants efforts to address other more problematic issues apparent in the findings.

Research Question #2: To what extent and in what ways do faculty, staff, and students believe that campus is welcoming and affirming?

Dependent variable: General Campus Climate

Whereas administrators were statistically equivalent to the other three groups on their ratings of General Campus Climate (e.g., not directly related to diversity, equity, or inclusion), students consistently rated the General Campus Climate at WMU higher than faculty and staff. There were no significant differences between graduate students and undergraduate students for this variable. A number of important demographic differences emerged, in particular for race/ethnicity in which White only participants tended to rate the General Campus Climate at WMU more positively than other racial-ethnic groups. Personal Experiences of Discrimination was a strong negative predictor of General Campus Climate consistently across all status groups, uniquely accounting for 31.3 – 40.2 percent of the variance in this variable. Diversity Engagement Climate was a positive predictor of General Campus Climate for students, staff, faculty, but not administrators. Kalamazoo Climate was a unique positive predictor for students, staff and administrators.

Similar to the responses regarding Diversity Climate, focus group participants tended to engage discussions about the General Campus Climate in ways that attempted to make sense of findings they felt were counter to their experiences on campus and their expectations about how the survey findings would turn out. There were frequent attempts to provide counter-examples to the positive outcomes of the survey findings for General Campus Climate. In addition, broad issues regarding the general campus climate were identified as undermining the morale among employees (especially staff and faculty occupying lower levels of the hierarchy), and ultimately contributing to problems in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion by increasing the likelihood of incivility, bullying, harassment, and intimidation that is channeled through the equity and discrimination complaint processes (see the main report for an in depth analysis of these findings).

Research Question #3: To what extent and in what ways do faculty, staff, and students perceive that policies and institutional practices promote and/or hinder equity on campus?

Dependent variable: Equity Climate

Dependent variable: Fear Reporting Inequity (Employees Only)

Experiencing and Reporting Unfair and Inequitable Treatment:

For two sets of items on the survey, respondents were asked to indicate whether they reported one or more of the unfair or inequitable incidents they experienced or witnessed. In addition, participants who indicated that they reported incidents were also asked whether they believed their complaints were (a) handled with fairness, and (b) resolved to their satisfaction. Among the 367 individuals who indicated that they had experienced unfair or inequitable treatment, only 111 (30.2%) indicated that they reported one or more of those incidents. In addition, among the 104 individuals offering a response to the items regarding the outcomes of those reports, only 21 (20.2%) indicated that they believed the report was handled with fairness, and only 10 (9.6%) indicated that the complaint was resolved to their satisfaction.

Similarly, among the 399 individuals who indicated that they believed others received unfair or inequitable treatment, only 21 (5.3%) indicated that they reported one or more of those incidents. In addition, only 1 indicated that they believed the report was handled with fairness, and only 1 indicated that the complaint was resolved to their satisfaction.

Equity Climate: Whereas students, staff and administrators were statistically equivalent on their ratings of Equity Climate at WMU, faculty consistently rated this variable lower than

the other three groups. In addition, within the student group, there was a significant difference between graduate students and undergraduate students for Equity Climate. Demographic differences were observed on this variable for people with disabilities (lower for student and faculty samples), racial-ethnic group members (lower for staff sample), and gender (lower for administrator sample). Personal Experiences of Discrimination was a strong negative predictor of Equity Climate consistently across all status groups, uniquely accounting for 23.3 – 30.0 percent of the variance in this variable. RaceTalk Comfort (i.e., comfort stating thoughts about racial/ethnic issues in a variety of campus contexts), Zero Tolerance Climate, and Diversity Engagement Climate were strong positive predictors of Equity Climate for students, staff and faculty, but not for administrators.

Fear of Reporting Inequity (Employees Only): Whereas staff and faculty were statistically equivalent on their ratings of Fear of Reporting Inequity, administrators consistently rated this variable lower than the other two groups (i.e., less fear). There were no meaningful statistical differences between demographic groups based on gender race/ethnicity, sexual minority status, religious minority status, veteran status, or disability status. Personal Experiences of Discrimination was a strong positive predictor of Fear of Reporting Inequity consistently across all status groups, uniquely accounting for 34.6 – 38.3 percent of the variance in this variable. RaceTalk Comfort was the only

other unique negative predictor of Fear of Reporting Inequity for faculty, staff and administrators.

Without question the most prominent theme produced by the focus group interviews was with respect to Equity Climate at WMU, in part because the most striking findings in the preliminary report of the survey results were about experiencing and reporting unfair and inequitable treatment. Overwhelmingly, focus group participants reported that they were disappointed about this finding and that it would be important for the campus to address the underlying issues related to it. In addition, a substantial number of faculty, staff, students and

administrators indicated that they were “not surprised,” although a small minority expressed shock and surprise over these findings. Whereas a number of participants connected this issue directly to identity-based discrimination, participants mostly related this issue back to the general campus climate (e.g., not directly related to diversity, equity, or inclusion). Part of the discussion of these findings addressed how the policy structure and culture of the institution interact in ways that make people reluctant to make reports or feel unsatisfied with outcomes of complaints. A variety of observations were made with speculations about how to correct the underlying issues.

Research Question #4: To what extent and in what ways do faculty, staff, and students believe that the campus climate promotes their ability to achieve their full potential?

Dependent Variable: Classroom Climate (Students Only)

Dependent Variable: Work Valued Climate (Employees Only)

Classroom Climate (Students Only): There was no difference between undergraduate and graduate students on ratings of Classroom Climate. On average, students rated the classroom climate in the positive direction. There was a significant difference between people with and without disabilities among students on this variable. There were no other significant differences between demographic groups. Again, Personal Experiences of Discrimination was a strong negative predictor of Classroom Climate, uniquely accounting for 23.7 percent of the variance. RaceTalk Comfort, Zero Tolerance Climate, and Diversity Engagement Climate also were unique positive predictors of Classroom Climate.

Work Valued Climate (Employees Only): Administrators consistently rated Work Valued Climate higher than the other two groups, whereas staff rated Work Valued Climate consistently lower than the other two employee groups. In addition, among faculty, people with disabilities rated this variable

lower than people without disabilities. There was a small but meaningful difference on this variable between men and women (lower) among administrators. Personal Experiences of Discrimination was a strong negative predictor of Work Valued Climate across all status groups, uniquely accounting for 25.2 – 31.7 percent of the variance. RaceTalk Comfort also was a unique positive predictor of this variable.

Focus group interviews produced extensive data related to Work Valued Climate but not for Classroom Climate. In particular, faculty expressed concerns about the tenure and promotion process, specifically in terms of specific examples of inequities they had observed or experienced. In addition, term faculty expressed concerns about feeling devalued as members of the faculty at WMU. Staff focused on power differentials and bullying based on hierarchy, along with numerous examples of harassment, incivility, and insensitivity related to a wide range of identity characteristics.

Research Question #5: To what extent and in what ways do faculty, staff, and students express satisfaction with their experiences in the university as it pertains to diversity?

Dependent Variable: Diversity Satisfaction

Whereas administrators, staff and faculty were statistically equivalent on their ratings of Satisfaction with Diversity, students consistently rated this variable higher than the other three groups. There were significant and meaningful differences between White only participants (higher) and various other racial-ethnic groups on ratings of Satisfaction with Diversity across all status groups (students, faculty, staff and administrators). In addition, there were significant differences on the basis of disability status (students), religious/spiritual identity (faculty), sexual minority status (staff) and gender

(administrators), in all cases lower for minority groups. Again, Personal Experiences of Discrimination was a strong negative predictor of Satisfaction with Diversity consistently across all status groups, uniquely accounting for 25.1 – 33.6 percent of the variance in this variable. In addition, the variable Personal Diversity Engagement (i.e., the extent to which a participant is personally engaged in the meaningful activities related to diversity on campus) was a significant negative predictor of Satisfaction with Diversity for staff, faculty, and administrators,

meaning that individuals who indicated that they were deeply engaged in the work of diversity were less likely to be satisfied with diversity at WMU. Positive perceptions of the Kalamazoo Climate were also predictive of Satisfaction with Diversity for all four groups, suggesting that experiences with the city of Kalamazoo are a significant contributor to satisfaction with diversity at WMU.

Focus group interviews generated a substantial amount of discussion about the ongoing efforts to continue to advance

the climate for diversity, and ways WMU has made efforts to improve its image with respect to diversity. In addition, focus group participants offered numerous examples of areas that need improvement where dissatisfaction exists, including a perceived lack of progress in areas identified in the DMAP. Particular attention was focused on faculty and student recruitment and retention efforts to increase the compositional (numerical) diversity on campus.

Research Question #6: To what extent and in what ways do faculty, staff, and students express satisfaction with the greater Kalamazoo community as a place to live, work, and attend school? To what extent does the Kalamazoo Climate predict perceptions of WMU climate?

Dependent Variable: Kalamazoo Climate

Whereas staff and faculty were statistically equivalent on Kalamazoo Climate, students consistently rated this variable lower than the other three groups, and administrators consistently rated it higher than the other three groups. Only staff had significant demographic differences between groups on the basis of race/ethnicity and sexual minority status (lower among minority group members). Campus Safety became a strong positive predictor across all four groups, accounting for 21.9 – 41.7 percent of the variance.

Focus group discussions regarding the Kalamazoo Climate focused extensively on the extent to which Kalamazoo is a safe place to live, work and attend college. For students in particular, there were strong themes related to discomfort going to specific parts of town and fear related to people from the community coming to campus who are not affiliated with WMU. Some students, faculty and administrators discounted fears they have heard about Kalamazoo as a potentially unsafe place.

Conclusions

The WMU Campus Climate Study has produced an expansive amount of data from which a rich set of findings has been obtained. Overall, there are many positive findings, along with a number of focal issues of concern for members of the WMU community to address. Among the positive findings were the following:

1. Students, faculty staff and administrators tend to view the climate for diversity at WMU more positively than negatively.
2. Students in particular tend to have the most positive views of the climate for diversity and equity.
3. Some participants view the campus as making progress in some important areas of diversity and inclusion, and demonstrating a commitment to the work of continuous improvement related to diversity and inclusion.
4. Some of the strongest predictors of campus climate indices reflect positively on the ways WMU is promoting the diversity mission on campus (e.g., Race Talk Comfort, Personal Diversity Engagement, Zero Tolerance Climate, Diversity Engagement Climate). These predictors of climate can help to serve as the foundation for efforts to improve campus climate at WMU.
5. The DMAP was identified in focus group discussions as a preexisting roadmap for advancing diversity, equity and in-

clusion at WMU that can be reaffirmed and implemented as one immediate step toward improving the climate at WMU.

6. Focus group discussions revealed that there are large numbers of campus stakeholders among students, faculty, staff, and administrators who are deeply invested in the success of WMU to advance the mission of diversity, equity and inclusion—who are committed to helping the campus take advantage of the findings from the comprehensive campus climate study through immediate and decisive action.

In addition to the positive findings, there were a host of issues raised in both the quantitative and qualitative data that indicate specific areas for improvement, especially regarding issues of equity climate at WMU. The most salient areas for improvement in the data include the following:

1. Personal experiences of discrimination were a powerful and consistent predictor of all of the dependent variables related to campus climate at WMU (except Kalamazoo Climate).
2. A large percentage (28.5%) of the survey participants reported Personal Experiences of Discrimination based on endorsement of one or more of the four items used to measure this variable.
3. There were significant differences between members of demographic identity groups on Personal Experiences of Discrimination, in which members of minority groups (e.g.,

people of color, LGBTQ individuals) were more likely to report discrimination as part of their experience at WMU. When examining experiences of bias based on a specific identity, members of the targeted identity groups tended to report substantially higher percentages of bias-related experiences.

4. Survey respondents who reported experiences of unfair or inequitable treatment reported a low incidence of reporting those experiences. Among those who made reports of unfair or inequitable treatment, very few indicated that they were satisfied with the outcome, and even fewer reported that the issue had been resolved to their satisfaction. Focus group participants overwhelmingly believe this set of findings is related to broad structural and cultural conditions at WMU that have existed for many years and have been resistant to change.
5. Broad issues regarding the general campus climate (e.g., not directly related to diversity, equity, or inclusion) were identified as undermining the morale among employees (especially staff and faculty occupying lower levels of the hierarchy), and

ultimately contributing to problems in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion by increasing the likelihood of incivility, bullying, harassment, and intimidation that is channeled through the equity and discrimination complaint processes.

6. Focus group discussions prominently portrayed the WMU campus as consistent with what Sue (1995) would describe as “nondiscriminatory” (e.g., a non-systemic, fragmented approach to diversity intended to meet legal standards for nondiscrimination and avoid lawsuits), despite its own best efforts, especially in recent years, to advance to the status of “multicultural” (e.g., actively valuing diversity in its many forms in a manner that permeates all aspects of the institution). That is, there are pervasive perceptions among focus group participants that diversity, inclusion and equity efforts at WMU lack sufficient administrative support and an integrated organizational structure to achieve a truly multicultural climate, and thus often are reduced to maintaining only a level of engagement necessary to achieve minimum compliance.

Recommendations

If WMU is to become a more diverse, inclusive, equitable and multicultural institution, the entire campus community will need to actively engage in efforts to reduce personal experiences of discrimination on campus and improve the systemic processes that promote the development of a diverse, equitable inclusive campus. The following recommendations are intended to operate at individual and systemic levels towards those ends:

1. Develop a plan for the public distribution of findings from the WMU Campus Climate Study. Convene meetings of different types and sizes for a variety of different audiences, from town hall meetings to staff workshops to faculty meeting presentations to small group student dialogue sessions. Promote the positive aspects of the findings while at the same time openly addressing the areas that need improvement. Continue this process for 6-12 months with regular updates for the campus community about actions taken to enhance the climate at WMU.
2. Identify immediate, short-term, and long-term actions that will begin to shape and address the most salient findings of the WMU Campus Climate Study. Convene and charge a task force to develop an accountability plan for addressing the short-term and long-term actions, as well as developing any additional action steps needed along the way. Emphasize issues of equity climate in these efforts; attend particularly to reducing fears of reporting inequity.
3. Reaffirm the DMAP as the WMU diversity and multiculturalism action plan. Take steps to advance the work of diversity and multiculturalism at WMU as described in the DMAP. Identify specific actions included in the DMAP that have been achieved. Identify several specific actions from the DMAP that are yet to be completed, and initiate steps to achieve them among the immediate and short-term actions identified as

part of Recommendation #2. Make appropriate updates and revisions to the DMAP on the basis of actions that have been achieved and those that are yet to be accomplished. Allocate adequate human, fiscal and physical resources.

4. Work with senior campus leaders to develop division-level and unit-level plans to promote and advance positive morale and civility among employees as a means of increasing the general campus climate. Provide campus-wide trainings at all levels (including senior leadership) for promoting a positive working and learning environment that discourages discrimination, harassment, bullying, intimidation and incivility through educational workshops. Increase accountability of campus leaders for implementing or enforcing zero tolerance for discrimination, harassment, bullying, intimidation and incivility.
5. Identify and enhance existing multicultural programs and/or develop new programs that serve to advance the multicultural competencies encompassed within the prominent predictor variables from the WMU Campus Climate Study (e.g., Race Talk Comfort, Personal Diversity Engagement, Social/Academic Engagement, Zero Tolerance Climate, Diversity Engagement Climate). For example, an intergroup dialogue program or a difficult dialogues program would have the capacity to facilitate interactions across differences in ways that serve to decrease problematic behaviors (including intentional and unintentional discrimination) and increase positive awareness, attitudes, knowledge and culturally competent behaviors and skills.



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