

Taskforce - Questions and Answers

What is Campus Climate?

There is no simple definition of campus climate. Campus climate is both policy and practice that refers to behaviors within a workplace or learning environment that can influence whether an individual feels safe, listened to, and treated fairly and with respect. It also refers to an organization's structures, policies, and practices; the diversity of its faculty, staff and students; the attitudes and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interactions and communication.

What is a Campus Climate Study?

Climate surveys serve as an essential means for determining the nature of universities' "campus climate" in order to gauge how campus communities are responding to demographic changes, to the need to foster inter-group cooperation and to the need to evaluate universities' "comfort level with difference." The Stony Brook Campus Climate Survey contained 16 demographic items covering gender, age, disability, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, marital status, and education.

What is the Presidential Task Force on Campus Climate?

The Presidential Task Force on Campus Climate is a follow up to the Campus Climate Survey. Comprised of selected faculty, staff, and students; the Task Force is similar in structure to the University Five Year Plan; i.e. containing specific goals, objectives, and a timeline for implementation, the names of the administrators responsible for implementation, the manner in which success will be defined, and a plan for continued evaluation.

What is the Overall Goal of the Task Force on Campus Climate?

The overall goal of the Task Force is to propose specific changes based on indicators of Stony Brook's Campus Climate noted in reports and studies since 1988 and to formulate action plans for the campus community. Furthermore, these specific changes will be designed in such a way as to ensure that the strategies implemented through the action plan will become part of the institutional culture in the long term as well as the immediate future. This goal will be accomplished through five key activities: Listen and Assess Progress, Take Leadership, Provide Training and Development Opportunities, Develop and Map Concrete Programs and Efforts, and Provide Information and Communicate with the campus community.

What is the Structure of the Task Force on Campus Climate?

Steering Committee

The Task Force will consist of a Steering Committee and five subcommittees. Members of the Steering Committee will assist in focusing the direction of the Task Force and ultimately forge the five subcommittee action plans into one overall campus action plan. Steering Committee members are expected to listen and assess progress, and provide ongoing feedback to the five subcommittees, provide information, and support communication to the entire campus community. Steering Committee members will also be present at the President's cabinet for annual progress reports from the Vice Presidents on the implementation of the Task Force's Action Plan.

Five Subcommittees

Each subcommittee will have two co-chairs and focus on a particular dimension that contributes an overall healthy campus climate. It is expected that co-chairs will (1) provide effective leadership; (2) reinforce the importance of developing a positive campus climate and; (3) strive to incorporate positive campus modeling in their own committee work. The focus areas are: Mandated Training and Education, Participation and Empowerment, Employment and Hiring, Building Internal Community, and Building External Community. Each subcommittee will insure to incorporate the 16 demographic dimensions outlined in the Campus Climate Survey, consider both policy and practice implications and map accountability lines as part of their action plan.

What are some suggested Strategies that Subcommittees may wish to Explore?

While there is no specific strategy that subcommittees must consider to assist their deliberations, several have been suggested that may be helpful. These include:

- Interviews with key persons who are directly involved in the focus of the subcommittee. This may include Vice Presidents, Deans, faculty, staff, and students.
- Focused and structured town meetings
- Recruitment of other resource persons to assist in the development of an action plan.
- Consultation with other subcommittees for information, guidance, or advice.
- Focused meetings with specific constituency-based faculty, staff, or student organizations
- Identification of comparable organizations/university strategies

What is the Timeline for the Final Report?

The final Task Force Report should be completed by the close of the spring semester with implementation deadline dates beginning with the end of the fall 2006 semester.

What Work has been done to Date?

Co-Chairs Associate Dean Aldustus Jordan and Assistant Vice President George Meyer, working together with the Director of Diversity and Affirmative Action Christina Vargas-Law and faculty member Carolyn Peabody have spent the last three months reviewing Stony Brook historical documents related to campus climate, ranging from the 1988 "Report of the Racial/Cultural Sensitivity Group," to the 2004 "Campus Climate Survey." The major themes contained in the collected wisdom of these various reports will form a basis for the work of the Task Force.

Although the subcommittee co-chairs and membership of both the steering committee and subcommittees have been selected, it is critically important that subcommittee membership is reflective of the campus diversity. With this in mind it is expected that each co-chair will immediately assess the adequacy of their subcommittee's diversity and seek to identify and invite individuals that will provide necessary insight and experience to the task at hand.