



Office of Diversity and Inclusion

Kennesaw State University  
Assessment of Climate for  
Learning, Living, and Working  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OCTOBER 2014



## *Background*

Kennesaw State University (KSU) affirms that diversity and inclusion are crucial to the intellectual vitality of the campus community. It is through freedom of exchange over different ideas and viewpoints—in supportive environments—that individuals develop the critical thinking and citizenship skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. Diversity and inclusion engenders academic engagement where teaching, working, learning, and living take place in pluralistic communities of mutual respect.

In 2006, President Daniel Papp authorized a campus-wide initiative to assess the status of diversity and equity on campus. Entitled the Diversity and Equity Assessment Initiative (DEAI) and composed of faculty, staff, and students, the aim was to examine organizational structure, recruitment and retention, overall campus climate, and diversity-focused teaching and research. Approaches for data gathering included surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Starting in late fall 2007, team leaders presented results to a wide range of stakeholders across campus: president’s cabinet, deans’ council, chairs’ council, faculty senate, student government representatives, staff senate, and administrators’ senate. Relevant for this report, one goal of the DEAI was to develop diversity assessments that could inform leadership decision-making consistent with the university’s strategic plan.

In order to carry out an assessment of the campus climate, in 2010, Linda Lyons, interim chief diversity officer (CDO), secured the funding and put together a team to review numerous external consultants. In 2012, Erik Malewski, hired as permanent CDO, continued the climate assessment process using the 2012-2017 Strategic Plan for KSU as a guideline<sup>1</sup>. Goal 4 of the plan mandates that KSU “enhance the collegiate experience, and foster a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive environment.” It also requires the establishment of baseline data that measure diversity and inclusion and afford opportunities to make improvements on campus.

To that end, in 2013, members of the university formed the Campus Culture and Climate Assessment Task Force (CCCA). The CCCA was composed of nearly 40 faculty, staff, students, and administrators<sup>2</sup>. Ultimately, KSU contracted with Rankin & Associates Consulting (R&A) to conduct a campus-wide study entitled, “Assessment of Climate for Learning, Living, and Working.” Data gathering focused on the experiences and perceptions of various constituent groups. Based on the findings, two to three action items will be developed through community forums and completed by fall 2015.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.kennesaw.edu/president/pdfs/strategic\\_plan.pdf](http://www.kennesaw.edu/president/pdfs/strategic_plan.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For a list of the CCCA members, please see <http://www.kennesaw.edu/diversity/assessment.php>



*Diversity and inclusion engenders academic engagement where teaching, working, learning, and living take place in pluralistic communities of mutual respect.*

*Students, faculty, and staff gathered for a kick off of the climate assessment, "Ignite: Your Voice, Our Future"*

## *Project Design & Campus Involvement*

The CCCA collaborated with R&A to develop the survey instrument. In the first phase, R&A conducted 14 focus groups composed of 99 participants (53 students, 25 faculty, and 21 staff). Data from the focus groups informed the CCCA and R&A in constructing the questions. The KSU survey contained 103 items, which included 18 qualitative and 85 quantitative questions via a secure online portal and was available from February 19, 2014, through March 30, 2014. Confidential paper surveys were distributed to those who did not have access to an Internet-connected computer or who preferred a paper survey. The paper surveys were available in both English and Spanish.

## *KSU Participants*

KSU community members completed 5,128 surveys for an overall response rate of 17%. Only surveys that were at least 50% completed were included in the final data set for analyses<sup>3</sup>. Response rates by constituent group varied: 52% (n = 815) for Staff, 28% (n = 685) for Faculty, 15% (n = 3,360) for Undergraduate Students, 11% (n = 213) for Graduate Students, and 3% (n = 55) for Continuing Education Students. See Table 1 (page 12) for a summary of selected demographic characteristics of survey respondents.



<sup>3</sup> 192 respondents were removed because they did not answer at least 50% of the survey.



# Key Findings – Strengths

## 1. High levels of comfort with the climate at KSU.

Climate is defined as “the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of faculty, staff, administrators, and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential.”<sup>4</sup> The level of comfort experienced by faculty, staff, and students is one indicator of campus climate.

- 83% (n = 4,239) of the survey respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at KSU.
- 77% (n = 1,155) of Faculty and Staff respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their departments/work units.
- 82% (n = 2,764) of Undergraduate Student respondents and 85% (n = 181) of Graduate Student respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their classes.
- 85% (n = 582) of Faculty respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their classes.

## 2. Faculty and Staff – Positive attitudes about work-life issues.

Campus climate<sup>5</sup> is constituted in part by perceptions of work, sense of balance between work and home life, and opportunities for personal and professional development throughout the span of one’s career. Work-life balance is one indicator of campus climate.

- 65% (n = 963) of Faculty and Staff respondents found KSU supportive of their taking leave.
- 75% (n = 1,105) of Faculty and Staff respondents indicated that KSU was supportive of flexible work schedules.
- 69% (n = 1,016) of Faculty and Staff respondents were comfortable taking the leave they were entitled to without fear that it may affect their jobs/careers.

Faculty and Staff respondents were provided the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences with work-life issues. More than 200 respondents provided written commentary. The themes included: (1) *Supervisor Advice and Guidance*, commentary was mixed—some respondents indicated that their supervisors were very supportive

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<sup>4</sup> Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264

<sup>5</sup> Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006

while others noted that they received little or no support from their supervisors; (2) *Flexible Work Schedules*, respondents noted that while KSU was supportive of flexible work schedules, the practice was discouraged in many departments; (3) *Professional Development*, respondents noted that they lacked time and/or resources to pursue professional development despite the support of their supervisors; and (4) *Administrative Support*, respondents indicated that a lack of resources led to a lack of administrative support and additional work for those currently in administrative support positions. The themes and selected comments that support each theme are provided in the full report.

### **3. Students – Positive attitudes about academic experiences.**

The way students perceive and experience their campus climate influences their performance and success in college.<sup>6</sup> Research also supports the pedagogical value of a diverse student body and faculty for improving learning outcomes.<sup>7</sup> Attitudes toward academic pursuits are one indicator of campus climate.

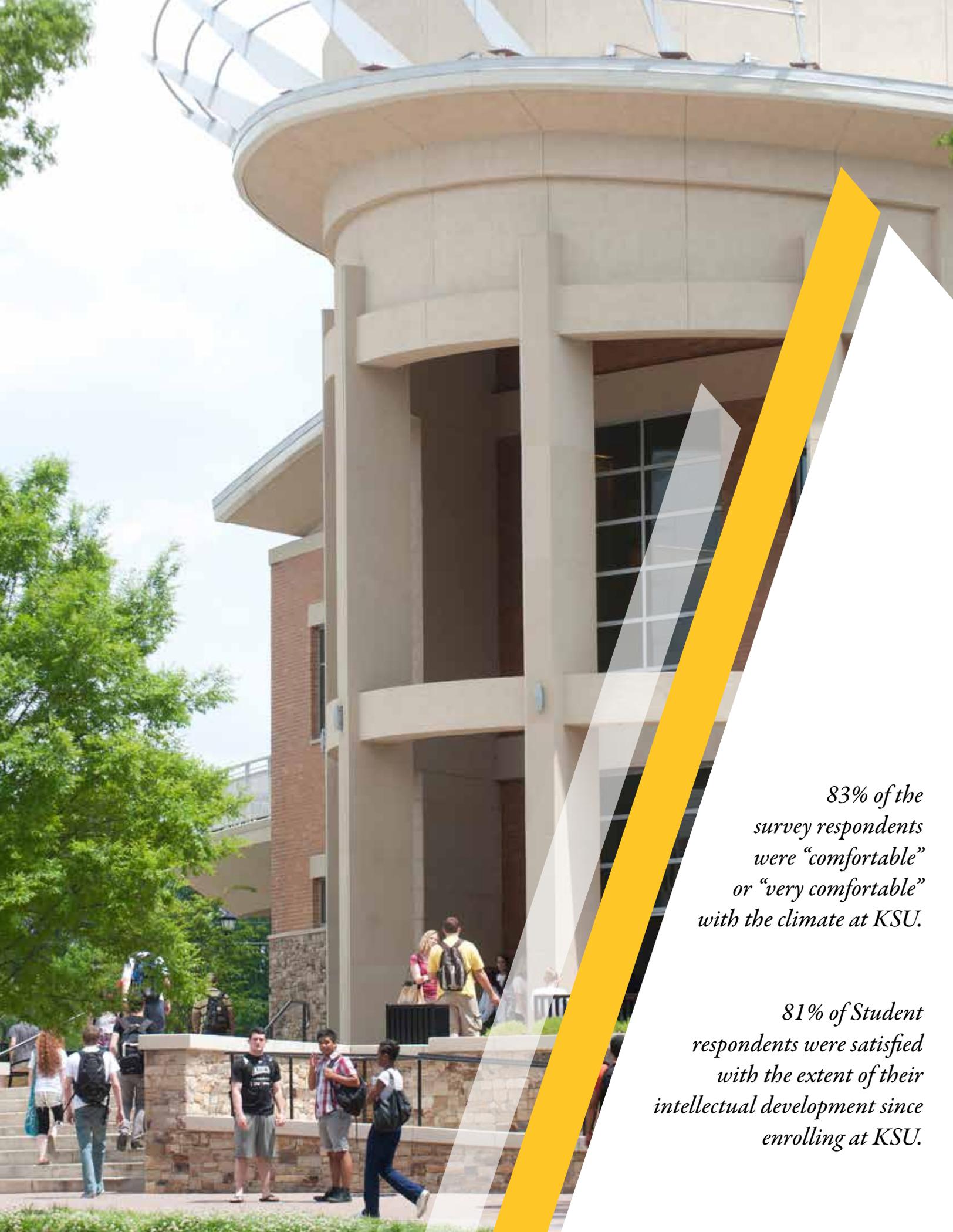
- 81% (n = 2,902) of Student respondents were satisfied with the extent of their intellectual development since enrolling at KSU.
- 79% (n = 2,834) of Student respondents indicated that their interest in ideas and intellectual matters increased since coming to KSU.
- 79% (n = 2,846) of Student respondents were satisfied with their academic experience at KSU.

### **4. Students – High level of satisfaction with diversity of course materials.**

- A majority of Student respondents indicated that the courses offered at KSU included sufficient materials, perspectives, and/or experiences of people based on a variety of individual and social characteristics (e.g., age, ethnicity, gender identity, marital status, racial identity, sexual identity).

<sup>6</sup> Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005

<sup>7</sup> Hale, 2004; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2004



*83% of the survey respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at KSU.*

*81% of Student respondents were satisfied with the extent of their intellectual development since enrolling at KSU.*



## Key Findings – Challenges

### 1. Members of several constituent groups were differentially affected by exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

Several empirical studies reinforce the importance of the perception of non-discriminatory environments for positive learning and developmental outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Research also underscores the relationship between workplace discrimination and subsequent productivity.<sup>9</sup> The survey requested information on experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

- In questions that focused on exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct, 21% (n = 1,050) of respondents indicated that they personally experienced such conduct. Of these respondents, 31% (n = 326) indicated that the conduct interfered with their ability to work or learn.<sup>10</sup>
- Differences emerged based on various demographic characteristics. For example,
  - Women respondents (50%, n = 355) indicated that they experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct based on their gender identity more often than Men respondents (45%, n = 132).
  - Ethnic and racial minority respondents (68% of People of Color respondents [n = 206] and 46% [n = 38] of Multiracial respondents) indicated that they experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct based on their racial identity more often than non-minority respondents (29%, n = 185).

Respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. More than 300 respondents provided written commentary. The themes included: (1) *Lack of Advocacy*, respondents felt that there was a lack of institutional concern and/or follow through; (2) *Fear*, respondents indicated fear of identification if they provided details of their experiences and that being identifiable might lead to additional targeting or retaliation; (3) *Public Displays of Conduct*, respondents indicated that they most often experienced the conduct in public meetings or it was made public by the offender; (4) *Racial Discrimination*, respondents indicated that the conduct they experienced was directly connected to their racial identity and was most often in the form of inappropriate comments; (5) *LGBT Discrimination*, respondents who identified as members of the

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<sup>8</sup> Association of American & Messineo, 1997; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001

<sup>9</sup> Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008; Waldo, 1999

<sup>10</sup> The literature on microaggressions is clear that this type of conduct has a negative influence on people who experience the conduct, even if they feel at the time that it had no impact (Sue, 2010; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).

LGBT community indicated that they experienced both subtle and overt discrimination based on their sexual orientation; and (6) *Sexual Harassment*, Women respondents noted that they experienced bullying and harassment owing to their gender and that it made them feel unsafe and uncomfortable. The themes and selected comments that support each theme are provided in the full report.

## **2. Several constituent groups indicated that they were less comfortable with the overall campus climate, workplace climate, and classroom climate.**

Prior research on campus climate focused on the experiences of faculty, staff, and students associated with historically underserved social/community/affinity groups (women, people of color, people with disabilities, first-generation students, veterans, etc.).<sup>11</sup> Several groups indicated that they were less comfortable than their majority counterparts with the climates of the campus, workplace, and classroom.

- Differences by Position:
  - Staff respondents (82%) were more comfortable than Faculty respondents (75%) with the overall campus climate at KSU.
  - Faculty respondents (79%) were more comfortable than Staff respondents (75%) with the climate in their departments/work units at KSU.
- Differences by Ability:
  - Respondents with No Disabilities (85%) were more comfortable with the overall climate at KSU than respondents with Disabilities (81%).
  - Respondents with No Disabilities (79%) were more comfortable with the climate in their departments/work units at KSU than respondents with Disabilities (69%).
  - Respondents with No Disabilities (86%) were more comfortable with the climate in their classes at KSU than respondents with Disabilities (78%).

*Ethnic and racial minority respondents indicated that they experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct based on their racial identity more often than non-minority respondents*

<sup>11</sup> Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Norris, 1992; Rankin, 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008)

- Differences by Racial Identity:
  - White respondents (80%) were more comfortable with the climate in their departments/work units at KSU than People of Color respondents (74%) and Multiracial respondents (63%).
  - White respondents (89%) were more comfortable with the climate in their classes at KSU than People of Color respondents (80%) and Multiracial respondents (80%).

### **3. A small but meaningful percentage of respondents experienced unwanted sexual contact.**

In 2014, *Not Alone: The First Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault* indicates that sexual assault is a significant issue for colleges and universities nationwide, affecting the physical health, mental health, and academic success of students. The report highlights that one in five women is sexually assaulted while in college. One section of the KSU survey requested information regarding sexual assault.

- 2% (n = 76) of respondents reported that they experienced unwanted sexual contact while at KSU.
- A higher percentage of Undergraduate Student respondents (2%, n = 59) experienced unwanted sexual contact in the past four years than did other respondents.

Respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on why they did not report unwanted sexual contact. Forty respondents provided written responses. The themes included: (1) *Fear*, respondents most frequently cited fear of re-victimization; (2) *Lack of Openness/Awareness Among University Departments*, respondents noted a perceived intimidation and indifference by select offices; and (3) *Felt Responsible, Embarrassed, and Did Not Perceive the Incident as Sexual Assault*, respondents indicated that they were, in part, responsible for and too embarrassed to report the incident. The themes and selected comments that support each theme are provided in the full report.



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*Shameka Wilson, director of the Women's Resource  
and Interpersonal Violence Prevention Center at KSU*

## Conclusion

The KSU campus climate findings<sup>12</sup> are consistent with those found in higher education institutions across the country based on the work of R&A Consulting.<sup>13</sup> For example, 70% to 80% of all respondents in similar reports found the campus climate to be “comfortable” or “very comfortable”; 83% of all respondents in the KSU survey reported that they were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at KSU. Likewise, 20% to 25% of respondents in similar reports indicated that they personally experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct; at KSU, 21% of respondents reported that they personally experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. The results also parallel the findings of other climate studies of specific constituent groups.<sup>14</sup>

The KSU climate assessment report provides baseline data on diversity and inclusion, fulfilling one of the goals outlined in the 2012-2017 strategic plan. While the findings in and of themselves may guide decision-making in regard to policies and practices at KSU, it is important to note that the cultural fabric of an institution and unique aspects of each campus’s environment must be considered when developing action items based on such findings. KSU is 50 years old and undergoing a series of significant changes in its size, demographic composition, and academic profile. The climate assessment findings provide the KSU community with an opportunity to build upon its strengths but also develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. KSU, with the support from senior administrators and collaborative leadership, is in a prime position to actualize its commitment to an inclusive campus and to institute organizational structures that respond to the needs of its dynamic campus community.

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<sup>12</sup> Additional findings disaggregated by position and other selected demographic characteristics are provided in the full report.

<sup>13</sup> Rankin & Associates Consulting, 2014 <http://www.rankin-consulting.com>

<sup>14</sup> Guiffreda, Gouveia, Wall, & Seward, 2008; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2004; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Sears, 2002; Settles et al., 2006; Silverschanz et al., 2008; Yosso et al., 2009

*Table 1. KSU Sample Demographics*

Characteristic	Subgroup	n	% of Sample
Position Status	Undergraduate Student	3,360	65.5
	Graduate Student	213	4.2
	Continuing Education Student	55	1.1
	Staff	815	15.9
	Faculty	663	12.9
	Continuing Education Instructor	22	0.4
Gender Identity	Man	1,795	35.0
	Woman	3,272	63.8
	Transgender	14	0.3
	Genderqueer	45	0.9
	Other	30	0.6
Racial Identity	Person of Color	1,502	29.6
	White	3,195	62.9
	Multiracial – POC/White	317	6.2
Sexual Identity	LGBQ	431	8.4
	Heterosexual	4,126	80.5
	Asexual/Other	296	5.8
	Multiple Sexual Identities	139	2.7
Citizenship Status	U.S. Citizen	4,766	92.9
	Non-U.S. Citizen	266	5.2
	Multiple Citizenships	69	1.3
Disability Status	No Disability	3,920	76.4
	Disability	999	19.5
Military Status	Military Service	284	5.5
	No Military Service	4,796	93.5
Religious/ Spiritual Affiliation	Christian Affiliation	3,394	66.4
	Other Faith-Based Affiliation	194	3.8
	No Affiliation	807	15.7
	Multiple Affiliations	108	2.1
	Spiritual, No Affiliation	529	10.3
SES <sup>15</sup> - Students	Low Income	1,037	28.4
	Not Low Income	2,482	70.5

*Note: The total n for each selected demographic characteristic differs as a result of missing data.*

<sup>15</sup> *Low Income respondents are respondents with incomes below \$29,999. Not Low Income respondents are respondents with incomes of \$30,000 or greater. This question was asked of Students only.*



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