Kennesaw State University-Marietta (KSU-Marietta, formerly Southern Polytechnic State University [SPSU]) 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 engender academic engagement where teaching, working, learning, and living take place in pluralistic communities of mutual respect.

In September 2013, then President Lisa Rossbacher appointed Kami Anderson, Associate Professor in the department of Digital Writing and Media Arts, and Jill F. Forest, Associate Director of Career Services, to co-chair SPSU’s newly created Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion. President Rossbacher charged the group with exploring two questions:

• How can we understand and describe diversity and inclusiveness for SPSU in ways that are consistent with the University’s values and mission?
• How can SPSU build an inclusive environment for all faculty, staff, and students?

The Task Force had the latitude to determine the scope of its work. After the first two meetings, members unanimously agreed that a campus climate assessment would provide vital insight into SPSU’s environment. The Task Force completed a review of the merits and drawbacks of an internally or externally driven survey process and decided that a consultant should be hired to complete the assessment. Task Force members began a review of potential consulting firms when, in November 2013, the University System of Georgia Board of Regents announced SPSU’s consolidation with KSU. The Task Force met two additional times and determined a climate assessment was still needed but that any plans would be put on hold until more information about the consolidation came forth.

In January 2014, the Consolidation Operational Working Group for Diversity and Inclusion (OWG 36) was established to consolidate the campuses’ respective programs and activities. Jill F. Forest co-chaired the OWG, along with Erik Malewski, Chief Diversity Officer and Professor of Curriculum Studies at KSU. After discussion, it was determined that SPSU would complete a climate survey before the consolidation in order to capture SPSU-specific data. SPSU established the Campus Culture and Climate Assessment Task Force (CCCATF), a new task force focused on completing the survey design. The CCCATF, composed of 13 faculty, staff, students, and administrators, modified the Kennesaw State survey to better fit the Marietta context.

For a list of CCCATF members, please see http://mariettacca.kennesaw.edu.
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.

Marietta students during an engineering lecture
The CCCATF collaborated with Rankin & Associates Consulting (R&A) to develop the survey instrument. The KSU-Marietta survey contained 103 items (20 qualitative and 83 quantitative) and was available via a secure online portal from November 4 through December 5, 2014. Confidential paper surveys were distributed to individuals who did not have access to an Internet-connected computer or who preferred a paper survey.

KSU-Marietta community members completed 919 surveys for an overall response rate of 12 percent. Only surveys that were at least 50 percent completed were included in the final data set for analyses. Response rates by constituent group varied: 12% (n = 662) for Undergraduate Students, 6% (n = 50) for Graduate Students, 64% (n = 24) for Administrators, 32% (n = 95) for Staff, and 27% (n = 88) for Faculty. Table 1 provides a summary of selected demographic characteristics of survey respondents. The percentages offered in Table 1 are based on the numbers of respondents in the sample (n) for the specific demographic characteristic.

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\(^2\) Sixteen respondents were removed because they did not complete at least 50% of the survey.

\(^3\) The total n for each demographic characteristic may differ as a result of missing data.
1. **High levels of comfort with the climate at KSU-Marietta**

Climate is defined at KSU-Marietta as the “the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of faculty, staff, administrators, and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential.” The level of comfort experienced by faculty, staff, administrators, and students is one indicator of campus climate.

- 75% (n = 690) of the survey respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at KSU-Marietta.
- 72% (n = 148) of Faculty, Staff, and Administrators were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their departments/work units.
- 79% (n = 516) of Undergraduate Students and 86% (n = 43) of Graduate Students were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their classes.
- 87% (n = 72) of Faculty were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their classes.

2. **Faculty, Staff, & Administrators – Positive attitudes about work-life issues**

Campus climate is constituted in part by perceptions of work, a 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.

- 77% (n = 156) of Faculty, Staff, and Administrators found KSU-Marietta supportive of flexible work schedules.
- 77% (n = 159) of Faculty, Staff, and Administrators indicated that their supervisors provided them with resources to pursue professional development opportunities.
- 80% (n = 165) of Faculty, Staff, and Administrators indicated that KSU-Marietta provided them with resources to pursue professional development opportunities.
- 74% (n = 152) of Faculty, Staff, and Administrators were comfortable taking leave that they were entitled to without fear that it may affect their job/careers.

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4 Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264
5 Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006
3. **Students – Positive attitudes about academic experiences.**

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

- 79% (n = 558) of Students indicated that many of their courses in the 2014-15 academic year have been intellectually stimulating.
- 76% (n = 534) of Students indicated that they were satisfied with the extent of their intellectual development since enrolling at KSU-Marietta.
- 79% (n = 558) of Students indicated that their academic experience has had a positive influence on their intellectual growth and interest in ideas.
- 80% (n = 40) of Graduate Students and 74% (n = 488) of Undergraduate Students were satisfied with their academic experience at KSU-Marietta.

4. **Students – Perceptions of Campus Climate.**

- A majority of Students indicated that they felt valued by faculty in the classroom (86%, n = 614) and that they felt valued by other students in the classroom (84%, n = 597).
- Students reported that KSU-Marietta faculty/instructors (83%, n = 590), staff (79%, n = 555), and administrators (72%, n = 510) were genuinely concerned with their welfare.
- 92% (n = 646) of Students indicated that they had opportunities for academic success that were similar to those of their classmates.

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\(^6\) Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005
\(^7\) Hale, 2004; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2004
75% of the survey respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at KSU-Marietta.

76% of Student respondents were satisfied with the extent of their intellectual development since enrolling at KSU-Marietta.
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.\footnote{Aguirre & Messineo, 1997; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001} Research also underscores the relationship between workplace discrimination and subsequent productivity.\footnote{Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008; Waldo, 1999} The survey requested information on experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

- 21% (n = 194) of respondents noted that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.\footnote{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).}
- 27% (n = 53) of respondents who reported having experienced the conduct indicated that it was based on their gender/gender identity. Others indicated that they experienced such conduct based on their age (19%, n = 36) and on their position at KSU-Marietta (18%, n = 35).
- Differences emerged based on gender identity and position status. For example:
  - A significantly higher percentage of Women (29%, n = 98) than Men (16%, n = 88) noted that they had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.
  - Significantly lower percentages of Undergraduate Students (19%, n = 124) and Graduate Students (16%, n = 8) than Faculty (32%, n = 28), Administrators (29%, n = 7), and Staff (28%, n = 27) noted that they had experienced such conduct.
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 has focused on the experiences of faculty, staff, and students associated with historically underserved social/community/affinity groups (e.g., women, people of color, people with disabilities, first-generation students, veterans). Several groups indicated that they were less comfortable than their majority counterparts with the climates of the campus, workplace, and classroom.

- Differences by Position Status:
  Faculty and Staff (72%, n = 137) were significantly less comfortable than were Undergraduate and Graduate Students (78%, n = 553) with the overall campus climate at KSU-Marietta.

- Differences by Racial Identity:
  Faculty and Students of Color (73%, n = 187) were significantly less comfortable with the climate in their classes than were Multiracial (83%, n = 385) and White (85%, n = 45) Faculty and Students.

- Differences by Income Status:
  Low Income Students (73%, n = 147) were significantly less comfortable (“very comfortable”/“comfortable”) with the climate in their classes than were Not Low Income Students (84%, n = 387 were “very comfortable”/“comfortable”).

- Differences by Gender Identity:
  A significantly greater percentage of Women Faculty and Students (10%) than Men Faculty and Students (5%) were “uncomfortable” in their classes.

Of those respondents who indicated they experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct, a significantly higher percentage of women (29%, n=98) than men (16%, n=88) indicated it was based on gender identity.

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* indicated 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-Marietta survey requested information regarding sexual assault.

- 2% (n = 18) of respondents indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact while at KSU-Marietta.
- Respondents who indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact rarely reported the incident.
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.

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

KSU-Marietta campus climate findings are consistent with those found in higher education institutions across the country based on the work of R&A Consulting. For example, 70 percent to 80 percent of all respondents in similar reports found the campus climate to be “comfortable” or “very comfortable.” Seventy-five percent of all KSU-Marietta respondents reported that they were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at KSU-Marietta. Likewise, 20 percent to 25 percent in similar reports believed that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. At KSU-Marietta, 21 percent of respondents believed that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. The results also paralleled the findings of other climate studies of specific constituent groups offered in the literature.

The KSU-Marietta climate assessment report provides baseline data on diversity and inclusion, addressing both the University’s mission and 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-Marietta, it is important to note that the cultural fabric of an institution and unique aspects of each campus’s environment must be taken into consideration when considering additional action items based on these findings. It also is important to take into consideration that, during the project, the University was undergoing a series of significant changes in leadership. The current project’s data were collected during the tenure of a previous senior administration and, therefore, may not represent the community’s reflections on the current administration. The climate assessment findings do provide the KSU-Marietta community with an opportunity to build upon its strengths but also develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. KSU-Marietta, with 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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12 Additional findings disaggregated by position status and other selected demographic characteristics are provided in the full report.
13 Rankin & Associates Consulting, 2015
14 Guiffrida, 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

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<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Subgroup</th>
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<th>% of Sample</th>
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<td>Faculty</td>
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<td></td>
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Note: The total n for each selected demographic characteristic differs as a result of missing data.

\[\text{Low Income respondents are respondents with incomes below $29,999. Not Low Income respondents are respondents with incomes of $30,000 or greater. This question was asked of Students only.}\]
References


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