

Year 1 Public Description of Work for  
Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Rutgers University

**Greatly Expanded Program of Climate Surveys to Include Sexual Harassment as well as Sexual Assault, and Surveying New Populations**

**This Action Applies to Rubric Item(s): 23-28**

**Description of Work:**

In 2014, Rutgers University—New Brunswick launched #iSPEAK, its first campus climate survey about sexual violence, at the request of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. In an inquiry of massive scope, more than 12,000 students were asked about their attitudes and beliefs about campus sexual violence, as well as their familiarity with campus resources intended to address such violence. Since then, the Rutgers' campus climate surveys have continually evolved based on the best science available. They have now been conducted across all four of the Rutgers campuses, with over 22,000 student responses collected. Modules have been added to assess for dating violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of identity-based discrimination. The project has been a joint effort between Student Affairs from each of the Rutgers' campuses and researchers from Rutgers' Center on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) at the School of Social Work.

The Rutgers team has been intentional about developing a model to guide its campus climate work on addressing sexual violence, harassment, and other forms of abuse and harm. This model is characterized by several key tenets including that it is collaborative, ongoing, comprehensive, transparent, and focused on the translation of research to practice. Surveys are conducted every 3-4 years, with the time in between used by the appropriate administrative officers to develop, implement, and evaluate action plans driven by the campus climate findings. The team has published its model on its website ([www.socialwork.rutgers.edu/centers/center-violence-against-women-and-children/](http://www.socialwork.rutgers.edu/centers/center-violence-against-women-and-children/)) as well as in a peer-reviewed article (McMahon et al., 2018).<sup>1</sup> A report on the Rutgers process and model was submitted to the White House and has been used by the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) to provide support to other campuses engaging in this work.

The Rutgers team conceptualizes the campus climate broadly to include measurement not only of prevalence of abuse, violence, and harm, but also students' perceptions of the way the campus responds to such violence, awareness of campus policies and resources, and

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<sup>1</sup> McMahon, S., Stepleton, K., Cusano, J., O'Connor, J., Gandhi, K., & McGinty, F. (2018) Beyond sexual assault surveys: A Model for conducting a comprehensive campus climate assessment. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 55 (1), 78-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2017.1358629>

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willingness to engage in prevention and prosocial behavior (e.g., bystander intervention). A number of follow-up questions are posed to participants who indicate that they experienced various forms of abuse and harassment in order to learn more about the context and their experience in accessing support on campus. The team uses evidence-based research to guide its methods, and includes validated scales from the ARC3 surveys as recommended by the National Academies, as well as other reliable tools.

The campus climate surveys are regarded as a collaborative endeavor. Across each campus, the research team convened a multi-disciplinary advisory board (AB), which included representatives from the Title IX office, victim services, residence life, and student affairs, along with student representation. The ABs play a pivotal role in the campus climate assessment process, providing feedback and input throughout the entire cycle from adapting the survey tool to recruitment to reviewing the findings.

To make the survey as inclusive as possible, a census approach is used on each campus, meaning that all students enrolled on the various Rutgers campuses (both undergraduates and graduates) are invited to participate. The surveys are promoted via social media campaigns, printed advertisements, and on-campus tabling. Student organizations, student leaders, faculty, staff, and members of the ABs all help to publicize the survey.

The findings from all campus climate surveys are compiled into reports that are available online, and are presented to various groups including the student affairs leadership team, key stakeholders, and several student groups. The team is committed to exploring innovative ways to make the data accessible and has developed infographics, short reports, and currently is working on a podcast.

These surveys have yielded a wealth of rich information about the experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of students related to sexual and dating violence, harassment, and abuse. The methodology itself has also proven to be an awareness-raising experience for many students. Participants generally expressed thanks for the survey, a desire to learn more about sexual violence, or an interest in becoming involved in addressing the issue. In addition, the impact of the project is demonstrated through its important findings and the implementation of changes on campus to better address sexual violence. They have helped inform the development of campus policies and services regarding these issues.

The campus climate surveys represent only one part of a larger effort to create a “data ecosystem” as recommended by the American Association of Universities (Driver-Linn & Svenson, 2017). Thus, the data from campus climate surveys is integrated with other types of assessment efforts that occur more frequently on campus, such as program evaluation, monitoring and tracking service utilization, and focus groups with students who are underrepresented on surveys (e.g. students of color and LGBTQ+ students).

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Most recently, the team has focused more intentionally on the issue of sexual harassment versus sexual assault. In the Spring of 2020, the team completed the administration of surveys for all seven schools in Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences, including two medical schools, a dental school, a school of nursing, a school of graduate studies, a school of public health, and a school of health-related professions. All surveys used validated scales from ARC3 and are currently under analysis. The average response rate across the seven schools was 37%. In addition, the first-ever University-wide survey focusing on sexual harassment is planned for Fall '21, and is actively in development. The survey will be administered across all four Rutgers campuses, and will include populations not included in previous surveys, most specifically, faculty, staff, postdocs, and academic administrators.

Information about our campus climate work, including the key findings, reports, and other resources, can all be found at <https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/centers/center-violence-against-women-and-children/research-and-evaluation/understanding-and>.

### **Website for further information (if applicable):**

<https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/centers/center-violence-against-women-and-children/research-and-evaluation/understanding-and>

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