

Year 2 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Rutgers University

Measuring the prevalence of sexual harassment, University-wide

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

- Measure the prevalence of sexual harassment
- Using climate assessment to inform action

Description of Work:

Background

Rutgers University has been conducting campus climate surveys with students since 2014 when it was asked by the Obama Administration's *White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault*¹ to pilot a campus climate survey tool developed by the Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women in 2014. Since then, the Rutgers campus climate surveys have evolved based on the best science available to address sexual violence, dating violence, and sexual harassment. They have now been conducted across all four of the Rutgers campuses, with over 22,000 student responses collected in total. The project has thus far been a joint effort between the Student Affairs Office from each of Rutgers' four campuses and researchers at the Center on Violence Against Women & Children (VAWC). Results are used to inform policy, practice, and procedures at all of the Rutgers campuses as well as University-wide initiatives.

In 2019-2020, researchers piloted a sexual harassment survey for students specifically at seven health-based schools within Rutgers University. Rutgers is now actively planning to expand its efforts by administering a campus climate survey throughout the entire University where all members of the community are able to participate. All students will be included, as well as all faculty and staff, as their role is also integral to creating safe and inclusive learning environments. The survey will not only measure sexual harassment but will also use an intersectional approach to measure experiences of other types of identity-based discrimination. This will allow Rutgers to develop an action plan that acknowledges the intersection of sexual violence with other forms of discrimination and harm, and engage the entire campus community.

In addition, researchers are working with University Communications and the University's Division of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement to ensure that the sexual harassment survey is conceptualized as just one dimension of holistic climate assessment.

Survey planning and development

¹ White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. (April 2014). Not Alone: The first report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. Retrieved from <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/protecting-students-sexual-assault>.

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The University-wide assessment process is in its planning phase, which includes engaging senior leadership, developing appropriate recruitment strategies, creating inward-facing and outward-facing communications plans, coordinating with key offices on campus, and finalizing the survey tools. The team is committed to a collaborative, inclusive and transparent process, and thus has dedicated a full year to planning. To date, senior leadership at the University has been briefed and have offered their support as well as additional resources to the project. The team has also begun to meet with key partners on campus including Institutional Research, Title IX offices, victim services offices, University Communications, and the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement.

The survey tools are actively in development. In order to fulfill Rutgers University's commitment to the Action Collaborative, the survey tools are currently based on the validated Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative (ARC3) Campus Climate Survey Instruments, consistent with the recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's 2018 report on the sexual harassment of women.² One survey will be administered to students, and another to faculty and staff.

The research team is also taking steps to help maximize an integrated approach to effectively measuring the climate at Rutgers University by adopting a broader, more comprehensive definition of climate. To accomplish this, the research team has been consulting the literature for validated measures that address the intersectionality of identities and the multiple contextual factors affecting harassment and discrimination on campus to include on the survey tool. This includes reviewing campus climate survey instruments that have been used at other Big Ten institutions. While there are currently few instruments that assess multiple dimensions of the climate, the [Know More Campus Climate Survey](#) administered at Michigan State University (MSU) provides a useful model for the research team.

Using climate assessment to inform action

All campus climate surveys at Rutgers are conducted according to a model established by the Rutgers team to guide previous survey administrations that has been published and disseminated (McMahon et al, 2019). As part of the model, conducting a campus climate survey is embedded within a process that includes time on the front end for planning, engaging others on campus, and finalizing the tool, and on the back end, allows time for analysis, translation, dissemination, and most importantly, action planning.

We have also convened a multi-disciplinary advisory board before the administration of each campus climate survey done at Rutgers University since 2014. The advisory boards assist with both the development of outreach measures to promote the surveys to students and to guide

² National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*. The National Academies Press.

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subsequent action planning as well as dissemination of findings based on the results of the surveys.

The advisory boards have consisted of staff from student affairs and the Title IX office as well as staff from the victim services provider on each campus, students, and faculty members. The advisory board will be essential to the success of this university-wide survey initiative in particular as it will include populations not included in our previous surveys. The university-wide survey advisory board will consist of students as well as university leadership, faculty, and post docs as well as staff from student affairs, academic affairs, title IX and various other offices. The university-wide survey advisory board will work with each campus to develop specific recruitment strategies, as well as develop university-wide messaging and action planning once we have survey results.

Next Steps

The research team will continue to develop the tool based on best available science and validated measures as well as by consulting various stakeholders across Rutgers University to ensure a collaborative, comprehensive endeavor.

Ongoing faculty, staff, and student engagement will also be essential to the success of the university-wide survey initiative as it will include populations not included in previous surveys (e.g., faculty, staff, postdocs, and academic administrators).

This will include, but is not limited to, the following activities: (1) The development of a planning group, convened with the support of university leadership to help coordinate the project, work with each campus to develop specific recruitment strategies, as well as develop university-wide messaging; (2) creation of a media campaign to explain the purpose of the project and generate enthusiasm as this will be critical; and (3) developing an incentive structure, particularly for student involvement, as this has also been demonstrated as necessary for stronger participation rates and as a means of minimizing bias.

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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