

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

## **Salk Institute for Biological Studies**

### Year 2 Work:

#### **Conducting a Campus Climate Survey**

#### Most relevant areas of the rubric to which this work applies:

**Measuring the prevalence of harassment and related/contributing behaviors  
Publicly sharing the results/data from evaluation work  
Using Climate Assessments to Inform Action**

#### **Description of Work:**

1. Purpose and goals of the campus climate survey

Many of our goals around developing, deploying, and using the results from our inaugural campus climate survey are consistent with the NASEM 2018 report. The goal of this initiative was to understand the working, training, and research environment from the perspective of individuals at Salk based on both the positions they occupy at Salk and their personal identities. We aimed for an instrument through which we could obtain both quantitative data that could be analyzed by position status and aspects of personal identity, and candid qualitative responses. Assurances around confidentiality were key to these goals.

Salk plans to use the survey report to inform future actions related to the prevention and reporting of sexual harassment; recognizing and reducing bias; increasing campus civility and mutual respect; enhancing opportunities for career advancement and mentoring; increasing diversity across all positions; fostering inclusion and ensuring equity in institutional policies, structures and decision making. We strive to develop and convey strategies to eradicate harmful behaviors through education that increases understanding of their detrimental impact on campus climate and ensures a sense of belonging for all members of our community in an environment that is safe and welcoming.

2. Relationship of our goals with the 2018 NASEM report

While we do receive official/formal reports of harassment and other unwelcome conduct pursuant to our policies surrounding harassment and discrimination and our Code of Conduct, we recognize that not everyone reports. Because there are many contributing factors, a survey was a safe space for individuals to provide details without identification or fear of retaliation. We also understand that not everyone connects that conduct such as

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microaggressions, instances of bias, uncivility, etc. can lead to harassment and if reported, could be addressed before it escalates. As such, we aimed to create space in the survey to convey such information.

In the survey, questions were asked about unwanted and unwelcome sexual contact as well as exclusionary conduct to encourage everyone to respond in a manner that was relatable to experience(s) they personally had or observed. Determining the prevalence of sexual harassment and/or related conduct - whether people did or did not report (and if they did not, why not) - were important goals. Another driving factor was to assess the experiences and perceptions of populations that may not feel heard due factors such as position or personal identities, or attributable to power differentials, institutional cultural considerations, or systemic structures at Salk.

### 3. Our Process

In 2019, Salk formed a *Campus Climate Advisory Committee (CCAC)*, formed partly in response to the *NASEM Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education*. Committee members were to engage in outreach across the campus to identify concerns and make recommendations or propose specific actions to bring about positive, measurable outcomes to foster a diverse and welcoming workplace. In addition to the prevention of sexual harassment, the committee's charge included issues such as bullying, racial harassment, and implicit and explicit bias, as impactful to the campus culture.

This group made three recommendations in its initial year, to (1) re-envision sexual harassment training, (2) create an ombuds office and (3) conduct a campus climate survey. After obtaining approval for the survey in early 2020, that group added additional members to ensure representation across our campus population to form the *Climate Survey Working Group (CSWG)*.

Following discussion about engaging a third-party expert in climate surveys, a decision was needed about whether to proceed with developing and deploying this survey during an unprecedented period – during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was discussed and input was obtained from various stakeholders. Ultimately, since all climate surveys are a snapshot in time, we decided to proceed. While there was some nervousness around how this might impact participation and results, the reduction in travel, increased accessibility through virtual meeting software, and the available time that some pandemic restrictions freed up for some individuals, were contributing factors in our decision to move forward. This allowed us to include questions around significant events of 2020 and how that impacted members of the Institute both personally and professionally.

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Following the decision to proceed, an outside consulting firm (“the consulting firm”) was chosen to guide the committee in the survey development process and to ultimately disseminate the survey, analyze the results and report/present them to Salk. An initial meeting of the CSWG was convened in August of 2020. That kicked off a series of biweekly meetings through the end of 2020, during which committee members met with the dedicated consultant from the consulting firm and tackled tasks between meetings to develop questions, discuss potential concerns, rethink/rewrite questions, finalize and ultimately test the survey instrument.

In November we began to communicate and build awareness and momentum around the survey. In mid-January, the survey was launched, with a one month turn-around time. Members of the CSWG, volunteer ambassadors in the community, and our Office of Equity & Inclusion conducted extensive outreach in person (via Zoom due to the timing during the pandemic), by email, through videos, interviews, and testimonials on the intranet, to promote survey participation; the tremendous support our communications department provided was invaluable to the success of this initiative.

#### 4. How this work is new for Salk

The ways in which this work is new for Salk are myriad. It was proposed by a committee that was novel in both form and function; the committee included faculty and staff (administrative and scientific) and had a broad charge. Although there had been other surveys in the past at the Institute, they were commissioned and overseen by formal leadership bodies. This survey was developed and driven by a representative committee with guidance by a consulting firm with expertise in this area.

A tremendous amount of time and effort was put into ensuring confidentiality and transparency with the goal of a high level of survey participation from faculty, scientific staff, administrative staff, and trainees. To instill confidence in the measures being taken around confidentiality, the CSWG submitted the survey to Salk’s institutional review board (IRB) which assessed it through the lens of protocols for human subject research. Since this was an administrative tool and our organization would not be using the data for research, this step was optional. However, as a scientific research institute, the committee recognized the value of proceeding this way to demonstrate the commitment to confidentiality.

In addition to confidentiality, a significant focus of the communication strategy was about transparency. Our communications consistently reiterated that the results would be

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analyzed, reported, and presented by the consulting firm to the internal Salk community without advance review by the Institute's administration, faculty, or board of trustees. Because of these measures, nothing in the report could be altered by the Institute.

### 5. Status of the work currently

As noted above, transparency in the process was critical to demonstrate to the community that sexual harassment and the wide array of other topics covered in the climate survey would be taken seriously. We also felt that it would increase accountability to act on the results.

In July 2021, the consulting firm released an executive summary of the climate survey report to the internal Salk community. This was posted on our intranet and in our library. One week later, our assigned consultant from the consulting firm (who had worked with us since the beginning of the process) presented the results in a town hall dedicated solely to the survey. The next day the full report was posted on our intranet. The town hall reserved time for questions and answers; questions could be posed to members of the Institute's executive leadership team, members of the committee, or to the consultant who delivered the report. Members of the community were encouraged to submit questions before, during and after the town hall. Any questions not addressed during the event were posted on our intranet along with a recording of the event and the presentation.

### 6. How Salk is involving stakeholders in the work and next steps

Based on the recommendation of the CSWG, we are now holding 1-2 discussion forums (live and virtually) each week through September of 2021. The goals of these sessions are to glean reactions to the survey report, hear from voices that may not have been captured due to limitations around confidentiality (i.e., small sample size) and solicit input on priorities for action. In addition to these formally planned sessions, campus affinity groups and committees as well as individual departments and laboratories are encouraged to host their own sessions and submit feedback. An online forum for conversations about the report, an email address to submit additional feedback, and an online form to submit feedback anonymously are additional methods for engagement around the results.

Feedback, suggestions, and priorities are being compiled during this period. As their last task together, the CSWG plans to cull and present the themes that emerged as priorities from the community. From there, we anticipate that working groups will be established to develop and implement action plans to include an evaluation of necessary human and fiscal resources. Members of the community who are particularly passionate about and/or

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directly impacted by working group themes will be encouraged to volunteer to participate along with internal subject matter experts; how we might engage external resources and experts will also be discussed and evaluated. By undertaking this survey, the Institute has committed to action that will continue to actively engage our internal community through a process that is well underway.

### **7. How Salk plans to or evaluate the success, effectiveness, and impact of the work**

The Institute has also committed to conducting a follow-up survey in several years. In the meantime, we aim to establish benchmarks for our organization against which we can measure our progress as changes are implemented. Enhancements to campus communication have become a priority over the last several years and we are committed to keeping the community informed about changes that relate to the survey results and the progress and impact that comes from those changes.

Other tools to measure effectiveness and impact include the inclusion of actions that impact our organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plan; evaluation of exit interview data, the annual ombuds reports and turnover data; evaluation and measurement from professional development, mentoring and career advancement strategies; and the outcomes of our focused initiative on re-envisioned approaches to sexual harassment education and prevention.

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