

HEDS Diversity and Equity Climate Survey 2023

Executive Summary

During the 2022-2023 school year, HEDS conducted a comparative climate survey of Minnesota State University, Mankato. This survey consisted of two separate parts. The first part involved items that HEDS regularly assesses, which allows for a comparison with other 4-year institutions. The second part was tailored to particular interests at MNSU, M.

A total of 7,919 students and 1,711 staff/faculty were invited to take the survey. Of those, 943 students and 724 staff/faculty submitted a response, for response rates of 12% and 42%, respectively. Response rates for emailed surveys are typically around 10%, indicating better-than-average response rates for both groups.

The sample was primarily White (71%), female (57%), heterosexual (81%), liberal (46%), non-disabled (89%), Christian (58%), and had at least some college education (45%).

PART I

How do people feel about the overall campus climate?

Attitudes towards campus climate were generally positive when compared to other 4-year institutions in the database. Most respondents felt satisfied about the overall campus climate (76%), and believe that diversity improves campus interactions (87%). To a lesser extent, respondents felt satisfied with how much community members have a sense of belonging (54%) and agreed that campus is free from tensions (51%). Respondents indicated they agreed that they feel comfortable sharing their views on diversity and equity (63%), though this is slightly lower than other 4-year institutions (67%).

In terms of group differences, all racial/ethnic groups other than White and Asian felt more poorly about campus climate, particularly among employees.

What did respondents report in terms of hearing disparaging remarks?

Respondents on this campus reported a slightly higher rate of hearing disparaging remarks compared to other 4-year institutions. Similar to other institutions, the most common disparaging remark involved political affiliation (51%). Gender/gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, age, English language learners, and sexual orientation were experienced by about 30-35% of respondents. Religion, immigration status, socioeconomic background and disability were also higher than most other institutions, but were less commonly disparaged compared to other groups (20-29%).

Respondents indicated these disparaging comments most commonly came from students (56%), followed by community members (48%), faculty (29%), staff (25%) and administrators (17%).

Have respondents experienced discrimination and harassment? What was the nature of the discrimination or harassment?

Approximately 23% of respondents indicated they experienced discrimination or harassment (with another 10% indicating they were unsure if they had experienced it). Of those indicating they had experienced it, 61% of them experienced it within the past year. In terms of the source of harassment, respondents indicated it primarily came from students (52%) followed by faculty (50%), staff (28%), administrators (24%), and the local community (18%).

Characteristics that were the basis of discrimination/harassment that occurred “often” or “very often” included race/ethnicity(24%), political affiliation (22%), gender/gender identity (21%), physical appearance (21%), sexual orientation (19%), and religion (17%). Different groups on campus experienced these at varying rates. Students tended to experience more discrimination/harassment based on sexual orientation, religion, physical appearance, and political affiliation. Faculty, meanwhile, experienced more discrimination around gender/gender identity and age. Administration/staff reported the lowest incidence of discrimination/harassment across all characteristics.

The most common form of discriminatory behavior was being ignored or excluded (55% or higher across all roles), derogatory remarks (55% or higher across all roles), intimidation or bullying (which was highest among faculty, at 60%). More intense forms of harassment, such as physical threats or violence, were fortunately low overall, though a substantive percentage of students indicated they had feared for their physical safety (24%).

Students were most likely to report that the discriminatory event happened either in a physical classroom or virtual classroom. Faculty, administrators and staff tended to experience discriminatory events in departments or conference rooms.

The source of the discrimination tended to come from peers. Approximately 83% of students identified another student as the source; 88% of faculty identified a fellow faculty member as the source; administration and staff identified a staff member (60%) or an administrator (49%) as the source.

When asked whether they had reported the discriminatory/harassing event, a minority of respondents said yes, with faculty having the highest reporting rate at 35% and undergraduate students having the lowest reporting rate at only 18%

How did respondents feel about institutional support around diversity?

Respondents were asked to state whether they agreed with four statements about institutional support:

- The campus environment is free from tensions related to individual or group differences.
- Recruitment of historically marginalized students, faculty, and staff is an institutional priority.

- Retention of historically marginalized students, faculty, and staff is an institutional priority.
- Senior leadership demonstrates a commitment to diversity and equity on this campus.

For the first item, regarding campus tension, most undergraduate and graduate students agreed with the statement (67% and 55%, respectively). Staff/administration and faculty tended to be less likely to agree (37% and 31%, respectively).

For the second item, regarding recruitment, a majority of all groups agreed with the statement, ranging from 54% (graduate students) to 69% (staff/administration).

For the third item, regarding retention, responses were more moderate, with a range of 50% (graduate students) to 63% (undergraduate students and staff/administration) agreeing.

For the fourth item, regarding senior leadership commitment, a majority agreed, ranging from 57% (faculty) to 67% (undergraduate students).

What groups are students, faculty, and staff/administration uncomfortable with?

Overall, 80% or more respondents indicated they felt either “comfortable” or “very comfortable” interacting with different groups on campus with two notable exceptions.

First, only 73% of undergraduate students and 76% of staff/administrators feel comfortable interacting with undocumented immigrants, with relatively large proportions indicating they feel neutral. It is clear that part of what is driving this discomfort is the lack of documentation, as generally over 90% of respondents feel comfortable with people from foreign countries.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these results correspond with respondent reports of the types of people they interact with regularly. Approximately 70-80% of respondents report that they have not knowingly interacted with any undocumented immigrants. Respondents, meanwhile, less than 6% of respondents say they have not knowingly interacted with people from foreign countries.

Second, all groups feel some discomfort with talking with people with different political affiliations. Only 78% of undergraduate students, 82% of graduate students, 81% of faculty, and 80% of administrators feel comfortable engaging with people on the other end of the political spectrum. The majority of respondents report that they engage with people with different political beliefs on a daily or weekly basis, so the discomfort is not driven by a lack of experience with that group. At the time of this report, the U.S. is heading into election season, so some of this discomfort is likely to intensify as the election draws closer.

What activities have been most helpful for generating support for diversity and inclusion topics?

First, a substantive proportion of respondents (typically 30-50%) report not having any of the listed experiences. Additionally, less than 10% of respondents indicated that any activity made

them less supportive of diversity and inclusion, so ensuring that people have more exposure to these activities seems like it will be helpful for improving attitudes towards diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Respondents across roles at the university reported that having discussions, training or activities focused on diversity were helpful for making them feel more supportive. Students and faculty were also more likely to report that community service has been helpful. Respondents found having political discussions and attending training on immigration issues as least helpful overall.

PART II

How do students feel about aspects of belongingness, support, and inclusion on campus?

Overall, students feel positively about campus. Across groups, rates of agreement were over 70% on all items with the exception of a three items:

- “Our campus takes appropriate action when people have been harassed or discriminated against” received only 58% agreement.
- “I feel a sense of belonging at this school” received 67% agreement.
- “In my classes, I feel comfortable sharing my perspectives and ideas” received 70% agreement.

Further examination of various groups indicated that there were two groups – students of color and trans/non-binary students – who were notably lower across all items.

In terms of students of color, agreement was particularly low for the following items:

- *In my classes, I feel comfortable sharing my perspectives and ideas* (69%)
- *I feel emotionally safe when interacting with students* (69%)
- *At this school, I see people who share my background/identity represented in the campus environment* (67%)
- *I feel a sense of belonging at this school* (65%)
- *I have not felt isolated at this school because of my identity* (65%)
- *Our campus takes appropriate action when people have been harassed or discriminated against* (62%, which, while low, is higher than the overall average unlike the other statements)
- *At this school, I see people who share my background/identity represented in the courses and curriculum* (61%)

Only one item (*I feel physically safe while on campus*) received higher than 80% agreement.

In terms of trans/non-binary students, while the number of total respondents was relatively small (36 respondents), agreement rates were much lower than average across all items. Items that had the lowest rates of agreement included:

- *Our campus takes appropriate action when people have been harassed or discriminated against* (26%)
- *The school is supportive of students with disabilities* (31%)
- *This school is committed to ensuring students with disabilities are treated with respect* (31%)
- *I have not felt isolated or left out at this school because of my identity* (36%)

It is worth noting, though, that these students do tend to feel more positively about their treatment from faculty and staff. While only 42% report feeling emotionally safe around students, 69% report feeling safe around faculty and staff, and over 70% report feeling that faculty and staff treat them fairly, make them feel welcomed, and treat them in a caring way.

How do employees feel about aspects of belongingness, support, and inclusion on campus?

Overall, employees did not feel as positively about campus culture. There were multiple items that received less than 70% agreement:

- *I think I need more training on equity, diversity, and inclusion.* (37%)
- *Our campus takes appropriate action when people have been harassed or discriminated against.* (38%)
- *I think my colleagues and supervisors need more training on equity, diversity, and inclusion.* (47%)
- *I am able to openly express my suggestions or concerns without fear of retaliation.* (57%)
- *I have not observed others being harassed or discriminated against at my current employer in the last four years.* (59%)
- *I feel like I can be myself at work.* (65%)
- *Faculty and staff treat students of different backgrounds, cultures, and identities with respect.* (66%)
- *I feel a sense of belonging at this workplace.* (67%)
- *This employer is supportive of employees with disabilities.* (68%)
- *This employer is committed to ensuring employees with disabilities are treated with respect.* (69%)
- *My supervisor provides feedback and evaluates employees fairly, regardless of their background, culture, or identity.* (70%)
- *I have not felt isolated or left out at work because of my identity.* (70%)

As with students, there were also some notable results specific to particular groups. While there was only a small number of employees identifying as trans/non-binary (less than 10), their responses were lower on every item. Those that were particularly low included:

- *I feel a sense of belonging at this workplace. (0%)*
- *I feel like I can be myself at work. (11%)*
- *I have not felt isolated or left out at work because of my identity. (11%)*
- *This employer is supportive of employees with disabilities. (11%)*
- *This employer is committed to ensuring employees with disabilities are treated with respect. (11%)*
- *I am able to openly express my suggestions or concerns without fear of retaliation. (22%)*
- *If I needed to, I would feel comfortable requesting an accommodation for a disability at this workplace. (33%)*
- *Faculty and staff treat students of different backgrounds, cultures, and identities with respect. (33%)*
- *I have not observed others being harassed or discriminated against at my current employer in the last four years. (33%)*
- *Our campus takes appropriate action when people have been harassed or discriminated against. (33%)*

Another notable point about this group is that they were much more likely to endorse a need for DEI training for colleagues and supervisors (78%, as compared to only 47% across all groups).

In terms of campus role, faculty tended to demonstrate less agreement overall (63%) compared to staff (70%) and administration (78%). Items that had particularly low agreement included:

- *Our campus takes appropriate action when people have been harassed or discriminated against. (34%)*
- *I am able to openly express my suggestions or concerns without fear of retaliation. (57%)*
- *I have not observed others being harassed or discriminated against at my current employer in the last four years. (59%)*
- *I feel a sense of belonging at this workplace. (67%)*

Staff and administration also tended to be low in agreement on these items, but not as low as faculty.

KEY LESSONS

There are a few lessons that can be drawn from this survey that can benefit campus climate.

There is room for improvement in terms of building a sense of community and helping people feel a sense of belonging at MNSU,M. A substantial proportion (about 20%) of most groups feel neutral about their belongingness at MNSU,M, so helping students, faculty, staff and administrators feel a sense of community and shared purpose can help improve attitudes.

Throughout the survey, respondents expressed skepticism about whether the university takes appropriate action when discrimination or harassment occurs. Better information about policies, reporting structures, and remediations may help with this, even if it means that a supervisor or faculty member will need to explain requirements of confidentiality when discussing employee or student misconduct.

The survey also indicated that the bulk of discriminatory behavior is coming from students. Finding ways to equip students, faculty, staff, and administrators with tools to address acts of discrimination and harassment can be helpful in remediating these behaviors. Learning how to balance helping young adults learn and ensuring that historically disadvantaged groups feel supported and welcome is a difficult task, but one that will be vital in ensuring an improved climate.

In terms of what groups may be in particular need of support or resources, three key groups emerged in these findings. First, employees of color tend to feel the lowest sense of belonging, comparatively, so learning more about why these employees feel more negatively compared to other 4-year institutions will be helpful.

Second, trans and non-binary students and employees generally felt poorly about most aspects of the organization, and they were the only group that generally endorsed more training for their colleagues and supervisors. The context surrounding this finding is important; at this time, multiple states are passing laws concerning trans and non-binary people's rights, so it is not surprising that this demographic may be feeling particularly vulnerable at this time.

Third, the campus at large has indicated that few individuals have knowingly interacted with undocumented immigrants, and that people feel less comfortable interacting with these people. Given that most respondents don't feel uncomfortable interacting with immigrants in general, it appears that the lack of documentation is driving the discomfort. Thus, education around the lack of documentation can help people understand this group better and feel more inclusive towards them.