

Sedlacek, W. E. (2000, Spring/Summer). A campus climate survey! Where to begin. *Diversity Digest*, 4(3), 24-25. Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Campus climate surveys can be extremely useful to educational leaders as they work to develop effective diversity plans whether around issues of curriculum, residence life, or student recruitment and retention. Many campus practitioners, however, don't know where to begin in designing campus climate surveys. And while there are many resources that can help (see box below and www.diversityweb.org), each institution is different and requires different sorts of evaluations. I offer the following suggestions just to help practitioners get started on designing campus climate surveys to effectively guide them in their diversity planning.

Tailoring Surveys to Institutional Needs

First, know your institution. Rely on your judgment, or someone you trust, about what issues should be surveyed. Check the campus and/or local newspaper for diversity topics that have come up frequently. Look at what other schools have done, but just because Tapioca Tech used a certain survey does not mean it will be useful for your school. Focus your survey: don't try to do too much. Perhaps on your campus, issues concerning a particular racial group seem most important. A good survey on a limited topic is better than a wide-ranging survey on many topics. Do several focused surveys over time if necessary.

Another way of focusing is to concentrate on one of three types of content: *information, attitudes or behavior*. It is generally not a good idea to try for all three in one survey, because of time needed to complete the survey, and the difficulty of developing adequate items in all three areas. The three areas yield potentially much different data. Discovering what someone knows about something may be unrelated to how they feel about it, or what they will do about it. For example, *information* might include knowledge learned in courses or knowledge about policies or definitions of terms. *Attitudes* might include feelings or perceptions about any aspect of campus diversity. *Behavior* might include attendance at events, joining clubs, taking courses, or retention at your institution.

How Results Will Be Used

Right at the beginning, it is useful to decide on what you want to do with the results of your survey. Are you designing a research study to teach social science students? Will the survey results be used by the school president to help determine and recommend general campus policies? Will the results be used by diversity program staff to help plan specific programs?

Determine what kinds of data will likely be useful to the intended audience. Consider multiple methods. Focus groups, telephone surveys, online surveys, case studies, using existing data, historical studies, studying newspaper files, interviews etc all

have their advantages and disadvantages. Use models or theory, where possible, to help organize your thoughts or concepts. One useful resource is Janet Helms' *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have*. This can help you determine the content and/or methods used in your survey.

Collaborations and Realism: Keys to Success

Collaborate with experienced people wherever possible. Involving faculty who work in multicultural areas, consulting with statisticians and campus assessment offices, and finally working with student groups can all be beneficial. Keep it practical. Do what you do well. If you don't have the resources for a campus-wide study, do one of just the residence halls, or the faculty in engineering. Again, a well-done study that makes smart use of resources is preferred. Recognize the limitations in your data. We tend to expect too much of a survey. We want to make cause-effect inferences and solve all our problems with one survey. So don't go beyond what you have. Use campus climate surveys as background information that is fallible. If it is part of an overall research program with many types of studies, then you can start to make generalizations about your campus.

Watch sampling problems. It is better to have a small well-defined sample than a large sample that is poorly drawn. Spend your resources on getting returns and providing incentives that do not interfere with the responses. For example, credit at the bookstore, a movie pass, and a pen with the school logo are all things I have used successfully. Avoid presuming the nature of the responses. For example, a pro-diversity pencil or tickets to a diversity-sponsored event may affect responses, or make it more likely you would hear from certain segments of your population. Different groups have different reactions to diversity issues.

Dissemination and Follow-Up

Pay attention to follow-up. Campus climate surveys can be very helpful starting points, but they must be followed up by decisive action that builds on the data that are gathered. In order to maintain credibility and momentum, it is important for members of the campus community to see any analysis of the survey data that is done and to see any plans of action that emerge from the analyses. Finally, while the first purpose of any survey should be to improve an individual campus' diversity practices and policies, survey results can also be useful to practitioners and policy makers in your state or around the country. If you do a survey, consider sending the results to AAC&U for inclusion in *Diversity Digest* or DiversityWeb and see below for other communications tips.

Box

Campus Climate Survey Resources

University of Maryland Diversity Survey:

<http://www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/Topic/Diversity/Response/UM/Programs/Initiative/survey.html>.

Ancis, J.R., Sedlacek, W.E. & Mohr, J.J. (2000) Student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 180-185.

Helms, J.E. (1992). *A race is a nice thing to have*. Topeka, KS. Content Communications.

Sedlacek, W.E (1994) Issues in advancing diversity through assessment. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 72, 549-553.

Sedlacek, W.E. (1995) Using research to reduce racism at a university. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling and Development*, 33, 131-140.

Sedlacek, W.E. (1996) An empirical method of determining nontraditional group status. *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development*, 28, 200-210.

Sedlacek, W.E. (1998) Strategies for social change research. In C.C. Lee, and G.R. Walz. (Eds) *Social action: A mandate for counselors*. Pp 237-239. Alexandria, Va. American Counseling Association.

(2000. Spring/Summer). Association of American College and Universities, pp. 24-25.