

# CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE: CLASSROOM & TEACHING CLIMATE

*A toolkit series to guide UMass community members in understanding, interpreting, reflecting on, and responding to findings of the 2021 Campus Climate Survey*

## WELCOME!

The prominence and importance of classrooms within the campus environment cannot be overstated. College classrooms are key sites of course-based human interaction and of intellectual and social engagement. Ideally, all UMass Amherst students, across social identity aspects, should feel equally welcome, valued, and engaged within these learning spaces. However, higher education contexts, particularly those of predominantly white institutions (PWIs), carry a historical legacy of exclusion and marginalization. In addition, many academic disciplines remain gendered. These circumstances and others present challenges for achieving equitable classroom climates for our students.

Existing scholarship has documented ways in which school-based learning environments can be inhospitable or unengaging for students – particularly those whose social identities have been historically marginalized. Because classrooms are such important sites of engagement with both peers and faculty, students' experiences in these spaces can be especially impactful, in both positive and negative ways.

This set of Campus Climate Survey results focuses on students' and instructors' experiences in the classroom. We hope that this toolkit provides insight about the extent to which our classroom climates are equitably experienced, and prompts critical reflection about existing challenges and growth opportunities by both students and faculty alike.

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## SURVEY QUESTIONS

**Both undergraduates and graduate students were asked how often each of the following happens to them at UMass Amherst:**

- You feel excluded in class on the basis of an aspect of your social identity
- You feel like your point of view is dismissed in class on the basis of an aspect of your social identity
- You are targeted unfairly or singled out unfairly by course instructors because of your social identity
- Course instructors stereotype, make negative remarks about or tell jokes about an aspect of your social identity

**Both faculty and graduate student instructors/TAs were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each of the following statements:**

- Students in my course have enthusiasm for learning about diverse perspectives
- Students' resistance limits the free expression of ideas in my classes
- I would value guidance about how to more effectively address diversity issues in my courses
- I have difficulty managing diversity-related topics/conversations in my class
- My department's undergraduate curriculum includes diversity of identity, experience, and perspective (*only for faculty*)



## KEY FINDINGS: STUDENTS



- Students' sense of belonging is one of the strongest predictors of one-year retention for UMass Amherst undergraduates. Students who indicated feeling excluded in the classroom or that their point of view is dismissed were less likely to report a strong sense of belonging than are those who did not report these experiences.
- About a quarter of all students reported they sometimes or often feel excluded based on their social identity, and a similar percentage reported that their social identity has caused their point of view to be dismissed in classroom settings. It is important to acknowledge that students were not asked whose behavior caused them to feel excluded or dismissed: it may be that of peers, instructors, or a combination of both.
- While an encouraging 89–92% of students report that they never experience faculty targeting them, singling them out, stereotyping them, and making negative remarks or jokes about their social identity, there are some notable differences among identity groups. Black undergraduates were four times more likely to report feelings of exclusion than their white peers, and transgender undergraduates were more than three times as likely to report similar experiences than their cisgender counterparts. A similar disparity exists for graduate students.
- In terms of being targeted, unfairly singled out, or stereotyped by course instructors, experiences also vary by social identity, with less positive experiences being reported by Black students and students with a learning disability.
- When students who reported challenging classroom experiences were asked to indicate which aspects of identity were targeted, gender and race were the aspects most likely to be selected among both undergraduate and graduate students.

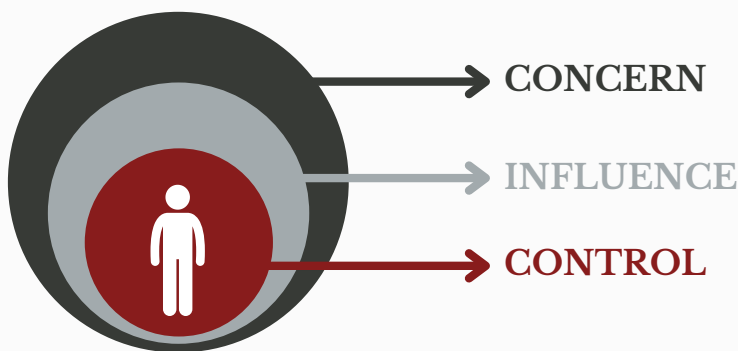
# IMPORTANT IDEAS:

## LOCATING OUR AGENCY

When faced with major challenges – like radically shifting to a culture of equity and inclusion! -- it is easy to become quickly overwhelmed and even frozen, unclear where to begin.

**Once we have set clear intentions about what we collectively wish to move toward, it is imperative for community members to consider where our individual time and energy will be best spent in support of this vision.**

One framework popularized by Stephen Covey encourages both individuals and groups to consider their personal spheres of concern, influence, and control. The widest circle encompasses all of our concerns – every worry, every change we'd like to see, everything we think and care about – including the ones we have no power to meaningfully change. The smallest circle, our individual circle of control, includes all of the items that we can personally act on and directly impact. In the middle lies our sphere of influence, whose scope is highly variable and comprises items that we may be able to shape through interpersonal and intergroup relationships.



**By focusing most intently on the circles of control and influence, we set ourselves up for success by creating achievable goals that will build momentum and increase our resilience when met.**

When processing the Campus Climate Survey data through this lens, we might ask ourselves questions like the ones below...

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

- What would an “ideal” classroom and teaching climate look and feel like? If the concerns raised by this data were effectively addressed, how would we know? What evidence would signal change and growth?
- Which actions can I/we personally take to move closer to this ideal vision? What can we act on today? This month? This semester?
- Who or what is within my/our sphere of influence? Where can I partner with others to leverage our collective power and agency? Who are my allies, accomplices, and co-conspirators?



## KEY FINDINGS: FACULTY



- Majorities of both faculty (90%) and graduate student instructors/TAs (78%) across all identity groups agreed (either somewhat or strongly) that their students have enthusiasm for learning about diverse perspectives.
  - Among faculty, responses are quite similar across most social identity groups, although Black faculty were more likely than their peers of other races/ethnicities to Strongly Agree that their students have enthusiasm for learning about diverse perspectives.
- Vast majorities of both graduate student instructors/TAs (80%) and faculty (86%) disagreed, either somewhat or strongly, that student resistance limits the free expression of ideas in their classrooms.
- Majorities of both faculty (70%) and graduate student instructors/TAs (75%) agreed either somewhat or strongly that they would value guidance about how to address diversity issues in their courses more effectively. However, a much smaller percentage of respondents reported that they have difficulty managing diversity-related conversations or topics in their classes – only 20% of graduate student instructors/TAs and 22% of faculty indicated that they Strongly Agree or Agree.
  - There were some modest differences across social identity in the faculty-specific dashboard, such as women (77%) and nonbinary faculty (81%) being somewhat more likely than men (63%) to agree that they would value guidance.
- When asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree that their department's undergraduate curriculum includes diversity of identity, experience, and perspective, a majority of faculty (70%) indicated agreement with this statement and responses were generally similar across social identity categories, although Black (26%) and Latinx (17%) faculty were more likely than their peers of other races/ethnicities (8% or less) to Disagree Strongly.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUED LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT

## Spotlight On:

### UMass Center for Teaching and Learning

The Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) supports the professional development of faculty across all career stages and disciplines with programs and resources focused on course design, classroom instruction, curriculum development, and other forms of instructional support for faculty, departments, and the campus as a whole.

Relevant CTL resources include:

[How Do I Navigate Hot Moments in the Classroom?](#)

[How Do I Engage Students in Difficult Class Discussions Around Sensitive Topics?](#)

Additional Resources for Faculty:

[Creating an Identity Safe Classroom](#)

[Addressing an Identity-Threatening Incident](#)

- Podcast episode: Invisibilia, [The Culture Inside](#)
- Book: *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* by Anthony Greenwald & Mahzarin Banaji
- [What Is the Circle of Control \(And How to Use It to Stop Feeling Powerless\)](#)
- [Tips and Tools for Constructive Conflict Resolution](#)
- [Project Implicit: Implicit Association Tests](#)
- [How to Think about 'Implicit Bias'](#)
- [How Does Implicit Bias Influence Behavior? Explanations and Impacts of Unconscious Bias](#)

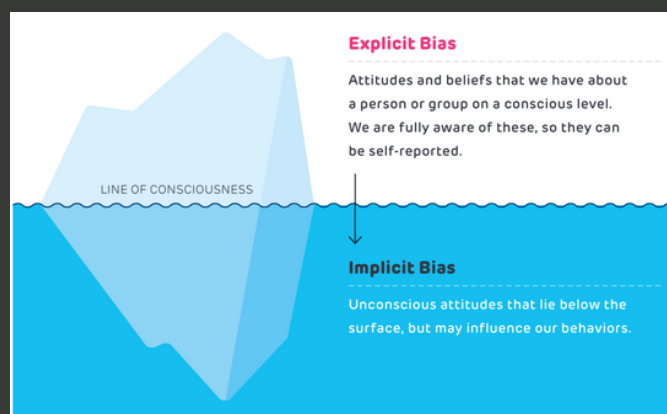
## STRATEGIES TO LESSEN THE IMPACTS OF IMPLICIT BIAS

- Explore and identify your own implicit biases by taking implicit association tests or other means
- Consider experience from the perspective of the person or group being stereotyped
- Pause and reflect on your potential biases before interacting with people of certain groups to reduce reflexive reactions
- Individuate people based on their personal characteristics rather than those affiliated with their group
- Embrace evidence-based statements that reduce implicit bias
- Practice cultural humility, a lifelong process of critical self-reflection and adjustment

## IMPORTANT IDEAS:

### IMPLICIT BIAS

While most of us can fairly easily recognize our explicit biases – the *conscious* attitudes and beliefs we hold about people and groups – and understand why negative bias can be harmful, implicit bias can be trickier to both notice and mitigate. If you imagine bias as an iceberg, implicit bias is the portion hidden below the waterline – nearly invisible but still hugely influential, often informing our assumptions, actions, and attitudes in ways that may not even align with our actual values and beliefs.



Although implicit bias may operate in subtle or indirect ways, its impact is deep and undeniable. Countless studies have demonstrated how cultural stereotypes and prejudices inform one's experiences in the world, contributing to both interpersonal conflict and large scale social inequity. While implicit bias most often involves discriminating against those perceived as "different" or "other", it can also lead to preferential treatment being afforded to those who occupy more dominant or normative identities and experiences.

Some important types of implicit bias to recognize include:

- Confirmation bias: unconsciously seeking evidence that our existing beliefs and personal opinions are accurate
- Affinity bias: positive feelings of connection about those we perceive as similar to us
- Halo effect: projecting positive qualities onto individuals solely based on their social identity or group membership