CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEY ENGAGEMENT GUIDE:
WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

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 University of Massachusetts is more than an institution of higher education. For over 6,500 faculty and staff, this is also their workplace. Be it salting and shoveling our walkways, preparing the food we eat, advising our students, managing our books (both literally and figuratively), or teaching our classes, the employees here work hard to ensure that the business of the University is done well. Like the overall composition of our campus, this work is conducted by people who hail from a diversity of backgrounds and life experiences. Our campus is richer for their presence.

Yet, we know that there are broad challenges facing our campus community and evidence of them is found in the responses surrounding workplace climate. Disproportionately impacted in the workplace by the pandemic, staff reported higher levels of dissatisfaction than faculty with the university’s response. Faculty and staff with a disability were more likely to report mistreatment in the workplace, and to specifically report it as bullying. LGBTQIA+ and female-identifying faculty and staff were more likely to report difficulties in work-life balance. Also notable are the voices which are underrepresented in these survey results. Numerous barriers to participation, logistical and relational, resulted in frontline staff – the people who do service work on our campus and often hold positions of less institutional power – being less likely to complete the survey. We recognize that there is much to be learned from their stories and will strive to create better access to participation in the future.

These findings reveal opportunities where meaningful changes can be made. By leaning into community and the imperative to care for one another, we can work together to make this campus a place where people thrive, and their ambitions are realized. This toolkit is a starting point, where we take this up to us.

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SURVEY QUESTIONS

Note: Please see the complete Workplace Environment dashboard for important information regarding General Context for Staff and Faculty, impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and limitations of the Staff survey results.

- Thinking about your own experiences and interactions, please rate your immediate work environment on each scale below:
  - Unwelcoming → Welcoming
  - Hostile → Friendly
  - Unsafe → Safe
  - Not Collaborative → Collaborative
  - Disrespectful → Respectful
  - Not Inclusive → Inclusive
  - Intolerant → Tolerant
  - Not Diverse → Diverse
  - Unsupportive → Supportive
  - Weak → Strong sense of community

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
  - Differences among people are valued
  - I am clear on my role and responsibilities
  - I am encouraged to grow in my position
  - I feel appreciated
  - I have opportunities to do what I do best
  - I have the resources I need to do well
  - People seem to care about me
  - There is a spirit of cooperation

- From your perspective, to what extent does your supervisor pay attention to how people in your workplace are treated?

- So far this semester, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your ability to balance your work priorities with your personal life priorities? (Faculty & Staff)

- How challenging is it for you to effectively balance your work as a graduate assistance and your academic work? (Graduate Assistants)

- In your campus job, how often do you experience mistreatment—either by your co-workers or others?
  - Would you describe any of the mistreatment you experience as bullying?
Overall, majorities of both faculty and staff agreed (either Somewhat or Strongly) that they are clear on their role and responsibilities, that people seem to care about them, that there is a spirit of cooperation, that their supervisor pays attention to employees’ treatment in the workplace, and that they Rarely or Never experience mistreatment at their campus job.

Of the ten climate aspects discussed in the survey, the least positively rated categories included diversity, inclusivity, collaboration, and sense of community, while perceptions of safety and friendliness ranked higher.

Across response categories, perceptions of workplace climate varied by identity group. One notable example is faculty and staff with a disability, who rated their work environment climate much lower than their non-disabled peers (3.1 vs 3.8) and were twice as likely to report being Very Dissatisfied with their work environment climate. This group was also much more likely to report experiencing mistreatment Sometimes or Often (48-56% vs 28-30%), and more likely to describe the mistreatment as bullying (34 - 43% vs 19 - 25%).

While the majority (58 - 66%) of respondents indicated being Somewhat or Very Satisfied with their ability to balance their work and personal life priorities, perceptions of work-life balance varied by social identity and employee role, with marginalized identity groups such as Trans, Nonbinary, Questioning, and Female staff members reporting lower levels of satisfaction.

Additionally, nearly three quarters of graduate assistants (73%) said it was Somewhat Challenging or Very Challenging for them to balance their assistantship work with their academic work.

33 - 40% of respondents disagreed (either Somewhat or Strongly) that they have the resources they need to do well, 36% of staff disagreed that they are encouraged to grow in their position, and 31% of faculty disagreed that differences among people are valued.

Some examples of common microaggressions (and the hidden messages they might convey) include…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Targeted</th>
<th>Microaggressive Comment</th>
<th>Potential Messages Received</th>
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| Ethnicity & Nationality | Wow, you speak English so well! | • I didn’t expect someone who looks like you to be intelligent or well-spoken  
• I assumed you were not a native English speaker based on your appearance |
| Disability | You’re so inspiring! I never would have been able to accomplish everything you have if I were in your position. | • I’m relieved and grateful that I don’t share this site of identity  
• A primary function of disabled people is to inspire and remind others how fortunate they are to be non-disabled |
| Gender Identity | I never would have guessed you were transgender if you didn’t tell me! You pass so well. | • All transgender people aspire to appear cisgender and will consider this a compliment  
• There is a certain way that I “expect” trans people to look |
| Race & Gender | Can I touch your hair? I’m so curious to know what it feels like! | • Something about your body/appearance is strange or exotic  
• I feel entitled to occupy your personal space |
| Body Type/Size | You look great! Did you lose weight? | • Thinner bodies are inherently more attractive  
• Losing weight is always a positive thing (it could be due to stress or health issues) |

First defined by Columbia University professor of counseling psychology Dr. Derald Wing Sue, microaggressions are “the everyday slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate negative messages to someone based solely upon their marginalized group membership.”

When it comes to recognizing microaggressions, it’s important to note that context and relationality matter! The same comment that is well-received by a close friend may land poorly when said to a stranger or professional acquaintance.

Even when well-intentioned, microaggressions often reinforce inequitable ideas of who is “normal” and who is “other”, and function to remind minoritized individuals of the ways in which they are different. Over time, the accumulated impact of microaggressions leads to stress, fatigue, and disconnection that disproportionally affects some identity groups more than others.
RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

When microaggressions occur, it is common and understandable to freeze, recognizing that something feels ‘off’ but feeling uncertain about how to respond. Unfortunately, there is no one guaranteed perfect way to navigate these moments. However, practice makes better, and there are many strategies you can try out to see what works best for you!

Different players in the interaction will likely have differing needs and ways of responding.

If you are on the receiving end of a microaggression...
Trust your intuition and give yourself permission to feel hurt, angry, disappointed, etc. Try to share your experience with someone who you know will understand and validate what you are feeling. If desired, tag in an ally to help navigate the situation - you are not obligated to manage this moment alone!

If you are the person who said or did something microaggressive...
Try to resist the urge to over-explain or defend yourself by focusing on your intent. Instead, acknowledge the impact of your words and offer a sincere apology coupled with changed behavior in the future. You can also seek support for your feelings of confusion, frustration, remorse, etc. but the person who felt hurt by your comment is usually not the most realistic or appropriate source for this kind of validation. Turn to a trusted friend outside the situation to vent, process, and strategize your response instead.

If you are a bystander or someone seeking to act as an ally...
Learn about and practice different strategies for intervening and responding to microaggressions, such as seeking clarification, challenging stereotypes, or using humor to defuse the situation. See THIS RESOURCE for a complete list of sample strategies! When in doubt, ask the person most directly impacted what would be most helpful and follow their lead.

For further learning, please see...
- Calling In and Calling Out Guide
- You’ve Been Called Out for a Microagression. What Do You Do?
- Don’t Get Defensive: 6 Ways To Respond To Being Called Out Despite Your Good Intentions

IMPORTANT IDEAS:

Members of marginalized or minoritized groups most directly impacted might feel...
- Affirmed to see their experiences reflected
- Frustrated that this experience is not already common knowledge
- Cautious/skeptical about the potential for change
- Vigilant to see how others will respond

Those not directly impacted, but who strive towards allyship might feel...
- Surprise or sadness to learn that things are “worse than you realized”
- Increasingly committed to advocate for positive change and growth
- A sense of urgency to act immediately and fix every problem

Those who have not yet had an opportunity (or obligation) to consider these topics might feel...
- Disengaged — “what does this have to do with me anyway?”
- Confused, impatient, or even irritated by others’ strong reactions
- Embarrassed by a lack of knowledge or awareness

QUESTIONS FOR SELF REFLECTION

- What is your initial response to this data? Which emotions do you notice? (Note: you may find this Feelings Inventory list helpful!)
- Have you ever experienced or witnessed a microaggression? What happened? Which marginalized identities were targeted?
- How did you and/or others respond or react?
- Which emotions did you notice in yourself and/or others?
- What is one skill or strength you would like to remember to utilize the next time you find yourself in a tough interaction?
QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

After reviewing the Strategies for Responding to Microaggressions and Bias, consider the case studies in the column to the right in pairs or small teams. Read each case study aloud and explore any or all of these questions:

- What is the intent and impact of this encounter?
- Which identities, cultural norms, values, and power dynamics might be at play in this situation?
- Which intervention strategies could be most (or least) successful and why?
- What could you do or say to move the situation toward a positive resolution?
- What prior knowledge, skills, or practices could have prevented or eased this situation?

CASE STUDIES

In a staff meeting, attendees in their 20s and 30s make derogatory comments about how slow older people are to understand and embrace new technology. There are also references to negative stereotypes about older people's cognitive, visual, and hearing abilities.

A staff member with a mobility disability sometimes requires extra time to complete their work, due to inaccessible buildings and a lack of reliable public transportation to their work site. They receive an unfavorable review from their supervisor, who points out their lower levels of productivity compared to non-disabled colleagues.

During a discussion about equity & inclusion initiatives in their department, white employees speak more tentatively than usual and repeatedly ask the only Black woman present for her feedback on the ideas being shared. Someone suggests that she should lead the DEI committee, even though this is unrelated to her field of expertise.

A new team member is non-binary and uses they/them pronouns, which are visible in their email signature and display name during Zoom meetings. When showing the employee around the office, their supervisor introduces them and adds, "he uses they/them pronouns". When another colleague uses the incorrect pronouns during a meeting, several others look uncomfortable but no one says anything.

After a lunch meeting, male attendees exit quickly, while women find themselves staying behind to tidy up the gathering space. In the same department, there is a pattern of women taking on additional duties, such as committee work, mentoring, and service roles. When one female faculty member points this out in a group conversation, a male colleague responds that he hasn't noticed this, suggests that perhaps she is being too sensitive, and offers advice that if it bothers her, she should just refuse the extra tasks.

Additional Resources:

- Examples of Microaggressions
- Microaggressions are a big deal: How to talk them out and when to walk away (podcast episode)
- Research: The Real-Time Impact of Microaggressions
- Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions at Work
- Current Understandings of Microaggressions: Impacts on Individuals and Society