SUNY Cobleskill 2016 Campus Climate Survey

Summary Report

Committee Summary

The SUNY Cobleskill Campus Climate Survey was conducted in April-May 2016 and elicited a total of 887 responses from students, faculty, administration, and staff members at the college.

Survey results reveal that the leading perception of SUNY Cobleskill is one of an open, welcoming place where its members feel respected and supported. A majority of respondents felt comfortable both inside and outside of their classes. However, substantial feedback regarding issues such as lack of civility, racial tension, unprofessional faculty and staff, and a city-country divide, to name a few, were reported. Recommendations for moving forward to address the reported issues are provided by the committee and are also drawn from survey respondents' feedback.

The Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Members: Sinikka Grant (Chair), Grace Begany, Derwin Bennett, Lynn Berger, Briana Dominick, Amanda Hantho, Joseantonio Merzeau, D'Andre Miller, Julie Roth, Salvador Rivera, Barbara Sprouse, Adam Wild

A subcommittee consisting of Dr. Sinikka Grant (Associate Professor of English, Chair of the Cultural Diversity Committee), Lynn Berger (Director of Employee Relations and Affirmative Action), Derwin Bennett (Director of Educational Support Services), and Devoughn Robinson (student member) along with Dr. Don LaPlant, Senior Assistant Librarian, designed the survey..

The subcommittee adopted the Inclusive Excellence (IE) framework, developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) as the guiding principle for the survey. In the survey, "campus climate" referred specifically to the prevailing attitudes and behaviors of campus community members related to issues of access, inclusion, diversity, and equality.

Results

Altogether 887 people took the survey. The respondents identified their status on campus as follows:
- Students: 588 (66.29% of respondents)
- Faculty: 76 (8.57% of respondents)
- Management/administration: 17 (1.92% of respondents)
- Classified/professional staff: 52 (5.86% of respondents)
- "prefer not to respond": 32 (3.60% of respondents)
- Altogether 112 people (12.6% of respondents) skipped the question.

Quantitative Responses.

Q.1. How do you feel about the campus climate IN YOUR CLASSES at SUNY Cobleskill?

The majority of respondents—**71% of all respondents indicated they are comfortable in their classes** and 13% indicated they were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. Some students and faculty did, however, report discomfort: 5% of the students said they feel uncomfortable and 2% feel very uncomfortable; 4% of faculty said they feel uncomfortable, and 1% very uncomfortable.

Q.2. How do you feel about the campus climate OUTSIDE OF CLASSES at SUNY Cobleskill (e.g. in residence halls, dining halls, offices, shared public spaces)?

Overall, **66% of respondents felt either comfortable or very comfortable on campus outside of classes.** Of all the groups, staff indicated the highest level of comfort, while some students and faculty were uncomfortable.

- Overall, 66% of all respondents were comfortable or very comfortable, 20% neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, and 12% uncomfortable or very uncomfortable.
    - Students: 9% uncomfortable, 3% very uncomfortable
    - Faculty: 8% uncomfortable, 2% very uncomfortable
    - Other: 9% uncomfortable, 5% very uncomfortable
    - Staff: 4% uncomfortable, 2% very uncomfortable

Q.3. How do you feel about the campus climate OFF CAMPUS in the town of Cobleskill?

Approximately half of the respondents felt either comfortable or very comfortable off campus in the town of Cobleskill. A substantial number did, however, feel either uncomfortable or very uncomfortable in the town:

- **Overall, 54% of respondents felt comfortable or very comfortable in town and 28% were neutral**
    - Management/administration: 12% uncomfortable, 12% very uncomfortable
    - Faculty: 17% uncomfortable, 5% very uncomfortable
    - Other: 12% uncomfortable, 3% very uncomfortable
    - Students: 9% uncomfortable, 4% very uncomfortable
    - Staff: 8% uncomfortable, 4% very uncomfortable

Q.4. I believe SUNY Cobleskill is an open, welcoming place that treats everyone fairly.

Overall, the majority of respondents agreed that SUNY Cobleskill is "an open, welcoming place that treats everyone fairly." However, 16% of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

- **Overall, 63% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ; 14% of respondents had no opinion on the statement**
    - Students: 15% disagreed, 4% strongly disagreed with the statement
    - Faculty: 20% disagreed, 5% strongly disagreed with the statement

- Management/administration: 18% disagreed, 12% strongly disagreed with the statement
- Staff: 15% disagreed, 0% strongly disagreed with the statement
- Other: 18% disagreed, 8% strongly disagreed with the statement

Q.5. I believe the campus should do more to create an open, welcoming climate at SUNY Cobleskill.

The majority of respondents believe "the campus should do more to create an open, welcoming climate":

- **Overall, 61% of respondents indicated a need for improvement**, 29% had no opinion, and only 9% felt there was no need for improvement.
  - Management/Administration: 82% indicated a need for improvement
  - Faculty: 72% indicated a need for improvement
  - Students: 61% indicated a need for improvement
  - Staff: 57% indicated a need for improvement

Q.6. Identify your level of experience with the types of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, or hostile behavior listed below. (Check all that apply.)

In every category more than 10% of respondents reported that they had either experienced or witnessed such behavior. In **eight** of the **fourteen** listed categories over 20% of respondents indicated that they had either experienced or witnessed this type of behavior.

1. The category with highest percentage of reported incidents is **"disrespectful, demeaning, derogatory, or offensive comments."**
   - **Altogether 41% of respondents indicated that they had either experienced or witnessed this type of behavior**
     - Faculty: 47% had either experienced or witnessed this type of behavior
     - Management/administration: 43% had either experienced or witnessed this type of behavior
     - Students: 41% had either experienced or witnessed this type of behavior
     - Staff: 36% had either experienced or witnessed this type of behavior
     - Other: 37% had either experienced or witnessed this type of behavior

2. The second highest category is **"prejudicial or biased treatment based on race/ethnicity."**
   - Altogether **30%** of respondents had either experienced or witnessed such behavior
     - Students: 30% had either experienced or witnessed such behavior
     - Management/administration: 30% had either experienced or witnessed such behavior
     - Faculty: 22% had either experienced or witnessed such behavior
     - Staff: 15% had either experienced or witnessed such behavior
     - Other: 31% had either experienced or witnessed such behavior

3. The third highest category is **"bullying."**
   - Overall, 28% of respondents said they have either experienced or witnessed bullying
     - Faculty: 32% had either experienced or witnessed bullying
     - Students: 27% either experienced or witnessed bullying
     - Other: 30% either experienced or witnessed bullying
     - Staff: 24% either experienced or witnessed bullying
     - Management/administration: 17% either experienced or witnessed bullying

The other categories in which **more than 20% of all respondents** indicated they had either experienced of witnessed the negative behavior are:

- "prejudicial or biased treatment based on body type/physical appearance" (22%)
- "prejudicial or biased treatment based on sex (e.g. male, female)" (22%)
- "prejudicial or biased treatment based on group affiliation (e.g. major, club, organization)" (22%)
- "prejudicial or biased treatment based on geographical home or regional affiliation (e.g. urban/rural, out-of-state, international)" (21%).
- "intimidation or threats of physical violence" (20%)

The overall level of experiencing or witnessing of negative behavior in the remaining categories is as follows:

- "prejudicial or biased treatment based on sexuality/gender identity or gender expression" (17%)
- "prejudicial or biased treatment based on political beliefs/ideology" (17%)
- "prejudicial or biased treatment based on religion/faith" (14%)
- "physical violence" (13%)
- "prejudicial or biased treatment based on age" (13%)
- "prejudicial or biased treatment based on economic status" (11%).

Q.7. If you experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, or hostile behavior *first hand*, the perpetrator (person responsible) was (choose all that apply).

- **Overall 37% of respondents identified *a student* as the perpetrator**
  - 39% of students identified a student as the perpetrator
  - 33% of management/administration identified a student as the perpetrator
  - 30% of both faculty identified a student as the perpetrator
  - 30% of staff identified a student as the perpetrator

- **Overall, 14% of respondents identified *faculty/instructor* as the perpetrator**
  - 27% of faculty identified faculty/instructor as the perpetrator
  - 19% of other identified faculty/instructor as the perpetrator
  - 13% of students identified faculty/instructor as the perpetrator
  - 6% of management/administration identified faculty/instructor as the perpetrator
  - 0% of staff identified faculty/instructor as the perpetrator

- **Overall, 7% of respondents identified *a community member* (off-campus) as the perpetrator**
  - 11% of management/administration identified a community member (off-campus) as the perpetrator
  - 8% of students identified a community member (off-campus) as the perpetrator
  - 6% of faculty identified a community member (off-campus) as the perpetrator
  - 6% of staff identified a community member (off-campus) as the perpetrator
  - 6% of other identified a community member (off-campus) as the perpetrator

- **6% of respondents identified *staff in administrative offices* as the perpetrator**
  - 28% of management/administration identified staff in administrative offices as the perpetrator
  - 21% of staff identified staff in administrative offices as the perpetrator
  - 13% of faculty identified staff in administrative offices as the perpetrator
  - 9% of other identified staff in administrative offices as the perpetrator
  - 3% of students identified staff in administrative offices as the perpetrator

- **5% of respondents identified *University Police* as the perpetrator**
  - 6% staff and management/ administration identified University Police as the perpetrator
  - 5% of students identified University Police as the perpetrator
  - 5% of other identified University Police as the perpetrator
  - 3% of faculty identified University Police as the perpetrator

- **4% of respondents identified *staff in the residence halls* as the perpetrator**
  - 4% of students identified staff in the residence halls as the perpetrator
  - 4% of other identified staff in the residence halls as the perpetrator
  - 3% of staff identified staff in the residence halls as the perpetrator
  - 3% of faculty identified staff in the residence halls as the perpetrator

19% of students, 18% of staff, 17% of management/administration, 17% of other, and 13 % of faculty indicated that they prefer not to answer this question.

Q.9 How welcoming/supportive do you feel SUNY Cobleskill is for people in the following groups? (1 = very welcoming/respectful, 5 = hostile/disrespectful)

This question asked respondents to identify how welcoming or hostile they find the campus environment to be for specific groups of people. Respondents largely found the campus welcoming to people in such categories as "People with physical/psychological challenges," "People with learning disabilities," International students," "LGBTQ+ people," "People from small towns/rural areas," "Military veterans," "Nontraditional/Returning students," and "Commuter/Off-campus students." **In these categories 6% or less of respondents answered 4 or 5 in the scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being hostile/disrespectful.**

- 13% of faculty identified hostility/disrespect towards international students
- 11% of faculty and 12% of management/administration identified hostility/disrespect towards LGBTQ+ people

The categories of people towards whom largest percentages of respondents identified hostility/disrespect are:

- **Overall 11% of respondents felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People from large cities/urban areas"**
    - 13% of faculty felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People from large cities/urban areas"
    - 24% of management/administration felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People from large cities/urban areas"
    - 12% of students felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People from large cities/urban areas"
    - 8% of other felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People from large cities/urban areas"
    - 6% of staff felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People from large cities/urban areas"

- **Overall 12% of respondents felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "Ethnic/racial minorities"**
    - 30% of management/administration felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "Ethnic/racial minorities"
    - 18% of faculty felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "Ethnic/racial minorities"
    - 13% of students felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "Ethnic/racial minorities"
    - 9% of Other felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "Ethnic/racial minorities"
    - 6% of staff felt SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "Ethnic/racial minorities"

- **Overall 9% of respondents felt that SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People whose first language is not English"**
  - 17% of faculty felt that SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People whose first language is not English"
  - 12% of management/administration felt that SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People whose first language is not English"
  - 10% of staff felt that SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People whose first language is not English"
  - 10% of students felt that SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People whose first language is not English"
  - 3% of other felt that SUNY Cobleskill is hostile or disrespectful toward "People whose first language is not English"

Qualitative Responses.

As noted, there were a total of 887 respondents to the Campus Climate Survey. Of these respondents, 125 provided qualitative feedback and, as such, this feedback represents 14.1% of the total survey respondent feedback. Table 1 below shows the primary themes that emerged from the qualitative data and the number of instances of each code's occurrence within the textual survey responses. As indicated in the table, the most prevalent theme to emerge from the qualitative data was a general lack of civility; 39% of qualitative responses.

Table 1. Code occurrence of primary themes in the Campus Climate Survey qualitative responses

PRIMARY THEMES	INSTANCES OF OCCURRENCE
Lack of Civility	49
Positive Sentiments	22
Call for Action/Suggestions	20
Racism/Racial Bias/Tension	20
Unprofessional Faculty/Staff	19
City-Country Conflict	17
Poor Follow-Up	13
Negative Behavior by Police-UPD	12
Perceived Favoritism	12
Ag/Non-Ag Conflict	12
Feeling Unwelcome	10
Negative Consequences	9
Sexism	7
Threatened/Afraid/Intimidated	5
Anti-White Sentiment	3
Hateful Speech	3

Key Themes with Narrative Examples

Below are the key themes that emerged from the survey's open-ended, qualitative responses and examples of comments coded with these themes. Some of the comments were coded multiple times, as they reflected several different themes.

Lack of Civility

Many respondents reported a lack of courteous, respectful behavior on the part of some members of the campus community. Some examples of respondents' feedback regarding lack of civility include reports of (1) students mocking ESL students, (2) people disparaging others because of how they dress, wear their hair, and their weight, (3) bullying among sports team members and its tolerance by coaches, and (4) students being called "stupid" by faculty, among other reports of incivilities.

Positive Sentiments

A number of respondents reported that their experience with the Cobleskill community was a positive one. Although some respondents indicated that they were aware of issues and problems on campus related to the campus climate, they personally were not subject to any negative behaviors. In some cases, respondents' comments referred to their positive perceptions of the climate of the campus itself while others referred to positive experiences in the town of Cobleskill.

Call for Action

In addition to the issues and concerns raised by respondents, they also expressed constructive suggestions for improvement of the campus climate. These "calls to action" included various ideas and suggestions for specific action(s) the Cobleskill community should take in order to address a particular campus issue. Some examples of participants' suggestions for improving diversity, equity, and inclusion include (1) cultural sensitivity training for the entire campus, (2) hiring of an unbiased party (e.g. a campus ombudsperson) to handle bias reports, (3) improved services for disabled persons, specifically hearing disabled, (4) improved transgender awareness, and (5) hiring of more diverse, multilingual faculty and staff, to name a few.

Racism/Racial Bias/Tension

The topics of racism, racial bias, and racial tension were among the most prevalent themes that emerged from the campus climate survey. Reports of race-related issues were primarily based on respondents' experiences on the Cobleskill campus, but included some off-campus experiences as well. Some examples of respondents' feedback included descriptions of significant racial tensions between white and black students playing out in the dorms, dining halls, and elsewhere

around campus; and, numerous instances of students being subject to racial slurs, homophobic language, and other hateful comments from other students and Cobleskill townspeople.

Unprofessional Faculty and Staff

Another theme to emerge from the qualitative survey responses was regarding the level of professionalism of faculty and staff. Specifically, respondents reported that they had experienced a clear lack of professional behavior on the part of <u>some</u> faculty and staff. These behaviors were reported by students, faculty, and staff alike. Some feedback that illustrated experiences with unprofessional faculty and staff behavior included descriptions of inappropriate staff comments and behavior; yelling and verbal assaults on the part of senior faculty towards students and staff; and, students being mocked by faculty for their political beliefs and lack of understanding of class material.

City-Country Conflict

The tension between students from city environments and those from rural environments was another key theme in the survey's qualitative responses. The emergence of this particular theme from respondents' comments supports the conventional wisdom on campus where the divide between urban and rural students is oft discussed. Some of the reported perceptions referred to a "war" between city and country kids, a huge divide between students from upstate and downstate NY, and tensions between rural Cobleskill townspeople and students from urban areas.

Poor Follow-Up on Complaints

A number of respondents reported a problem with the SUNY Cobleskill leadership's efforts in following up on reports of bias, unprofessional faculty and staff, and other issues and complaints filed by various members of the campus community. Examples of respondents' comments include reports of getting deferred from one administrator to another regarding a complaint and never getting to a resolution, receiving no follow-up at all after reporting a bias incident to an RD/RA, and the general perception that administration does not care about student/faculty issues, concerns, and specific complaints and that they simply ignore things and hope they go away.

Negative Behavior by Police - UPD

Another emergent theme was the reported negative behavior on the part of SUNY Cobleskill campus police officers. In general, the respondents' feedback speaks to an overly-aggressive stance toward students on the part of the UPD. These reports of negative behavior exhibited by campus police generated from respondents of various race/ethnicities and were not limited to any one group. Some examples include students getting frequently pulled over and aggressively questioned for no clear reason (no ticketing occurs in these instances); a perception by some

students that UPD officers hover over them, waiting for them to do something wrong; and, feeling generally harassed by the UPD as they go about their business on campus.

Ag/Non-Ag Conflict

Related to the theme "City-Country Conflict" are the reported issues and tensions between campus community members in the "Ag" side of the campus (School of Agriculture and Natural Resources) and those in the "Non-Ag" side of the campus (School of Liberal Arts and Sciences). Respondents' feedback notes the general feeling of separation and animosity between these two groups. For example, some respondents reported feeling that the campus overall does not value people who are not in Ag, Wildlife, or Fisheries programs and that the school facilitates this divide by favoring Ag students and programs (e.g. offering more events, funding, and other resources for Ag). Additionally, respondents report a general animosity between Ag and Non-Ag majors, fueled by the fact that there are almost no opportunities (or, perhaps interest) for the two schools to interact.

Perceived Favoritism

Survey respondents also discussed circumstances where they perceived favoritism to be at play. Several respondents' comments made specific reference to the perceived preferential treatment of the Agricultural students, while some were related to other issues such as race/ethnicity, gender, and participation in athletics, to name a few. For example, some respondents expressed that the campus environment favors students from rural areas while, conversely, others reported perceived preferential treatment of students from urban areas.

Feeling Unwelcome

Several respondents reported an overall sense of not feeling welcome on the Cobleskill campus and in town communities. This sense of feeling unwelcome was fostered by a variety of circumstances from how the college is run (e.g. a perceived hostile attitude toward outsiders), to a lack of cultural diversity, uncivil behaviors, discrimination against older, non-traditional students, and other issues.

Negative Consequences

Some responses addressed negative outcomes experienced by students or faculty who had faced a general lack of civility, or some specific negative behavior, on the Cobleskill campus or in the town of Cobleskill. Among the negative consequences mentioned in the comments were dropping a class due to an uncivil classroom environment and therefore being forced to stay an additional semester; and, wanting to quit college, or to transfer to another college perceived as having a more unified student body or being more diverse, accepting, and supportive of students' needs and concerns.

Sexism

Some respondents' comments made reference to sexist behavior on the part of an individual member of the Cobleskill community or of a general sexist environment on the Cobleskill campus. Responses included reports of some faculty disrespecting female students by talking down to them or hitting on them.

Threatened/Afraid/Intimidated, Anti-White Sentiment, and Hateful Speech

In addition to the above-mentioned results and examples, a few more themes emerged that bear highlighting, even though they were reported to a lesser extent. Specifically, some respondents expressed (1) a feeling of being threatened, afraid, and/or intimidated by someone(s) or some circumstance in the Cobleskill community, (2) a feeling that White/Caucasians on campus are unfairly discriminated against, and (3) feelings and ideas that are hateful, and sometimes violent, toward an individual or group that is part of the Cobleskill community.

Conclusions

The survey indicates that the vast majority of respondents—2/3 or more—feel comfortable and welcome on campus, both in and outside classes. While the number of respondents expressing discomfort were relatively low, that 12% of the campus community does not feel comfortable is, however, a concern, as all campus members should feel welcome and respected. Overall, the respondents recognized this, as 61% of all respondents indicated that the campus should do more to create an open, welcoming climate at SUNY Cobleskill.

The survey indicated specific issues that cause discomfort and/or make community members feel unwelcome. The biggest issue that emerged from the quantitative section of the survey was "disrespectful, demeaning, derogatory, or offensive comments." Altogether 41% of respondents said they had either experienced or witnessed this kind of behavior. This finding was further reinforced by the answers in the qualitative section, where the theme of "lack of civility" emerged the most prominent (49 comments, or 39.2% of quantitative responses).

Another substantial issue indicated in the survey was "prejudicial or biased treatment based on race/ethnicity." Altogether 30% of respondents had either experienced or witnessed such behavior. This finding was also enforced by the quantitative analysis, where "Racism/Racial Bias/Tension" emerged as one of the most prominent themes.

The third most substantial issue arising from the survey was "bullying," with 28% of respondents saying they had either experienced of witnessed it.

The above-mentioned three categories were the most prominent, but various other kinds of prejudice are an issue on campus as well: prejudice based on physical appearance, sex, group affiliation, geographical home or regional affiliation, sexuality/gender identity, political beliefs/ideology, religion/faith, age, and economic status were all reported

The survey also asked the respondents to indicate those responsible for negative behavior on campus. The various campus constituencies all indicated students—the largest group on campus—as being the most responsible for negative behavior: 30% of all respondents identified a student as the perpetrator. The next largest group of perpetrators, 14%, were faculty/instructor. This finding was further supported by the quantitative analysis, where "unprofessional faculty/staff" was a substantial theme. The third largest group of perpetrators, 7%, was a "community member (off campus)" and fourth, 6%, was staff in administrative offices.

The level of comfort and feeling welcome in the town of Cobleskill as well was somewhat lower than the comfort on campus. Approximately half of the respondents indicated that they were comfortable. Substantial numbers of faculty and management/administration (23.5%) indicated that they did not feel comfortable in town, as did 13% of students. Also, a substantial portion of faculty and management/administration (27.5%) as well as students (19%) disagreed that SUNY Cobleskill is a welcoming and treats everyone fairly. The quantitative analysis indicated that the town is particularly not welcoming of students of color, who are subjected to racist comments and racial prejudice in town.

The Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is very grateful for the support of the campus community at all stages of this survey. The substantial number of responses to the survey testifies to campus members' commitment to the campus community and its well-being. The survey allowed us not just to assess the overall campus climate—which is largely positive—but also gave clear indications of areas that need improvement, and even suggestions for specific improvements.

Recommendations & Next Steps

Based on the overall results of the Campus Climate Survey, the following recommendations and next steps are offered:

- Hold a town hall meeting with faculty, staff, and students to share the survey results with them and elicit feedback and suggestions for next steps.
- Hold faculty/staff and student focus groups (open invitation) to start the conversation about simple, positive, incremental improvements that can be made based on the data.
- Identify 3-4 areas for focused change that can be implemented in 2017-18 based on the focus group recommendations.
- Communicate each semester about what changes are being made/have been implemented.
- Conduct a faculty/staff/student follow-up survey on progress in the identified 3-4 areas in spring 2018.
- Adjust future surveys (e.g., coding to eliminate "other" category and other wording that dilutes the data analysis) so that demographic correlations can be more effectively considered.