Creating a More Inclusive Climate at WFU

Within the University, there are at least two broad dimensions that influence climate: **departmental and organizational policies and practices**, and **individual conduct**. As leaders, administrators play an important role in shaping both dimensions of climate. Assessing the university's climate for equity, diversity, and inclusion is an important task. Such an assessment is also a first step for developing an Inclusive Excellence strategic plan.

While a University's climate is not created by any one individual, the expectations and standards surrounding interpersonal interactions at the institution are important in creating an inclusive climate overall. To begin to understand the experiences of others, the questions below can guide institutional leaders through understanding the context and experiences within the University community.

**Questions to Consider When Conducting a Climate Assessment Survey**

![Questionnaire Table](image)

Adapted by IAP2: International Association for Public Participation 2007.

Using the question below to conduct a climate assessment via surveys or focus groups provides a university with a better understanding of the experiences of faculty, staff, and students. This also provides insight to the needs of the community and how the institution can work to meet those needs through various interventions, policies, and practices.

**Additional Factors to Consider When Evaluating Campus Climate:**

**Socio-historical Context**

- What has occurred at the local, state, national, or international level in the past year, or the past 10 or 50 years that affect students, faculty, and staff at your institution with diverse identities (e.g. socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, geography, ability, age, etc.)?
- How has the understanding of diversity, inclusion, and equity in higher education changed over time?
Government/Policy Context

- How does the institution monitor legislative support for diversity, inclusion, and equity? How do these efforts apply to people who hold different identities (e.g. socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, geography, disability, age groups, etc.)?

Institutional Context

- Does community engagement involve individuals and organizations representing people from different socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, geography, disability, and age groups?
- What is the composition of the communities (with regard to socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, geography, disability, and age) from which students, faculty, and staff are recruited?
- To what extent is the institutional vision regarding diversity and inclusion integrated throughout all areas of the institution?
- What policies are in place to protect and support members from different socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, geography, disability, and age groups? For example, are there flexible schedules, maternity/paternity leaves, tenure clock stoppage programs, nondiscrimination policies, and training programs?
- How have institutional administrators demonstrated their commitment to diversity and inclusion?
- To what extent do institutional administrators serve as role models for a culture of diversity and inclusion?

Each of the dimensions of the institutional climate may influence diversity efforts, in both positive and negative ways. Be sure to consider the various influences on climate and the impact they have on university policies, diversity, and experiences. To get a true picture of institutional culture and climate, we recommend a multi-methods approach in part because many culture and climate frameworks are multifaceted and require data from various sources and perspectives. Focusing on the various areas that impact climate can provide a holistic approach to implementing changes that lead to inclusive excellence.
Ijeomo Oluo, the author of *So You Want to Talk About Race*, offers some good points when talking about a challenging topic such as race, which can be key when speaking on diversity:

- State your intentions. Be transparent in your findings, and engage stakeholders in their role in creating an inclusive climate.
- Remember what your top priority in the conversation is, and don't let your emotions override that.
- Do your research. Consult with experts in the area to discuss data, trends, and bias work.
- Don't make your or anti-bias argument oppressive against other groups.

Taking the steps to build and sustain an inclusive university climate can aid in retention efforts or faculty/staff searches to fill vacancies when under-valued faculty/staff members leave. These questions are a great start for beginning to assess the institutional climate and understand the experiences of faculty, staff, and students. Ultimately, enhancing the university inclusive climate increases morale and helps everyone reach their full academic potential.
References


