Prior to administering a campus climate survey, colleges and universities are encouraged to build capacity to undertake such a research project and develop a collaborative approach across campus entities. For the purpose of the campus climate assessment, the capacity described in this document refers to the ability to effectively develop, organize, and utilize resources to engage in all steps of the assessment, ultimately catalyzing and driving change on campus.¹

The pre-planning phase of the assessment process at a college or university must include selecting a group of individuals who are capable of conducting research according to rigorous methods and who are able to generate an effective and feasible action plan based on the assessment results.

In order to accomplish this goal, it is helpful to consider creating two central teams: 1) An Advisory Board to provide input on the project, and 2) A Research Team to oversee the project.

The research team and the Advisory Board are intended to work in collaboration with one another as such partnerships provide a venue for stakeholders from a broad cross-section of the community to interact with one another and jointly promote campus-wide change.²

This chapter presents key questions and recommendations colleges and universities may want to consider when building research capacity and campus collaborations in preparation for the campus climate assessment.

CREATING A RESEARCH TEAM

It is vital that the campus climate assessment gathers credible data. To help ensure this, it is important that administrators identify those on campus with extensive knowledge of research, particularly with an understanding of the Institutional Review Board process, development of methodology, survey administration, data analysis, and interpretation of results.

To select a group of individuals with this knowledge, administrators may want to begin by identifying available faculty or research personnel on campus who are interested in understanding the problem of sexual assault on their campus and in the higher education environment. Colleges and universities can look to gender studies faculty, social science faculty, as well as other faculty familiar with relevant research methods as a starting point.

Faculty researchers are ideal for the campus climate assessment because they are familiar with the campus, have established relationships with school entities, and are likely to have a commitment to understanding the substantive content of the assessment. Researchers on campus will also have the knowledge and tools to implement assessments according to rigorous research methods.

However, not all schools have the necessary resources readily available on campus to conduct research. These colleges and universities can consider creating a regional partnership with other schools in the surrounding area to aid with data collection and analysis, or they may look to private firms with the necessary expertise to conduct all research driven assessments.³

CREATING AN ADVISORY BOARD

An Advisory Board can be an essential component of the campus climate assessment process, as it engages a diverse group of individuals on campus with the shared purpose of addressing sexual assault. No individual person or department has a comprehensive understanding of the current institutional infrastructure or the array of contextual factors involved in the problem of sexual violence on campus; therefore an Advisory Board comprised of individuals across divisions and disciplines affords numerous advantages to the campus climate assessment process.⁴

Considerations When Assembling an Advisory Board

When determining who should participate on the Advisory Board, administrators and members of the research team may consider the following questions:

- Who represents the areas of expertise in regard to sexual assault on campus?
- Who most commonly interacts with survivors of sexual assault on campus?
- Which administrators should be represented on the Advisory Board?
- Who are the particular on-campus populations that are vested in the project?
- Who has access to students and can help with the implementation of the survey?

Campuses should also consider including, if applicable, individuals from the Dean of Students’ office, a representative from the Title IX office, staff of on-campus victim services entities, staff of on-campus women’s centers, an administrator from the office of student conduct, and an administrator from the office of student affairs (or their corollaries) on the Advisory Board.
The Advisory Board may provide guidance on which climate survey questions are salient to the university setting and necessary for inclusion, make decisions about the content and methodology of assessments, help to identify gaps in resources at the conclusion of the resource audit, and prepare any reports based on campus climate assessment results.

All of the previously listed activities can be done in collaboration with the research team. However, the Advisory Board can also help to obtain wider institutional and public support for addressing sexual assault on campus, develop the financial and human resources necessary to conduct all components of the assessment, increase the accountability of the project, support the evaluation of the current institutional response to sexual violence on campus, and plan improvements based on the assessment.

To achieve these goals, it is important that the Advisory Board be composed of individuals who are vested in the project and can provide input to guide both the content and process of the campus climate assessment. The Advisory Board can include as many faculty members, staff members and students as a school sees fit. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Advisory Board will be convening throughout the project and availability and time constraints may make a larger Advisory Board cumbersome.

Members of the Advisory Board, while knowledgeable and committed to improving a school’s response to sexual assault, may also have a stake in the results of the campus climate assessment. For instance, negative student feedback about a particular office’s services could reflect poorly on representatives of that office who are serving on the Advisory Board. Therefore, it is critical that researchers thoughtfully seek and incorporate input from the Advisory Board while maintaining strict research integrity. In order to avoid bias, the research team may choose to strictly define the roles of Advisory Board members in relation to the research team’s activities so that vested Advisory Board members can not influence any assessment results.

Researchers can further ensure the integrity of the results by maintaining clear and open communication with the members of the advisory board. Specifically, the research team can provide the advisory board members with advanced knowledge of assessment results and project information so that all interested parties can prepare for the release of both positive and negative results with thoughtful planning, supported by the college or university. It is important, particularly if negative results emerge, that researchers and advisory board members keep in mind the goal of the campus climate assessment: to determine the current institutional response to sexual violence and address gaps to better support and protect students.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Once schools construct research teams and create Advisory Boards, the researchers can begin to develop methodology for the campus climate assessment. Meeting with the Advisory Board throughout the process can help keep stakeholders informed as the project progresses.

After the research team analyzes the results of all assessments, the Advisory Board, in collaboration with the research team, will be better equipped to develop an action plan that is evidence-based and meets federal mandates, while also addressing student needs.

Recommended Citation


Notes

5. Chavis, 1995

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