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## STUDENT ACTION PACKET ON CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS

This Student Action Packet is designed to help students navigate the complexities of conducting a campus climate survey on sexual assault at their own college or university.

Campus climate surveys are essential because they generate data on the nature and extent of sexual assault on campuses, as well as campus attitudes surrounding sexual assault. Armed with accurate data, administrators and students can then begin to direct resources where they are most needed. Both the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault and the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights have identified campus climate surveys as best practices.

The items in the student action packet provide students with resources to help them effectively engage with their college or university's administration to conduct a campus climate survey on their own campus. The action packet includes:

- FAQ Sheet on Campus Climate Surveys – Developed in Response to Questions Submitted by Student Advocates
- Student Talking Points – To Help Students Understand and Communicate about Climate Surveys
- A Peer's Perspective on Campus Climate Surveys – An Interview with a Student on Campus Climate Surveys
- Administrators' Perspectives on Campus Climate Surveys – Two Interviews with Administrators on Campus Climate Surveys
- Campus Climate Survey Validation Study (CCSVS) Fact Sheet

Anyone with questions about the Student Action Packet, or Campus Climate Surveys in general, should feel free to e-mail OVW at [ovw.campus.surveys@usdoj.gov](mailto:ovw.campus.surveys@usdoj.gov).



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS

### 1. What is a campus climate survey on sexual assault?

A campus climate survey on sexual assault generates school-specific data on the nature and extent of sexual assault as it exists on a campus, as well as data on the attitudes and perceptions about sexual assault among different campus groups. The survey itself asks as [series of questions](#) that may address students' experiences with sexual victimization both before and after joining the campus; knowledge of the school's policies and procedures for reporting incidents; perceptions about how well campus authorities and local law enforcement handle reports of sexual assault; and the frequency and nature of sexual assault experienced by students on campus.

### 2. What are the goals of a campus climate survey?

Campus climate surveys can serve multiple purposes; however, one of their main goals is to generate school-specific data to improve institutional responses, including targeted prevention, intervention, support for victims, and accountability for offenders. These efforts are always more successful when they are tailored to the unique needs of individual campuses, which is why it is so important to have accurate school-specific data. When schools have a clear understanding of the climate around sexual assault as it actually exists on their campuses, they are in a better position to effectively prevent and respond to incidents of campus sexual assault.

### 3. Why are campus climate surveys important?

Campus climate surveys provide campus-level data on sexual assault in a way that national data, or even data from similarly situated schools, cannot. For example, decades of research has shown that victims rarely report sexual assault to law enforcement, and in many cases do not even access formal services, such as crisis centers. The result is that official statistics may not represent the full extent of the problem on any one campus. They also fail to provide a nuanced view of a complicated issue that usually has contributing factors that may vary from one school to the next.

### 4. Do campus climate surveys have any benefits outside of data collection?

In addition to the direct benefits that schools receive from the data generated, the act of conducting a survey can in itself have a positive effect on the campus climate because it reflects a school's genuine commitment to combat campus sexual assault. For example, when campuses address sexual violence, victims may feel more comfortable coming forward to report incidents. This can help campus and local

law enforcement identify and deal with serial perpetrators, making campuses safer in the process. When victims come forward, it can help them heal from the trauma and get better access to support services (such as counseling). Plus, when they feel supported by the community and are confident in a school's handling of an assault, they are more likely stay in school.

## **5. Are there best practices for conducting campus climate surveys?**

Yes. Best practices for campus climate surveys have been established, and surveys are most effective when they follow these practices. One of the first steps is to do a thorough review of the best practices, with a particular emphasis on the materials referenced in question 6 below.

## **6. How can I find out what these best practices are?**

Many of the established best practices came out of the 2015 Department of Justice [Campus Climate Survey Validation Study](#) (CCSVS). The DOJ survey instrument and methodology are free. The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) is available to answer questions about them. Contact us at: [ovw.campus.surveys@usdoj.gov](mailto:ovw.campus.surveys@usdoj.gov).

Additional resources for campus climate survey best practices include a [lessons learned guide](#) from the Rutgers School of Social Work Campus Climate Assessment team, as well as the many resources developed by the [Prevention Innovations Research Center](#) at the University of New Hampshire, the result of UNH's many years of experience conducting campus climate surveys.

## **7. Are there best practices for developing the content of a campus climate surveys?**

Yes. When developing the content for a survey, it is important to keep in mind the goal of the survey and the characteristics of individual campuses. The questions should strive to assess campus-specific rates of sexual violence and also gain a perspective on the campus-wide knowledge of policies and resources. Specific guidelines for creating the content for a campus climate survey can be found in the materials referenced in question 6 above.

## **8. Are there best practices specific to protecting survivor confidentiality in surveys?**

Protecting confidentiality is crucial in a campus climate survey on sexual assault. It is of particular importance when incentives are offered to increase survey response rates, something that is a recommended best practice. Resources to aid schools in determining best practices on climate survey confidentiality include the CCSVS final report; chapters four and six of the lessons learned [guide](#) from the Rutgers School of Social Work Campus Climate Assessment Team; and a school's own Institutional Review Board (IRB), which should always be consulted at the beginning of the survey process.

A few examples of best practices for maintaining confidentiality were demonstrated in the CCSVS:

- Provide a disclosure at multiple points during the survey to make participants aware that no identifying information would be stored with or linked to their survey data.

- Program the survey so that IP addresses are not collected when individuals participate in the survey.
- Provide students with a Survey Access Code that they use to log into the survey website, rather than asking them to log in with personally identifying information, such as an e-mail address or student ID number.

## 9. Are there best practices for publicizing the results of a campus climate survey?

Yes. The Prevention Innovations Research Center at the University of New Hampshire has [developed a guide](#) for campus administrators, faculty, and staff to aid discussions about using and communicating climate survey data. The guide can be used as a reference for schools that want to follow best practices for sharing the results. It is also a useful reference for discussions around campus climate survey confidentiality.

The guide identifies important questions to think about when considering how to publicize the results of a campus climate survey, including:

- Who has ownership of the data?
- Who will write and speak about the results?
- What will your community use the data for?
- What formats will you use to share the findings?
- What should the report(s) look like?
- Who do you need to communicate with prior to the release of the data?
- How will reports and findings be distributed?
- How are you going to respond to people who are challenging your findings?
- How do you use the data to highlight the areas that are in need of change and attention?
- How do you put your local findings in the context of national cases/data?
- How do you use information to mobilize community response?
- How are you going to respond to individuals who are using false data or misconstrued data to counter the findings both in and outside of the institution?
- How will you acknowledge underserved populations and any limitations of your findings based on who responded to the survey?

## 10. How much does it cost to conduct a campus climate survey?

The cost to conduct campus climate survey depends on several variables, including campus size; type of school; whether the school is participating in a consortium with other schools in the area; and the existing resources at a school's disposal, such as faculty or staff who can help implement the survey as a part of their regular job functions. However, as a general rule, the cost of a campus climate survey can run from tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

### **11. That sounds expensive. Are there ways for schools to cut down on costs?**

Yes. However, it is important to remember that cost-cutting measures should never be at the expense of conducting a survey that follows established best practices.

One way that schools can significantly cut down on the costs associated with survey development and still conduct a scientifically valid survey is to use the survey instrument and methodology tested and validated in the CCSVS. These tools are freely available for any school to use and can be found in the [CCSVS final report](#) and [the survey instrument as revised based on the results of the CCSVS study](#), which are both available online.

Another one of the largest costs associated with campus climate surveys are the incentives offered to students for survey completion, a recommended best practice to ensure that surveys produce scientifically valid results. The CCSVS tested monetary incentives at several levels and found that cash incentives should be in the \$25 per person range; offering less had a negative impact on survey results. One option that schools can experiment with is providing the incentive in the form of gift certificates or credit to school-owned entities, such as campus food establishments. Schools may also want to consider forming partnerships with businesses or other organizations that want to support the fight against campus sexual assault by providing gift certificates to students who complete the survey.

It is also important to remember that while campus climate surveys can require a large up-front allocation of resources, the data generated by a scientifically valid survey will ultimately help schools save money and conserve resources. With the knowledge gained from the survey, schools will be able to target resources where they are needed most to reduce incidents of campus sexual assault and provide better responses to students when incidents do occur.

### **12. Are there financial resources available to schools or student groups who want to conduct campus climate surveys?**

Yes. The Office on Violence Against Women at the Department of Justice has [grants](#) available for activities designed to reduce sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking on campus.

The Office on Women's Health of the Department of Health and Human Services also funds colleges and universities to address sexual assault through their [College Sexual Assault Policy and Prevention Initiative](#). Grants are awarded to implement policies and practices – including climate surveys – that will prevent sexual assault at post-secondary schools.

There is also potential for grant money through other non-governmental sources, as well as through certain departments at the schools themselves. Student advocates may want to help research additional sources of public and private grant funding for schools to conduct campus climate surveys.

### **13. Are there best practices for increasing diverse participation in campus climate surveys?**

The survey should be made available as widely as possible using various devices, especially phones, and with all types of people in mind; for instance, consider the accessibility of the survey for international students and those with disabilities. Working collaboratively with a wide variety of student organizations

to encourage broad participation in the survey also can be helpful. To ensure the survey accurately represents the campus makeup, demographic information can be requested in the survey and then used to create a representative sample. A school's Institutional Review Board (IRB) should also be consulted on the best methods for getting diverse representation in a campus climate survey.

**14. Can campus climate surveys be conducted by students? Or does it have to be conducted by the school administration?**

Smaller student-conducted surveys can always play a role in the conversation. When student groups are considering conducting their own campus climate survey, however, they must think about all the different pieces necessary to conduct a valid campus climate survey. Such pieces include gathering a representative sample of students; ensuring confidentiality; analyzing the data; using incentives to ensure sufficient participation to obtain valid results; and the development of a campus-wide action plan to address the issues identified in the data generated by a survey. Students can play a key role in helping to make a survey happen, but administrative resources are likely to be important to the success of a survey of the nature being discussed here.

**15. What happens after a campus climate survey has been completed and the results disseminated?**

As discussed above in question 9, the main purpose of a campus climate survey is to generate valid campus-specific data that schools can use to develop targeted and effective prevention and response efforts. The real benefit to conducting a survey is the campus action plan that is developed as a result of the information gained from the survey. In the [Rutgers School of Social Work's Lessons Learned Guide](#), Chapter 6, "Action Planning and Dissemination," you will find specific examples of steps that Rutgers took as a result of their campus climate survey.



## TALKING POINTS: CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS

Campus climate surveys are essential for colleges and universities committed to preventing campus sexual assault. They generate valuable school-level data about the nature and extent of sexual assault on individual campuses so that schools can create tailored prevention and response efforts.

### SUMMARY

- Campus climate surveys are an essential tool to prevent and respond to incidents of campus sexual assault.
- The White House and the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights have identified campus climate surveys on sexual assault as a best practice.
- Existing reporting mechanisms and national data do not capture the nature and scope of sexual assault as it exists on individual campuses. Without valid school-level data schools cannot effectively prevent and respond to incidents of sexual assault.
- As demonstrated in the Department of Justice’s [Campus Climate Survey Validation Study](#), best practices for conducting campus climate surveys have now been established and every campus climate survey conducted should meet these standards.
- Campus climate surveys can help schools direct resources where they are needed most and will be the most effective.
- Campus climate surveys should serve as the foundation of a comprehensive campus sexual assault action plan.

**Campus climate surveys are essential to prevent and respond to incidents of campus sexual assault.**

- One of the most important purposes of a campus climate survey is to generate school-level data about the nature and extent of sexual assault on individual campuses so that schools can use the information to effectively prevent and respond to incidents of campus sexual assault.

- Campus climate surveys can help schools:
  - Uncover blind spots in existing institutional responses to campus sexual assault;
  - Reveal whether students perceive certain campus environments or populations as hostile;
  - Identify student populations most at risk for sexual assault;
  - Show whether sexual assault is more likely to occur during certain times of year or to coincide with certain campus events;
  - Demonstrate whether students feel comfortable reporting incidents of sexual assault to school officials;
  - Show the level of knowledge that students have about campus resources for victims; and
  - Bring to light any confusion about policies and procedures related to campus sexual assault, including how and where to report incidents.
- The regular administration of campus climate surveys can show changes over time, such as decreases in sexual assaults and increases in awareness or reporting, helping schools measure whether their prevention and response efforts are working.
- Campus climate surveys can lead to safer campuses by demonstrating a school's commitment to combatting sexual assault, which can build trust with students, faculty, and parents, creating an environment where students feel more comfortable reporting incidents of sexual assault.
- Having students who feel comfortable reporting sexual assault on campus enables campus or local law enforcement to deal with serial perpetrators and helps victims heal from trauma, stay in school, and feel confident in the school's handling of the assault.

**The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) recommends that schools conduct campus climate surveys.**

- OCR's 2015 [Title IX Resource Guide](#) recommends that Title IX coordinators help develop a method to survey the campus climate, evaluate whether any discriminatory attitudes pervade the school culture, and determine whether any harassment or other problematic behaviors are occurring, where they happen, which students are responsible, which students are targeted, and how those conditions may be best remedied.



- In its 2014 “[Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence](#),” OCR recommends conducting a climate survey as one response to incidents of sexual violence on campus, regardless of whether a victim is pursuing a complaint, to help limit the effects of sexual violence, prevent its recurrence, and eliminate a hostile environment.
- Since 2013, climate surveys have been a [standard requirement](#) in resolution agreements OCR enters into with schools to resolve Title IX complaints.
- In its 2011 [Dear Colleague Letter on Title IX Coordinators](#), OCR recommends that Title IX coordinators coordinate the collection and analysis of information from an annual climate survey if, as recommended by OCR, the school conducts one.

**Campus climate surveys have been identified as a best practice to combat sexual assault by the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault.**

- The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault characterizes regular climate surveys as “a best-practice response to campus sexual assault” and recommends that schools use them to “examine the prevalence and incidence of sexual assault on campus and assess students’ perceptions of a university’s response to sexual assault.”
- In recognition of the important role campus climate surveys play in combatting campus sexual assault, the Task Force developed the *Not Alone* campus climate survey toolkit to serve as a guide for schools to plan and conduct their own surveys. The toolkit includes a sample survey piloted by [Rutgers University](#).

**Best practices for conducting campus climate surveys have now been established and are freely available to any school.**

- In 2015 the U.S. Justice Department successfully developed, tested, and validated a campus climate survey, the [Campus Climate Survey Validation Study \(CCSVS\)](#), which was grounded in the *Not Alone* toolkit. The express intention of the CCSVS was to create a survey that meets the highest standards of survey research that can be used by any school to efficiently collect valid school-level data from students about their experiences with sexual assault on campus.
- The CCSVS successfully demonstrated best practices for campus climate survey research and every campus climate survey should meet these standards to be considered valid. Some examples of best practices include:
  - The survey instrument should be brief (less than 20 minutes) and available on a variety of electronic devices.
  - The survey should be administered towards the end of the academic year and remain available to participants for at least one month, but preferably two.

- The methodology should include multiple follow-up reminders for non-respondents.
- Recruitment materials should be personalized for potential respondents and messages should be customized for males to increase participation.
- The [survey instrument and methodology](#) used in the CCSVS are free to any school that wishes to conduct its own survey.
- Best practices and guidance regarding [confidentiality in sexual assault research](#) and [communicating and using survey results](#) are also available through the University of New Hampshire's Prevention Innovations Center. The [CCSVS](#) final report also includes information on how students' confidentiality was maintained during the survey.

**Campus climate surveys conducted according to established best practices are necessary to provide an accurate picture of sexual assault as it exists on individual campuses.**

- Sexual violence is an underreported crime and existing reporting mechanisms do not capture the true prevalence of campus sexual assault. For example, The [CCSVS](#) revealed that the majority of students who experience rape on campus do not report it to school authorities. Of the 2,380 incidents of completed rape experienced by students participating in the CCSVS during the 2014-15 academic year, 770 occurred on campus. Of those 770, only about 60 were reported to school authorities.
- The nature and extent of sexual violence on campuses can differ greatly from school to school and may or may not reflect national data, or even data from other similarly situated schools. Both the CCSVS and a [2015 Association of American Universities Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct](#) revealed a wide variation of rates of sexual assault across participating colleges and universities.
- The [CCSVS](#) found that across the nine participating schools, only 13% of rape incidents and 4% of sexual battery incidents were reported to school or law enforcement officials.
- The American Association of Universities Campus Climate Survey revealed wide variations in the types of sexual assault and misconduct, as well as in opinions about how problematic it is at the school and how students and university officials might react to an incident, across the 27 colleges and universities that participated in the survey. For example, the percentage of students who thought it was very or extremely likely that the university would take a report of sexual assault or misconduct seriously varied from a low of 46 percent to a high of 77 percent.

**Campus Climate Surveys can help schools direct resources where they are needed most and are most effective when they serve as the foundation of a comprehensive campus sexual assault action plan.**

- When schools understand the specific obstacles to addressing sexual assault on campus, they can focus resources where they are needed most, whether it be to raise awareness about policies and procedures for reporting incidents of sexual assault; improve campus counseling services for students who have experienced sexual victimization in their lifetimes; develop targeted prevention efforts; or increase outreach to student populations most at risk for campus sexual assault.
- Several schools, including the [University of California](#) system, [Rutgers University](#), and the [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) have used the results of their campus climate surveys to inform action plans based on information learned from their surveys. Some of the specific actions these schools have taken, or plan to take, include:
  - Rewriting sexual assault policies to include an affirmative consent definition.
  - Developing prevention programming aimed at male students and hiring additional staff to focus on men’s engagement.
  - Creating a [website](#) to serve as a “one-stop-shop” for information and resources about campus sexual assault that included the results of the survey.
  - Enhanced counseling support for survivors.
  - Student affairs staff members received updated training and counseling center staff members learned more about PTSD and how it pertains to sexual assault victims.
  - Modifying references used during new student orientation and throughout first-year student programs in response to the revelation that a high number of female students had been sexually assaulted before enrolling at the university.
- Climate surveys are even more effective if an audit of available resources is conducted before the survey is released because knowing exactly what resources are available on campus can be used to tailor the survey.
- Action plans in programs, policies, and services to address any gaps identified by the assessment require a strong, collaborative approach among researchers, student affairs, and university leadership.

**It is possible to conduct a cost-effective scientifically valid campus climate survey.**

- The [survey instrument and methodology](#) tested in the CCSVS is freely available for any school to use.

- Regional consortiums are an effective way for schools to pool resources to conduct campus climate surveys.
- The Office on Violence Against Women at the Department of Justice has [grants](#) available to combat sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking on campuses.
- The Office on Women’s Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has [funding available](#) through its College Sexual Assault Policy and Prevention Initiative.
- The Office on Violence Against Women is available to answer any questions regarding the CCSVS and campus climate surveys in general at [ovw.campus.surveys@usdoj.gov](mailto:ovw.campus.surveys@usdoj.gov) .



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## **AN ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS**

*OVW Interview with Jaime Nolan, Associate Vice President for Community, Equity and Diversity, University of New Hampshire*

### **In your experience, why do institutions of higher learning decide to conduct campus climate surveys?**

The purpose of a climate survey is to assess how the faculty, staff, and students are experiencing the environment/climate in terms of living, learning, and working at the university. The data collected give both the "big" picture for the university as a whole as well as the experiences for specific groups of people who live, work, and learn at the university. The information from the surveys is crucial in informing institutional efforts to addressing any issues that negatively impact the climate at the university and reinforcing efforts that are working well. Research indicates that universities should conduct climate surveys every three years as part of a larger effort to assess and improve the climate.

### **Have you ever been surprised by survey results?**

For me, frankly no. Anyone who has done inclusion, community building, and social justice work in education understands the issues and trends associated with institutionalized racism, heterosexism, homophobia, sexual violence, etc., that continue to plague not only education institutions, but our culture as well. It's important to understand that universities are situated in a broader social, cultural, and political context, and whatever issues impact the broader society will inevitably impact educational institutions as well. That's what makes these surveys so important because they help form policies and actions, but they are also educational/teaching tools, and as an educational institution we have an obligation to seize the teachable moments that the information provided by these surveys make visible.

### **Have you engaged with student advocates during any part of a campus climate survey process? How so?**

On the front end we conducted focus groups as a way to both gauge where students were with regard to their understanding about climate studies as well getting a general sense of how they are experiencing the campus. Students then became ambassadors for the survey and provided outreach and education to other students. Their efforts were important for building support for the surveys, informing the community, and allowed us to follow-up with specific groups.

**How would you describe the value that student advocates bring to the process?**

Students are crucial to all aspects of university life. They have tremendous power to create institutional change.

**If you were a student who wanted to advocate for your institution to conduct a campus climate survey, what would your first steps be?**

These efforts happen just like social movements happen. Students can work with various student groups to educate themselves about the importance of climate surveys - many universities have done them and continue to do so, and the results and processes they use are widely available and open to the public. Understand the benefits to the institution, particularly that creating a healthy campus climate is essential for student success, and if a university is serious about student success (which they say they are), that is a strong rationale for conducting a climate survey to gather baseline data and then establish a program of follow-up surveys.

**What would your advice be to a student advocate who wanted to know how to most effectively engage with administrators on this issue?**

Do your homework. Understand the reasons and rationales for pursuing specific policies or taking various institutional actions, and as students always frame your arguments in terms of student success. Universities are all about creating inclusive environments where students feel safe, welcome, and cared about, which research proves is essential to their persistence and overall academic success.

**Have any of the institutions you have worked with changed institutional responses to campus sexual assault due to the results of a survey?**

Yes. Survey results informed a comprehensive university response and development of a systemic approach to address sexual violence. We realized for example, that we needed to better coordinate all efforts, collaborate with one another to ensure that we all operating from the same knowledge base, using the same language etc. This process involved a broad cross section of campus community stakeholders including, of course, students.

**Is there any other advice you would give to student advocates working on campus sexual assault issues?**

Students are an essential to informing the need for and the creating of change. There are a variety of ways to engage in processes that impact policy, programs and practices with regard to sexual violence on college campuses. Whether through volunteering at prevention programs, student organizations or participating on councils and committees, there are multiple avenues through which to engage and doing so makes a difference. I'm reminded of a quote I often use in my work with groups when talking about the importance of community from filmmaker Abigail Disney: "*We all have the choice every day to be part of the answer, or part of the problem. And if we choose to conceive of an "us" that is greater than simply the people in our immediate vicinity, we will start to build a community of fellowship and shared empathy rather than of mistrust and hostility. We each have this choice and we influence the choices made by those around us.*"



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## **AN ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS**

*OVW Interview with Dr. Felicia E. McGinty, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Rutgers University*

### **Why did your institution decide to conduct a campus climate survey?**

In 2013, the Title IX Coordinator and the Director of Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance approached the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs to discuss conducting a climate survey. Our goal was to improve the response process and access to resources for students who experience sexual violence. We knew that we had a good process in place to respond to reports of sexual violence, and that we had many resources available for students, but we also knew that students were not necessarily reporting to the university or using our formal process when sexual assault occurred. We hoped that a climate survey could help us understand what students knew and didn't know about making reports and accessing resources at the University, and also help us to identify ways to improve these processes and services for our students. We reached out to faculty with expertise in this area to develop a proposal for the survey, which became the framework for the survey we conducted.

### **Did anything about the survey results surprise you?**

Many of our results were similar to those at other institutions and were not necessarily a surprise to those who have worked in this field for many years. However, certain results were notable, such as finding that 1 in 4 undergraduate females reported experiencing sexual violence before coming to Rutgers, and that students who identified as part of the LGBTQ community were twice as likely to be victims of sexual violence. We also uncovered that most survivors who did tell someone about sexual violence told a friend. Additionally, we learned that a majority of students who took the survey did not know what resources are available to victims of sexual violence or how to report an incident to the University, but they wanted to learn more. We have used, and will continue to use, all of this information to enhance services for students and improve our methods of sharing information.

### **Did you engage with student advocates during any part of the campus climate survey process? How so?**

Yes, student advocates were integrally involved in the planning, development, and promotion of the survey instrument, and also participated in focus groups. The research team that led the climate survey project met with student leaders and advocates to discuss the purpose and implementation of the survey and sought feedback from those groups throughout the survey process.

**How would you describe the value that student advocates brought to the process?**

Student involvement was invaluable to the process. We offered some incentives, but students embraced the project and created their own social media campaign to promote the climate survey. The videos they created were posted on YouTube and shared on Twitter and Facebook. Endorsement from student leaders added to the legitimacy and credibility of the survey for students and helped increase participation rates in the survey and in focus groups.

**If you were a student who wanted to advocate for your institution to conduct a campus climate survey, what would your first steps be?**

Students should first reach out to advocates at other schools to find out what, if any, role they played in lobbying for a campus climate survey at their school, and ask those advocates for advice. Also, they should thoroughly research the value and purpose of climate surveys, different options and methods for conducting surveys, and the results that other schools have achieved in conducting surveys, so that they can be well-educated on the topic before approaching school officials. Lastly, they should seek out professionals at their own institution, such as the Title IX Coordinator, victim advocates, and other staff whose daily work is focused on sexual violence or related issues. These staff and administrators can serve as important allies, can provide insight and guidance, and will likely have similar goals to student advocates with respect to conducting a climate survey.

**What would your advice be to a student advocate who wanted to know how to most effectively engage with administrators on this issue?**

Thoroughly research and educate yourself on the topic so you can present real information to administration on the benefits of doing a climate survey. Talk to them about how the information collected can help the entire campus community, including students, staff and faculty. Let them know the survey is not an opportunity to just talk about what is wrong but an opportunity to gain real insight into the community and a challenge to make things better. If possible, provide examples of cost-effective tools that other schools have used to successfully conduct surveys, and offer meaningful examples of how students can help with the survey process.

**Did your institution change any of its institutional responses to campus sexual assault as a result of the survey?**

Absolutely. We already had in place robust and comprehensive prevention and response programs, but the information gained from the climate survey allowed us to pinpoint opportunities to enhance and provide broader access to these programs. We created an action plan to address the five key findings from our climate assessment. This included, in part: designing and launching a centralized website ([endsexualviolence.rutgers.edu](http://endsexualviolence.rutgers.edu)); creating public service announcements with involvement from school officials and student leaders; launching new training programs for students, staff and faculty; designing and disseminating resource brochures to every on-campus resident, and to staff and faculty and local off-campus students; widely promoting the University's Student Policy on Sexual Misconduct; hiring additional staff to focus on men's engagement; enhancing counseling support for survivors; and engaging all departments within the division of student affairs in a year-long campaign to raise



awareness and develop programs related to sexual violence. We are now working on initiatives for next year to continue the work we started this year.

**Is there any other advice you would give to students?**

Despite what is often highlighted in the media, most colleges and universities want to do right by their students. Student advocates should frame the issue for staff and administrators – particularly those working within student affairs – that the outcome of the climate survey will help students. If student advocates approach the issue as an opportunity for collaboration with staff and administrators, rather than as an adversarial situation, they will get more support.



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## A PEER'S PERSPECTIVE ON CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS

*OVW Interview with Julia O'Connor, Rutgers University*

### **Why did you decide to become involved in advocating for your campus to conduct a climate survey?**

I actually become involved due to luck! When I started my Ph.D. program in social work, the campus climate assessment project had begun several months earlier. I worked on the project as part of my graduate assistantship for the PhD program. However, I had been active in the area of sexual assault as far back as my undergraduate career (over 15 years ago). As an undergraduate I was active with a student group working to get the college administration to address sexual violence. To create a record of the problem, this group documented stories of students who had experienced sexual assault. We wanted to document the extent of the problem from year to year. A campus climate survey is a more systematic and quantitative approach to tackling the same problem of sexual assault that I addressed as an undergraduate.

### **Which parts of the campus climate survey process were you engaged in?**

I worked on project coordination, survey data analysis, and focus group analysis. Our campus climate assessment involved multiple methods of data collection and assessment of the campus, including a resource audit, survey, and focus groups. We also repeated the process on several of my university's other campuses. As such, I have been privileged to work on many aspects of the projects from start to finish.

### **What value did the student perspective bring to the process?**

The student perspective is invaluable. Because sexual assault is an issue that affects students directly, it is key that we understand the issue in the same ways students understand it. This includes not only understanding victimization but also students' attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge around sexual assault, campus resources, and policies. Conducting focus groups, in addition to the survey, allowed our administration to understand sexual violence in students' own words as well as the nuances of students' perception of the issue, which can't be captured by a survey alone.

### **What first steps should a student take to advocate for their institution to conduct a climate survey?**

To make the campus climate assessment a meaningful process that results in change on the campus, buy-in must occur at all levels of campus administration. This does not necessarily mean each level of the administration will be involved with conducting the campus climate assessment; they might be involved in action planning after the assessment as well as providing implicit support throughout the process. Forming an advisory board or a working group of students, staff, faculty, and administrators can help ensure that you have a dedicated group of stakeholders who are thinking through the process and working together to make the process have impact.

**What is your advice to a student advocate who wants to know how to most effectively engage with administrators on this issue?**

Sexual violence is a sensitive topic that may be upsetting to some people. In order to ensure the campus is ready to address the issue, it is necessary to have an advocate for the issue within the administration or faculty. I recommend finding a college administrator or faculty member who can work one-on-one with students to facilitate buy-in and support from within the campus to effectively engage the campus.

**Did anything about the survey results surprise you?**

I was not surprised by many of the findings, as we largely found what researchers have told us for years. That being said, the results are difficult to digest and have clear implications for campus administrators. A situation in which one in five undergraduate women experience sexual violence— a rate that has been repeatedly confirmed by research— is a social justice concern for all students and staff.

**Did your institution change any of its institutional responses to campus sexual assault as a result of the survey? If so, were you involved in this part of the process?**

Yes, due to the strong campus support from my university's administration, a number of changes were implemented across campus. The administration implemented an action plan to address specific issues raised by the campus climate assessment project. Some of these changes were minor, such as changing intake forms for accessing services, while other changes were larger and are ongoing, such as educating students on the issue of sexual violence and raising awareness within the student body at large.

**Is there any other advice you would like give to students?**

Don't forget to take care of yourself! The issue of sexual violence is difficult and may involve hearing disturbing things that are challenging to take in. Additionally, working for change across large bureaucratic institutions can be slow and frustrating. Self-care in whatever form works for you— going for a run, journaling or venting with likeminded friends—can help prevent feelings of burnout or helplessness. Remember to take care of yourself while trying to change your campus.



## CONDUCTING A VALID CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEY

The [Campus Climate Survey Validation Study](#) and accompanying survey instrument provide a methodology that generates essential data to make effective policies and implement best practices for preventing and better responding to campus sexual assault.

The methodology in the *Study* and the survey instrument were tested and proven to produce high-quality data for understanding attitudes and behaviors related to sexual assault.

The study offers guidance for conducting a survey and gives results from the nine-school pilot with more than 23,000 undergraduate men and women.

The results showed that rates of sexual assault vary greatly from school to school, as do student perceptions, so it is crucial for schools to conduct their own campus climate surveys to understand the unique problems and opportunities on their specific campuses.

Findings reported in the *Study*:

- The average prevalence rate for sexual assault since entering college reported by women varied from 12% to 38% across the nine schools; the average was 21%. For men, the average was 7%.
- Among fourth-year women, 1 out of 4 reported they had experienced sexual assault since entering college.
- Only 13% of rape incidents and 4% of sexual battery incidents were reported to an official, such as an administrator, faculty, staff, campus police, or local law enforcement.
- Women, younger students, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students were most at risk for sexual assault. For lesbian and gay students, the prevalence rate of sexual assault since entering school was 22% across the nine schools; for bisexual students, it was 35%; and for transgender students, it was 28%.

### Benefits

#### Rigorously tested.

The [Campus Climate Survey Instrument](#) validated by the study is state of the art.

#### Evidence-based.

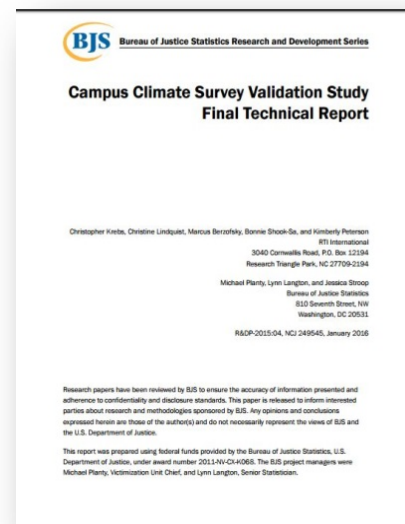
Policies and practices are more effective when they are based on results from state-of-the-art tools such as the [Campus Climate Survey Validation Study](#).

#### Free and Customizable.

The questionnaire in the *Study* is free and can be customized to meet an institution's unique needs.

#### Accuracy.

Sexual violence is under-reported. Collecting data based on a high-quality campus climate survey provides data not available from existing data collection mechanisms, which capture only a fraction of incidents.



The [Campus Climate Survey Validation Study](#) gives detailed guidance about how to conduct a campus climate survey more effectively, including specific guidance on using the findings to get reliable and useful results that keep students safer.

### Learn More

- **Download the *Campus Climate Survey Validation Study***  
[www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ccsvsfr.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ccsvsfr.pdf)
- **Download the Campus Climate Survey Instrument**  
[https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/RevisedInstrumentModules\\_1\\_21\\_16\\_cleanCombined\\_psg.pdf](https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/RevisedInstrumentModules_1_21_16_cleanCombined_psg.pdf)
- **Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice**  
[www.justice.gov/ovw/responding-campus-sexual-assault](http://www.justice.gov/ovw/responding-campus-sexual-assault)
- **ChangingOurCampus.org**  
[www.changingourcampus.org/resources/research](http://www.changingourcampus.org/resources/research)

### Definitions

**Campus climate:** Student perceptions on school connectedness; general perceptions of campus police, faculty, and university leadership; perceptions of leadership around sexual assault prevention and response; student norms related to sexual conduct; and attitudes about sexual assault.

**Sexual assault:** Any unwanted and nonconsensual contact that involved either rape or sexual battery. It does not include sexual harassment or coerced sexual contact.

**Rape:** Any unwanted and nonconsensual contact that involved a penetrative act.

**Sexual battery:** Any unwanted and nonconsensual contact that involved forced touching of a sexual nature not involving penetration.