



NATIONAL PROGRESS ON CAMPUS CLIMATE SURVEYS: A SNAPSHOT

Over the past few years, there have been unprecedented efforts to use campus climate surveys to measure the prevalence of sexual assault on campus, test students' attitudes and awareness about the issue, and use the data provided by surveys to craft solutions that match the needs of individual schools. As a result, numerous resources have been developed to aid campuses in developing and implementing high quality campus climate surveys. This document provides a sample of the resources that are available to help college and university administrators navigate the campus climate survey process.

Resources for Administrators

- The U.S. Department of Justice developed a free campus [climate survey instrument and module](#) for schools to use to conduct their own campus climate surveys. Tested and validated in the [Campus Climate Survey Validation Study](#) (CCSVS), the survey instrument embodies best practices in current campus climate survey research. In addition to testing and validating the free survey instrument, the CCSVS:
 - Presents the results of a nine-school pilot test that was conducted to develop a campus climate survey that collects school-level data on sexual victimization of undergraduate students.
 - Describes the development of the survey instrument and procedures for data collection, nonresponse bias analysis, weighting, and validity assessments.
 - Presents estimates for each school on the prevalence and incidence of sexual assault, rape, and sexual battery during the 2014–15 academic year, as well as characteristics of the victims and incidents.
 - Describes information about perpetrators and the tactics they use.
 - Provides estimates of the prevalence of sexual assault since entering college and during the student's lifetime.
 - Examines the relationship between measures of campus climate and rates of sexual victimization.
- The OVW-funded website [ChangingOurCampus.org](#) serves as a clearinghouse for information related to campus sexual assault (as well as domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking), including up-to-date [research](#) on climate surveys and other topics, such as prevention, assessment, and evaluation.
- The [OVW website](#) includes a list of resources on how to protect students from campus sexual assault, including a summary of [lessons learned from the CCSVS](#) on how to conduct a campus climate survey.
- Rutgers University and their Center on Violence Against Women and Children has prepared a guide entitled "[Understanding and Responding to Campus Sexual Assault: A Guide to Climate Assessment for Colleges and Universities.](#)" The guide includes a copy of their survey, tips for fostering relationships on

campus related to implementing climate surveys, and plans for conducting a resource audit. It also includes a document on how to translate campus climate survey data into action.

- The [Administrator-Researcher Campus Climate Collaborative](#) (ARC3) has a website that includes information on their work related to helping campuses understand and conduct sexual violence climate surveys. Their survey instrument was developed by a collaboration of researchers with extensive experience in measuring sexual and domestic violence and has been used on a number of campuses.
- [The Prevention Innovations Research Center at the University of New Hampshire](#), which has many years of experience with campus surveys on sexual assault, developed a [guide for campus administrators, faculty, and staff](#) to aid discussions about using and communicating climate survey data, in addition to many [other resources](#).

Campus Climate Surveys in the News

- The [Association of American Universities developed and tested a campus climate survey](#) that found results consistent with other research about the prevalence of sexual assault on campus. The survey was designed to assess the incidence, prevalence and characteristics of incidents of sexual assault and misconduct. It also examined the overall climate of campuses with respect to sexual assault.
- [The Washington Post conducted a campus sexual assault poll in partnership with the Kaiser Family Foundation](#). Their findings are consistent with prior research on campus sexual assault, and the survey asked questions about exposure to prevention messages, perceptions about sexual assault on campus, and behaviorally specific items about victimization experiences.

School-Specific Climate Survey Initiatives

A number of individual colleges and universities have or are conducting campus surveys related to sexual violence. Below are a few highlights, though the list is by no means exhaustive.

- The [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) conducted its own survey in the fall of 2014 and made both the survey instrument and the results publicly available.
- The [University of Michigan](#) conducted a campus sexual assault survey in spring 2015 and released findings publicly.
- Researchers at many other campuses continue to collect climate survey data including the [University of Oregon](#); [University of New Hampshire](#); [Johns Hopkins University](#); [University of Chicago](#); [University of California](#) system in collaboration with Rankin and Associates, Consultants; [University of Kentucky](#); [Indiana University](#); [University of Montana](#); and [Barnard College](#).

Emerging Issues

- **Confidentiality**

Some researchers have raised concerns that institutions may consider disclosures by students made on research surveys to fall under their Title IX reporting obligations. Collecting anonymous data via research is not typically a disclosure that requires a report. For federal guidance on this issue, the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights provides an [FAQ with information about confidentiality](#), or contact them about this or other Title IX questions at: ocr@ed.gov or 800-421-3481.

In addition, researchers at Prevention Innovations Research Center at the University of New Hampshire have prepared a white paper, "[Institutional Title IX Requirements for Researchers Conducting Human Subjects Research on Sexual Violence and other Forms of Interpersonal Violence](#)," which outlines a rationale to exempt researchers from Title IX reporting requirements.

Protecting confidentiality is also important in securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for schools to conduct a campus climate survey. The Prevention Innovations [white paper](#) also provides tips for schools to navigate the IRB process.

The [CCSVS](#) found that confidentiality is an important consideration when offering incentives to increase response rates to climate surveys. Designing a web-based system that can securely link individual incentive awards to survey respondents without compromising participant anonymity is challenging and must be approached carefully. Such a confidential or anonymous system also helps students feel more comfortable disclosing sensitive information.

- **Survivor concerns about research questions.**

Recent [news articles](#) have highlighted concerns by some students about being asked questions about sexual assault and other victimization experiences. However, decades of research have documented why it is important to ask behaviorally specific questions about victimization in order to obtain more accurate estimates of the problem.

Relatively few (5%-10%) survey participants report any emotional distress or negative emotions, and those who do report emotional distress note that these feelings are transitory. Negative emotions rarely show up in follow-up surveys. This holds true with both high school and college samples, with men and women, and with participants who are and are not victims. The findings are consistent with broader reviews about the impact of asking questions about trauma. Thus, the overall evidence from the research is clear that asking students, even those with a victimization history, questions about sexual assault presents very minimal risk and is often perceived as beneficial.

There are many important safeguards for participants that can help lessen even the minimal risk of distress, including having a clear informed consent process for the research that provides participants with information about the nature of what they will be asked. Climate surveys should also provide participants with links to local and national support services.

Ready to Take the Next Step?

- Fortunately, **many climate survey instruments are free and openly available for schools to use**, such as the [survey instrument](#) tested and validated by the CCSVS. The CCSVS report and other resources described in this document provide well-studied tools and information for schools to use in conducting climate surveys.
- Conducting a quality, reliable campus climate survey and **obtaining trustworthy data is complex – but attainable**. Be prepared to consult with researchers, partner with other schools, and reach out to experts.
- **Federal agencies are exploring ways to provide more technical assistance** to schools that want to implement campus climate surveys. Visit the [Office on Violence Against Women’s website](#) for updates and funding opportunities.