



Rankin & Associates, Consulting

Assessment • Planning • Interventions

University of Rhode Island

Assessment of Climate for
Learning, Living, and
Working

Executive Summary

October 2021



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History of the Project

This report provides the findings from a survey entitled “*University of Rhode Island Assessment of Climate for Learning, Living, and Working*,” conducted at University of Rhode Island (URI). In the summer of 2020, URI contracted with Rankin & Associates Consulting (R&A) to conduct a university-wide study. Twenty-seven URI faculty, staff, students, and administrators formed the Climate Study Working Group (CSWG). The CSWG worked with R&A to develop the survey instrument and promote the survey’s administration in spring 2021. Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, URI engaged in online learning and working environments. All members of URI were encouraged to complete the survey.

Responses to the multiple-choice format survey items were analyzed for statistical differences based on various demographic categories (e.g., URI position status, gender identity, disability status) where appropriate. Where sample sizes were small, certain responses were combined into categories to make comparisons between groups and to ensure respondents’ confidentiality. Throughout the report, for example, the Faculty category included tenure-track faculty, non-tenure-track academic appointment faculty, PTF/per-course faculty, and post-doctoral fellow.

In addition to multiple-choice survey items, several open-ended questions provided respondents with the opportunity to describe their experiences at URI. Comments were solicited to 1) give “voice” to the quantitative findings and 2) highlight the areas of concern that might have been overlooked owing to the small number of survey responses from historically underrepresented populations. For this reason, some qualitative comments may not seem aligned with the quantitative findings; however, they are important data.

Four thousand five hundred fifty-five (4,555) surveys were returned for a 22.4% overall response rate. Table 1 provides a summary of selected demographic characteristics of survey respondents. Of the respondents, 58% ($n = 2,660$) of the sample were Undergraduate Students, 12% ($n = 565$) were Graduate Students, 18% ($n = 820$) were Staff members, and 11% ($n = 510$) were Faculty members.

Table 1. URI Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Subgroup	<i>n</i>	% of sample
Position status	Undergraduate Student	2,660	58.4
	Graduate Student	565	12.4
	Faculty	510	11.2
	Staff	820	18.0
Gender identity	Women	3,013	66.1
	Men	1,379	30.3
	Trans-spectrum/Multiple/Other	123	2.7
	Missing	40	0.9
Racial/ethnic identity	APIDA	261	5.7
	Black/African/African American	175	3.8
	Latinx	229	5.0
	Multiracial	331	7.3
	Additional Respondents of Color	44	1.0
	White	3,370	74.0
	Missing	145	3.2
Sexual identity	Queer-spectrum	360	7.9
	Asexual	121	2.7
	Bisexual	349	7.7
	Heterosexual	3,590	78.8
	Missing	135	3.0
Citizenship status	U.S. Citizen-Birth	3,995	87.7
	Naturalized/Permanent Status	331	7.3
	International	168	3.7
	Missing	61	1.3
Disability status	Single Disability	551	12.1
	No Disability	3,698	81.2
	Multiple Disabilities	269	5.9
	Missing	37	0.8

Table 1. URI Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Subgroup	<i>n</i>	% of sample
Religious affiliation	Christian Religious Affiliation	1,912	42.0
	Jewish Religious Affiliation	105	2.3
	Additional Religious Affiliation	220	4.8
	No Religious Affiliation	1,974	43.3
	Multiple Religious Affiliations	188	4.1
	Missing	156	3.4

Note: The total *n* for each demographic characteristic may differ as a result of missing data.

*ND: No data available

Comfort With Campus, Workplace, and Classroom Climate at URI

Research on campus climate generally has focused on the experiences of faculty, staff, and students associated with historically underserved social/community/affinity groups (e.g., women, People of Color, people with disabilities, first-generation and/or low-income students, queer-spectrum and/or trans-spectrum individuals, and veterans).¹ Several groups at URI indicated on the survey that they were less comfortable than their majority counterparts with the climates of the campus and workplace.

Most survey respondents were “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the overall climate at URI (69%, *n* = 3,147, *p*. 65) with the climate in their departments, divisions, or colleges (70%, *n* = 930, *p*. 65), and with the climate in their classes (76%, *n* = 2,832, *p*. 65). Trans-spectrum respondents and Women respondents were significantly² less comfortable than were Men respondents with the overall climate (*p*. 69). Women respondents were less comfortable than were Men respondents with the climate in their department, division, or college and classes (*p*. 70, *p*. 71). Black/African/African American respondents were less comfortable than were Multiracial respondents, Latinx respondents, and White respondents with the overall climate (*p*. 72). Multiracial Faculty and Staff respondents and Faculty and Staff Respondents of Color were less comfortable than were White Faculty and Staff respondents with the climate in their

¹ Garvey et al. (2015); Goldberg et al. (2019); Harper & Hurtado (2007); Jayakumar et al. (2009); Johnson (2012); Means & Pyne (2017); Soria & Stebleton (2013); Rankin (2003); Rankin & Reason (2005); Walpole et al. (2014)

² All findings that are reported were found to be statistically significant.

department, division, or college (p. 73). Queer-spectrum respondents were less comfortable than were Heterosexual respondents with the overall climate at URI (p. 75). Bisexual Faculty and Student respondents were less comfortable than were Heterosexual Faculty and Student respondents with the climate in their classes (p. 76). Respondents with Disabilities were less comfortable than were Respondents with No Disabilities with the overall climate and climate in their classes (p. 77, p. 78). Low-Income Student respondents were less comfortable than were Not-Low-Income Student respondents with the overall climate (p. 79).

Faculty Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Faculty Work

Tenured and Tenure-Track

Tenure-line Faculty respondents held positive attitudes about faculty work at URI and indicated that research (78%, $n = 254$, p. 166) and teaching (73%, $n = 238$, p. 167) were valued at URI. Some differences emerged based on gender identity, racial identity, and disability status, where the responses of Women Faculty respondents, Faculty Respondents of Color, and Faculty Respondents with At Least One Disability were less positive than responses from Men Faculty respondents, White Faculty respondents, and Faculty Respondents with No Disability (p. 164-169).

Non-Tenure-Track

Non-tenure line faculty held positive views about the review and promotion process and indicated that the process for review (79%, $n = 95$, p. 173) and process for promotion (74%, $n = 89$, p. 173) were clear.

PTF/Per-Course

PTF faculty felt that clear expectations of their responsibilities existed (74%, $n = 29$, p. 178).

All Faculty

A majority of all Faculty respondents felt that they belonged at URI (68%, $n = 337$, p. 195) and connected to coworkers (64%, $n = 320$, p. 195). Faculty with fewer years of employment felt less that they belonged at URI and less connected to coworkers than faculty with more years of employment (p. 195).

Staff Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Staff Work

Staff respondents generally held positive views about working at URI. Staff respondents felt their coworkers/colleagues (72%, $n = 582$, p. 198) gave them job/career advice or guidance when they needed it and that their supervisors provided adequate support for them to manage work-life balance (73%, $n = 587$, p. 202). A majority of Staff respondents thought that their supervisors were supportive of flexible work schedules (71%, $n = 570$, p. 216) and that they had job security (69%, $n = 559$, p. 224). Some differences emerged based on staff status, years of employment, and disability status, where the responses of Classified Staff respondents, Staff respondents with more years of employment, and Staff Respondents with At Least One Disability were less positive than responses from Non-Classified Staff, Staff with fewer years of employment, and Staff with No Disability (p. 198-206).

Student Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Academic Experiences

Overall, Undergraduate Student respondents had positive perceptions of their experiences at URI. Most Student respondents felt that they belonged at URI (66%, $n = 2,095$, p. 259), and felt that they had other students whom they perceived as role models (63%, $n = 1,997$, p. 260). More than half of Student respondents (58%, $n = 1,850$) felt connected to other students (p. 258). Some findings suggested that students of color, trans-spectrum students, queer-spectrum students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities had less positive perceptions than did their peers (p. 258).

In general, Graduate Student respondents also viewed their URI experiences favorably. Most Graduate Student respondents felt satisfied with the quality of advising they have received from their departments (72%, $n = 405$, p. 274), that they had adequate access to their advisors (84%, $n = 476$, p. 274), and felt that their major professors (80%, $n = 452$, p. 275) and advisors (77%, $n = 431$, p. 274) provided clear expectations. Some findings underscored students with disabilities had less positive perceptions than did their graduate peers (p. 274).

Experiences of Exclusionary, Intimidating, Offensive, and/or Hostile Conduct

Several empirical studies reinforce the importance of the perception of non-discriminatory environments for positive learning and developmental outcomes.³ Research also underscores the relationship between hostile workplace climates and subsequent productivity.⁴ The survey requested information on experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

- 15% ($n = 685$) of respondents indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct (p. 90). Of these respondents, 25% ($n = 169$) indicated that the conduct was based on their position status, 19% ($n = 132$) suggested that the conduct was based on gender identity, 14% ($n = 97$) noted that the conduct was based on age, and 13% ($n = 91$) indicated that the conduct was based on racial identity.

Differences Based on Gender Identity, Age, and Racial Identity

- By gender identity, higher percentages of Trans-spectrum respondents (20%, $n = 24$) and Women respondents (16%, $n = 479$) than Men respondents (12%, $n = 165$) indicated that they had experienced this conduct (p. 92).
 - Higher percentages of Trans-spectrum respondents (33%, $n = 8$) and Women respondents (23%, $n = 109$) than Men respondents (7%, $n = 12$) who had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct indicated that the conduct was based on their gender identity (p. 92).
- By age, higher percentages of respondents who were 65-74 Years of Age (23%, $n = 26$), 55-64 Years of Age (22%, $n = 74$), 45-54 Years of Age (23%, $n = 75$), and 35-44 Years of Age (20%, $n = 68$) than respondents who were 22-24 Years of

³ Dugan et al. (2012); Eunyoung & Hargrove (2013); Garvey et al. (2018); Hurtado & Ponjuan (2005); Mayhew et al. (2016); Oseguera et al. (2017); Pascarella & Terenzini (2005); Strayhorn (2012)

⁴ Bilimoria & Stewart (2009); Costello (2012); Dade et al. (2015); Eagan & Garvey (2015); García (2016); Hirshfield & Joseph (2012); S. J. Jones & Taylor (2012); Levin et al. (2015); Rankin et al. (2010); Silverschanz et al. (2008)

Age (12%, $n = 60$), 20-21 Years of Age (11%, $n = 119$), and 18-19 Years of Age (10%, $n = 104$) indicated that they had experienced this conduct (p. 93).

○ A higher percentage of respondents who were 25-43 Years of Age (27%, $n = 22$) than respondents who were 20-21 Years of Age (8%, $n = 9$), 45-54 Years of Age (7%, $n = 5$), and 18-19 Years of Age (5%, $n = 5$) who had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct indicated that the conduct was based on their age (p. 93).

- By racial identity, higher percentages of Multiracial respondents (20%, $n = 65$) and APIDA respondents (21%, $n = 54$) than White respondents (13%, $n = 447$) indicated that they had experienced this conduct (p. 94).

○ Higher percentages of Black/African/African American respondents (52%, $n = 17$), APIDA respondents (48%, $n = 26$), Multiracial respondents (29%, $n = 19$), and Latinx respondents (27%, $n = 9$) than White respondents (3%, $n = 12$) who had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct indicated that the conduct was based on their racial identity (p. 94).

Respondents Who Seriously Considered Leaving URI

Campus climate research has demonstrated the effects of campus climate on faculty and student retention.⁵ Research specific to student experiences has found that sense of belonging is integral to student persistence and retention.⁶

Faculty and Staff Respondents

Forty-eight percent ($n = 244$) of Faculty respondents and 48% ($n = 392$) of Staff respondents had seriously considered leaving URI in the past year (p. 232). Forty-one percent ($n = 101$) of Faculty respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of low salary/pay rate, and 37% ($n = 90$) for increased workload, and 37% ($n = 90$) for

⁵ Blumenfeld et al. (2016); Gardner (2013); Garvey & Rankin (2016); D. R. Johnson et al. (2014); Kutscher & Tuckwiller (2019); Lawrence et al. (2014); Pascale (2018); Ruud et al. (2018); Strayhorn (2013); Walpole et al. (2014)

⁶ Booker (2016); García & Garza (2016); Hausmann et al. (2007)

institutional support (p. 234). Fifty-eight percent ($n = 228$) of Staff respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of low salary/pay rate, and 54% ($n = 211$) limited opportunities for advancement (p. 233).

Student Respondents

Thirty-two percent ($n = 1,465$) of Undergraduate Student respondents and 19% ($n = 105$) of Graduate Student respondents had seriously considered leaving URI in the past year (p. 282). Fifty-one percent ($n = 371$) of Undergraduate Student respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of a lack of sense of belonging, 47% ($n = 337$) wanted to transfer to another institution, and 46% ($n = 334$) owing to a lack of a social life (p. 283). Thirty-eight percent ($n = 40$) of Graduate Student respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of a lack of a sense of belonging, while others contemplated leaving owing to the climate was not welcoming (31%, $n = 32$), lack of social life (26%, $n = 27$), and personal reasons (26%, $n = 27$) (p. 283).

Respondents' Sense of Belonging

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the *Sense of Belonging* scale derived from questions 105, 109, and 110 on the survey. Higher scores on the *Sense of Belonging* factors suggested an individual or constituent group felt a stronger sense of belonging at URI. Using this scale, analyses revealed the following significant differences in the overall test means for:

- Faculty respondents by gender identity, racial identity, years of employment, and disability status on *Faculty Sense of Belonging*. Findings indicated that Faculty Respondents with No Disability were more likely than their counterparts to feel a stronger sense of belonging at URI (p. 193).
- Staff respondents by gender identity, racial identity, years of employment, and disability status on *Staff Sense of Belonging*. Findings indicated that Staff Respondents with Less Than 7 Years of Employment; White, APIDA and Multiple Race Staff respondents; and Staff Respondents with No Disability were more likely than their counterparts to feel a stronger sense of belonging at URI (p. 230).

- Student respondents by gender identity, racial identity, first-generation status, and sexual identity on *Student Sense of Belonging*. Findings indicated that Women Student respondents; White Student respondents; and Heterosexual Student respondents were more likely than their counterparts to feel a stronger sense of belonging at URI (p. 255).

Challenges and Opportunities Related to Campus Climate

Staff Respondents

Staff responses indicated that they felt less positive about several aspects of their work life at URI. Twenty-two percent ($n = 179$) of Staff respondents felt that staff salaries were competitive (p. 217). Thirty-five percent ($n = 280$) of Staff respondents felt positive about their career opportunities at URI (p. 222). Forty-eight percent ($n = 393$) of Staff respondents felt that their workload increased without additional compensation as a result of other staff departures (p. 205). More than half of Staff respondents (53%, $n = 426$) indicated that a hierarchy existed within staff positions that allowed some voices to be valued more than others (p. 206).

Faculty Respondents

Forty-one percent ($n = 132$) of Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that they were burdened by service responsibilities beyond those of their colleagues with similar performance expectations (p. 168) and 46% ($n = 147$) that they performed more work to help students than did their colleagues (p. 168). Just less than half (46%, $n = 55$) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt pressured to do extra work that was uncompensated (p. 174). Less than half of PTF/Per-Course Academic Appointment Faculty respondents felt that the PTF performance evaluations were clear (43%, $n = 17$, p. 177) and that the procedure for PTF advancement was clear (45%, $n = 18$, p. 177). Just one-third of all Faculty respondents (35%, $n = 174$) felt that salaries for tenure-track faculty positions were competitive (p. 181), and 14% ($n = 69$) felt that salaries for adjunct faculty were competitive (p. 181). Only 18% ($n = 88$) of all Faculty respondents felt that URI provided adequate resources to help them manage work-life balance (p. 185).

Student Respondents

One-third of Student respondents (31%, $n = 977$) felt that faculty prejudged their abilities based on their perceptions of their identity/background (p. 259). Analyses of the Students' survey responses revealed statistically significant differences based on gender identity, racial identity, sexual identity, citizenship status, first-generation status, and disability status, where students from backgrounds historically underrepresented at colleges held less positive views of their experiences than did their peers from "majority" backgrounds (pp. 258 - 264).

Student Respondents' *Perceived Academic Success*

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the *Perceived Academic Success* scale derived from Question 14 on the survey. Higher scores on the *Perceived Academic Success* factor suggested a student or constituent group perceived themselves as more academically successful. Using this scale, analyses revealed the following significant differences in the overall test means for: Undergraduate Student respondents by gender identity, racial identity, income status, and first-generation status. Findings indicated that Women Undergraduate Student respondents; White Undergraduate Student respondents; Not-Low-Income Undergraduate Student respondents; and Not-First-Generation Undergraduate Student respondents were more likely than their counterparts to perceive themselves as academically successful (p. 251).

A Meaningful Percentage of Respondents Experienced Unwanted Sexual Conduct

In 2014, *Not Alone: The First Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault* indicated that sexual assault is a substantial issue for colleges and universities nationwide, affecting the physical health, mental health, and academic success of students. The report highlights that one in five women is sexually assaulted while in college. One section of the URI survey requested information regarding respondents' experiences with sexual assault.

- 10% ($n = 457$) of respondents indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact/conduct while at URI (p. 122).⁷

⁷ Percentages may not sum to the total n as a result of multiple response choices.

- 1% ($n = 49$) experienced relationship violence (e.g., ridiculed, controlling, hitting, p. 123).
- 2% ($n = 88$) experienced stalking (e.g., following me, on social media, texting, phone calls, p. 128).
- 6% ($n = 280$) experienced sexual interaction (e.g., catcalling, repeated sexual advances, sexual harassment, p. 135).
- 3% ($n = 155$) experienced unwanted sexual contact (e.g., fondling, rape, sexual assault, penetration without consent, p. 140).
- Respondents identified URI students, current or former dating/intimate partners, acquaintances/friends, and strangers as sources of unwanted sexual contact/conduct (pp. 125 - 149).
- Most respondents did not report the unwanted sexual contact/conduct (pp. 126 - 151).

Respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on why they did not report unwanted sexual contact/conduct. The primary reason cited for not reporting these incidents was that respondents handled the situation on their own or a feeling that nothing would be done. Other rationales included the concern for the assailant’s wellbeing, minimizing the severity of the incident, failing to report the incident out of fear or retaliation, embarrassment or self-blame, or the fact that they could not identify or did not know the assailant.

Conclusion

URI climate findings⁸ were consistent with those found in higher education institutions across the country, based on the work of R&A Consulting.⁹ For example, 70% to 80% of respondents in similar reports found the campus climate to be “very comfortable” or “comfortable.” A slightly lower percentage (69%) of URI respondents indicated that they were “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the overall climate at URI (p. 65). Twenty percent to 25% of respondents in similar reports indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating,

⁸ Additional findings disaggregated by position status and other selected demographic characteristics are provided in the full report.

⁹ Rankin & Associates Consulting (2021)

offensive, and/or hostile conduct. At URI, a lower percentage of respondents (15%) indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct (p. 90). The results also paralleled the findings of other climate studies of specific constituent groups offered in the literature.¹⁰

URI's climate assessment report provides baseline data on diversity and inclusion, and addresses URI's mission and goals. While the findings may guide decision-making regarding policies and practices at URI, it is important to note that the cultural fabric of any institution and unique aspects of each campus's environment must be taken into consideration when deliberating additional action items based on these findings. The climate assessment findings provide the URI community with an opportunity to build upon its strengths and to develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. URI, with support from senior administrators and collaborative leadership, is in a prime position to actualize its commitment to promote an inclusive campus and to institute organizational structures that respond to the needs of its dynamic campus community.

¹⁰ Guiffrida et al. (2002); Harper & Hurtado (2007); Harper & Quaye (2004); Hurtado & Ponjuan (2005); Rankin & Reason (2005); Sears (2002); Settles et al. (2006); Silverschanz et al. (2008); Yosso et al. (2009)

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