



Rankin & Associates, Consulting

Assessment • Planning • Interventions

# Saginaw Valley State University

## Assessment of Climate for Learning, Living, and Working Executive Summary

October 2020



Rankin & Associates, Consulting

## Executive Summary

### History of the Project

This report provides the findings from a survey entitled “Saginaw Valley State University Assessment of Climate for Learning, Living, and Working,” conducted at Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU). In the 2018 fall semester, SVSU contracted with Rankin & Associates Consulting (R&A) to conduct a university-wide study. Eighteen SVSU faculty, staff, students, and administrators formed the Climate Survey Working Group (CSWG). During the winter/spring 2019, the CSWG worked with R&A to develop the survey instrument and developed the communication/marketing plan. The survey was administered in October 2019. All members of SVSU 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., SVSU position, 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 includes tenure-track faculty and non-tenure-track faculty.

In addition to multiple-choice survey items, several open-ended questions provided respondents with the opportunity to describe their experiences at SVSU. 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.

One thousand one hundred fourteen (1,114) surveys were returned for a 22% overall response rate. Table 1 provides a summary of selected demographic characteristics of survey respondents. Of the respondents, 54% ( $n = 599$ ) of the sample were Undergraduate Students, 5% ( $n = 53$ ) were Graduate Students, 17% ( $n = 190$ ) were Faculty members, and 24% ( $n = 272$ ) were Staff members.

**Table 1. SVSU Sample Demographics**

| <b>Characteristic</b>  | <b>Subgroup</b>                  | <b><i>n</i></b> | <b>% of sample</b> |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Position status        | Undergraduate Student            | 599             | 53.8               |
|                        | Graduate Student                 | 53              | 4.8                |
|                        | Faculty                          | 190             | 17.1               |
|                        | Staff                            | 272             | 24.4               |
| Gender identity        | Women                            | 758             | 68.0               |
|                        | Men                              | 323             | 29.0               |
|                        | Transspectrum                    | 21              | 1.9                |
|                        | Missing/Unknown                  | 12              | 1.1                |
| Racial/ethnic identity | Asian/Asian American             | 24              | 2.2                |
|                        | Black/African/African American   | 77              | 6.9                |
|                        | Latinx/Chicanx/Hispanic          | 25              | 2.2                |
|                        | White                            | 889             | 79.8               |
|                        | Middle Eastern                   | 6               | 0.5                |
|                        | American Indian/Alaska Native    | < 5             | ---                |
|                        | Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander | < 5             | ---                |
|                        | Multiracial                      | 52              | 4.7                |
| Missing/Other          | 36                               | 3.2             |                    |
| Sexual identity        | LGBQ                             | 143             | 12.8               |
|                        | Heterosexual                     | 898             | 80.6               |
|                        | Missing/Other                    | 73              | 6.6                |
| Citizenship status     | U.S. Citizen                     | 1,023           | 91.8               |
|                        | Non-U.S./Naturalized Citizen     | 77              | 6.9                |
|                        | Missing                          | 14              | 1.3                |
| Disability status      | Single Disability                | 91              | 8.2                |
|                        | No Disability                    | 968             | 86.9               |
|                        | Multiple Disabilities            | 45              | 4.0                |
|                        | Missing                          | 10              | 0.9                |
| Religious affiliation  | Christian Religious Affiliation  | 673             | 60.4               |
|                        | Other Religious Affiliation      | 35              | 3.1                |
|                        | No Religious Affiliation         | 325             | 29.2               |
|                        | Multiple Religious Affiliations  | 40              | 3.6                |
| Missing                | 41                               | 3.7             |                    |

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

## **High Levels of Comfort With the Climate at SVSU**

Most survey respondents were “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the overall environment at SVSU (81%,  $n = 906$ , p. 47) with the environment in their department/work units (78%,  $n = 359$ , p. 47), and with the environment in their classes (85%,  $n = 711$ , p. 47). Student respondents were significantly more comfortable with the overall environment than were Staff respondents (p. 48).

### **1. Staff Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Staff Work**

Staff respondents generally viewed working at SVSU positively. Staff respondents felt their supervisors provided adequate support for them to manage work-life balance (p. 156). Seventy-eight percent ( $n = 210$ ) of Staff respondents thought that health insurance benefits were competitive (p. 151). Eighty-three percent ( $n = 223$ ) of Staff respondents felt that vacation and personal time packages were competitive (p. 151). Eighty-three percent ( $n = 223$ ) of Staff respondents felt that their supervisors were supportive of their taking leave (p. 150). Eighty-five percent ( $n = 213$ ) of Staff respondents felt valued by coworkers in their work unit (p. 156).

### **2. Faculty Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Faculty Work**

#### ***Tenured and Tenure-Track***

Seventy-one percent ( $n = 75$ ) of Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt their teaching was valued by SVSU (p. 127). Seventy-seven percent ( $n = 82$ ) of Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that their service contributions (p. 127) were valued at SVSU.

#### ***Non-Tenure-Track***

Eighty-six percent ( $n = 70$ ) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt their teaching was valued at SVSU (p. 132). Additionally, 85% ( $n = 69$ ) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that expectations of their responsibilities were clear (p. 131).

#### ***All Faculty***

Eighty-six percent ( $n = 160$ ) of all Faculty respondents felt valued by students in the classroom (p. 139 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). Eighty-five percent ( $n = 161$ ) of all Faculty respondents felt valued by their department chair (p. 139). Additionally, 85% ( $n$

= 111) of all Faculty respondents felt SVSU administrators were genuinely concerned with their welfare (p. 139).

### 3. Student Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Academic Experiences

Overall, Student respondents had positive perceptions of their experiences at SVSU. Eighty percent ( $n = 514$ ) of Student respondents felt valued by SVSU faculty in the classroom (p. 174). Seventy-eight percent ( $n = 507$ ) of Student respondents indicated that they felt valued by SVSU faculty and 75% ( $n = 480$ ) felt valued by support staff (p. 173 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).

In general, Graduate Student respondents also viewed their SVSU experiences favorably. Eighty-five percent ( $n = 45$ ) of Graduate Student respondents felt department faculty members responded to their emails, calls, or voicemails in a prompt manner (p. 179). Additionally, 88% ( $n = 40$ ) of Graduate Student respondents felt comfortable sharing their professional goals with their advisors (p. 179 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).

### 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.<sup>1</sup> Research also underscores the relationship between workplace discrimination and subsequent productivity.<sup>2</sup> The survey requested information on experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

- 20% ( $n = 220$ ) of respondents indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct (p. 68). Of these respondents, 34% ( $n = 74$ ) reported that the conduct was based on their position status, and 16% each indicated that the conduct was based on their gender identity ( $n = 36$ ) or their age ( $n = 36$ ). Twenty-two percent ( $n = 48$ ) did not know the basis

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<sup>1</sup> Aguirre & Messineo (1997); Flowers & Pascarella (1999); Pascarella & Terenzini (2005); Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora (2011)

<sup>2</sup> Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley (2008); Waldo (1999)

of the conduct, and 14% ( $n = 30$ ) of respondents indicated “a reason not listed above” (p. 69).

### ***Differences Based on Position Status and Gender Identity***

- By position status, a higher percentage of Staff respondents (27%,  $n = 73$ ) than Undergraduate Student respondents (16%,  $n = 97$ ) indicated that they had experienced this conduct (p. 69).
  - A higher percentage of Staff respondents (56%,  $n = 41$ ) than Undergraduate Student respondents (19%,  $n = 18$ ) who had experienced this conduct indicated that they thought that the conduct was based on their position status (p. 69).
- By gender identity, a higher percentage of Transpectrum respondents (43%,  $n = 9$ ) than Women respondents (20%,  $n = 151$ ) and Men respondents (17%,  $n = 56$ ) indicated that they had experienced this conduct (p. 71).
  - A higher percentage of Transpectrum respondents (78%,  $n = 7$ ) than Women respondents (16%,  $n = 24$ ) and Men respondents (9%,  $n = 5$ ) who had experienced this conduct indicated that the conduct was based on their gender identity (p. 71).

### **Comfort With Campus, Workplace, and Classroom Climates**

Prior research on campus climate 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 students, and veterans).<sup>3</sup> Several groups at SVSU indicated that they were less comfortable than their majority counterparts with the climates of the campus and workplace. No significant differences were found by respondents' levels of comfort in their classrooms.

### ***Significant Findings for Overall Climate at SVSU***

- 45% ( $n = 121$ ) of Staff respondents compared with 56% ( $n = 362$ ) of Student respondents felt “very comfortable” with the overall climate (p. 48).

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<sup>3</sup> Harper & Hurtado (2007); Hart & Fellabaum (2008); Rankin (2003); Rankin & Reason (2005); Worthington et al. (2008)

- 37% ( $n = 120$ ) of Women respondents compared with 28% ( $n = 211$ ) of Men respondents were “very comfortable” with the overall climate (p. 51).
- 20% ( $n = 19$ ) of Respondents of Color compared with 32% ( $n = 283$ ) of White respondents felt “very comfortable” with the overall climate (p. 54).
- 19% ( $n = 30$ ) of Low-Income Student respondents compared with 33% ( $n = 158$ ) of Not-Low-Income Student respondents felt “very comfortable” with the overall climate (p. 60).

### ***Significant Findings for Department/Program and Work Unit Climate***

- 34% ( $n = 90$ ) of Women respondents compared with 45% ( $n = 82$ ) of Men respondents felt “very comfortable” with the climate in their department/program or work unit climate (p. 52).

## **Respondents Who Seriously Considered Leaving SVSU**

### ***Employee Respondents***

Forty-five percent ( $n = 86$ ) of Faculty respondents and 47% ( $n = 128$ ) of Staff respondents had seriously considered leaving SVSU in the past year (p. 159). Forty-eight percent ( $n = 61$ ) of Staff respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of limited opportunities for advancement (p. 159). Forty percent ( $n = 34$ ) of Faculty respondents and 52% ( $n = 66$ ) of Staff respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of a low salary/pay rate (p. 160).

### ***Student Respondents***

Twenty-nine percent ( $n = 171$ ) of Undergraduate Student respondents and 30% ( $n = 16$ ) of Graduate Student respondents had seriously considered leaving SVSU (p. 181). A majority of those Student respondents (58%,  $n = 109$ ) considered leaving in their first year as a student at SVSU. Forty-three percent ( $n = 72$ ) of Undergraduate Student respondents attributed a lack of a sense of belonging as the main reason why they seriously considered leaving SVSU.

## **Challenges and Opportunities Related to Campus Climate**

### ***Staff Respondents***

Staff respondents indicated that they felt less positive about several aspects of their work life at SVSU. Only 19% ( $n = 51$ ) of Staff respondents felt that child care benefits were competitive (p. 151). Less than half of Staff respondents felt that support staff opinions were valued by SVSU faculty and administration (p. 152) or on SVSU committees (p. 152). Additionally, less than half of Staff respondents felt the performance evaluation process was productive (p. 143) or that staff salaries were competitive (p. 151).

### ***Faculty Respondents***

Forty-five percent ( $n = 48$ ) of Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty respondents (p. 129) and 43% ( $n = 45$ ) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents (p. 132) felt faculty opinions were taken seriously by senior administrators. Additionally, 44% ( $n = 35$ ) of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that the criteria used for contract renewal were not applied equally to positions (p. 131) and 44% ( $n = 36$ ) felt that they did not have job security (p. 131).

Of all Faculty respondents, only 9% ( $n = 17$ ) felt child care benefits were competitive (p. 135). Additionally, 27% ( $n = 50$ ) of the Faculty respondents felt salaries for tenure-track faculty positions were not competitive (p. 135), and 66% ( $n = 124$ ) felt that salaries for adjunct professors (p. 135) were not competitive.

### ***Student Respondents***

Analyses of the Students' survey responses revealed statistically significant differences based on gender identity, racial identity, sexual identity, religious/spiritual affiliation, disability status, first-generation status, income status, racial identity, military service, and housing status, where students from backgrounds historically underrepresented at colleges held less positive views of their experiences than did their peers from "majority" backgrounds (p. 173). Findings indicated that 55% ( $n = 357$ ) of Student respondents felt they had staff whom they perceived as role models (p. 177). Additionally, 59% ( $n = 383$ ) of Student respondents felt valued by SVSU senior administrators (p. 173).

## 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 SVSU survey requested information regarding sexual assault.

- 9% ( $n = 99$ ) of respondents indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact/conduct while at SVSU (p. 99).
  - 2% ( $n = 20$ ) experienced relationship violence (e.g., ridiculed, controlling, hitting, p. 99).
  - 2% ( $n = 26$ ) experienced stalking (e.g., following me, on social media, texting, phone calls, p. 103).
  - 5% ( $n = 53$ ) experienced sexual interaction (e.g., catcalling, repeated sexual advances, sexual harassment, p. 106).
  - 3% ( $n = 35$ ) experienced unwanted sexual contact (e.g., fondling, rape, sexual assault, penetration without consent, p. 111 **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).
- Respondents identified SVSU students, current or former dating/intimate partners, acquaintances/friends, and students as sources of unwanted sexual contact/conduct (pp. 110-113).
- Most respondents did not report the unwanted sexual contact/conduct (pp. 102-115).

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 the incidents did not feel worth reporting. Other rationales included respondents feared the consequences of reporting, they had no evidence, and they expected a negative response from reporting (pp. 102-115).

## Conclusion

SVSU climate findings<sup>4</sup> were consistent with those found in higher education institutions across the country, based on the work of R&A Consulting.<sup>5</sup> For example, 70% to 80% of respondents in similar reports found the campus climate to be “very comfortable” or “comfortable.” A slightly higher percentage (81%) of SVSU respondents indicated that they were “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the overall climate at SVSU (p. 47). Twenty percent to 25% of respondents in similar reports indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. At SVSU, a slightly lower percentage of respondents (19%) indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct (p. 68). The results also paralleled the findings of other climate studies of specific constituent groups offered in the literature.<sup>6</sup>

SVSU’s climate assessment report provides baseline data on diversity and inclusion and addresses SVSU’s mission and goals. While the findings may guide decision making regarding policies and practices at SVSU, 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 SVSU community with an opportunity to build upon its strengths and to develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. SVSU, 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.

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<sup>4</sup> Additional findings disaggregated by position status and other selected demographic characteristics are provided in the full report.

<sup>5</sup> Rankin & Associates Consulting (2016).

<sup>6</sup> Guiffrida, Gouveia, Wall, & Seward (2002); Harper & Hurtado (2007); Harper & Quaye (2004); Hurtado & Ponjuan (2005); Rankin & Reason (2005); Sears (2002); Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart (2006); Silverschanz et al. (2008); Yosso et al. (2009).

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