

2024 Public Description of Work for Action Collaborative on Preventing Sexual Harassment in Higher Education

Boston University

University-wide Belonging & Culture Survey Follow-up

Relevant Rubric Area(s):

1. Evaluation: Measuring the Prevalence of Sexual Harassment
2. Evaluation: Publicly sharing the results/data from evaluation work
3. Response: Improved communication and increased transparency

Description of Work:

Purpose and goals

Part of the vision of Boston University's Office of the Associate Provost for Community & Inclusion unit is "to fortify the University as a place where everyone can participate and thrive, while harnessing intellectual innovation and interconnection." Research maintains that a strong sense of belonging and positive perceptions of culture generally result in successful outcomes, such as more positive educational experiences and healthy identity development for students; productivity and a sense of value for faculty and staff; and increased well-being for the entire community.

During the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters, the University undertook a comprehensive culture and climate assessment, the Belonging & Culture Survey. This campus-wide climate and culture survey allowed BU to assess the sense of belonging and culture at the University for students, staff, and faculty and to identify both successes and opportunities for improvement. Survey data is now assisting the institution in identifying areas of focus from which initiatives can be developed.

What we did and how it was done

The survey was administered to the entire BU community. Since one goal of the project is inclusiveness and allowing traditionally silenced/minimized/excluded voices to be heard, the survey did not use a sampling technique.

The survey comprised 123 questions and incorporated logic to ensure respondents received question sets corresponding to their role as faculty members, students, staff members, or postdoctoral staff members. The survey included question sets about:

- respondent demographics;
- experiences with exclusionary conduct, including harassment or bias based on identity;
- unwanted sexual experiences, including sexual harassment or assault;
- intent to leave the University and the reasons why;
- availability of and familiarity with campus resources;
- promotion and tenure for staff and faculty; and,
- academic experiences.

The survey was completely anonymous and confidential. Rankin Climate administered the survey independently and received all survey responses directly. BU did not collect any survey responses directly.

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Timeline post-survey administration

Spring 2023

- **February 21:** The Belonging & Culture Survey is launched university-wide to all students, staff, and faculty.
- **April 7:** The survey closes, and no further responses are collected after this date.
- **April:** Survey response data coding by Rankin Climate begins.
- **May:** Data analysis and interpretation by Rankin Climate begins.

Summer 2023

- **July-August:** Rankin Climate develops the survey results reports and presentations.

Fall 2023

- **October:** On October 18, the survey results report is presented and published on a website accessible to all BU community members with login credentials. (The survey results are not available to the general public.) On the same day, Rankin Climate and university executive leadership presented the survey results during two town hall meetings on the Charles River and Medical Campuses, which were open to all members of the BU community.
- **November:** Raw data from the survey is released through data dashboards by school, college, and unit to deans and senior executive unit leaders for their review of unit-level data.
- **December:** Deans and senior executive unit leaders review their data dashboards and begin determining areas of focus and designing initiatives to improve culture and belonging in their unit.

Spring/Summer 2024

- **January:** Deans and senior executive unit leaders submitted reports to the provost and president regarding areas of focus in their unit's data around which to design initiatives to improve culture and belonging in their units.
- **February:** The Office of the Provost developed the charge for and constituted the Belonging and Culture Strategic Committee (BCSC) to work in concert with the Rankin Climate Team on determining university-wide areas of focus and action items, as well to support deans and senior executive unit leaders in identifying unit-level areas of focus and designing initiatives to improve culture and belonging in their schools, colleges, and units.
- **March:** The BCSC began meeting regularly to work on its charge.
- **April-August:** The BCSC will work to develop strategic objectives, action items, and measures of success for university-wide, unit-specific, and population-specific actions for improvement.

Fall 2024

- **Fall 2024 and beyond:** The survey website will share information about strategic objectives and action items with the BU community. The university and individual units will begin implementing action items and tracking progress.

2026

- *Proposed time to repeat the survey administration to measure progress on climate, culture, and sense of belonging.*

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How the work is new

Surveys undertaken by Boston University over recent years have provided the institution with meaningful, actionable feedback, however, no previous surveys have attempted to reach the entire BU community through a single survey administration. The inaugural Belonging & Culture Survey launched an ongoing process that will be repeated approximately every three years. It provides an opportunity for all constituencies on campus to have input, share their experiences, and determine areas of improvement.

In addition to the Belonging & Culture Survey, BU also worked with Rankin Climate to administer a separate student sexual misconduct climate survey in the spring of 2024. Rankin Climate is currently analyzing the survey data, and BU is awaiting the results of that survey.

Plans for evaluating the success, effectiveness, and impact of the work

The survey administration was only the initial step in a more extensive assessment, reflection, and action process to improve the campus climate at BU. Success will be determined by the effectiveness of the action plans developed from the survey results, impacting the entire University and myriad constituencies. The Office of the Associate Provost for Community & Inclusion (Community & Inclusion), in conjunction with its BU Diversity & Inclusion unit, will document and track programs, services, and initiatives developed because of the Belonging & Culture Survey. Community & Inclusion will also provide advice, guidance, and limited oversight in implementing the programs, services, and initiatives developed.

Formative assessment of these programs, services, and initiatives will be ongoing and conducted by individuals and units across the University, with Community & Inclusion serving as a resource and touchpoint for the assessment processes. Perhaps the strongest indicator of success for the Belonging & Culture Survey will be parity in response rates when the survey is conducted in 2026 because faculty, staff, and students will have observed and experienced the impact of programs, services, and initiatives that were implemented as a result of the first survey administration in 2023.

Work Completed to Date

The survey opened on February 22, 2023, and closed on April 7, 2023, with an overall participation rate of 23.4%. Broken down by position status, the participation rates were:

- undergraduate students 19.1%,
- graduate students 16.3%,
- faculty 32.6%,
- staff 41.8%, and
- postdocs 41.4%

Rankin Climate remarked that these are very good response rates for a voluntary campus climate survey, with all position statuses exceeding 30% except students. Students are widely known to have low response rates to voluntary surveys, and Rankin Climate remarked that BU's double-digit

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student response rates are also considered very good. Overall, BU reached its goal of having high enough response rates to draw reasonable conclusions from the survey results and thereby design data-informed actions to improve the campus climate.

Rankin Climate produced a results report at the end of summer 2023 that includes institution-level results and presented the report to BU leadership and the Belonging & Culture Survey Working Group before the town hall meetings with the community. On October 18, 2023, the report was posted on the Belonging & Culture Survey website (bu.edu/belong), with access restricted to members of the BU community (login required), and consultants from Rankin Climate conducted town hall meetings for the BU community on the Charles River and Medical Campuses about the final report and recommendations. Meanwhile, Analytical Services & Institutional Research (AS&IR) received and analyzed the raw survey data from Rankin Climate, developing internal data dashboards for each school, college, and senior executive unit to aid the analysis, dissemination, and development of action plans at the unit level in response to the survey results. AS&IR also developed a plan for data dissemination, dashboard creation, and data request management. This includes data presentations to multiple units across campus and consultation on how the data can be used to create or improve existing programs, services, and initiatives to improve campus climate in various areas of the University.

In November 2023, the provost and president of the university asked all deans and executive unit leaders to review their data dashboards and begin determining areas of focus around which to design initiatives to improve culture and belonging in their unit. In January 2024, deans and senior executive unit leaders submitted reports to the provost and president regarding areas of focus in their unit's data and began to design initiatives to improve culture and belonging in their units.

In February 2024, the provost developed the charge for and constituted the Belonging and Culture Strategic Committee (BCSC) to work with the Rankin Climate team to determine university-wide areas of focus and action items. The BCSC also supports deans and senior executive unit leaders in identifying unit-level areas of focus and designing initiatives to improve culture and belonging in their units. The BCSC has met regularly since March 22, 2024.

Current status of the work and next steps

The BCSC is working to develop strategic objectives, action items, and measures of success for university-wide, unit-specific, and population-specific actions for improvement. The BCSC has also formed ad hoc subcommittees of faculty, staff (including postdocs), and students that will begin meeting in June 2024 and throughout the summer to generate ideas for addressing strategic priorities for those subgroups of our BU community. The BCSC will gather recommendations from Rankin Climate and the ad hoc subcommittees, develop ideas for improvement, and suggest potential action items to the provost for consideration in fall 2024.

Moreover, the BCSC diligently analyzed Rankin's assessment findings, reviewed all the unit-level findings and reports, and has begun identifying University-wide strategic priorities to enhance the overall positive perceptions of our campus climate. In collaboration with the ad hoc committees,

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the BCSC will spend the summer crystalizing the strategic priorities and developing data-informed goals and initiatives.

Community & Inclusion will maintain records and track the progress of the initiatives arising from the survey data and publish this information on the survey website.

Website for further information (if applicable): <https://www.bu.edu/belonging-culture-survey/>

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