



Campus Climate: Looking at Faculty/Staff Diversity

Jan. 14, 2014

The third goal of CSUF's Strategic Plan is: Recruit and retain a high-quality and diverse faculty and staff.

In pursuit of that goal, Lori Gentles, vice president for human resources, diversity and inclusion, is leading a campus climate assessment that will determine how Cal State Fullerton is meeting its goal to "cultivate an environment that honors differences in various forms – race, ethnicity, gender, age, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs and status within the University."

On Feb. 4, approximately 100 faculty and staff members will participate in focus groups designed to provide a picture of the "campus climate" for various constituent groups on campus. The results will be used to inform the development of questions for a campuswide survey to be distributed to the CSUF community this spring.

Below, Gentles offers some answers to commonly asked questions.

What do you mean by campus climate?

Campus climate refers to the current attitudes, behaviors, standards and practices of employees and students of an institution. The Campus Climate Study at CSUF is designed to assess the current attitudes, behaviors and standards of faculty, staff and administrators concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities and potential at the University. It's a way to take the temperature, if you will, of how closely our values are aligned with how we treat and work with one another.

Why are we doing this? Is it that important?

We believe it's very important. Assessing how members of our community experience Cal State Fullerton's social and academic climate will help us develop programs and policies that will increase inclusivity in areas that are shown to be problematic and enhance and replicate programs and policies in areas that are shown to be successfully meeting the needs of the community.

Research demonstrates that the personal and professional development of employees is impacted by campus climate. Not only that, but faculty and staff members who judge their campus climate more positively are more likely to feel personally supported. This, in turn, creates a welcoming environment for our students.

I haven't heard of these sorts of assessments. Are other campuses conducting this research?

Yes, many progressive campuses are conducting climate assessments because there are such positive benefits to faculty and staff, and this extends to students and the community at large. We all benefit from constructive participation in a diverse, multicultural world. It opens the doors to underserved students and creates a more welcoming environment. It also improves the working and learning environment on campus.

How will the assessment take place?

We're beginning the process by conducting focus groups with different members of our campus community. These participants have been nominated by the Diversity Action Plan Task Force composed of faculty, staff, administrators and students, and represent a wide cross section of faculty and staff to provide some qualitative insight. Once we have finished and analyzed these answers, we will proceed with a campuswide survey of all our faculty and staff members. The focus groups are NOT the survey. They are providing information about their experiences at Cal State Fullerton; they aren't speaking on behalf of any particular groups of people.

How will faculty/staff participate in the survey?

In March, you will receive information on how to access the survey. The survey can be completed online or with paper and pencil, and shouldn't take more than 20 to 25 minutes. Our goal is to have as much participation as possible. The greater the response, the more information we'll have as we proceed with our diversity action plan. We want everyone to be HEARD!

Will the survey be anonymous?

Yes. In fact, we're working with an outside consulting firm (Rankin & Associates) that has performed more than a hundred of these kinds of assessments. They will receive the data, analyze it and then provide us with a report. This information will inform our campus-specific diversity action plan.

Will the information be shared?

Over the next several months, we will share information with our internal audience and we hope to continue the process of fostering an environment where faculty and employees feel heard and respected. Based on what we discover, we can create a new culture and shape, rather than respond to, issues of equity, diversity and inclusivity.

Is there a committee overseeing the process? If so, who are the members?

Yes, the Diversity Action Plan Task Force is one of 11 task forces that are working campus-wide on different facets of the University's Strategic Plan and represents a cross section of the campus. Members of the Diversity Action Plan Task Force include:

Vice President and Leader:

Lori Gentles, vice president, human resources, diversity and inclusion

Senior Leadership Team:

José Cruz, provost and vice president, academic affairs

Harry Norman, associate vice president, international programs, and dean, University Extended Education

Faculty:

Emily Bonney, associate professor of liberal studies

David D. Bowman, chair and professor of geological sciences

Staff:

Melba Castro, director, educational partnerships

Phenicia McCullough, chief of operations, human resources, diversity and inclusion

Joe Ferrer, facility use officer

Student:

Carlos Navarro, ASI chief administrative officer

Ex Officio:

Davida Hopkins-Parham, director of special projects, human resources, diversity and inclusion

Ad Hoc:

Ed Sullivan, assistant vice president, institutional research and analytical studies

Valerie Orleans, director of internal communications, strategic communications