Institutional Climate Committee Report to Senate April 30, 2015

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The focus of the Institutional Climate Committee (ICC) is taking action to identify and solve climate-related barriers to learning at Kutztown University. Recent recommendations from the ICC are largely based on the results of KU’s campus wide Institutional Climate Study (Rankin & Associates, 2011).

Defined in the survey as, “offensive, hostile, exclusionary, or intimidating conduct,” harassment across KU is experienced among sexual minorities more than heterosexuals (32% v. 15%), people with disabilities more than non-disabled people (30% v. 14%), and people of color more than whites (21% v. 15%) (Rankin & Associates, 2011, p. 32-36).

Of the 543 (18%) survey respondents who reported experiencing harassment, only 11.5% \((n = 66)\) made a complaint to a campus employee/official (Rankin & Associates, p. 41). Low complaint rates may be related to the finding that harassment at KU is more covert (e.g., exclusion, ignoring) than is typical at other universities (Rankin & Associates, p. ix.; p. 45).

Regarding employee climate, Rankin et. al. (2011) found that 29% of staff and 26% of management reported experiencing harassment, largely due to “position” (p. 34). They found that 33% of faculty respondents \((n = 76)\) reported experiencing harassment, mostly by colleagues (Rankin & Associates, 2011, p. 34). The percentage of KU faculty reporting harassment is considered large (Rankin & Associates, 2011, p. 34).

The percentage of faculty who consider leaving KU is also large. Forty-two percent of tenured faculty members, 37% of tenure-track faculty members, and 31% of temporary faculty members considered leaving KU within the past year (Rankin & Associates, 2011, p. xiv; p. 112).

An important finding in the climate study emerged on a yes-no question about whether an employee felt they could trust their colleagues. Just over half (52%; \(n = 276)\) felt that they could trust their colleagues (Rankin & Associates, 2011, p. ix). Mistrust among employees is high.

33% \((n = 177)\) of employee respondents believed they had observed discriminatory promotion practices (Rankin & Associates, 2011, p. ix). Faculty views on the clarity of the promotion process varied widely. In response to the item “I believe that the promotion process is clear,” 97 faculty agree/strongly agree; while 87 faculty disagree/strongly disagree that the process is clear.

To build a working framework for pursuing climate transformation at KU, the ICC adopted Rankin and Reason’s (2008) “tapestry of social justice” model in 2014. The KU Commission on Human Diversity supported the model in their February 2015 spring conference, “Taking Action: Social Justice for All.” At the conference, the ICC presented a session on transforming climate following the results of Rankin and Associates. The session facilitated dialogue about KU climate and participant sharing was used to help inform future direction. The ICC is currently
developing a campus-wide program of “trust talks” to promote opportunities for more open and honest communication across the campus community.

Covert forms of harassment may be more difficult to detect than overt ones. Among KU employee respondents, 36% \((n = 191)\) felt that there were many unwritten rules concerning how to interact with colleagues, and 33% \((n = 177)\) said they were reluctant to bring up issues for fear that doing so would affect their performance evaluation or tenure decision.

Exchange of informal knowledge is most apt to occur when people perceive no harmful consequences from sharing ideas and opinions. Climates of mistrust consist of adversarial attitudes, hidden animosities, and disrespect. They compromise performance because energies go into protection rather than efficiency and effectiveness. Interpersonal trust, on the other hand, enhances learning capabilities, knowledge acquisition, knowledge dissemination, and the generation of ideas (Lobo, & Dolke, 2005).

Trust is “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable.” (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). Creating conditions for all members of the KU campus community to feel safe to communicate ideas, feelings and opinions openly and without fear of repercussion is the goal of the committee.

The ICC passed a motion on 4-9-15, recommending reinstatement of the ombudsperson position. This is supported by findings from Rankin from all segments of the university community. Students, staff, faculty and management all want a place or person to go to for conflict resolution. Students want a person to whom to address complaints of classroom inequality \((70\%, n = 2,010)\), and employees want a clear and fair processes to resolve conflicts \((84\%, n = 431)\).

The ICC embraces the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) (1995) recommendation to: “affirm and enact a commitment to equality, fairness, and inclusion…” and commit to “the task of creating…inclusive educational environments in which all participants are equally welcome, equally valued, and equally heard (p. xxi).”

References


