Rankin & Associates, Consulting

Assessment • Planning • Interventions

Brock University

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

October 2020

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History of the Project

This report provides the findings from a survey entitled "Assessment of the Learning, Living, and Working Environment," conducted at Brock University. In the 2019 fall semester, Brock University contracted with Rankin & Associates Consulting (R&A) to conduct a university-wide study. Twenty-five Brock University 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 2020. During the course of survey administration, Brock University followed Canadian stay-at-home orders and transitioned to online learning and working environments. The survey administration dates were extended by six weeks while the Brock University community adjusted to the guidelines. All members of Brock University 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., Brock University 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 included Faculty Member or Professional Librarian (BUFA Members) respondents, English as a Second Language (ESL), Sessional & Part-time Instructors respondents, Academic Administrator (e.g. Provost, Dean, Vice-Provost respondents, University Librarian, Associate Dean) respondents, and Research Position (e.g., Post-Doctoral Fellows, Research Assistants) respondents.

In addition to multiple-choice survey items, several open-ended questions provided Respondents With the opportunity to describe their experiences at Brock University. 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.

Three thousand-four (3,004) surveys were returned for a 14.2% overall response rate. Table 1 provides a summary of selected demographic characteristics of survey respondents. Of the

respondents, 72% (*n* = 2,165) of the sample were Undergraduate Students, 11% (*n* = 335) were Graduate Students, 6% (*n* = 188) were Faculty members, and 11% (*n* = 315) were Staff members.

Table 1. Brock University Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Subgroup	*n*	% of Sample
Position status	Undergraduate Student	2,165	72.1
	Graduate Student	335	11.2
	Faculty	188	6.3
	Staff	315	10.5
Gender identity	Women	2,120	70.6
	Men	816	27.2
	Trans-spectrum/Multiple/Other	50	1.7
	Missing	17	0.6
Racial/ethnic identity	Indigenous	67	2.2
	Black (e.g., African, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian)	130	4.3
	East Asian/Southeast Asian/South Asian	466	15.5
	White (e.g., European descent)	1,865	62.1
	Additional/Multiple Racialized Identities	242	8.1
	Missing	233	7.8
Sexual identity	Queer-spectrum (Not Bisexual)	241	8.0
	Bisexual	212	7.1
	Heterosexual	2,375	79.1
	Missing	175	5.8
Citizenship status	Canadian Citizen	2,388	79.5
	Canadian Citizen, Naturalized	266	8.9
	Non-Canadian Citizen	326	10.9
	Missing	23	0.8
Disability status	Mental Health Disability	577	19.2
	Single Disability (Not Mental Health)	283	9.4
	No Disability	2,044	68.1
	Multiple Disabilities	99	3.3

Table 1. Brock University Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Subgroup	*n*	% of Sample
Religious affiliation	Christian Religious Affiliation	1,049	34.9
	Additional Religious Affiliation	382	12.7
	No Religious Affiliation	1,221	40.7
	Multiple Religious Affiliations	102	3.4
	Missing	249	8.3

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 Brock University

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, racialized people, people with disabilities, first-generation and/or low-income students, queer-spectrum and/or trans-spectrum individuals, and veterans).[1,2] Several groups at Brock University indicated on the survey that they were less comfortable than their majority counterparts with the climates of the campus, workplace, and classroom.

Most survey respondents were "very comfortable" or "comfortable" with the overall environment at Brock University (83%, *n* = 2,489, p. 59) with the environment in their departments/program or work units (61%, *n* = 308, p. 59), and with the environment in their classes (84%, *n* = 2,233, p. 59). Examples of statistically significant findings include: Staff and Faculty respondents were less comfortable with the overall environment than were Student respondents (p. 60). Faculty respondents were less comfortable than Staff respondents (p. 61), and Unionized Staff respondents were less comfortable than Non-Unionized Staff respondents (p. 62) with the climate in their department/program or work unit. Undergraduate Student respondents were less comfortable than Faculty respondents with the climate in their classes (p.63). By gender identity, Trans-spectrum respondents were less comfortable than Men and Women respondents with the overall climate (p. 64). By racialized identity, Black respondents were less comfortable than White respondents and Additional/Multiple Racialized Identities

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[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] Research cited in this literature review serves as the foundation for R&A's work and is rooted in studies conducted in the United States.

respondents with the overall climate (p. 66). All Racialized Faculty and Student respondents were less comfortable than White Faculty and Student respondents with the climate in their classes (p. 67). By sexual identity, Bisexual respondents and Queer-spectrum (Not Bisexual) respondents were less comfortable than Heterosexual respondents with the overall climate (p. 68). Queer-spectrum (Including Bisexual) Faculty and Staff respondents less comfortable than Heterosexual Faculty and Staff respondents with the climate in their department/program or work unit (p. 69). By disability status, Respondents With a Mental Health Disability and With Multiple Disabilities were less comfortable than Respondents With No Disabilities with the overall climate (p. 71). Faculty and Student Respondents With Multiple Disabilities were less comfortable than Faculty and Student Respondents With a Single Disability (Not Mental Health) and With No Disability with the climate in their classes (p. 73). By first-generation/low-income status, First-Generation/Low-Income Student respondents were less comfortable than Not First-Generation/Low-Income Student Respondents with the overall climate and climate in their classes (p. 74 - 75). By time employed at Brock, Faculty and Staff respondents employed Less Than Five Years were less comfortable than those employed 6 - 15 Years with the overall climate (p. 76).

1. **Faculty Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Faculty Work**

   Tenured and Tenure-Track

   Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty respondents held positive attitudes about faculty work at Brock University and believed that criteria for tenure were clear (73%, $n = 95$, p. 147), and that research (81%, $n = 106$, p. 148) and teaching (73%, $n = 95$, p. 148) were valued at Brock University.

   Non-Tenure-Track

   No findings for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents exceeded 70% when combining "strongly agree" and "agree."

   All Faculty

   Approximately three-quarters of all Faculty respondents felt that they had job security at Brock (74%, $n = 128$, p.158). Similarly, they felt valued by students in the classroom (81%, $n = 149$, p. 160). A majority of all Faculty respondents (73%, $n = 135$, p. 163) felt that they had faculty who they perceived as role models. The findings suggested that

women faculty and racialized faculty had less positive perceptions than did their peers (p. 159, p. 161, p. 163).

2. **Staff Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Staff Work**

Staff respondents generally held positive views about working at Brock University. A majority of Staff respondents felt their coworkers/colleagues (73%, $n = 229$, p. 165) gave them job/career advice or guidance when they needed it, and that their supervisors were approachable (82%, $n = 258$, p. 167). Almost three-quarters of Staff respondents thought that their supervisors (75%, $n = 236$) and colleagues (73%, $n = 229$) were supportive of their taking leave (p. 167). Many Staff respondents felt valued by coworkers in their department (83%, $n = 262$, p. 186) and coworkers outside their department (76%, $n = 238$, p. 186). Staff respondents felt that their work was valued (70%, $n = 219$, p. 189), that they had staff whom they perceived as role models (73%, $n = 227$, p. 189), and that their supervisors provided adequate support for them to manage work-life balance (74%, $n = 231$, p. 167). The findings suggested that unionized staff, women staff, staff with disabilities, and staff employed longer at Brock had less positive perceptions than did their peers (p. 165, p. 167, p. 175).

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

Overall, Student respondents had positive perceptions of their experiences at Brock University. Most Student respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they felt valued by Brock University faculty in the classroom (75%, $n = 1,845$, p. 213), and that they felt valued by other students in the classroom (70%, $n = 1,743$, p. 214). Most Student respondents had access to student resources on a variety of issues/concerns (76%, $n = 1,893$, p. 221). The findings suggested that students with disabilities, racialized students, queer-spectrum students, trans-spectrum students, and first-generation students/low-income students had less positive perceptions than did their peers (p. 218, p. 221).

In general, Graduate Student respondents also viewed their Brock University experiences favorably. Most Graduate Student respondents were satisfied with the quality of supervision that they have received from their departments (74%, $n = 246$, p. 226), had adequate access to their supervisors (78%, $n = 259$, p. 226), that their supervisors

responded to their emails, calls, or voicemails in a prompt manner (79%, $n = 262$, p. 226), and that they felt comfortable sharing their professional goals with their supervisors (74%, $n = 245$, p. 226). The findings suggested that racialized graduate students, queer-spectrum graduate students, trans-spectrum graduate students, and graduate students with disabilities had less positive perceptions than did their peers (p. 226, p. 227,).

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.

- 19% ($n = 554$) of respondents indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct (p. 83). Of these respondents, 24% ($n = 135$) indicated that the conduct was based on their gender/gender identity, and 18% ($n = 99$) indicated that the conduct was based on position status in Brock University (p. 84).

Differences Based on Position, Gender/Gender Identity, and Racialized Identity
- By position status, a higher percentage of Faculty respondents (37%, $n = 69$) and Staff respondents (35%, $n = 109$) than Undergraduate Student respondents (15%, $n = 325$) and Graduate Student respondents (15%, $n = 51$) indicated that they had experienced this conduct (p. 84).
    - A higher percentage of Staff respondents (52%, $n = 57$) and Faculty respondents (30%, $n = 21$) than Undergraduate Student respondents (14%, $n = 44$) who had experienced this conduct indicated that they thought that the conduct was based on their position status (p. 84).

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[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] Bilmoria & Stewart (2009); Costello (2012); Dade et al. (2015); Eagan & Garvey (2015); García (2016); Hirshfield & Joseph (2012); Jones & Taylor (2012); Levin et al. (2015); Rankin et al. (2010); Silverschanz et al. (2008)

- By gender identity, a higher percentage of Trans-spectrum respondents (38%, $n = 19$) than Women respondents (18%, $n = 383$) and Men respondents (18%, $n = 17$) indicated that they had experienced this conduct (p. 85).

  - A higher percentage of Trans-spectrum respondents (58%, $n = 11$) than Women respondents (18%, $n = 70$) and Men respondents (12%, $n = 18$) who had experienced this conduct indicated that the conduct was based on their gender identity (p. 85).

- By racialized identity, a higher percentage of Indigenous respondents (28%, $n = 19$) than Black respondents (19%, $n = 25$), Additional/Multiple Racialized Identities respondents (19%, $n = 47$), East Asian/Southeast Asian/South Asian respondents (18%, $n = 82$), and White respondents (18%, $n = 327$) indicated that they had experienced this conduct (p. 86).

  - A higher percentage of Black respondents (40%, $n = 10$), East Asian/Southeast Asian/South Asian respondents (33%, $n = 27$), Additional/Multiple Racialized Identities respondents (21%, $n = 10$), and Indigenous respondents ($n < 5$) than White respondents (3%, $n = 9$) who had experienced this conduct indicated that the conduct was based on their racialized identity (p. 86).

Respondents Who Seriously Considered Leaving Brock University

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] There is no literature on the retention of staff in higher education as it relates to climate.

Faculty and Staff Respondents

Sixty-two percent ($n = 116$) of Faculty respondents and 63% ($n = 197$) of Staff respondents had seriously considered leaving Brock University in the past year (p. 191). Thirty-eight percent ($n = 44$) of Faculty respondents who seriously considered leaving did

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[5] Blumenfeld et al. (2016); Gardner (2013); Garvey & Rankin (2016); 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)

so because of tension with coworkers (p. 193). Seventy-three percent ($n = 143$) of Staff respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of a low salary/pay rate (p. 191).

Student Respondents

Twenty-seven percent ($n = 572$) of Undergraduate Student respondents and 20% ($n = 68$) of Graduate Student respondents had seriously considered leaving Brock University in the past year (p.232). Forty-four percent ($n = 251$) of Undergraduate Student respondents who seriously considered leaving did so because of a lack of sense of belonging (p. 234). Thirty-two percent ($n = 22$) of those Graduate Student respondents who seriously considered leaving did so owing to lack of sense of belonging (p. 235).

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 Brock University. Twenty-three percent ($n = 70$) of Staff respondents felt that the performance evaluation process was productive (p. 167). Few Staff respondents felt that Brock University policies were fairly applied across Brock University (21%, $n = 67$, p. 176), staff salaries were competitive (11%, $n = 35$, p. 178), or that staff opinions were valued by Brock University faculty and administration (28%, $n = 85$, p. 180). Fifty-eight percent ($n = 180$) of Staff respondents felt that their workload increased without additional compensation as a result of other staff departures (e.g., retirement positions not filled, p. 170). Eighty-three percent ($n = 176$) of Staff respondents felt that a hierarchy existed within staff positions that allowed some voices to be valued more than others (p. 168).

Faculty Respondents

Fifty-one percent ($n = 66$) of Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that they were burdened by service responsibilities (e.g., committee memberships, departmental/program work assignments) beyond those of their colleagues with similar performance expectations (p. 149). Less than one-third of Tenured and Tenure-Track Faculty respondents (30%, $n = 39$) felt that faculty opinions were taken seriously by

senior administrators (e.g., president, dean, vice president, provost, p. 150). Less than one-fourth of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty respondents felt that the criteria used for contract renewal were applied equally to positions (21%, $n = 11$, p. 152). Twenty-one percent ($n = 36$) of Faculty respondents felt that Brock University provided adequate resources to help them manage work-life balance (e.g., child care, wellness services, elder care, housing location assistance, transportation, p. 157). Few Faculty respondents felt that salaries between Faculties/Schools were equitable across Brock University (13%, $n = 23$, p. 155) or that resources between Faculties/Schools were equitable (10%, $n = 18$, p. 157).

Student Respondents

Analyses of the Students' survey responses revealed statistically significant differences based on gender identity, sexual identity, disability status, and first-generation/low-income status where students from backgrounds historically underrepresented at universities held less positive views of their experiences than did their peers from "majority" backgrounds (p. 209, p. 210., p. 214).

Student Respondents' *Perceived Academic Success*

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the *Perceived Academic Success* scale derived from Question 14 on the survey. Using this scale, analyses revealed significant differences existed in the overall test for means for Student respondents by gender identity, racialized identity, disability status, and income status on *Perceived Academic Success* (p. 203). For example, Trans-spectrum Undergraduate Student respondents had less *Perceived Academic Success* than Women Undergraduate Student respondents. Black Undergraduate Student respondents had less *Perceived Academic Success* than White Undergraduate Student respondents. Undergraduate Student Respondents With a Mental Health Disability had less *Perceived Academic Success* than Undergraduate Student Respondents With No Disability. Low-Income Undergraduate Student respondents had less *Perceived Academic Success* than Not-Low-Income Undergraduate Student respondents.

A Meaningful Percentage of Respondents Experienced Unwanted Sexual Conduct

In 2018, the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities published findings from the "Student Voices on Sexual Violence Survey." This report indicated that sexual violence is a substantial issue on campuses in Canada. More recently (September 14, 2020), Statistics Canada indicated that one in ten women students was sexually assaulted in a postsecondary setting. One section of the Brock University survey requested information regarding respondents' experiences with unwanted sexual contact/conduct.

- 11% ($n = 335$) of respondents indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact/conduct while at Brock University (p. 112).
    - 2% ($n = 46$) experienced relationship violence (e.g., ridiculed, controlling, hitting, p. 113).
    - 4% ($n = 111$) experienced stalking (e.g., following me, on social media, texting, phone calls, p. 116).
    - 7% ($n = 196$) experienced sexual interaction (e.g., catcalling, repeated sexual advances, sexual harassment, p. 123).
    - 3% ($n = 95$) experienced unwanted sexual contact (e.g., fondling, rape, sexual assault, penetration without consent, p. 130).
- Respondents identified Brock University students, current or former dating/intimate partners, acquaintances/friends, and strangers as sources of unwanted sexual contact/conduct (pp. 114 - 133).
- Most respondents did not report the unwanted sexual contact/conduct (pp. 115 - 136).

Survey respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on why they did not report the various forms of unwanted sexual contact/conduct. The primary reasons cited for not reporting these incidents was that the incidents did not feel serious enough to report, the respondents did not trust the institution, and they feared social stigma.

Conclusion

Embarking on this campus-wide assessment is further evidence of Brock's commitment to ensuring that all members of the community live in an environment that nurtures a culture of

inclusiveness and respect. The primary purpose of this assessment was to investigate the climate within Brock and to shed light on respondents' personal experiences and observations of living, learning, and working at Brock. At a minimum, the results add empirical data to the current knowledge base and provide more information on the experiences and perceptions of the community as a whole and of the various identity groups within the Brock community.

Unlike previous campus-wide surveys, the "*Brock Assessment of Climate for Learning, Living, and Working,*" was underway when the COVID-19 pandemic forced colleges and universities to shutter their campuses and follow provincial and regional stay-at-home orders. Certainly, these circumstances have influenced the experiences of Brock's community of students, faculty, and staff members and have been noted, to an extent, in this report. In addition, during the writing of the report, compounding social injustices and disparities were amplified by the pandemic with protests against racial injustice erupting around the world. It is within this context that these findings were offered.

Assessments and reports, however, are not enough to effect change. Developing strategic actions and an implementation plan are critical to improving the campus climate, even as institutions of higher education grapple with financial and other operational challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and current social and political contexts. Though the process may be more arduous owing to the current culture, the climate assessment findings provide the Brock community with an opportunity to build upon their strengths and to develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. Brock, 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.

It is imperative that the voices of those who experience the most oppression and exclusion at Brock be placed at the center of action items and decisions in order to move the institution forward. These tenets are offered in the *Dimensions: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Canada* (EDI) charter that Brock endorsed in May 2019. Dimensions EDI is focused on addressing barriers in post-secondary research particularly faced by members of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups such as women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, members of

racialized groups, and members of LGBTQ2+ communities. In signing onto this nationwide charter, Brock reaffirmed its commitment to foster a culture of inclusivity, accessibility, reconciliation and decolonization.

Everyone benefits from a more inclusive campus. To transform the campus environment, Brock is required to acknowledge areas of opportunity and take responsibility for restoring, rebuilding, and implementing action that prioritizes those most negatively impacted in the current structure.

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