Campus Climate: Real Stories. Real Talk. Real Impact.

This is a summary document for the campus climate conversation that took place on Thursday, November 20, 2014, 11:00-1:30pm, in the Beacon Room on the 2nd floor of the Recreation and Wellness Center. Twenty faculty and instructional staff from a variety of units participated in the event hosted by members of the Campus Climate Planning Team and sponsored by the Campus Climate Work Group.

“What do you need to feel at home here? I am certain of something that must occur during the journey of finding your home. You must be in an honest, open, sometimes vulnerable conversation. Hopefully, this café today, will be a timely rest stop on that initial journey to our return back to... home.”

Na’im Madyun, Associate Dean of Undergraduate and Diversity Programs (CEHD) and Campus Climate Planning Team member

“From the first day I arrived at the University of Minnesota I found it to be a welcoming environment. But, then shortly after I was named Dean of CFANS a retired faculty member asked me this question: "How did a Jew like you get into Agriculture?" I was surprised and unsure how to answer this question. I then found a book entitled "Jews in American Agriculture" because I wanted to be prepared if that question ever came up again--it did not.”

Allen Levine, Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs

“I want to add my support for this effort and to ensure that you have the best possible climate to teach in, work in, conduct your research in, and thrive in here at the University. It is one of my top priorities to ensure we have a campus climate in which everyone is treated with respect and everyone experiences an environment that allows for success.”

Eric Kaler, University of Minnesota President

The shortest distance between two people is a story. The purpose of these conversations is to help create a welcoming and inclusive campus climate by sharing our individual and collective experiences so we can create and foster a campus climate where all persons are treated with respect, allowing everyone the opportunity to succeed.
Schedule-at-a-Glance
11:00  Welcome Reception/Lunch
11:15  Kick-Off
11:35  Introduction of the World Cafe Process
11:40  Round One Conversation
12:10  Round Two Conversation
12:40  Round Three Conversation
1:00   Sharing
1:15   Personal Commitments
1:20   Next Steps and Closing Poem
1:30   Farewell

Round One Conversation

Tell a story about what is affecting your success at the University of Minnesota. REAL STORIES
From all of the experiences you have heard and shared, what is standing out for you?

Round Two Conversation

- The future is not the past; acknowledge and repeat various paths to success
- Need for strong leadership to call out bad behavior and model and reinforce good; actively include and recognize less powerful and privileged, and marginalize those who act disrespectfully, arrogantly, and abusively.
- Importance of collaboration (intra- and inter-departmentally)
- Increase opportunities
- Need clear policy to implement
- We tend to focus on academic success and not emotional intelligence
- Independent powerful people who bring in lots of money – too big to fail. Don’t want to contribute as much, treat others with less power with less respect.
- Retribution – individual who experiences racism/sexism or is just doing their job might feel retribution when they try to restore relationships.
- We operate on a scarcity model that quantifies everything as a way to evaluate it. That drives dysfunction.
- There are examples of how others at the U are creating welcoming climates, respectful environments, democratic practices, etc.
- Respecting the work that people do regardless of titles, status, etc. (tenured, adjunct, instructor)

Participatory Leadership in Action

Participatory leadership principles and practices were used to leverage the collective experience and wisdom of all who attended. We had the opportunity to engage in multiple rounds of 20-30 minute conversations in groups of four around powerful questions. The guidelines for conversation were to contribute our thinking, listen attentively to others, focus on what matters, link and connect ideas, listen together for deeper insights, play, doodle, draw, and have fun. Between rounds of conversation, we moved to other tables which provided an opportunity to forge new connections and cross-pollinate ideas across the room. Some volunteered to be table hosts after each round, welcoming others to the table and providing a summary of the previous conversation.
We would love more clean, non-bathroom lactation spaces. Thanks for the event because it let me know this issue is not a small thing that I should feel "embarrassed" about. Rather, the event (that the event was held and what was discussed) let me know it’s a major issue at U, which is good. I will connect with my division leadership to let them know what kind of leadership is needed to support our community.

Less expensive child care options at the on-campus daycare.

Are there people here who are "too big to fail”? Are leaders willing to listen and do something about problems from that person? Why are all the top-level management personnel at the U people of Caucasian descent?

Each department should be required to acknowledge and reward attention to issues of diversity (diversity training, etc.) in 7.12 documents or other promotion documents.

Be more engaged with objectively addressing work-related issues and offering better solutions.

Take sex/gender off of education records - if they haven’t already (it’s not needed).

Make more bathrooms into “everybody bathrooms” instead of mens/womens.

It is hard to “reject complacency” when our admired, measurable efforts are not protected. Innovators have not been protected. I’d like to thank the climate planning team for initiating and organizing this event, which reminded—or informed me anew rather—that there are quite a few people who care about this important but underestimated component of our work place. It came to me as a happy surprise, and hearing lots of recurring themes in the discussions, I have been further reminded that it’s ok for us to think about this matter, it’s rather good to think about this, etc. In other words, both that the event took place and what was discussed therein meant a lot to me. Thanks for initiating this.

It is desirable that those who hold administrative power, including those who hope to have one, such as department/unit/program chairs etc. will go through mandatory training sessions to learn how to treat those who are 'under' his/her leadership fairly, with respect. For example, to my best knowledge, all administrative people (and beyond) who carry U of M credit cards for business expenses should go through a training session or sessions so that they don’t abuse funds unwittingly or otherwise. The message is that money is not to be abused. If so, is it not that human employees are not to be abused, either?
A Harvest Poem by Na’im Madyun

We started with real stories, from ACT test to bagels
Raining in the Carolinas and rejecting complacent labels
We underutilize faculty expertise because we tend to think others know
We over utilize faculty service and serve to make committee sizes grow
Do we support jerks over student development work?
If we truly support excellence, what new leaders might we unearth?
Be S.M.A.L.L.*, says Michael, as we stand tall against accountability
Reconstruct the budget model, and stop undermining responsibility
Leadership that listens as effectively as leadership that acts
Power that respects less power as part of our compact
A culture of collaboration, consultation and humanity
Not competition, capitalism and vanity
Excellence in the culture of governance
Measure success by more than just finance
What will we commit together, together and alone
To make this space, this campus, the U our home?

* Say, Monitor, Act, Lead, Live

NEXT STEPS

An Open Space Technology meeting for all members of the campus community will be held on Feb. 5, 2015. All feedback gathered during these events will be shared with senior leaders on the Campus Climate Work Group to inform their decisions on action steps to improve campus climate.