Campus Climate: From Conversation to Action

Summary
BACKGROUND

Campus climate emerged as a pressing issue through the strategic planning process on the Twin Cities campus, and past and current grassroots efforts led by campus groups concerned about the experiences of marginalized groups at the University of Minnesota. President Kaler also identified improving campus climate as a priority in his 2014 State of the University address.

CAMPUS CLIMATE WORK GROUP

To address campus climate issues, in early 2014 President Kaler charged a group of senior leaders with forming a work group to study climate on the Twin Cities campus – what’s working, what resources are in place, and what needs to change. This became the Campus Climate Work Group (CCWG), which met 19 times between February and October 2014, and is continuing to meet on a monthly basis. A report detailing their efforts and short- and long-term recommendations was released on January 15, 2015.

CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

Because the University needed broad input from students, staff, and faculty about campus climate concerns, the CCWG endorsed using methods from the Art of Participatory Leadership (AoPL), also known as the Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter. These approaches harness the collective wisdom and self-organizing capacity of groups through a blend of powerful conversational processes that invite people to step in and take charge of the complex issues facing them.

A core planning team was assembled that met weekly from July 2014 - February 2015 that included a broad and diverse group of staff and graduate and undergraduate students. Four experienced AoPL practitioners helped to guide the campus engagement planning efforts and facilitated events.

In the fall of 2014, the core planning team hosted four world cafés called “Campus Climate: Real Stories. Real Talk. Real Impact.” These events were designed to engage people in meaningful conversations and to surface issues and ideas. Two cafés were held in October for students, and a faculty world café and staff world café were held in November. Those conversations provided space for people to share their stories and ideas and also helped to inform the recommendations found in the CCWG report.

Over 425 students, staff, and faculty then came together in February to move from conversation to action.
From Conversation to Action

On February 5, 2015 the core planning team hosted an open space event called “Campus Climate: From Conversation to Action.” Over 425 faculty, staff, and students came together to collectively forge a path toward an improved campus climate that’s welcoming, inclusive, and respectful for all.

Open Space Technology is a method used all across the globe. The ideal conditions for Open Space are when there is a real issue of concern worth talking about; a high level of complexity, such that no single person or small group can solve the issue; a high level of diversity of skills and people required for a successful resolution; the potential for conflict, which implies people genuinely care about the issue; and a high level of urgency, meaning the time for decisions and action was “yesterday”.

The role of the attendees in Open Space:
• Create the agenda on-site by posing topics and questions that are important to them
• Engage in a discussion with others who care about the same topics
• Benefit from everyone’s experience and knowledge in a creative, respectful and responsible environment
• Express and develop ideas and identify actions

The Principles of Open Space:
1. Whoever comes is the right “people”
   genuine interest and wisdom are present
2. Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened
   focus on the best possible effort in the moment
3. Whenever it starts is the right time
   take things as they come
4. When it’s over, it’s over
   discussions may be short or long, you decide

The Law of Mobility:
When neither learning nor contributing to a conversation, attendees were encouraged to move on. Some moved around pollinating ideas among discussions (bumblebees) and others took breaks or took time to reflect (butterflies).
An agenda created by the attendees

- Join the Charter for Compassion?
- Getting over ourselves
- How do we walk the talk?
- Criminal background?
- Pride in our physical environment and facilities
- How do we address/support students experiencing homelessness?
- Cultural Adaptation - How can the U be more responsive to other cultures?
- Staff engagement
- Family inclusive supportive culture
- What is the University responsibility to communicate with the campus around “controversial” topics (nationally & internationally)
- Chicano Studies Crisis
- Retain and recruit staff of color and underrepresented groups
- International student experience
- Grad and professional student experience
- Classroom and discussion: Giving voice and not silencing
- Understanding peer bullying behaviors: Students, faculty, staff
- Rankism
- Engagement of international and domestic Students
- Unions on campus
- Tokenism in the classroom
- Affordability for low income students
- Spiritual and religious diversity
- What is our responsibility to transplants?
- Affinity groups for faculty and staff
- U’s relationship with AmerInd Tribal Nations
- Creating space for those not in the gender binary
- Student mental health
- Racialized crime alerts (2)
- Retaining faculty from underrepresented groups
- Recruitment and retention of African American students and faculty
- Work-life balance
- Welcoming environment for new students
- What is a healthy campus?
- Accessibility for all
- People of color with disabilities
- Welcoming visitors to campus - serving the whole region
- Focus on what UNITES us, recognize what DIVIDES us
- Diversity at the U - what does it really mean?
- How do we create safe spaces to discuss the reality of white privilege?
- The growing wage and benefit gap
- How do we make the U - and academia - welcoming to grad students of color
- Community engagement for students of color
- Women in fields where they are underrepresented
- Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration
Capturing the voices of the university community has been an intentional part of campus engagement efforts. On Feb. 5, discussions with key insights and next steps were typed up as reports that day. This process allowed attendees to see tangible results during the event. It also provided a way to share information with the broader university community to raise greater awareness of campus climate issues, foster on-going collaboration, and inspire action immediately after the event.

**Conversation Reports and Action Plans**

A compilation of all the reports can be downloaded as a **Book of Reports**

**12 action plans**
- Community Engagement for Students of Color
- Graduate and Professional Student Experience
- Racialized Crime Alerts
- How Can We Continue the discussion and expand on it - in the classroom and across the University?
- Family Inclusive Supportive Campus
- Student Mental Health/Wellness
- Staff Engagement
- Compassion
- International Student Experience
- What Unites Us?
- Public Acknowledgement of Native American History & Presence on this campus
- Chicano Studies Crisis
Gratitudes

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Thank you to everyone who invested time and energy while attending the Campus Climate: From Conversation to Action event!

Thank you to all those who called topics for discussion. You created an agenda with such depth and breadth! You hosted meaningful conversations and ensured insights and next steps were documented.

Thank you to the many faculty, staff, and student groups who over the years have insisted that the work to address campus climate issues is essential and that change for the better is possible and necessary.

Thank you to all those who made it possible for people to attend the open space event - family members, supervisors, instructors, classmates, colleagues and support staff, etc.

Office of the President
for providing leadership for this work and the resources to make it happen

Campus Climate Work Group
for your commitment to campus climate and your leadership

Student Union & Activities Event Services
for exceptional service in planning and setting up the space and providing A/V support

U Card Office
for exceptional service in making check-in easier with U Card swipers

University Dining Services
for exceptional service in setting up, providing refreshments, and providing lunch vouchers

College of Liberal Arts Office of Information Technology
for loaning laptops

Office of Information Technology
for loaning laptops and providing tech support
What Was Appreciated

- I appreciated that almost everyone in each group spoke up. It felt like a welcoming space to voice our ideas and opinions.
- Those reports are gold, and I hope the workgroup and administration will take them seriously. This event showed me we have the ability to become a leader, we have all the talent here. We just have to move the iceberg.
- I appreciated the University top administrators supporting and providing the space for these conversations to take place.
- I enjoyed the opportunity to speak and hear from people at parts of the university I didn't know existed.
- I definitely think the space was positive/safe, and I felt comfortable sharing my experiences and ideas with the group I participated in. The environment was non-judgmental, kind, and receptive.
- I liked that it was focused on what was important to people in the room, letting people call their own topic for discussion.
- I appreciated the openness of most to speak freely and the desire to help improve or change problem areas at the U. People weren't there just to complain, they were there to bring up issues and try to offer suggestions.
- I appreciate that we're talking about the problems we see that contribute to a less-than-ideal environment at the U. I appreciated that it was open to the entire community and that there were students, staff, faculty and administrators present.
- For an academic institution, this type of event and open dialogue should be expected and encouraged as part of our own cross-campus connection and our own learning and broadening of perspective. It was great to see senior leaders there and actually participating.
- I appreciated the honesty that everyone brought to my discussions. People were willing to say uncomfortable things, be vulnerable, etc. and I think this is because of the great atmosphere set up by the planners.
- I liked having the opportunity to form our own agenda. I really liked the sitting in a circle to start the day; the organization for this process was excellent. Liked how the facilitators framed the day. Liked the idea of the "news room" where reports were typed up right there.

- I liked the flexibility and permission to float in and out of conversations.
- This event was much more honest than I ever expected.

Suggestions for Improvement

- The time to focus on any one topic was too short. One hour is simply not enough to discuss and plan action steps.
- I was a bit concerned that many members of the campus community are unaware of some of the resources the university provides to support nontraditional populations. Perhaps providing a link to resources on the campus climate page either before or after the experience would be helpful.
- I was hoping the conversations would be more focused on actual actions and necessary next steps and resource commitments.
- I was disappointed that there weren't more students or faculty there. They are an integral part of the campus community. While I don't wish to discredit the staff experience, I would have liked to talk more about campus climate beyond inner-office workings.
- More space between groups as hearing multiple voices in a large crowd is difficult for most.
- I would have allowed callers to write reports on their own devices and email them back instead of having to wait for an open computer on stage.
- It was very hard to find topics, navigate the space, and then concentrate in small groups when other groups were so close. It was very hard to hear people sharing in the small groups with so much external noise around.
- If we want this sort of thing to be a true priority, and to include a full complement of voices, we need to have a day without classes on which everyone is encouraged to participate.
- I wondered if the energy and commitment would remain the same over two half days. I found that keeping up the intensity of the intellectual (and emotional) engagement was challenging over a full day.

Read more via the Event Twitter #RealActionUMN