

Climate Survey 2023

Executive Summary

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Illinois conducted a collegewide survey on topics related to climate, diversity, equity, and inclusion during the 2023 spring semester in collaboration with the Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning. The primary goal of the climate survey was to gain insights into the specific challenges and strengths of the college and its units, leading to targeted strategies and improvements throughout the LAS community.

Key Takeaways

- In general, results indicate a positive environment in the college.
- A closer look at the responses, broken down by identity groups such as employment status, race, and gender, indicates that some groups are doing relatively better than others, and that effort is needed to improve.
- Qualitative analyses on open-ended survey questions similarly indicate that efforts are needed to improve the departmental environments for these groups.

Inclusive Excellence at LAS

When people feel a sense of belonging in the spaces where they learn, teach, research, and work, they are more likely to engage, leading to better work and academic outcomes, higher morale, and better mental health. An inclusive climate is essential for ensuring that individuals within the LAS community can bring their best selves to the spaces where they teach, learn, and work. In addition, a higher sense of belonging is associated with higher rates of retention. The college works hard to recruit excellent faculty, staff, and students, and providing them with a strong sense of belonging is essential to keeping them as members of the college community.

In general, results from the climate study show a relatively positive environment in the college, while also helping to pinpoint areas where the college and its units can make progress. A closer look at the responses, broken down by identity groups such as employment status, race, and gender, indicates that some groups are doing better than others and that efforts are needed to improve the unit environment.

Within the LAS Strategic Plan, the college has committed to promote the access and inclusion of historically underrepresented minority faculty and staff in research, creative, and instructional activity, and to provide access to historically underrepresented minority graduate and

undergraduate students in education and research. As outlined in the institution's strategic framework in Pillar I, this undergirds the campus' commitment to enhance the diversity and inclusiveness of the University community.

The climate survey is an essential step in identifying barriers in our college and unit practices, policies, processes, and programs that impede entry and success in academic and professional endeavors. The aim is to eliminate these barriers to ensure that everyone in our college is able to flourish.

Process

The College of LAS climate study was developed by a committee of experts from various LAS departments and tailored to the specific needs and concerns of the college and its units.

It included open and closed-ended questions about how faculty, staff, and graduate students perceived the climate, or lived experience, of their units. The survey asked respondents to reflect on the extent to which professional development practices in their unit are fair, transparent, and equitable. Participants also reported first-hand and second-hand instances of incivility or harassment in their workplaces. Finally, respondents were asked a series of questions to get a sense of their psychological distress or depression.

Once the surveys were collected, the first phase involved analyzing the data. The Inclusive Excellence team worked diligently with the Center for Innovation in Teaching & Learning to ensure the data's accuracy, reliability, and confidentiality. The data was analyzed both at the college and unit level, providing a deeper look into issues related to aspects of the unique academic units within LAS.

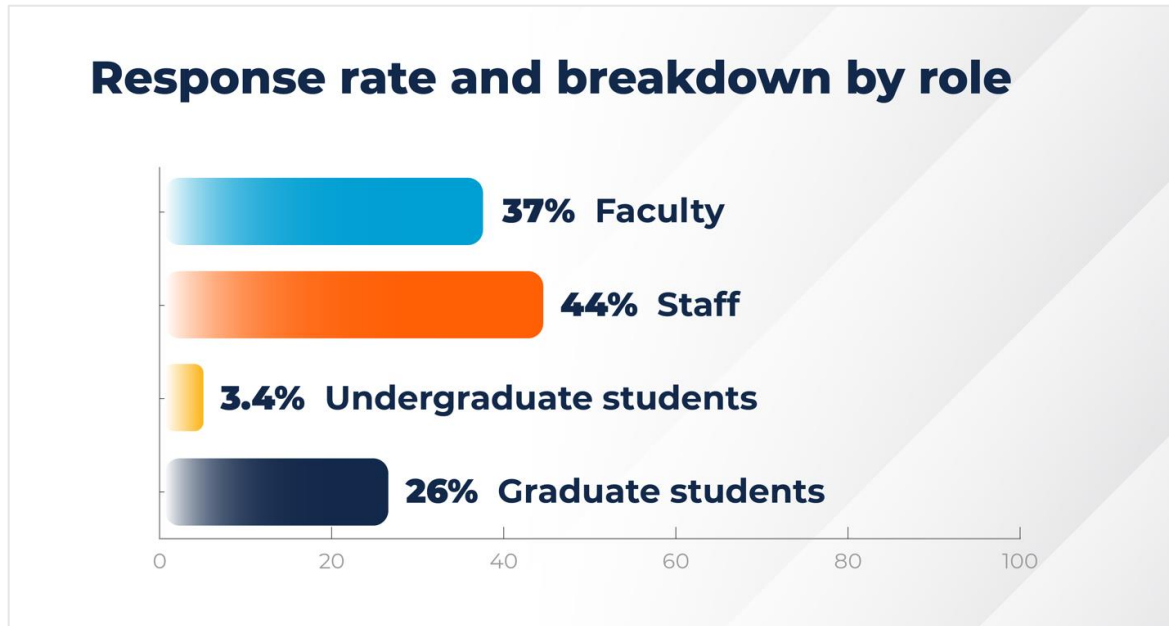
Once data analysis was completed, the Inclusive Excellence team created a report for every LAS unit. These reports provide an overview of the climate in each unit and contextualize the results with data from similar units in the college. In addition, the team summarized any issues raised in the open-ended responses to help provide necessary context to the quantitative data.

Finally, the Inclusive Excellence team met one-on-one with each of the 60-plus LAS units to review the survey's findings and provide resources to help each unit develop a strategic plan to address the climate study results.

Results

The overall response rate was 30%, an impressive response rate for a survey of this nature, that provided sufficient data to paint an overall picture of the lived experiences of the

LAS community. Unfortunately, fewer than 4% of undergraduate students completed the survey. This unexpectedly low response rate prevented the team from gaining a meaningful assessment of their experience in the college. This is an area to improve on in future climate assessments.



By grouping survey questions that addressed similar concepts, the team constructed four composite indices, each ranging from 1 to 5. The departmental climate index and fair and equitable practices index are positive indices, where higher scores represent more desirable outcomes.

The **departmental climate index** combines answers to 15 questions assessing things like the perceived climate in the unit, sense of belonging, whether the unit is a good place to work and study, whether people feel comfortable expressing their identities, whether they feel satisfied with the diversity of faculty, staff, and students, and so forth.



The overall departmental climate score at LAS was 3.54, with 3 being the center of the scale and corresponding to a response of “fair or moderate” and 4 to a response of “good” or a strong endorsement. The college’s overall climate is relatively positive, but this score also suggests that there is room for improvement.

The **fair and equitable practices index** was composed of answers to a dozen or so questions aimed at evaluating whether respondents feel their workplace practices are fair and equitable.



Some of the questions were tailored to each employment group—faculty, staff and graduate students since the practices in question vary by group. For instance, faculty were asked about fairness in promotion and tenure reviews and the distribution of service requirements. Graduate students were asked about practices such as graduate student assignments and graduate recruitment policies.



The fair and equitable practices index had an average score of 3.73 for faculty, 3.38 for staff, and 3.39 for graduate students. These results should inspire consideration of ways to improve governance practices.



The perceived incivility and harassment index and the psychological depression index are the two negative indices. These were also scored from 1 to 5, but for these indices lower scores represent more desirable outcomes.

The **perceived incivility and harassment index** was constructed from responses to nine questions aimed at evaluating the frequency with which members of a unit have experienced harmful, dismissive, or offensive behavior relating to their identity or protected status.



The college score on the perceived incivility and harassment index was 1.87. Here a score of 1 corresponds to a response of “Never” and 2 to a response of “rarely.” So, an average of 1.87 is a relatively good score, suggesting that instances of harassment and incivility are generally not a common occurrence in LAS workplaces.

The final index, **psychological depression**, was composed of nine questions about common depression indicators. The average score on this index was 2.86. With 2 representing “rarely” and 3 representing “sometimes,” this score indicates that the LAS community was closer to experiencing worrying symptoms of depression such as trouble sleeping or loss of interest in daily activities.



These index values are for all respondents, but significant variation exists between different identity groups.

Looking at **employment status**, graduate students reported both a lower departmental climate and a higher depression score than faculty or staff.

Differences in **gender identity** led to differences across the four indices. Women and transgender individuals reported higher instances of perceived incivility or harassment than men. Non-binary individuals reported lower departmental climate and higher depression than either men or women. For faculty in particular, women reported experiencing less fair and equitable practices than men.

At the college level, there were no significant **racial** differences for the four composite indices, although racial differences were evident in the responses to several specific questions and may have been evident in some specific units.

Next, looking at **national status**, international respondents reported higher departmental climate and lower perceived incivility or harassment than domestic respondents.

LGBTQ+ individuals reported having a more negative experience across all four indices: lower experiences of unit climate, higher perceived incivility or harassment, lower sense of fair and equitable practices, and higher depression.

Individuals with **disabilities** also reported a lower unit climate, higher perceived incivility or harassment, and higher depression.

The team computed a correlation between the two positive indices, unit climate and fair and equitable practices, for each employment group: faculty, staff, and graduate students. Across all three groups, they found robust correlations, showing something quite important: Unit climate and fair and equitable practices tend to go hand and hand. Individuals reporting a positive climate in their unit also tend to report that the unit's workplace practices are fair and equitable, while individuals reporting lower climate in their unit tend to report that the unit's workplace practices are unfair and not equitable.

The team also analyzed the more than 6,000 open-ended responses that the LAS community shared. These responses helped to identify key themes that were considered areas of strength or weakness in the college. Frequently, respondents shared that "people within their unit" was the factor that made their units most welcoming, sometimes taking the time to highlight specific people and the positive impact they have on the climate of their units.

Respondents also offered suggestions for addressing challenges in their units. For example, some respondents reported not knowing how to file grievances without fearing retaliation. Others bemoaned the lack of diversity in their units. There was a sense among some

respondents that their units were exclusive (as opposed to inclusive), and some felt uncomfortable with sharing their full identities at work.

There was also a sense from the data that, at the time of the survey in Spring 2023, the LAS community had not entirely recovered from the pandemic. Compared to before the pandemic, people felt disconnected from others in their unit, and many respondents expressed a desire that efforts be made to reconnect and revitalize the social fabric of their units.

Moving forward

This study has provided the college, and its units, with a wealth of information. College and unit leadership now have baseline data to better understand the experiences that people are having within LAS. But that is just the beginning. Next, the LAS community must act on what has been learned.

To start, LAS units have been asked to develop strategic plans to address areas that were identified as needing improvement as well as to commit to developing and maintaining good governance practices. The college's Office of Inclusive Excellence is providing support and resources to help units develop these plans.

Established initiatives of the Inclusive Excellence office align with themes that emerged from the survey results. For example, the data showed that good governance practices go hand in hand with better departmental climate. For the past couple of years, the Inclusive Excellence office, in collaboration with the National Center for Principled Leadership and Research Ethics, has been offering workshops to provide LAS unit leaders with expert advice on academic governance best practices that are also fair and equitable. The office also offers a program for academics who direct research groups to help faculty become effective and inclusive leaders in their labs.

The Inclusive Excellence office, in collaboration with the Grainger College of Engineering, was also recently awarded a \$1 million National Science Foundation-ADVANCE grant to help implement interventions aimed at redressing some of the gender-based inequities that were evident in the survey, in terms of the fairness with which departmental responsibilities are distributed among faculty. The Inclusive Excellence team will share more details as they make progress on this important project.

By learning about the current state of the college's climate, the college, its units, and the LAS community are better prepared to make meaningful contributions to this important work and to move the entire college forward.

To learn more, visit the website (las.illinois.edu/about/diversity/climate).