

Haverford College Climate Project Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is campus climate?

[Rankin & Associates Consulting, LLC](#)—which is serving as the outside consultant for the Haverford College climate survey—defines campus climate as “the current attitudes, behaviors, standards and practices of employees and students of an institution.” The climate is often shaped through personal experiences, perceptions, and institutional efforts.

2. Why is a positive climate important?

Dr. Susan Rankin’s research maintains that positive personal experiences with campus climate and positive perceptions of campus climate generally equate to successful outcomes. Examples of successful outcomes include positive educational experiences and healthy identity development for students, productivity, and sense of value for faculty and staff, and overall well-being for all.

3. Why is Haverford College conducting a climate survey?

The idea to conduct a campus climate survey originated from interested students, faculty, and staff who believed data from such a survey would be useful in planning for the future and improving the climate at Haverford College.

4. Who will be conducting the survey?

The Climate Survey Working Group (CSWG) is charged with conducting Haverford College’s climate survey. After a review of potential vendors, the committee selected Rankin & Associates Consulting to conduct the survey. Rankin & Associates reports directly to the committee. Although the CSWG will regularly update Haverford College about its progress, the committee—in consultation with Rankin & Associates—is solely responsible for the development, implementation and interpretation of the survey and its results. Dr. Susan Rankin (Rankin & Associates Consulting) is the consultant working directly with us on this project. Dr. Rankin is an emeritus faculty member of Education Policy Studies and College Student Affairs at The Pennsylvania State University and a senior research associate in the Center for the Study of Higher Education. She has extensive experience in institutional climate assessment and institutional climate transformation based on data-driven action and strategic planning. Dr. Rankin has conducted multi-location institutional climate studies at more than 200 institutions across the country. She developed the Transformational Tapestry model as a research design for campus climate studies. The model is a “comprehensive, five-phase strategic model of assessment, planning, and intervention. The model is designed to assist campus communities in conducting inclusive assessments of their institutional climate to better understand the challenges facing their respective communities” (Rankin & Reason, 2008).

5. Why was a non-Haverford College researcher selected for the project?

In reviewing efforts by other colleges and universities to conduct comprehensive climate studies, several best practices were identified. One was the need for external expertise in survey administration. Survey administration relating to a very sensitive subject like campus climate is likely to yield higher response rates and provide more credible findings if led by an independent, outside agency. Members of a college community may feel particularly inhibited to respond honestly to a survey administered by their own institution for fear of retaliation.

6. How were the questions developed?

The consultant has administered climate assessments to more than 220 institutions across the nation and developed a repository of tested questions. To assist in contextualizing the survey for Haverford College, and to capitalize on the many assessment efforts already undertaken, Haverford formed the Climate Study Working Group. The committee is responsible for developing the survey questions. The team reviewed selected survey questions from the consultant's tested collection and tailored them to Haverford's needs.

7. Why do some demographic questions contain a very large number of response options?

It is important in campus climate research for survey participants to "see" themselves in response choices to prevent "othering" an individual or an individual's characteristics. Some researchers maintain that assigning someone to the status of "other" is a form of marginalization and should be minimized, particularly in campus climate research which has an intended purpose of inclusiveness. Along these lines, survey respondents will see a long list of possible choices for many demographic questions. However, it is reasonably impossible to include every possible choice to every question. Our goal is to reduce the number of respondents who must choose "other."

8. What is the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process for this study?

The primary investigators from Haverford College for the IRB process are Cathy Fennell and Kevin Iglesias. An IRB application will be submitted for the project. Once the project is approved, the survey will be administered.

9. What will be done with data from the results?

Although the committee believes the survey process itself is informative, we have sought and received commitment from the senior leaders that data will be used to plan for an improved climate at Haverford College.

10. What is the response rate goal?

The target participation in the survey is all students, faculty, and staff at Haverford College. Every response matters and is valuable in providing the most beneficial feedback and results.

11. How is a respondent's confidentiality protected?

Confidentiality is vital to the success of campus climate research; particularly as sensitive and personal topics are discussed. While the survey cannot guarantee complete confidentiality because of the nature of multiple demographic questions, the consultant will take multiple precautionary measures to enhance individual confidentiality and the de-identification of data. No data already protected through regulation or policy (e.g., Social Security number, campus identification number, medical information) is obtained through the survey. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the assessment, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Confidentiality in participating will be maintained to the highest degree permitted by the technology used (e.g., IP addresses will be stripped when the survey is submitted). No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties; however, to avoid interception of data, the survey is run on a firewalled web server. In addition, the consultant and college will not report any group data for groups of fewer than five

individuals, because those “small cell sizes” may be small enough to compromise confidentiality. Instead, the consultant and the college will combine the groups or take other measures to eliminate any potential for demographic information to be identifiable. Additionally, any comments submitted in response to the survey will be separated at the time of submission to the consultant so they are not attributed to any individual demographic characteristics. Identifiable information submitted in qualitative comments will be redacted and the college will only receive these redacted comments.

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary, and participants do not have to answer any question and can skip any other questions they consider to be uncomfortable. Paper and pencil surveys are also available and will be sent directly to the consultant.

12. What will be included in the final summary reports?

The consultant will provide a final report that will include: an executive summary; a report narrative of the findings based on cross tabulations selected by the consultant; frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations of quantitative data; and content analysis of the qualitative data. The reports provide high-level summaries of the findings and will identify themes found in the data. Generalizations for populations are limited to those groups or subgroups with response rates of at least 30%. A subcommittee will review draft reports and provide feedback to the consultant prior to public release.

13. What protections are in place for storage of sensitive data, including for future secondary use?

Haverford College has worked with the consultant to develop a research data security description and protocol, which includes specific information on data encryption, the handling of personally identifiable information, physical security and a protocol for handling unlikely breaches of data security. The data from online participants will be submitted to a secure server hosted by the consultant. The survey software is The survey is run on a firewalled web server. The survey software is Voxco and the hosting platforms are SOC2. Rankin & Associates will have access to the raw data. All Rankin & Associates analysts have CITI(Human Subjects) training and approval and have worked on similar projects for other institutions. Data is stored in a SQL database which can only be accessed by VPN via authorized personnel. The encryption for communication is via HTTPS TLS 1.2. The server performs an hourly and daily backup and stores the backup on a separate context offsite for safety. The number of system administrators will be limited and each will have had required background checks.

The consultant has conducted more than 200 institutional surveys and maintains an aggregate merged database. The data from the Haverford College project will be merged with all other existing climate data stored indefinitely on the consultant’s secure server. No institutional identifiers are included in the full merged data set held by the consultant. The raw unit-level data with institutional identifiers is kept on the server for six months and then destroyed. The paper and pencil surveys are returned to the consultant directly and kept in a locked file drawer in a locked office. The consultant destroys the paper and pencil responses after they are merged with the online data. The consultant will notify the committee chairs of any breach or suspected breach of data security of the consultant’s server.

The consultant will provide the principal investigator with a data file at the completion of the project.

14. Why is this a population survey and not a sample survey?

The survey will be administered to all Haverford College students, faculty, and staff. Climate exists in micro-climates, so creating opportunities to maximize participation and to reach minority populations is important. Along these lines, the consultant has recommended not using random sampling as we may “miss” particular populations where numbers are very small (e.g., Native American students). Since one goal of the project is inclusiveness and allowing invisible “voices” to be heard, this random sampling is not ideal. In addition, randomized stratified sampling is not used because Haverford College does not have population data regarding most identities. For example, the College collects population data on gender and race/ethnicity, but not on disability status or sexual orientation. A sampling approach could miss many groups.

15. Review by the Institutional Review Board

Submitting the survey to the College's Institutional Review Board (IRB) is an important step of the campus climate study project. There are several benefits to going through this process, even if the survey is considered to be "exempt" or "not human subjects research." Firstly, it provides some assurance to potential participants that their responses to the survey will remain confidential. People who have participated in social science research may recognize and expect that the process has been reviewed by IRB. They may feel more comfortable sharing their confidential information and personal stories. Secondly, going through an IRB review provides some protections to the Principal Investigators (PIs) who will be entrusted with analyzing and managing the data, including both R&A and the institutional PIs. The expectation is that the data will not be shared with others, as designated in the data security plan. Lastly, an IRB review provides some cache to the study in the eyes of those who conduct research professionally, such as faculty members and scientists. These individuals understand what an IRB review requires and the protections for the data to which research professionals commit.

16. What is the timeline?

This initiative will include survey development (February 2022), survey administration seeking input from all Haverford College students, faculty, and staff (March-April 2022), and reporting of results (September 2022).

17. Feedback

Your questions and comments are very important throughout this process. Please share by contacting [Norm Jones](#), Interim Chief Diversity Officer, reachable by email at njones2@haverford.edu