

## Executive Summary

Colleges and universities are more aware of the challenges facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and ally members (LGBTQ<sup>1</sup>) in their communities. Literature from the past two decades documents the harassment, discrimination, and violence experienced by LGBTQ people on campus. In response, Michigan State University (MSU) conducted an internal assessment of the climate for LGBTQ persons and Allies within the campus to help lay the groundwork for future initiatives. This assessment was a proactive initiative, and is intended to be used to identify specific strategies for addressing the challenges facing the community and support positive initiatives on campus.

College campuses are complex social systems. They are defined by the relationships between faculty, staff, students, and alumni; bureaucratic procedures embodied by institutional policies; structural frameworks; institutional missions, visions, and core values; institutional history and traditions; and larger social contexts (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, Alma, & Allen, 1998).

Institutional missions suggest that higher education values multicultural awareness and understanding within an environment of mutual respect and cooperation. Academic communities expend a great deal of effort fostering climates that nurture their missions with the understanding that climate has a profound effect on the academic community's ability to excel in teaching, research, and scholarship. Institutional strategic plans advocate creating welcoming and inclusive climates that are grounded in respect, nurtured by dialogue, and evidenced by a pattern of civil interaction.

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<sup>1</sup> This report uses the term "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people" or "LGBTQ people" to describe individuals who share related experiences of bias based on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, this language is employed with the understanding that many individuals identified as LGBTQ may choose to use other self-identifying terms or none at all. Recent research (Rankin, 2003) suggests that many sexual minorities prefer choices such as "same-gender loving," "gender-queer," "pansexual," "queer," "woman-loving-woman," etc. Some considered the "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transgender" categories to be predominately white social constructs of identity, and therefore not relevant to their personal experiences. "Queer" was overwhelmingly not the self-identity choice of black LGBTQ people, in fact, most chose gay or lesbian. This report acknowledges the personal and political importance of language and the need to recognize a broad range of self-identity choices.

The climate on college campuses not only affects the creation of knowledge, but also affects members of the academic community who, in turn, contribute to the creation of the campus climate. Several national education association reports and higher education researchers advocate creating a more inclusive, welcoming climate on college campuses (Boyer, 1990; AAC&U, 1995; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Ingle, 2005; Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Michigan State University (MSU) has a long history of supporting diversity initiatives<sup>2</sup> as evidenced by the System's support and commitment to this project. In spring 2008, the MSU LBGT Resource Center, Center for Gender in Global Context (GenCen), and MSU Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) Faculty, Staff and Graduate Student Association (GLFSA) received an internal Inclusive Excellence Grant to conduct a campus-wide survey to assess climate for GLBT students, faculty and staff. This is the most comprehensive GLBT climate study since the 1992 Moving Forward report. With funding from the grant The Resource Center, GenCen and GLFSA formed a Climate Study Working Group (CSWG) to coordinate the survey effort (see appendix C). The CSWG contracted with Rankin & Associates (R&A), a national leader in conducting multiple identity studies in higher education, to facilitate the climate assessment and to analyze results. The CSWG reviewed R&A's survey template and revised the instrument to better match the campus context at MSU. The final survey contained 79 questions, including open-ended questions for respondents to provide commentary. This report provides an overview of the findings of the internal assessment, including the results of the campus-wide survey and a thematic analysis of comments provided by survey respondents.

Because of the inherent complexity of the topic of diversity, it is crucial to examine the multiple dimensions of diversity in higher education. The conceptual model used as the foundation for this assessment of campus climate was developed by Smith (1999) and modified by Rankin (2002).

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on MSU diversity initiatives <http://www.inclusion.msu.edu/> and for LGBTQ specific initiatives see <http://lbgtc.msu.edu/index.htm>

The CSWG was created at MSU to assist in coordinating the survey effort on campus. The CSWG reviewed the survey template and revised the instrument to better match the campus context at MSU. The final survey contained 79 questions, including open-ended questions for respondents to provide commentary. This report provides an overview of the findings of the internal assessment, including the results of the campus-wide survey and a thematic analysis of comments provided by survey respondents.

All members of the campus community (e.g., students, faculty, and staff) were invited to participate in the survey with specific recruiting emphasis within the LGBT community. The survey was designed for respondents to provide information about their personal experiences with regard to climate issues, their perceptions of the campus climate, student and employee satisfaction, and respondents' perceptions of institutional actions, including administrative policies and academic initiatives regarding climate issues and concerns on campus. A summary of the findings, presented in bullet form below, suggests that while the Michigan State University has several challenges with regard to diversity and LGBTQ issues, these challenges are found in higher education institutions across the country.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Rankin, S. and Reason, R. (forthcoming). *Transformational Tapestry Model: A comprehensive approach for assessing and improving campus climates for underrepresented and underserved populations*. New York: Stylus Publications.

## Sample Demographics

1,051 surveys were returned representing the following:

- 360 (34%) undergraduate students, 244 (23%) graduate students, 190 (18%) faculty, 215 (21%) staff, and 38 (4%) administrators
- 347 (33%) LGBTQ people; 698 (66%) heterosexual people
- 669 (64%) women; 353 (34%) men; 8 (1%) transgender<sup>4</sup> respondents
- 188 (18%) People of Color<sup>5</sup>; 848 (81%) White respondents
- 36 (3%) people who identified as having a physical disability
- 20 (2%) people who identified as having a learning disability
- 48 (5%) people who identified as having a psychological condition

## Quantitative Findings

- **More than half of all respondents indicated that they were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the overall climate at Michigan State University (57%, n = 594), in their departments or work units (62%, n = 646), and in their classes (62%, n = 492). The figures in the narrative show some disparities based on race.**
  - Lesbian and woman-loving woman (WLW) respondents were most comfortable with the climate at MSU (68% (n = 51) of whom were very comfortable or comfortable); in comparison, 64% (n = 14) of asexual respondents, 62% (n = 75) of gay respondents, 59% (n = 40) of bisexual respondents, 55% (n = 384) of heterosexual respondents, and 53% (n = 32) of “other” gender loving respondents were very comfortable or comfortable with the climate.
  - Among employees, 62% (n = 133) of staff, 51% (n = 97) of faculty, and 43% (n = 16) of administrators were comfortable or very comfortable with the campus climate at MSU.
  - 55% (n = 198) of males and 58% (n = 399) of females indicating they were comfortable or very comfortable with the overall climate.
  - Transgender respondents were much less comfortable with the climate than were cisgender men and women respondents (38% (n = 3) very comfortable or comfortable) compared to 56% (n = 197) of men and 58% (n = 388) of women).
  - Compared with 59% (n = 500) of White people, 50% (n = 94) of People of Color were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the overall campus climate.
  - When analyzed by sexual identity, racial identity, and primary status, results suggest that substantial percentages of White LGBTQ administrators (33%, n = 4), LGBTQ graduate Students of Color (39%, n = 7), LGBTQ Faculty of Color

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<sup>4</sup> “Transgender” refers to identity that does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender, but combines or moves between these (Oxford English Dictionary 2003). OED Online. March 2004. Oxford UW Press. Feb. 17, 2006 <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00319380>>.

<sup>5</sup> While recognizing the vastly different experiences of people of various racial identities (e.g., Chicano(a) versus African-American or Latino(a) versus Asian-American), and those experiences within these identity categories (e.g., Hmong versus Chinese), Rankin and Associates found it necessary to collapse some of these categories to conduct the analyses due to the small numbers of respondents in the individual categories.

(50%, n = 7), and heterosexual Administrators of Color (38%, n = 3) were uncomfortable/very uncomfortable with the climate.

- **5% (n = 53) of all respondents have considered leaving Michigan State University due to a homophobic and/or genderist climate.**
  - 6% (n = 21) of men, 4% (n = 27) of women, and 25% (n = 2) of transgender respondents have considered leaving MSU because of a homophobic and/or genderist climate.
  - 14% (n = 47) of sexual minorities (including 4% (n = 3) of bisexual respondents, 16% (n = 19) of gay respondents, 16% (n = 12) of lesbian/WLW respondents, 21% (n = 13) of “other” gender loving respondents, and none of the asexual respondents) and 1% (n = 7) of heterosexual respondents also have considered leaving MSU due to a homophobic and/or genderist climate.
- **94% of all respondents and 86% of LGBTQ respondents did not stay away from areas of campus where LGBTQ people congregate for fear of being labeled.**
- **When asked how many openly LGBTQ professors, staff members, and students they knew, higher percentages of sexual minority respondents than heterosexual respondents knew more openly gay people on campus.**

#### *Personal Experiences with Campus Climate*<sup>6</sup>

- **Some of respondents believed<sup>7</sup> they had personally experienced offensive, negative, or intimidating conduct that interfered unreasonably with their ability to work or learn on campus (hereafter referred to as harassment)<sup>8</sup> within the past year. Sexual identity was most often cited as the reason given for the harassment. People of Color and sexual minorities<sup>9</sup> perceived the harassment more often than White people and heterosexual respondents, and many of them felt it was due to their race or sexual orientation. Perceived harassment largely went unreported.**
  - 15% (n = 155) of respondents believed they had personally experienced offensive, negative, or intimidating conduct that interfered unreasonably with their ability to work or learn on campus. The percentage of respondents experiencing harassment

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<sup>6</sup> Listings in the narrative are those responses with the greatest percentages. For a complete listing of the results, the reader is directed to the tables in the narrative and Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> The modifier “believe(d)” is used throughout the report to indicate the respondents’ perceived experiences. This modifier is not meant in any way to diminish those experiences.

<sup>8</sup> Under the United States Code Title 18 Subsection 1514(c)1, harassment is defined as “a course of conduct directed at a specific person that causes substantial emotional distress in such a person and serves no legitimate purpose” (<http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/vii.html>). In higher education institutions, legal issues discussions define harassment as any conduct that has unreasonably interfered with one’s ability to work or learn on campus. The questions used in this survey to uncover participants’ personal and observed experiences with harassment were designed using these definitions.

<sup>9</sup> Sexual minorities are defined, for the purposes of this report, as people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

at Michigan State University is lower than the percentage of respondents who experienced harassment in studies of other institutions.<sup>10</sup>

- Among those experiencing harassment, the perceived conduct was most often based on the respondents' sexual identity (50%, n = 77), gender (31%, n = 48), age (22%, n = 34), and physical characteristics (21%, n = 33).
  - Of sexual minority respondents who believed they had experienced this conduct, 87% (n = 74) stated it was because of their sexual identity.
  - Compared with 14% (n = 114) of White people, 20% (n = 38) of People of Color believed they had personally experienced such conduct.
  - Of Respondents of Color who reported experiencing this conduct, 50% (n = 19) stated it was because of their race.
  - Compared with 13% (n = 84) of women, 17% (n = 59) of men and 38% (n = 3) of transgender respondents believed they had personally experienced such conduct.
  - Of the women who believed they had experienced this conduct, 42% (n = 35) stated it was because of their gender. 33% (n = 1) of the transgender respondents said the conduct was based on their gender.
  - Compared with 10% (n = 70) of heterosexual respondents, 25% (n = 85) of sexual minority respondents believed they had personally experienced such conduct.
  - 15% (n = 23) of participants made complaints to Michigan State University officials, while 17% (n = 27) did not know whom to go to, 16% (n = 25) did not report the incident for fear of retaliation, and 12% (n = 19) didn't report it for fear their complaints would not be taken seriously.
- **Some respondents avoided disclosing their LGBTQ or ally status to prevent specific negative consequences at MSU.**
    - 22% (n = 223) of respondents avoided disclosing their sexual identities to avoid intimidation.
    - 24% (n = 252) avoided disclosing their sexual identities due to a fear of negative consequences, harassment, or discrimination.

### Perceptions of Campus Climate

- **Slightly more than one-third of all respondents indicated that they were aware of or believed they had observed harassment on campus within the past year. The perceived harassment was most often based on sexual identity. People of color and sexual minorities were more aware of perceived harassment.**
  - 35% (n = 356) of the participants believed that they had observed or personally been made aware of conduct on campus that created an offensive, negative, or intimidating working or learning environment.
  - Most of the observed harassment was based on sexual identity (67%, n = 245), gender expression (38%, n = 139), ethnicity (35%, n = 129), race (37%, n = 135), and gender (31%, n = 112).

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<sup>10</sup> Rankin's (2003) national assessment of climate for underrepresented groups where 25% (n = 3767) of respondents indicated personally experiencing harassment based mostly on their race (31%), their gender (55%), or their ethnicity (16%).

- Higher percentages of gay (46%, n = 55), lesbian/WLW (46%, n = 34), and “other” gender loving (51%, n = 31) respondents believed they had observed offensive, negative, exclusionary, or intimidating conduct than did heterosexual respondents (31%, n = 217).
  - Compared with 43% (n = 282) of White respondents, 33% (n = 81) of Respondents of Color believed they had observed or personally been made aware of such conduct.
  - Compared with 31% of faculty (n = 59) and staff (n = 66), 34% (n = 83) of graduate students, 37% (n = 14) of administrators, and 40% (n = 143) of undergraduate students believed they had observed such conduct.
  - These incidences were reported to an employee or official only 3% (n = 12) of the time.
- **When asked how often they observed negative treatment due to others’ sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, the majority of respondents (68% - 88%) reported that they never observed negative treatment.**
    - 32% (n = 329) of respondents said they saw men who were not heterosexual being harassed due to their sexual identity.
    - 25% (n = 252) of respondents said they saw women who were not heterosexual being harassed due to their sexual identity.
    - 21% (n = 216) observed others harassing people who were gender variant due to their gender expression.

### Curricular Issues

- 35% (n = 272) of respondents thought their departmental curriculum/major requirements represented the contributions of LGBTQ people.
- When asked whether MSU should offer an LGBTQ Studies Program, 30% (n = 313) of all respondents strongly agreed; 30% (n = 308) agreed; 10% (n = 101) disagreed; and 6% (n = 58) strongly disagreed.

### Campus Responses

- **The survey queried respondents as to the degree to which they felt MSU responded to incidents of LGBTQ harassment and discrimination.**
  - The vast majority of respondents did not know how MSU responded to incidents of LGBTQ harassment (68%, n = 703) or discrimination (68%, n = 704).
- **Most faculty and staff respondents don’t know whether MSU provides equal benefits and services for LGBTQ faculty/staff and their partners and heterosexual faculty/staff and their partners.**
- **Respondents were asked to rank the importance of 33 LGBTQ support activities, events, and organizations at MSU.**

- Most respondents thought all of the activities, events, and organizations were important (i.e., respondents marked “very important” or “moderately important”).
  - Almost 30% of respondents thought LGBTQ graduation events, LGBTQ lending library, LGBTQ-related financial scholarships, and LGBTQ-themed housing were “not important.”
  - LGBTQ respondents believed the LGBTQ support activities, events, and organizations were more important than did heterosexual respondents.
- **More than 60% (n = 603) of all respondents did not participate in any LGBTQ or allies-focused activity or use LGBTQ or allies-focused resources in the past year.**
    - Higher percentages of LGBTQ than heterosexual respondents used these resources.

### Qualitative Findings

Many of the respondents contributed remarks to one or more of the open-ended questions. No respondents commented on all open-ended questions. Respondents included undergraduate and graduate students, as well as faculty, academic staff, and classified staff. .

When asked which MSU offices, facilities, programs and organizations positively or negatively contributed to the climate for LGBTQ community, several respondents identified particular majors/academic departments that had positive or negative effects.

A great number of people identified the LGBT Resource Center, the caucus groups, the Alliance of LGTBTA Students, Safe Schools, the Counseling Center, Student Affairs, the Center for Gender in Global Context, and Women’s Studies as those who contribute positively to the climate. Several people said certain religious groups and conservative groups on campus (i.e., Young Americans for Freedom) negatively affect the climate for LGBTQ people, and that the actions of those groups sometimes “scare” or “intimidate” others. Some respondents also thought certain administrative policies and lack of response from the administration with respect to anti-LGBTQ incidents on campus contribute negatively to the climate for sexual minorities.

Responses were divided as to whether Residence Life fostered a positive negative climate. Many respondents praised Residence Life for its many programs and posters which support and educate regarding LGBTQ issues. Others said Residence Life is sometimes “unaware of exclusion and negative commentary” and “could do more.” Response was also divided with

regard to the impact of the Human Resources Department. While most of the respondents who commented on athletics at MSU wrote about athletes making anti-LGBTQ remarks, a couple of women respondents said they better understood LGBTQ issues (and even thought of themselves as Allies) as a result of getting to know and becoming friends with lesbian teammates.

A large number of respondents offered suggestions for how to improve the climate for LGBTQ people at Michigan State University. A few individuals thought the climate at MSU was very welcoming and needed no improvement. Others thought certain aspects of campus life could be improved, and provided detailed feedback about how to improve the climate at MSU. For instance, several respondents wanted to improve the recruitment and retention of LGBTQ faculty and staff. Additionally, a number of people addressed the climate for women and asked for an investigation of women's issues on campus and to see more women in positions of authority on campus. Other respondents hoped the University would not "take it too far" and discriminate against the heterosexual population. Lastly, several respondents urged MSU leadership to actively set the tone, institute new initiatives, and create measures of accountability with regard to campus climate issues for LGBTQ people. A number of respondents advocated including LGBTQ topics throughout the curriculum, and instituting an LGBTQ Studies Program was the most mentioned suggestion.

One of the open-ended items queried, "Do you feel the LBGT Resource Center serves your needs and interests? Why or why not?" Some respondents said they were heterosexual and did not "need" the Center. Others were unaware of the Center and suggested more advertising for the programs and assistance available. Most of those respondents who used the Center were pleased with it and wished it could receive more funding, visibility and space. Others indicated that some of the LGBTQ groups felt "clique-y" and, as a result, they did not participate. Staff, faculty, and graduate students believed the LGBTRC focuses primarily on undergraduate students, and some respondents suggested instituting programs and services for graduate students, queer Students of Color, and bisexual and transgendered students.

Faculty and staff were asked, "Do you feel the GLFSA (Gay/Lesbian Faculty/Staff Association) serves your needs and interests? Why or why not?" Several respondents indicated they did not

have an interest in or a need for the GLFSA, did not answer the question, or wrote in “n/a.”

Some individuals were unaware the group existed at MSU. Most of the faculty and staff who did know of the GLFSA and responded to the question were supportive of the group and extended thanks to the individuals who do the work of the GLFSA. Some respondents liked the idea of a LGBTQ faculty and staff group, but thought the GLFSA could use some improvement (i.e., in lines of communication, better attendance at events, more practical information/resources for faculty and staff). Sadly, a few respondents said they avoided being associated with the group out of fear of negative consequences (e.g., boss’ reaction).

Question 75 asked student respondents, “Do you feel the LBGTQ student organizations serve your needs and interests? Why or why not?” Several students felt well served by LGBTQ student organizations, where most of their stated needs were social outlets, support, and community. A number of the student respondents wished more groups targeted toward graduate students, transgender students, and bisexual students existed. Other respondents insisted the existing groups were cliquish, attracted the same few members, and were “too socially oriented.” These individuals wanted more outlets for social justice and activist activities.

Question 76 asked respondents, “Do you think MSU is responsive and sensitive to the health and mental health issues of people who are LBGTQ? Why or why not?” The majority of respondents were unaware of the extent to which MSU was responsive to the health and mental health needs of LGBTQ people. A subset of those people guessed that MSU was responsive and sensitive, while others thought that since they had not seen any advertising for health/mental health services geared specifically for sexual minorities, the services must be lacking. Some respondents felt certain offices (e.g., Counseling Center, EAP) were responsive and sensitive. Many individuals suggested that Olin (and its employees) needed vast improvement in the way services are provided for LGBTQ people. Others suggested that MSU ought to train most employees to respond sensitively, rather than providing only a few “contact people” trained to work with the LGBTQ population. Respondents also wanted to see more sexual health education provided for sexual minorities. Several people also questioned whether administrators and faculty truly understood the enormity of the questioning and coming out process for some

students (and the toll it can take a person's mental health) when those administrators and faculty create programs or allocate resources geared towards LGBTQ mental health.

Question 77 asked respondents, "During your time at MSU, has the climate for people who are LGBTQ people improved, stayed the same, or deteriorated? In what ways?"

A number of respondents felt they were not part of the MSU climate long enough to offer constructive opinions. Some respondents indicated they only had been at MSU a short time and that the climate remained the same. Long-time employees said the climate had improved tremendously during their tenure at MSU.

The rest of the respondents were divided as to whether the climate had improved or deteriorated. Several respondents who thought the climate had improved suggested the changes were due to the "shift in thinking in the greater society," the institution of support services and offices for LGBTQ people on campus (e.g., LGBTQ Resource Center, caucuses), and the leadership of a few key individuals. Several people who thought the climate for LGBTQ people had deteriorated pointed to the 2004 change in the Michigan Constitution (Prop 2) and how it has affected MSU's policies and attitudes.

When asked if they would recommend MSU to an LGBTQ prospective student, faculty, or staff member, the vast majority of respondents answered affirmatively. Most of those respondents felt MSU was a great institution where anyone can find their niche and flourish. Others suggested that MSU was comparable to other large universities, and they would recommend to LGBTQ people to attend such institutions. A few respondents believed MSU had in place several offices, support services, and policies that would make LGBTQ people feel welcome. Others said MSU would be a good choice, but that East Lansing and the state of Michigan were not particularly forward thinking on LGBTQ issues. Some respondents felt the climate was more welcoming for LGBTQ undergraduate students than for sexual minority faculty or staff (suggesting a single young professional would have difficulty meeting a partner at MSU or in the area). Some respondents said they would suggest people interested in coming to MSU ought to investigate the climate in the departments, majors, and colleges they were interested in before making any decisions. Relatively few people said they would not recommend MSU, and their reasons

generally focused on their perceptions of the state of Michigan as an unwelcoming place for sexual minorities.

In addition, a few respondents commented on the survey and process itself. Some applauded the University's participation in the study and wanted to make certain that the results of the survey were made public and used to better Michigan State University. Several respondents insisted that Michigan State University leadership share with its constituents the climate assessment findings and initiatives instituted as a result of the findings.