

2021 Campus Climate Survey
St. Thomas Aquinas College
June 15, 2021
Executive Summary of Findings

From March 30, 2021, until the end of the academic semester, all students at St. Thomas Aquinas College (STAC) were contacted via e-mail and asked to complete an anonymous online survey exploring their attitudes, beliefs, and experiences with respect to sex- and gender-based misconduct on campus and at STAC-sponsored off-campus events during the 2020-2021 academic year.¹ The foregoing summary sets out respondents' demographic characteristics and outlines areas of strength with respect both to STAC's campus climate and, specifically, to students' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about sex- and gender-based misconduct. The summary closes with some recommendations about ways to improve policy and procedure.

Respondent Characteristics

Two hundred three (203) students completed at least part of the survey. The registrar reports that during spring, 2021, 1187 students were enrolled at STAC Main Campus. Thus, the survey had an approximate response rate of 17.10%.

Gender Identity. One hundred twenty-three respondents identified as female (66.85%), whereas 54 (29.35%) identified as male. Two students (1.09%) identified as genderqueer or gender non-conforming, and four students (2.17%) identified as non-binary. One student (.54%) identified as a transgender male, and no students identified as transgender females, agender, or as an unspecified gender category (i.e., 'other').² No students explicitly declined to answer the question. Altogether, we can see that approximately 4% of our student respondents identify themselves outside the traditional gender binary.

Sexual Orientation. One hundred fifty-one students identified as heterosexual/straight (82.51%). Three students (1.64%) identified as lesbian, and three students (1.64%) identified as gay. Sixteen students identified as bisexual (8.74%), one student identified as questioning (.55%), three students identified with another, unspecified sexual orientation (1.64%), and two students (1.09%) identified as asexual. Notably, four students (2.19%) explicitly declined to answer the question. Altogether, we can see that approximately 15% of our student respondents explicitly identify themselves as non-heterosexual.

Biological Sex Assigned at Birth. One hundred twenty-seven indicated that they had been assigned female sex at birth (69.78%), whereas 53 students indicated that they had been assigned male sex at birth (29.12%). Two students (1.10%) explicitly declined to answer the question.

¹ In 2017, the survey was approved by the IRB.

² Totals do not sum to 203, as two students declined to complete the survey when asked for their consent. The remainder (i.e., 201 students) completed at least part of the survey. For the entirety of the Executive Summary, figures will not total 203 for any item, and the percentages given in parentheses will reflect the percentage of students giving a particular response out of the total number of students who answered that survey item.

Race. One hundred thirty students identified as White (71.04%), 17 as Black/African-American (9.29%), ten as Asian (5.46%), one as Hawaii Native/Pacific Islander (.55%), six as Multiracial (3.28%), and 13 as belonging to another unspecified racial category (7.10%). No students identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Six students (3.28%) elected not to respond to the question pertaining to race.

Ethnicity. One hundred forty-three students identified as non-Hispanic (78.14%), whereas 31 identified as Hispanic/Latino (16.94%). Nine students (4.92%) elected not to respond to the item pertaining to ethnicity.

Campus Location. Almost all students (170; 92.90%) indicated they were students at STAC's main campus in Sparkill, New York. Thirteen students (7.10%) indicated that they were not students at STAC's main campus, probably indicating that they were remote students for the entirety of the academic year.

Class Rank. Thirty-five students indicated that they were freshmen (20.71%), 38 students indicated that they were sophomores (22.49%), 40 students indicated that they were juniors (23.67%), and 37 students indicated that they were seniors (21.89%). Seventeen students indicated that they were graduate students (10.06%), and two students categorized their class rank as "other" (1.18%).

Transfer Status. Only 42 students indicated that they had transferred to STAC from another institution (25.00%). The remainder (126; 75.00%) indicated they had only attended STAC.

Residency Status. Sixty-three students (37.28%) indicated that they had lived on campus during the entirety of the 2020-2021 academic year, whereas the remainder indicated that they had exclusively lived elsewhere (96; 56.80%) or had lived on-campus for part of the year but not the entire year (10; 5.92%).

Main Findings: Students' Attitudes, Beliefs, and Knowledge

1. *Students Feel Safe on Campus.*

The vast majority of participants either strongly agreed (57; 36.77%) or agreed (75; 48.39%) that they "feel safe on campus." Twenty-one students neither agreed nor disagreed (13.55%), two students disagreed (1.29%), and no students strongly disagreed.

2. *Students Feel that Reports of Sex- or Gender-Based Misconduct are Taken Seriously.*

Seventy-two students (55.38%) indicated that such reports are very likely to be taken seriously by the College. An additional 39 students (30.00%) indicated that such reports are moderately likely to be taken seriously. Only 19 students indicated that such reports are somewhat likely (13; 10.00%) or not at all likely (6; 4.62%) to be taken seriously.

3. *Students Feel that the College Supports Alleged Victims of Sex- or Gender-Based Misconduct.*

Students indicated that they believe the College would be "very likely" to do the following in instances of alleged sex- or gender-based misconduct:

- a. "keep knowledge of the report limited to those who need to know in order for the college to respond appropriately" (56.15% 'very likely')

- b. “take steps to protect the safety of the person making the report” (52.71% ‘very likely’)
 - c. “support the person making the report” (54.26% ‘very likely’)
4. *Students Know How to Get Support and Report Sex- and Gender-Based Misconduct.*
- a. Eighty-seven students either strongly agreed (42; 33.87%) or agreed (45; 36.29%) that they would know where to go to get help if they or a friend were sexually assaulted on campus. Only sixteen disagreed (15; 12.10%) or strongly disagreed (1; .81%) that they would know where to get help. Twenty-one students (16.94%) neither agreed nor disagreed that they would know where to get help.
 - b. Ninety-nine students either strongly agreed (49; 39.84%) or agreed (50; 40.65%) that they understood the College’s policy to address complaints of sexual assault. Only five students disagreed (4; 3.25%) or strongly disagreed (1; .81%) that they understood the College’s policy. Nineteen students (15.45%) neither agreed nor disagreed.
5. *Students Report a Willingness to use Bystander Intervention Strategies.*
- A large majority (presented in parentheses) of students said they were either very or moderately likely to take the following actions:
- a. “Confront other people who make inappropriate or negative sexual comments and gestures” (76.85%)
 - b. “Report other people who continue to engage in sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviors after having been previously confronted” (91.66%)
 - c. “Report other people who use force or pressure to engage in sexual contact” (93.52%)
 - d. “Confront a friend who is hooking up with someone who is passed out or otherwise incapacitated due to drugs or alcohol” (98.09%)
 - e. “Report a friend who committed a rape” (93.34%)
6. *Students Understand the Importance of Affirmative Consent.*
- a. Almost all students (98; 93.33%) indicated they would be very likely to terminate sexual activity if a partner said to stop, even if such activity began consensually. Only three students (2.86%) said they would not be likely to terminate sexual activity under such circumstances. The remainder of students said they would be either moderately likely (4; 3.81%) or somewhat likely (0; 0%) to do so.
 - b. Ninety-five (89.62%) students indicated they would be very likely (85; 80.19%) or moderately likely (10; 9.43%) to ask for verbal consent from a long-term partner prior to engaging in sexual relations with that partner, whereas only four students (3.77%) indicated they would not be likely to do so. The remainder of students said they were somewhat likely (7; 6.60%) to do so.
 - c. Students overwhelmingly disagreed (82; 81.19%) that “if somebody doesn’t say ‘no,’ they can’t claim rape.” Only four students (3.96%) agreed with this statement. Fifteen students (14.85%) were not sure.

Main Findings: Incidence of Sex- and Gender-Based Misconduct.

- 1. Nine students (7.76%) indicated that they had witnessed a situation that they believed was, or could have led to, an instance of sexual assault. One hundred seven students

- (92.24%) said they did not witness such a situation. No students explicitly declined to answer.
2. Twelve students (10.26%) indicated that another person had done something to them, sexually, that they did not consent to. Ninety-nine (84.62%) students said they had not been a victim of unwanted sexual contact. Six students (5.13%) explicitly declined to answer.
 3. Three students (2.56%) indicated that another person had attempted, but not succeeded, in using physical force or the threat of physical force to gain sexual contact with them. One hundred ten students (94.02%) said this had not happened to them. Four students (3.42%) explicitly declined to answer the question.
 4. Two students (1.71%) reported having been the victim of intimate partner violence. One hundred fourteen (97.44%) said they had not been the victim of intimate partner violence. One student (.85%) explicitly declined to answer the question.
 5. Fourteen students (12.07%) reported that somebody else had told them that they had had an unwanted sexual experience during the 2020-2021 academic year. Ninety-eight students (84.48%) reported that nobody had told them about having an unwanted sexual experience during the 2020-2021 academic year. Four students (3.45%) explicitly declined to answer the question.
 6. Eleven students (9.40%) reported that during the 2020-2021 academic year, another person had targeted them with behaviors intended to make them fear for their safety and/or experience significant emotional distress (i.e., stalked them). One hundred three (88.03%) students said they had not been stalked during the 2020-2021 academic year. Three students (2.56%) explicitly declined to answer the question.

Evaluation of Policy Recommendations Based on the Previous Campus Climate Survey (2019)

Following the 2019 survey, one policy recommendations was presented (reproduced below in red font). An evaluation of our success in achieving our goals follows each recommendation (presented in blue font).

Recommendation: Improve Participation of Men and Non-White Racial/Ethnic Groups

One problematic aspect of the 2019 survey's sample is that, relative to the sample obtained in 2017, the 2019 sample was *even more heavily female*. In 2017, 63.49% of respondents were female; in 2019, 69.14% of respondents were female. Additionally, in 2017, 68.18% of respondents identified as White; in 2019, nearly the same proportion (66.67%) identified as White. My impression is that more than one-third of our students are non-White, so it is worrisome that these non-White students are not completing our survey at rates proportional to their numbers in the student body. We may want to coordinate with Student Affairs in improving response rates among male students and among racial and ethnic minority populations on campus. By improving the demographic representativeness of our sample, we can increase our confidence in our survey's findings.

Progress Report:

While it is difficult and perhaps foolhardy to make sweeping decisions based on a survey collected during a global pandemic—which, it should be noted, necessitated a variety of temporary changes to campus policies and procedures while also likely impacting the characteristics of our population and resultant sample—it is nonetheless important to note that our sample became Whiter in 2021 than in 2019 and remained heavily female. To wit, in 2021, our sample was 71.04% White (2019: 68.18% White). Additionally, in 2021, our sample was 66.85% female (2019: 69.14% female). One possible means of improving response rates among non-White and male students could be to include the Multicultural Student Organization (MSO) and various athletic teams/coaches/captains in our pre-survey outreach in 2023.

New Recommendations

Although our current survey has been lightly edited following its initial development in 2017, it has not been substantively updated since that time. By 2023, the survey instrument will be six years old. Future iterations of the survey should be reviewed carefully and items added to reflect social, political, and cultural changes since 2017. Moreover, any gaps in the current survey ought to be filled at that time. Perhaps most notably, we may consider adding items pertaining to the following topics:

- the perceived prevalence of sex- and/or gender-based *discrimination* on campus;
- the perceived prevalence of anti-LGBTQIA+ *discrimination* on campus;
- the extent to which the College is perceived as an accepting and affirming environment for gender and sexual minorities;
- knowledge and beliefs about gender and sexual minorities.

Conclusions

STAC students generally feel safe on campus, believe the College takes sex- and gender-based misconduct seriously, believe the College supports alleged victims, and know how to report alleged sex- and gender-based misconduct. Students also understand important concepts such as affirmative consent and report a willingness to intervene in situations where sex- or gender-based misconduct is suspected. All the same, efforts should be undertaken to improve the response rate for specific student groups so that results can be interpreted with more confidence. Moreover, future iterations of the survey ought to include items pertaining to sex- and gender-based discrimination and, possibly, questions pertaining to knowledge and beliefs about gender and sexual minority populations.