

2019 Campus Climate Survey
St. Thomas Aquinas College
June 27, 2019
Executive Summary of Findings

During April, 2019, 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 2018-2019 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

One hundred sixty-nine students completed at least part of the survey. The registrar reports that during spring, 2019, 1,185 students were enrolled at STAC Main Campus. Thus, the survey had an approximate response rate of 14.26%.

Gender Identity. One hundred twelve students identified as female (69.14%), whereas 48 (29.63%) identified as male. One student (.62%) identified as genderqueer or gender non-conforming, and one student (.62%) identified as belonging to another, unspecified gender category.² No students identified as transgender or agender.

Sexual Orientation. One hundred thirty-eight students identified as heterosexual/straight (85.19%). Four students (2.47%) identified as lesbian, and two students (1.23%) identified as gay. Thirteen students identified as bisexual (8.02%), three students identified as questioning (1.85%), and two students identified with another, unspecified sexual orientation (1.23%). No students identified as asexual.

Biological Sex Assigned at Birth. One hundred twelve students indicated that they had been assigned female sex at birth (70.00%), whereas 48 students indicated that they had been assigned male sex at birth (30.00%).

Race. One hundred eight students identified as White (66.67%), 7 as Black/African-American (4.32%), six as Asian (3.70%), two as Hawaii Native/Pacific Islander (1.23%), 17 as Multiracial (10.49%), and 18 as belonging to another unspecified racial category (11.11%). No students identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Four students (2.47%) elected not to respond to the question pertaining to race.

¹ Prior to data collection, the survey was approved by the IRB.

² Totals do not sum to 169, as two students declined to complete the survey when asked for their consent. The remainder (i.e., 167 students) completed at least part of the survey. For the entirety of the Executive Summary, figures will not total 169 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.

Ethnicity. One hundred seventeen students identified as non-Hispanic (72.67%), whereas 39 identified as Hispanic/Latino (24.22%). Five students (3.11%) elected not to respond to the item pertaining to ethnicity.

Campus Location. Almost all students (159; 98.15%) indicated they were students at STAC's main campus in Sparkill, New York. Three students (1.85%) indicated that they attended another campus.

Class Rank. Thirty-six students indicated that they were freshmen (22.64%), 35 students indicated that they were sophomores (22.01%), 32 students indicated that they were juniors (20.13%), and 42 students indicated that they were seniors (26.42%). Ten students indicated that they were graduate students (6.29%), and four students classified their class rank as "other" (2.52%).

Transfer Status. Only 44 students indicated that they had transferred to STAC from another institution (27.67%). The remainder (115; 72.33%) indicated they had only attended STAC.

Residency Status. Approximately half of students (75; 47.17%) indicated that they had lived on campus during the entire 2018-2019 academic year, whereas the remainder indicated that they had commuted (81; 50.94%) or had lived on-campus for part of the year but not the entire year (3; 1.89%).

Main Findings: Students' Attitudes, Beliefs, and Knowledge

1. *Students Feel Safe on Campus.*

The vast majority of participants either strongly agreed (51; 33.55%) or agreed (80; 52.63%) that they "feel safe on campus." Fifteen students neither agreed nor disagreed (9.87%), four students disagreed (2.63%), and two students strongly disagreed (1.32%).

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

Eighty-seven students (61.70%) indicated that such reports are very likely to be taken seriously by the College. An additional 33 students (23.63%) indicated that such reports are moderately likely to be taken seriously. Only 21 students indicated that such reports are somewhat likely (16; 11.35%) or not at all likely (5; 3.55%) 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" (60.71% 'very likely')
- b. "take steps to protect the safety of the person making the report" (56.43% 'very likely')
- c. "support the person making the report" (49.29% 'very likely')

4. *Students Know How to Get Support and Report Sex- and Gender-Based Misconduct.*

- a. One hundred six students either strongly agreed (51; 37.50%) or agreed (55; 40.44%) that they would know where to go to get help if they or a friend were sexually assaulted on campus. Only twenty-one students disagreed (18; 13.24%)

or strongly disagreed (3; 2.21%) that they would know where to get help. Nine students (6.62%) neither agreed nor disagreed that they would know where to get help.

- b. One hundred sixteen students either strongly agreed (67; 49.63%) or agreed (49; 36.30%) that they understood the College's policy to address complaints of sexual assault. Only seven students disagreed (5; 3.70%) or strongly disagreed (2; 1.48%) that they understood the College's policy. Twelve students (8.89%) 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" (74.33%)
- b. "Report other people who continue to engage in sexual harassment or unwanted sexual behaviors after having been previously confronted" (81.41%)
- c. "Report other people who use force or pressure to engage in sexual contact" (86.73%)
- d. "Confront a friend who is hooking up with someone who is passed out or otherwise incapacitated due to drugs or alcohol" (93.46%)
- e. "Report a friend who committed a rape" (90.74%)

6. *Students Understand the Importance of Affirmative Consent.*

- a. Almost all students (105; 97.22%) indicated they would be very likely to terminate sexual activity if a partner said to stop, even if such activity began consensually. Only one student (.93%) said they would not be likely to terminate sexual activity under such circumstances. The remainder of students said they would be either moderately likely (1; .93%) or somewhat likely (1; .93%) to do so.
- b. Ninety-eight (90.74%) students indicated they would be very likely (79; 73.15%) or moderately likely (19; 17.59%) to ask for verbal consent from a long-term partner prior to engaging in sexual relations with that partner, whereas only five students (4.63%) indicated they would not be likely to do so. The remainder of students said they were somewhat likely (5; 4.63%) to do so.
- c. Students overwhelmingly disagreed (76; 73.08%) that "if somebody doesn't say 'no,' they can't claim rape." Only seven students (6.73%) agreed with this statement. Twenty-one students (20.19%) were not sure.

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

1. Eleven students (8.53%) indicated that they had witnessed a situation that they believed was, or could have led to, an instance of sexual assault. One hundred eleven students (86.72%) said they did not witness such a situation, and six (4.69%) preferred not to answer.
2. Eleven students (8.53%) indicated that another person had done something to them, sexually, that they did not consent to. One hundred twelve (86.82%) students said they had not been a victim of unwanted sexual contact. Six students (4.65%) preferred not to answer.

3. Seven students (5.43%) 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 twenty students (93.02%) said this had not happened to them. Two students (1.55%) declined to answer the question.
4. Nine students (7.03%) reported having been the victim of intimate partner violence. One hundred fourteen (89.06%) said they had not been the victim of intimate partner violence. Five students (3.91%) declined to answer the question.
5. Twenty-two students (17.05%) reported that somebody else had told them that they had had an unwanted sexual experience during the 2018-2019 academic year. One hundred three students (79.84%) reported that nobody had told them about having an unwanted sexual experience during the 2018-2019 academic year. Four students (3.10%) elected not to answer the question.

Evaluation of Policy Recommendations Based on the Previous Campus Climate Survey (2017)

Following the 2017 survey, several policy recommendations were presented (reproduced below in red font). An evaluation of our success in achieving our goals follows each recommendation (presented in blue font).

Recommendation 1: Students May Require More Prevention and Policy Training

While students, by and large, evinced socially-responsible attitudes and behavioral intentions with respect to sex- and gender-based misconduct, there nonetheless were a nontrivial number of students who indicated that they had experienced or heard about an instance of sex- or gender-based misconduct on campus. One area where increased efforts may be undertaken involves prevention trainings for students. Indeed, the majority of students (104; 54.45%) indicated that they either had not (69; 36.13%) attended such training or were unsure whether they had attended such training (35; 18.32%).

Another area of interest may include expanding student training involving policies and procedures regarding instances of sexual assault (e.g., what is defined as sexual assault, how to report an incident, confidential resources, procedures for investigating). The majority of students did indicate having had such training (107; 55.73%); however, the remainder said they either did not attend such training (47; 24.48%) or were unsure of whether they did or did not attend such training (38; 19.79%).

Recommendation 1: Progress Report

Relative to the survey distributed two years ago, students were more likely to report having attended sex- and gender-based misconduct prevention trainings. Specifically, seventy-three students (55.30%) reported having attended such training, whereas only 33 students (25.00%) said they had not attended such training. Twenty-six (19.70%) students were unsure of whether they did or did not attend such training.

Moreover, the vast majority of students (89; 67.42%) indicated they had attended training involving policies and procedures regarding instances of sexual assault (e.g., what is defined as sexual assault, how to report an incident, confidential resources, procedures for investigating). Only 17 (12.88%) students indicated they did not attend training. The remainder were unsure of whether they did or did not attend such training (26; 19.70%).

In sum, we have made substantial improvements in the domain of student training. Although we would like to see all students reporting that they had attended prevention and policy trainings, we recognize that we are making progress and anticipate continued progress going forward.

Recommendation 2: Future Surveys Should be Streamlined and Distributed Earlier in the Year

Although the survey was relatively brief compared to some Campus Climate Surveys (e.g., the Rutgers survey), we experienced a significant drop-off in responses as the survey progressed. For instance, only 150 students responded to the final survey item, reflecting a drop-off of 40.47% from the beginning of the survey. Given that the types of students who complete an entire 67-item survey are likely to differ from the broader sample of students in a variety of ways (e.g., conscientiousness, knowledge), this may have biased later items in the survey toward more-conscientious or socially-desirable responses. Additionally, given that the informed consent statement indicated that the survey would take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete, it is likely that less-motivated students were dissuaded from responding altogether. Future surveys should be designed to answer specific questions or address particular areas of concern with respect to sex- and gender-based misconduct policy and procedure and, as such, should be briefer and more narrowly-focused, thereby ameliorating sampling bias and participant attrition. Finally, the timing of the survey likely caused problems. Students were contacted during the latter half of April, meaning that final exams and projects likely competed with the survey for students' attention. Timing should be modified accordingly in the future.

Recommendation 2: Progress Report

Although we did not make substantial changes to the questions (or question order) in the survey, itself, we did distribute the survey two weeks earlier in the semester than we had done in 2017. Still, our response rate was lower than we would like, limiting our ability to draw firm conclusions about the broader student population based on the sample we obtained. In fact, fewer total responses were collected in 2019 than in 2017, despite the fact that the 2017 survey was active for two fewer weeks. It appears likely that we will need to coordinate with Student Affairs more closely, going forward, in encouraging students to complete the survey. One recommendation will be to request that residential life staff, the student government association (SGA), and other student leaders encourage their friends and classmates to complete the survey. Another possible strategy to improve the response rate could be to offer a small incentive (e.g., entry into a raffle to win a \$25 gift card) for students who complete the survey. Of course, entry into such a raffle would have to be voluntary and could not be done in such a way that students' responses could be

tied to their identities, thereby protecting anonymity. Still, an incentive could boost student response rates and improve the quality of the data we obtain.

New Recommendations

Recommendation 3: 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. As in Recommendation #2 above, 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.

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 to future surveys so that results can be interpreted with more confidence.