

MSU Denver
2021 Campus Climate Survey Findings: Staff

Presented by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion
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The purpose of this report is to provide information to the campus community about MSU Denver staff experiences with the campus climate for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). This report expands on initial analyses of the 2021 MSU Denver Campus Climate Survey that were presented in the Campus Climate Survey Executive Summary released in Spring 2022. The current report summarizes key quantitative findings, as well as results from the qualitative data regarding staff members' experiences, with a focus on the implications of these data for informing policy and practice interventions.

This report contains specialized analysis of four staff populations: Staff members who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other related identities (LGBTQ+) staff, staff with disabilities, and veterans. Limitations with the survey limit comparisons [e.g., White (or heterosexual or able bodied) staff were not provided with similar questions to enable comparisons between groups of staff based on race, sexual orientation, ability status or veteran status]. It is also worth noting that this report utilizes data from a relatively small group of staff. (Additional information about numbers of respondents are included in each section of this report.) These data are not intended to be interpreted as representative of a majority of staff experiences, but rather these data provide helpful context to generate understanding about *how* we can improve the campus climate regarding EDI. Implications are discussed in depth within each section as well as briefly summarized at the beginning of this document.

Key Implications

As the full report illustrates, there are a number of implications stemming from this data.

The following pages briefly summarize key implications that emerge from the qualitative data from the 2021 Campus Climate Survey.

Recommendations from BIPOC Staff

- Increase diversity among staff and University leadership
- Provide additional opportunities for community building and discussion of relevant topics, like multiracial identities
- Provide additional support to BIPOC staff who support students of color
- Engage with strategies to increase feelings of safety for staff members to address issues of equity
- Continue existing, effective EDI strategies

Recommendations from Staff with Disabilities

- Continue to work to dismantle stigmas associated with disabilities to ensure that staff (and faculty and students) can disclose their identities on campus, should they wish
- Provide trainings for supervisors to ensure their readiness to support staff members with disabilities
- Address physical barriers in the campus environment, such as snow on pathways

Recommendations from LGBTQ+ Staff

- Continue to work to dismantle stigmas associated with sexual orientation and gender identity to ensure that staff (and faculty and students) can disclose their identities on campus, should they wish
- Provide more specialized trainings about identities such as asexuality, bisexuality, and polyamory
- Continue to provide training and accountability that promote respect for University community members' gender pronouns

Recommendations from Veteran Staff Members

- Continue to work to create understanding about military service and veteran status to ensure that staff can disclose their identities on campus, should they wish
- Continue to provide trainings and accountability in regard to understand and supporting military veteran colleagues

BIPOC Staff

Summary of Quantitative Analysis

Staff members were directly asked if they identified as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPOC). The term BIPOC was defined on the survey as, “Black, indigenous, or a person of color [someone who is not white or of European parentage].” Out of 366 staff who responded to the question, 82 (22%) identified as BIPOC. Approximately 73% of BIPOC staff agreed they *felt welcome on campus*.

Summary of Qualitative Analysis

After utilizing quantitative measures to understand the experiences of BIPOC staff, staff respondents were then provided with an open-ended text box with the prompt “please provide any other comments on the topics in this section.” Of the 82 staff members who affirmed that they identify as BIPOC, 14 respondents provided qualitative data in response to this prompt. Data are edited minimally for grammar and comprehension.

The most common theme discussed by BIPOC staff members was in describing the need for further interventions about race and racism. Some offered more general feedback about their experiences at the university. For instance, one staff member wrote that, “I think the University has work to do when it comes to BIPOC acceptance, but so does the whole country.” Another staff member shared that, “I am that token person, but I don't see many others like me” indicating feelings of invisibility and marginalization in their identity. Similarly, another participant wrote that, “I think that we are very underrepresented as a whole and that are pockets of safe spaces within our positions and department. Also, when you do try to advocate for yourself your met with microaggression or being dismissed or labeled as hard to work with.” Underrepresentation

of BIPOC staff or faculty, and the challenges associated with this, represented the most significant theme in this data.

In a related vein, another staff member shared that,

“One of the biggest challenges of being a person of color that is vocal about the need for changes in equity and justice in our division is most of the folks I need to challenge are white and often express discomfort with tackling some issues around race head-on. All too often the white leaders in our division default to being too fearful to openly address the challenges with race that exist in our division. The language they use is so boilerplate and unoriginal. I would like to see our white leaders take more risk in these conversations or move over to give their spots up to folks that are willing to take the risks and engage in conversations that don't always make them popular. Chances are that if you're really popular when doing Equity and Justice work you probably aren't actually doing a lot to disrupt the status quo.”

Congruent with this comment, two other participants indicated that they would like to see more BIPOC people in leadership positions:

- “We need more BIPOC in administration and supervisory roles.”
- “We need more representation of BIPOC folx in leadership.”

Taken together these comments indicate that BIPOC staff members see multiple opportunities to improve the climate at MSU Denver for BIPOC staff, particularly in regard to representation and creating safety to address issues of equity, without fear of retaliation, when they emerge.

Several staff members shared comments that indicated that their identities as BIPOC staff members may be less visible or salient in their interactions with others. As one staff member shared, “I am white passing.” Similarly, another staff member wrote, “Am I BIPOC if I have one

white, European parent? Because I look white, I don't feel that I can answer these questions...Where do I belong?" Echoing this comment, another staff member said that "we do not encourage mixed Race/Ethnicity identification or address their concerns." Yet another staff member shared that the nature of how they interacted with others on campus may shape how they are viewed by others. "I am still quite new to the community, and since we're still only meeting virtually, it is difficult for me to say for certain how I feel I'm viewed. Because only a limited number of people in general are visually seeing me." The (in)visibility of identity for some BIPOC staff members may represent an opportunity to encourage additional spaces for staff to explore and share their identities with others with whom they work closely.

Two staff members responded to this prompt by acknowledging the centrality of student experiences in their recommendations for University interventions. As one staff member shared, "[There is] a lot of focus and effort on catering to BIPOC students." Another staff member shared that,

"We have a high population of BIPOC students, yet hardly any of the faculty and staff look like them. Students often find their "go-to" folks on campus regardless of their area of expertise, and this can be quite draining on those of us who are the only BIPOC available for these students to speak to. These students generally don't tell white folks everything that is impeding their success because they hear things like, "Well maybe they misunderstood you," or "Why does everything have to be about race," or "Are you sure you're not just imagining things?" This is so harmful for our students, and they really don't feel like they are being heard. We have got to do better."

As this staff member indicates, BIPOC staff members do a great deal of work to support students of color, and this can be a time-consuming aspect of their jobs that may be above and beyond what some white staff members can provide to students.

Notably, another theme in these data was an appreciation for the efforts that the University has taken to ensure an inclusive and equitable work environment. As one participant expanded, after sharing their recommendations for change, “With that said, I can see that the University is striving for a more inclusive atmosphere.” Similarly, another staff member shared that, “I had extremely difficult experiences with racism from living in the US and Germany in which lowered my self-worth and esteem. However, this university's stance on diversity and fight against racism was vital in my healing process to becoming whole again.” One additional staff member’s comment concisely summarizes comments in this section, in indicating that MSU Denver is a “work in progress...” when it comes to EDI goals for BIPOC community members.

Implications

Qualitative data from BIPOC identified staff members indicate opportunities for potential practice and policy implications. Data indicate that racial microaggressions persist in staff members’ experiences. Respondents indicated that some BIPOC staff members would like to see the underrepresentation of BIPOC staff addressed within the staff in general, as well as in leadership positions across the University. Staff members also shared that the invisibility of their racial identities may also indicate opportunities to help staff members connect meaningfully with colleagues, for instance through more nuanced discussion about multiracial identities. Staff members also shared their appreciation of, and frustrations with being able to provide relevant supports for students of color. Providing additional support mechanisms for BIPOC staff who are providing sometimes “draining” support for students of color, may also help alleviate the

burdens staff of color may face because of their identity. Staff also shared positive sentiments about the work that the University is already doing to promote a more inclusive and equitable environment, indicating that existing strategies are proving effective.

Staff Members with Disabilities

Summary of Quantitative Analysis

Staff members were also asked if they identified as having a disability. Disability was defined as “a diagnosed or known medical condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities; inability to fully access the campus experience due to academic or campus accessibility barriers.” Out of 376 staff members who responded to the question, 43 (11%) identified as having a disability. Of these staff members, 64% of them agreed they *felt welcome on campus*.

Summary of Qualitative Analysis

After utilizing quantitative measures to understand the experiences of staff members with disabilities, respondents were then provided with an open-ended text box with the prompt “please provide any other comments on the topics in this section.” Thirteen staff members (of the 43 total staff members who identified as having a disability) provided qualitative data in response to this prompt. Themes are presented in order of prominence in the data. Data are edited minimally for grammar and comprehension.

Seven participants commented that their disability (or disabilities) were not visible, and therefore they did not see their disability status as connected to how others treated them. The following quotes exemplify this sentiment:

- “As a person with a non-apparent disability, I am not treated differently.”
- “Most do not know, so who knows what they think.”
- “No one knows I have a disability so as a person they treat me okay.”

One of these participants also shared that, “I work to hide my disabilities. I fear not advancing in my career if people know about my disability.” Similarly, another shared that, “My disability is

not readily apparent. I have had difficulty finding out how staff can access accommodations based on a disability (I have asked and searched online). Also, I am not sure if it is confidential, or what the process is, and if it would jeopardize my employment. I think there should be more advertising/outreach to make the process easier and reassuring. I have not sought accommodations that I think would be helpful because of this.” These responses indicate that some staff members not only choose not to disclose their disability statuses with others, but that some do so for fear of how their career will be affected.

Not all staff members described reluctance in sharing their identities with others, nor did all staff have the “option” to choose to disclose their identities, as was more frequently the case for staff members with more visible disability statuses. As one staff member shared, “Not all disabilities are obvious. I only confide my disability to my supervisors and closest co-workers. I feel my supervisors support my condition.” Similarly, another staff member shared that, “I am very open with my having a learning disability and advocate for my needs and communications styles. And I have been met with a lot of microaggression.” Taken together these comments indicate the need to create even more inclusive workplace experiences for staff with visible and invisible disabilities.

Staff also shared issues that they have encountered and practical suggestions for improving experiences on campus for persons with disabilities. For instance, one staff member shared that, “I have a service dog on campus, and, generally, students are quite good about the presence of my service dog, but I've had some absolutely inappropriate interactions with students and staff related to my service dog (reaching at her and petting her while we're walking by without asking permission; directly asking me what my disability is; etc.).” This message indicates that raising awareness about how to interact with service animals would benefit

university community members with service dogs. Another staff member shared that, “Poorly cleared sidewalks after snowstorms are horrible for those with mobility aids” indicating additional opportunities for improving campus experiences for persons with disabilities. As another staff member indicated, “As we institutionally continue to the hard work of social justice and inclusion this is an area to lend more attention. I feel that disability, especially invisible, are not included in the conversation.” Taken together, these comments indicate several opportunities for potential intervention.

Implications

Qualitative data from staff indicate opportunities for potential practice implications to inform support and inclusion for staff with disabilities. Staff comments indicate that some staff members may not be comfortable sharing about their disability statuses with others, in some cases due to fears about career progression. Providing all supervisors with coaching about how to best support staff with disabilities may help ensure that staff feel supported in their roles and career progression within the University. Staff reflected that microaggressions and other challenges associated with their disabilities remain common, indicating an opportunity to work to provide more affirming responses when University community members decide to disclose about their disabilities. Staff also shared several practical suggestions for interventions to improve climate for staff with disabilities, including clearing walkways after inclement weather and ensuring that disabilities are central in EDI discussions.

LGBTQ+ Staff Members

Summary of Quantitative Analysis

Three hundred and seventy-three staff members responded to the question “Do you identify within the LGBTQIA+ community?”. Of these respondents, 52 (14%) selected “yes”, 12 (3%) “not sure”, 31 (8%) “prefer not to say, and 278 (75%) did not identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Staff who selected any response other than “no” were asked follow-up questions regarding their experiences on campus. Approximately 80% agreed they could openly express their *gender identity/expression* on campus, while 77% agreed they could openly express their *sexual identity* on campus.

Summary of Qualitative Analysis

After utilizing quantitative measures to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ staff members, staff respondents were then provided with an open-ended text box with the prompt “please provide any other comments on the topics in this section.” Responses indicate areas for additional growth in supporting LGBTQ+ staff members. Of the 64 staff members who selected anything other than “no”, 13 staff members provided qualitative data in response to this prompt. Themes are presented in order of prominence in the data. Data are edited minimally for grammar and comprehension.

Several staff members shared that they did not want to or did not feel comfortable sharing about their sexual orientation at work. For instance, one staff member shared that, “I don't discuss or divulge anything about my sexual orientation at work.” Similarly, another respondent wrote that, “[I] hate labels and labeling. Creates more and more division with each new category we create in the name of inclusion. Sex is personal and no one's business but yours and your partner(s). It has no effect on one's job unless you work in a sex related industry.” Two staff

members echoed this sentiment, but shared that there may be more personal reasons, related to their identity development that they are not interested in sharing about their sexual or gender identities; as one staff member shared, “[I’m] just not ready for it.” Similarly, another respondent said,

“I do not outwardly express my sexual orientation and feel that doing so would not be great for me. I just recently came to the realization that I am on the asexual spectrum. I am demi-sexual, but have not really shared it with anyone. I feel like I can freely express myself if I chose to do so, but cannot say for sure how welcoming others would be if I did, hence my neutral answers for many of the questions.”

These comments indicate that some staff are reluctant to share about their sexual or gender identities with university community members, but that the reasons for not doing so, vary.

Two respondents indicated that knowing more about the people they were disclosing to was central to their decisions. “Specific individuals dictate whether or not I feel comfortable expressing myself openly.” Similarly, another respondent shared that, “Even though I am bisexual I do not openly share that information with my place of work. There are only two people at work who know and that’s because I’ve known one person prior to working at Metro and one person who became a work friend.” The lack of comfort in sharing about these identities with colleagues is potentially indicative of a workplace culture that could be more intentionally affirming of LGBTQ+ identities. One staff member also shared about their experience with polyamory: “I wish I could be a little more open about being polyamorous (specifically not having to hide the fact I have two partners), but I don’t feel that’s unusual despite where I am, unfortunately.” While polyamorous identities are not specific to LGBTQ+ people, the common experience of stigma associated with one’s relationships remains a theme in these data.

Staff members also shared several specific suggestions for interventions, most commonly in relationship to gender pronouns. As one staff member shared, “I have heard multiple microaggressions about gender neutral pronouns on this campus by faculty members (“They pronouns? That’s ridiculous! Don’t you think that’s confusing to kids??”) which leads me to believe that there is some hostility toward queer/gender-nonconforming folks on this campus. This question directly depends on where you are and who you are around. Some offices are far more hostile than others.” Another staff member wrote a similar sentiment: “Gender pronoun education is something I want to strive for my team and would encourage the same for all employees.” These comments indicate that gender pronouns, as well as the stigmas associated with less privileged relationships statuses (e.g., same-sex, asexual, polyamorous) are important areas to address to improve campus climate for LGBTQ+ staff members.

Implications

LGBTQ staff comments provide several potential implications for programming and practice at MSU Denver. Some staff members said that they were uncomfortable sharing about their identities with others due to fear for how others might respond. This indicates that continued work is needed to ensure that staff (and students and faculty) are able to share about their identities and experiences without fear of repercussions. Continuing to provide trainings and accountability on LGBTQ+ identities will help to create a culture of inclusion and belonging for LGBTQ+ staff. Including diverse identities in these trainings (e.g., asexuality, bisexuality, polyamory) may help to foster a more broadly inclusive climate for LGBTQ+ staff members. Furthermore, continuing trainings and accountability regarding gender pronouns represent an additional challenge for creating an LGBTQ+ inclusive University climate.

Veteran Staff Members

Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

Lastly, staff members were asked if they were a military veteran. Out of 381 staff members who responded to the question, 11 (3%) identified as a veteran. Six of the 11 veterans agreed they *felt welcome on campus*. Military veteran respondents were also provided with an open-ended text box with the prompt “please provide any other comments on the topics in this section.” Of the ten staff members who indicated that they were military veterans, only two provided qualitative comments. Data are edited minimally for grammar and comprehension. These two comments indicate that, “Despite focus on diversity the university seems to struggle to understand that many faculty and administrators harbor biases against military veterans.” This may also contribute to the lack of interest in disclosing a military background; “I don’t often announce my veteran status when working with groups.”

Implications

While there were not many comments in regard to the experiences of veteran staff members, these comments indicate that there may be opportunities to promote visibility and awareness about the experiences of staff members who are military veterans.

For additional questions about the results from the analyses of staff data from the 2021 Campus Climate Survey, or feedback about the next iteration of this survey please reach out to: Jeremy VanHooser, Associate Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at jvanhoo1@msudenver.edu.