

# UW-Madison: Student survey on campus climate

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MADISON — Most students from nearly all backgrounds find the University of Wisconsin–Madison to be a safe, welcoming and respectful place where they feel they belong, though gaps in the campus experience persist, according to initial results from a fall 2021 Campus Climate Survey.

Most respondents also indicated that they value diversity and that it's very important to them that the university does, too.

However, challenges remain. Even though most students from historically underrepresented and marginalized groups reported an overall positive experience on campus, they rated the campus climate less highly than their peers. These gaps were about the same as in fall 2016, the last time the campus-wide student climate survey was conducted.

With a few notable exceptions, the results overall were stable from five years earlier. The results come against a backdrop of a worldwide pandemic, a disrupted student experience, and social unrest fueled by the murder of George Floyd.

The 2021 survey was administered by the UW Survey Center on behalf of the Division of Diversity, Equity and Educational Achievement (DDEEA). The Office of Strategic Diversity Planning and Research within DDEEA posted the initial results on its website. The division had pledged to update the campus community with high-level results before students left campus at the end of the academic year.

A full analysis of the data is in progress and is expected this summer. A Campus Climate Survey Task Force will convene in May; its recommendations are expected in August.

“I want to sincerely thank all the students who took the time to participate,” says LaVar Charleston, deputy vice chancellor for diversity and inclusion and the university’s chief diversity officer. “This is important feedback that will drive future decisions. I look forward to having more to share once the full analysis is complete and the task force has had time to dig deeper into the findings and make its recommendations.”

The task force will be co-chaired by Anju Reejsinghani, assistant vice provost for strategic diversity, equity and inclusion administration in the DDEEA, and Gabe Javier, an associate vice chancellor for student affairs in the area of identity and inclusion. Members of the task force represent faculty, staff, current students and recent alumni. A full list can be found [here](#).

In 2016, the first time the survey was conducted, more than 8,600 students participated — a 21% response rate. This time, more than 13,400 students took part, resulting in a higher response rate of 28%. All enrolled students (undergraduate, graduate, professional, special and part-time) were invited to participate. The students who completed the survey were representative of the overall student population, according to the Office of Strategic Diversity Planning and Research.

#### High-level results:

-Most students reported very or extremely often feeling welcome (74%), respected (76%) and safe (77%). About 61% of students reported very or extremely often feeling like they belong, and 57% of students reported never or rarely feeling excluded.

-In most cases, students of color, students with a disability, nonbinary students, transgender students, and other LGBTQ+ students responded less positively than their counterparts to questions on campus climate, although their responses still were broadly favorable.

-In 2021, 23% of students reported ever witnessing hostile, harassing or intimidating behavior at UW-Madison, and 14% said they had personally experienced such behavior at UW-Madison. These percentages were about the same as in 2016.

-There were few differences in student responses by school/college, student level,

full-time/part-time status, or students' religious or political views.

While student views and experiences of campus climate were often comparable to the previous survey in 2016, there were notable changes:

-In the previous survey, half of the respondents (53%) reported feeling very or extremely comfortable contacting the University of Wisconsin Police Department (UWPD) if they had a problem. By 2021, that dropped to 40%. Based on a preliminary review of qualitative feedback on the survey, most comments referenced concerns about law enforcement and policing issues generally.

-Fifteen percent of student respondents during the fall 2021 semester reported seriously considering leaving UW-Madison. That percentage was stable between 2016 and 2021. However, among those 15% of students who seriously considered leaving in 2021, campus climate or culture at UW-Madison was more frequently cited as a reason — 56% in 2021 compared to 40% in 2016.

Since the 2016 survey, the university has taken many steps to make the campus more welcoming and to increase awareness of and respect for diversity in its many forms, including religious, political, racial/ethnic, gender/sexual orientation and disability status. The university also recently launched the UWPD racial equity and transparency initiative.