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Article Title: **Anatomy of a Climate Study**

Author: Ken D. Coopwood Sr., PhD

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## Climate studies are done to take a snapshot of people's perceptions of their experiences on and about the campus environment(s). Ken Coopwood, Ph.D., CDE, CDROI Professional

You should know why you want to do a climate survey. Oddly enough, many institutions do a climate survey to simply see how many people are on campus or to see if they have problems that are aligned with national trends ... wrong. Climate studies are done to take a snapshot of people's perceptions of their experiences on and about the campus environment(s). They help assess how people behave with respect to things like the institution's history, who is there and calling the shots, how warm or chilly it feels there, and how people are treated in general.

Since climate studies are done using a *representative* sample, you will need to ensure that adequate numbers of different kinds of people response to your survey. In most cases, an adequate response rate is anywhere from 8 to 10 percent of a particular population, but this depends on the size of the population.

**Example:** If there are 5,000 people of one population, then a 10 percent (500) response rate may be adequate to help you say that, in general, most of the other 4,500 people who didn't respond to your survey think like the 500 who did. However, getting only five out of 50 may not work. Not getting a good representative sample is a common mistake made when sampling underrepresented populations. Plan to get a good representative sample so that your results and recommendations are as valuable as possible.

Many schools find climate studies to be a daunting and time-consuming task. Here are some thoughts and action items that will help even the most inexperienced person conduct a climate study. Below are step-by-step instructions from start to finish on how to do a campus climate survey.

### Pre-survey Preparation

- Designate a researcher to take in the survey responses.
- Apply for and get clearance for research on human subjects.
- Assign a steering committee to help with targeting populations to take the survey, come to interviews, develop response incentives, set response goals, establish time lines for launching and closing the response period, and develop a general promotion plan.
- Prepare for leadership of the institution to deal with media and questions.
- Prepare for political and philosophical resistance.

- Plan for financial and human capital support of the survey findings.
- Obtain approval through your institutional review board and secure assistance from your office of institutional research to create in-depth data analysis once your survey is complete.

Make sure your survey contains questions that will share individual and group perceptions, views, and experiences on campus with those responsible for moving the information collected toward realization of your school's mission. Viewfinder® Campus Climate Surveys campus climate surveys provide a tremendous depth and breadth of information on myriad campus issues and perceptions that no other campus climate survey can. Sample questions from all five of our surveys are available to view on our website.

You will need survey software to collect all the data you will receive during the survey administration in order to make research-based decisions regarding the results of your data. Viewfinder® uses SurveyMonkey to house its surveys. If you choose to only purchase our survey(s), you will receive a custom SurveyMonkey link to use for administering your survey. If you choose to have Campus Climate Surveys, LLC, administer your survey, you will receive a SurveyMonkey link with all of the data we have collected after the survey is closed. In both cases, your office of institutional research will then be able to produce all necessary reports. SurveyMonkey allows users to create reports by applying one or more filters.

## **The Survey Period**

This is the longest, most intense part of the climate study process because it is when you are actually encouraging people to take your survey — every day until the response period is over and the survey has closed. The length of time for the response period varies and is often determined by the size of your campus and the goals you've set for the participation rate. Remember, there will be days when the participation rate is high and days when it can slow to a crawl. If we are administering your survey, we will give you periodic updates on the number of responses coming in, and we will send out reminder emails to potential participants. However, you will still need to be prepared to get out there and rally for participation. Here are suggested things to do during this period:

- Conduct a presidential announcement of the survey, including why you are doing it, when it will begin, how people can participate, and what, if any, incentives are being given.
- Get reports from your designated point person on how many responses are coming in; ramp up your promotions and rallies during times when responses lull.

- Place visible response goal charts around campus so people know how well the campus is doing in meeting its goals; this might encourage more participation.
- Prepare for post-survey meetings, town halls, and communications with specific historically underserved or underrepresented groups.
- Prepare for upsurges in activism due to specific findings from the data collected.
- Prepare for fiscal distribution of resources to address anticipated short-term recommendations.

### **Post-survey Work**

This segment of the climate study process is where you will see your data begin to tell a story in the form of charts, graphs, and summaries. You must now compare and contrast your data (analyze) to determine whether your campus climate is good, bad, or ugly. Here are some key things to do at this point:

- Develop recommendations based upon what the data show.
- Present data findings and recommendations to your campus through speeches, your website, media, visuals, etc.
- Engage with populations connected to significant findings; let respondents know that their opinions and experiences matter.
- Dismiss the steering committee and form a diversity committee to ensure distribution of the quantitative research conclusions; identify and formulate plans to achieve short-, medium-, and long-range action items.
- Engage senior leaders in discussions about accountability and rewards for metric achievement within the structure.
- Post news of these achievements and ongoing processes for improvement and change in places visible to everyone on campus.

These are general suggestions and many not be inclusive of other situations that might occur during any stage of the campus climate survey process. However, adherence to the above could easily set your campus apart from those that achieve minimal results from their climate study because they don't follow these important steps. The key to a successful campus climate study is good pre-preparation, asking the right questions in the survey, and developing and acting on recommendations within a structure that is equitable, impactful, and transparent.