

UMass students react to 2016 Campus Climate Survey

By: Rachel Swansburg

AMHERST—Students interviewed on the University of Massachusetts campus this past week had varying reactions to the recently released results of the school's "Campus Climate Survey". The questionnaire was conducted with students, staff, and faculty in the fall of 2016.

The survey attempted to gauge people's satisfaction with the social climate on the UMass Amherst campus, as well as to analyze people's individual experiences in the classroom and the workplace.

One of the primary objectives of the survey according to the Executive Summary Abridged Climate Report was to measure how open people at UMass believe the campus to be. Across the board, the majority of responders rated the campus as "inclusive."

Many of the students interviewed on campus agreed with this assessment, though some thought it was more true for certain groups. "UMass is definitely inclusive of certain groups," said Erik McIntosh, a sophomore operations and information management major. "I'm not a conservative, but I know lots of people who are, who aren't comfortable expressing their beliefs."



Kamila Coelho, a junior wildlife conservation major, expressed similar sentiments. "UMass definitely used to be pretty accepting, but I'm not so sure anymore," she said. Coelho was interviewed while waiting for a protest on the gender designation of bathrooms in dorms. "This part of campus [the Central housing area] and Baker Hall especially are supposed to be the most inclusive. And here we are, fighting administration just to get our bathrooms back," she said.

UMass had recently re-designated the gender neutral restrooms in certain dorms back to single gender restrooms, raising concern from students who do not wish to identify with a single gender.

Some students said that the level of inclusivity depends on where you live on campus, given that certain dorms and floors are designated for specific groups of people. Baker Hall is one of these areas, with the first floor, or the Spectrum Floor, designated for people in the LGBT community.

Ollie White, a sophomore anthropology and women's studies double major, said, "I'm living on the Spectrum floor and I feel more comfortable on campus this year than I ever have before. Last year I lived in Northeast and it was really difficult."

Spencer Privette, a senior mechanical engineering major, said that he “had no problems” finding a comfortable place on campus, but that he “can imagine it must be more challenging for people of minority groups.”

When asked if there was anything more the school could do to help students feel a sense of belonging, many said no.

“People who feel as though they don’t belong might have just not met the right people yet. There are lots of opportunities that UMass gives people to help them find a place they feel comfortable in,” said Kathleen Codair, a sophomore psychology and premed major.

Danny Sanatar, a sophomore computer science major, mentioned the weekly emails sent out by the school to help students find activities and groups that interest them. “As a white male I don’t want to sound ignorant, but I feel like the school already does so much to help people figure out where they can go to find support,” he said.

Some students, however, have experienced situations where they cannot simply leave the group they’re in, though they might feel unwelcome.

Sylee Dandekar and Yasmin Aydemir are junior and sophomore math majors, respectively, and have both faced repeated issues in STEM classes where they don’t feel accepted or respected. “There are certain computer science classes I’ve taken where I’m the only girl there. It’s intimidating, I only speak up when I know the answer. I don’t raise my hand just to ask questions like everybody else,” said Dandekar. “The space itself is aggressive.”

“I’ve worked with guys in my math classes before who will look at me and then not let me help with the assignment. They’ll only work with the other guys in the group,” said Aydemir.