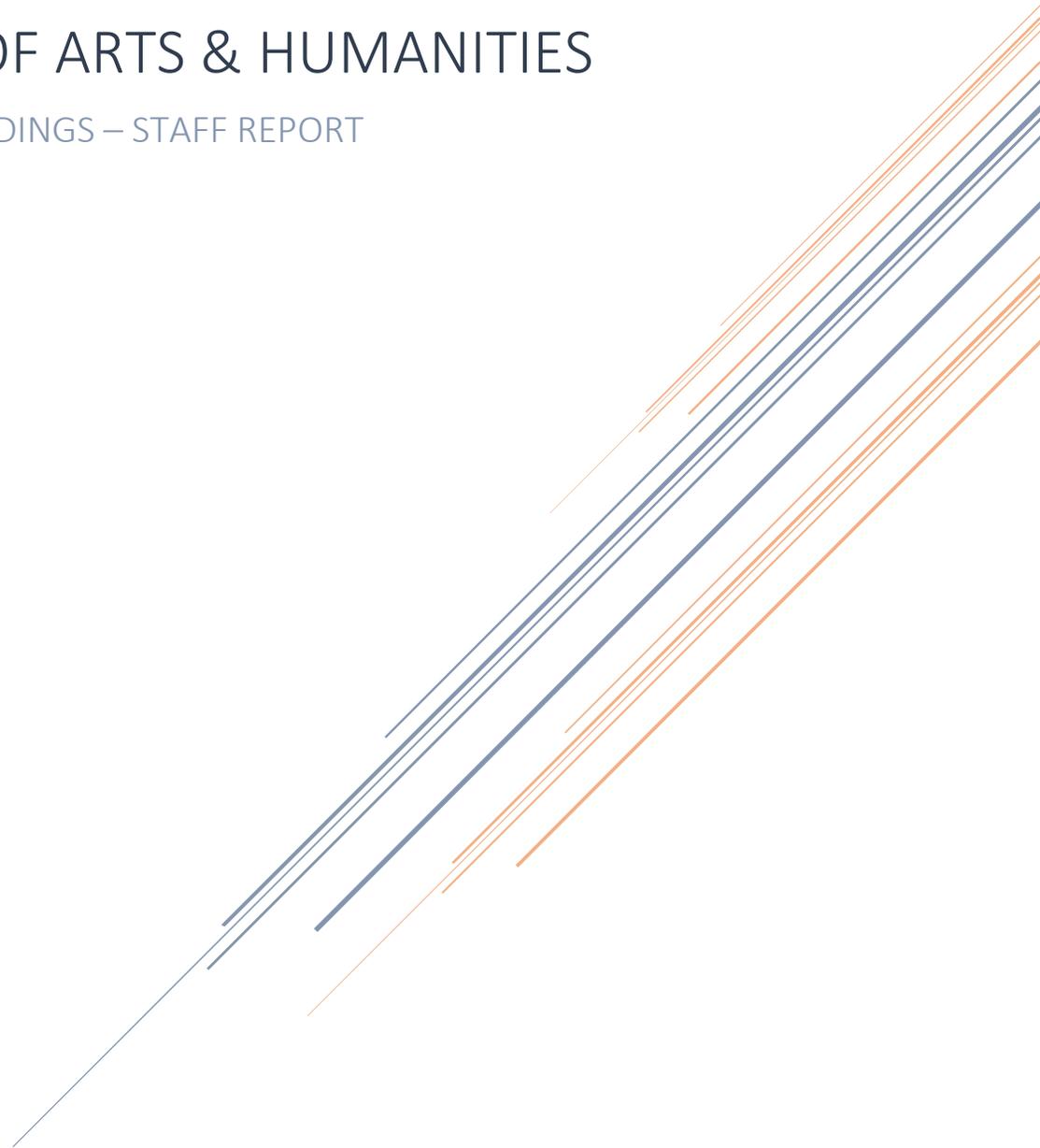


DIVISION OF ARTS & HUMANITIES

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS – STAFF REPORT



ADMINISTERED BY HARVARD COLLEGE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

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Introduction

This report presents qualitative findings from staff responses to a climate survey administered to the Arts & Humanities Division in spring 2021. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate climate among faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students. Climate is a multidimensional construct with, therefore, a number of climate dimensions identified as targets of assessment in the literature. The focus of the staff section of the survey was on satisfaction (with one's job and with the climate in one's home department) and perceptions of inclusion and belonging, interpersonal justice, commitment to diversity and inclusion efforts, communication and civil discourse, workplace incivility, accountability for wrongdoing, and supervisor support.

Methods

Data Collection

HCIR developed the survey instrument, drawing on validated scales from the organizational behavior literature. Survey framing and processes were developed in consultation with Benita Wolff (Equity and Inclusion Administrative Fellow in the FAS Division of Science). The survey consisted of approximately 20 forced-choice/Likert-type items. Four additional open-ended items allowed participants to elaborate on their Likert-type survey responses, to further describe their experiences, and to provide suggestions about ways the climate could be improved.

The open-ended items were as follows:

- Q1: We see that you reported that you are treated differently by others in the community because of your identity. Please comment on these experiences.
- Q2: This survey has asked you to reflect upon a large number of issues related to the climate and your experiences in this climate, using a multiple-choice format. If you would like to elaborate upon any of your survey responses and/or further describe your experiences, we encourage you to do so in the space provided below.
- Q3: Please provide suggestions about ways the climate could be improved in your department.
- Q4: If your department is making efforts to improve the climate, please note any aspects of those efforts that seem promising.

Parallel items were administered across groups to faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students with the point of reference (i.e., department/program).

The survey was administered during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 30 - April 14). The pandemic was acknowledged in the survey and participants were instructed to think broadly about their experiences with climate in the department/program and about how the department normally functioned during pre-pandemic times.

A total of 2,137 surveys were sent to staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students in 21 departments in the Arts & Humanities Division. The overall response rate was 44.9%. 106 staff members were sent the survey and 96 responded, resulting in a 91% response rate for this subgroup. Response rates by open-ended question vary and are historically lower. 7 staff members responded to Q1; 27 staff members responded to Q2, and 33 staff members responded to Q3.

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted on staff survey comments combined across departments. Responses to all four questions were downloaded from Qualtrics into a Word document, which in turn was downloaded to NVivo 12, a coding and qualitative data management program. Drs. Jenny Bergeron and Jeff Solomon then conducted a combined content and thematic analysis of the data by coding text items (ranging from a couple of words, in some instances, to multiple lines, in others) to classify the ways in which participants addressed the survey questions. A key limitation is that responses were obtained from only a small portion of staff survey participants and therefore open-ended comments may not be generalizable. The comments should be interpreted as representative only of the views of those who provided them. However, attempts were made to interpret results in light of the Likert-type items, which had larger response rates. We use the comments to provide context for interpretation of Likert-type responses.

Summary

- While staff were generally satisfied with climate in their departments, there are still pockets of incivility often attributed to those with more power and academic status. In fact, from the numerical data we learned that 77% of staff respondents report experiencing incivility.
- Some instances of incivility were felt to be related to identity. These incidents were characterized as taking the form of microaggressions.
- Staff reported that lack of a clear and fair process for accountability (one that holds all members of the community accountable) and safe reporting lines contributed to inaction in addressing incivility.
- There were some staff who mentioned feeling overworked, not supported, undercompensated, and underappreciated. This has been especially true during the pandemic. Some exhibited signs of burnout (they reported experiencing stress, physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion).
- In efforts to support diversity and inclusion, staff recommended the need for greater diversity in hiring, additional diversity trainings and discussions, and funding for other diversity and inclusion efforts within their departments.
- While overall 78% of staff respondents agreed that there was a strong sense of community in their departments, a few staff members shared how this could be further enhanced by building events to bring everyone together, especially in departments where staff are spread out among different buildings. Staff members noted the importance of faculty participation in community events.

Results

Incivility and Accountability for Wrongdoing

Although the majority of staff were satisfied with their jobs (85% satisfied) and with the climate in their departments (83% satisfied), there were high levels of incivility reported by this group. 77% of staff respondents reported experiencing incivility committed by a relatively small number of individuals in their departments, as highlighted below.

- *Many people are perfectly decent people but there are a few whose behaviors impact the morale*

of the entire department.

- *Most of the difficult situations I have had have involved insensitive, unkind, discourteous, demanding, disrespectful, condescending faculty. But the VAST majority of faculty in the department do not fit that category-- quite the opposite.*
- *I feel that most staff members, and students, are welcoming, inclusive, and respectful. Many faculty members are as well, but some are not....*
- *There will always be a divide between tenured faculty and everyone else. I do feel that most people are respectful.*

From the Likert-type items we learned that 80% of staff respondents reported that the source of incivility was most often a faculty member. In the open-ended comments staff described incivility as emanating from faculty and others of higher job status, characterizing this as a downward flow of incivility to individuals with less status who then bore the costs of such behavior.

- *It is a very hierarchical environment, which is not necessarily the fault of any one individual, but is built into the power structure of the academic system at Harvard.*
- *The department's climate has become fairly toxic this past year. The hierarchical tendencies have become more entrenched and voices have been silenced as a result.*
- *The most egregious examples of behavior that make for a poorer climate in the department come from some of the senior faculty who sometimes show little respect for students and colleagues (including junior and senior ladder faculty). The department would likely have a much healthier climate if this were not an issue.*
- *Tenured faculty have much more freedom to express their opinions, etc. than do untenured or non-ladder faculty, for example, which is built into the institutional structure. Staff may feel well-respected by the majority of faculty, but not by all and there is little recourse to change that.*
- *No one is able to say "no" to faculty or to communicate what respectful treatment would look like. Staff are treated like servants. For the most part, students are very thoughtful and hardworking. However, students repeat the behaviors they see modeled by faculty.*
- *Poor treatment by faculty is a cultural thing and not unique to a single department. The questions here lead me to believe that there might be an attempt to solve or deal with that at the departmental level. This seems like something that needs to be addressed at both the university and department levels.*
- *Generally younger faculty are not as hierarchical as the old guard and are more collaborative and respectful with staff and have a more democratic approach in which I feel that my expertise is appreciated and I am listened to with respect.*

We also learned that 18% of staff respondents agreed that they felt like they were being treated differently due to their identity. The number of open-ended comments pertaining to this were small. Responses in this category included examples of staff being treated differently (most often negatively) due to their age, gender, race, sexual preference, and religion. These incidents were characterized as taking the form of microaggressions.

Moreover, a little less than half of staff (48%) respondents agreed that there is a clear process for resolving grievances surrounding incivility. For some, lack of a clear process is synonymous with inaction on the part of department leadership.

- *I think there will inevitably be power differentials in the department, and that's a source of*

tension. I think that tension could be lessened, however, if there were better channels of communication outside the department for talking about climate issues. Basically, what do I do if person X says something disrespectful to me? Right now, it feels unclear who to talk to, unless it's a Title IX violation.

- *Stronger leadership and guidance in dealing with issues of disrespect would be appreciated whether they come from inside the department or in the Division.*
- *I have experienced bullying in my department on multiple occasions and was ignored when I called it to the attention of the department leadership. I know that other staff members experienced bullying by the same person, who is still the departmental administrator. Some staff members have left their jobs because the unpredictable aggressive behavior of the administrator made the office environment extremely stressful. Complaints were made to HR, the Ombudsman, the union, the chair of the department, and university administration. I am unaware of any disciplinary action taken against this administrator. I am disappointed in the leadership in the department and in the university for allowing the bullying to continue unchecked. At times it seems the bullying was motivated or encouraged by people in higher leadership positions, in order to "whip the staff into shape."*

In order to reduce incivility within departments staff recommend the need for:

1. An improved accountability system

Staff described the desire for clear policies regarding standards of behavior for all community members (and specifically faculty), as well as a clear and safe channels for reporting them.

- *Add a clause to tenure contracts that addresses behaviors that effectively proclaim they don't care about any Harvard policy or any other way their bad behavior affects others.*
- *A clear system for reporting harassment.*
- *We need to do more to clarify our department's values. How should faculty, staff, and students interact--what are the expectations for these relationships? We also need to clarify how we think sensitive topics ought to be discussed, especially in the classroom.*

2. Workshops, trainings and other interventions for addressing incivility and its implications

A couple staff members recommended holding trainings on addressing difficult conversations and how to redirect them.

- *Outspoken individual faculty can have inordinate impact in a larger group setting. Faculty and staff alike could benefit from being better prepared to recognize and redirect these conversations.*

Another participant recommended a system for remediation (coaching) instead of punishment (i.e., removing someone from leadership opportunities) for bad behavior.

- *Tenured faculty are at the top of their field in scholarship, but they are prone to the same mistakes and judgment errors as other employees of the university. When regular employees of the university act in a disrespectful manner, bully, or otherwise transgress the written and unwritten rules of acceptable behavior in the workplace, there are clear channels of reporting grievances and opportunities for redress. When the behavior is not unlawful, but problematic nonetheless, employees may improve their behaviors and their difficult relationships with others*

through mediation, coaching, etc. A mechanism whereby faculty can learn of grievances being leveled against them and attempt to correct those behaviors that may cause distress does not seem to exist. Rather than blacklisting faculty from leadership opportunities, it would be healthier for the university to create opportunities for faculty to understand why some of their behaviors are perceived as problematic and to explore ways in which they might change those behaviors. For example, a council formed of esteemed retired faculty with experience leading departments with healthy climates might be tasked with "listening" to grievances that involve senior faculty and with working with those faculty, in a confidential and judgment-free setting, to address the behaviors that may cause harm to others.

3. Ongoing dialogue about climate in the department

One respondent noted the importance of maintaining ongoing conversations about climate in the department to reinforce and to sustain commitment to this cause.

- *I think we should continue having climate meetings at regular intervals, and reconnecting over a shared commitment to certain values and beliefs. I think it's important for long-time department members to be reminded of how these commitments need to be sustained, and it shows new department members that we as a community take these things seriously. It's kind of like marriage--you can't just marry someone you love and then sit back. You have to keep putting work into the relationship as you grow and change.*

Another staff member explained the importance of including staff in discussions of climate. This participant described how the topic of climate is mainly focused on how faculty and students feel. Staff are also part of the community but often feel ignored.

- *I think one of the biggest issues with climate is that staff are not generally given the impression that we're included in these discussions (either being a part of them or being discussed in them). When the word climate (in this context) is mentioned, it tends to focus on issues concerning faculty and students.*

Work Overload

Comments in this category related to staff feeling overworked, unsupported, underappreciated, and undercompensated. This has been especially true during the pandemic, during which staff report being asked to do more with less while trying to manage job demands with family and one's own mental health. Some described experiencing characteristics of burnout (physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion)¹.

- *I believe life/work balance and our lives outside of Harvard are not given the importance they should be given. Working parents, caring for sick family, and one's own mental health are things that I've been afraid to speak about to supervisors for fear I would not be given the opportunity to advance. It's proven true as I've been here for 7 years without any encouragement by supervisors to advance. I have, in the past, been told I should not expect to learn new skills since I have "too much" going on in my personal life. It seems like I am far from the ideal employee. It's clear to me that ideally, Harvard would like workers who were childless, single, healthy, and young. In other words, they should be uncomplicated and able to put Harvard first and foremost in their lives. The people I've seen advance give lots of uncompensated hours of work to*

¹ Freudenberger, H.J. (1974). "Staff burnout." *Journal of Social Issues*, 30, 159-165.

Harvard.

- *In general, I would say I feel severely overworked and under-compensated in my role. I am exhausted all the time, I don't have time to take adequate meal breaks, nor do I feel comfortable requesting sick leave or vacation days, as it's ultimately more stressful to fall behind on the endless treadmill of work.*
- *In many ways my department and Harvard as a whole has supported staff very well through the pandemic. But the last year also illustrated how much staff are expected to just "figure things out" on their own, without enough support from experts in the various areas we work in. This unnecessarily added to the unavoidable stresses we all faced this last year.*
- *All of my efforts to negotiate my pay have not been successful or welcome. I feel as though I am carrying the entire burden of responsibility for some really key functions of my unit. I'm making decisions and orchestrating enormous projects that should honestly be my supervisor's bailiwick, but I barely make enough money to afford my rent. My performance reviews so far have felt perfunctory and been empty of content, and I also don't feel as though there are meaningful opportunities for promotion or professional growth. My supervisor has often provided me with significant new projects that do allow me to expand my skillset, but they are only added on top of my pre-existing responsibilities, and come with no changes to my title or pay grade. I don't want to turn these opportunities down, because they interest me and allow me to learn new skills, but they leave me exhausted, overwhelmed, and feeling frankly invisible: my unit will present impressive and innovative new projects that I have put together either single-handedly or in collaboration with other extremely talented and scandalously underpaid junior colleagues, while our supervisor reaps the public praise. This past year has left me feeling unmotivated and defeated.*
- *Students, both undergraduates and graduates, can fail to view staff as valuable members of the department who have a variety of life experiences, both outside and inside the institution. This manifests itself in a discounting of the work that staff do to make the department the best it can be, or a lack of consideration for the challenges that staff face from other parts of the university while doing their jobs.*

Diversity and Inclusion

From the Likert-type items we learned that 92% of staff respondents reported that there is a demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion within their departments. However, some staff viewed this differently, with some making recommendations for how this could be enhanced, including: the need for a more diverse faculty and those in leadership positions, additional diversity trainings and discussions, and funding for other diversity and inclusion efforts within their departments. One open-ended comment commended the department for its recent commitment to diversity and inclusion efforts.

- *The department lacks diversity, particularly in positions of authority, and the culture reflects that, even in attempts to address this lack.*
- *More POC hires.*
- *The most important step is to increase diversity among faculty--not visiting faculty but senior and tenure-track faculty. We also need more diversity among staff.*
- *Perhaps the number one concern I have heard voiced in the department is about the need [for] senior and junior faculty not just visiting professors to be more diverse.*
- *If it were possible to work with faculty--especially those most in need of "reform"--in a workshop format or one-on-one or something to help them become more inclusive in their teaching and*

dealings with staff/students/other faculty, that would be great.

- *Inclusivity training would be helpful. Coaching should be provided to all departmental leadership.*
- *More open communication among faculty, students and staff, while respecting (and being curious about!) each other's' backgrounds, paths, starting points, as well as viewpoints, would help people feel included and valued.*
- *It would be helpful to have ongoing resources and support (financial, consultation, etc.) as we continue our diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and anti-racism ethos development.*
- *I find that the department has been very proactive in the formation of a number of groups to be responsive to weak areas related to diversity and inclusion. As outside responsibilities weigh in on the priority of such efforts, I feel that Harvard should continue to find ways to fund, support, and proactively encourage with targeted specificity the diversity and inclusion efforts of [REDACT, department name] which seems to want to be at the cutting edge of what could and should be done to improve diversity and inclusion at Harvard and within the department.*
- *Diversity and inclusion training have been encouraged and made available in my department. More than once I have seen a colleague publicly and gently corrected when they misuse a person's pronouns even if that person wasn't present. I have also seen leadership attempt to rephrase something if it seemed as though an idea might be misconstrued or could have been off base. I find the efforts towards diversity and inclusion in the department to be moderately to fully embraced by staff and faculty.*

Sense of Community

Finally, from the Likert-type items we learned that 78% of staff respondents agreed that there is a strong sense of community in their departments. A few comments revolved around how sense of community could be further enhanced, including building events to bring everyone together and especially in departments where staff are spread out among different buildings. These staff members noted the importance of faculty participation in community events.

- *Consistent notification, advertising, and access to events. Faculty participation in events. Greater number of events.*
- *We have no gathering place that can accommodate more of our members so, for example, we have to limit involvement in some of our events. We need more events that bring us together.*
- *It would feel more like a community if all or most of our professors participated in dpt events or gatherings.*