2024 Campus Climate Listening Sessions

Report

Renton Technical College

Contents

Introduction

Background

Senate Bill 5227

Senate Bill 5227 was passed by the state legislature and signed by the governor in 2021. Now [RCW 28B.10.147](#) requires that higher education institutions in Washington "conduct a campus climate assessment to understand the current state of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the learning, working, and living environment on campus for students, faculty, and staff." The assessment should be completed at least every five years, and results should be utilized to inform professional development. In addition, higher education institutions must "conduct annual listening and feedback sessions for diversity, equity, and inclusion for the entire campus community during periods between campus climate assessments."

Campus Climate and Data Equity Committee

The Campus Climate and Data Equity Committee was created under the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council (DEIC) to organize efforts to fulfill the RCW requirements. The team is led by the Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and the Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. Members of the committee include both faculty and staff.

Alignment with Previous Assessments

Following the May 2023 campus climate assessment, the committee focused its efforts on organizing its first listening session in alignment with RCW requirements. The committee utilized key findings and insights from the campus climate survey to shape the structure and organization of the listening session groups. It is important to note that the listening sessions also played a key role in shaping RTC's new Strategic Equity Plan.

Methodology

Based on the results of the 2023 campus climate survey, the listening session small groups were organized with a focus on the following population groups:

1. BIPOC employee experiences
2. BIPOC student experiences
3. Disability and accommodations experiences
4. Faculty experiences
5. LGBTQ+ experiences

A Zoom open forum was also conducted with all members from RTC invited, in addition to the small groups.

The small group listening sessions took place in person in February 2024, each lasting 90 minutes. These sessions were filled with volunteers who signed up on a first-come, first-served basis, with a maximum of 15 participants per group. In contrast, the all-college open forum, held in March 2024, had no participant limit and was conducted via the Zoom online platform, also lasting 90 minutes. All sessions were facilitated by the external partner, Be Culture.

Overtime-eligible employees were compensated for overtime, where applicable. Adjunct faculty received a one-time payment for their participation, while students were provided with a $50 gift card. Participation in all sessions was voluntary. Childcare and translation services were available upon request, and after-care mental health resources were offered following each session.

Key Findings by Be Culture

Below is a summary of findings produced by Be Culture.

Be Culture has offered the following observations for reflection and consideration in decision-making related to the campus climate and as a part of the Strategic Equity Planning process. The Listening Session process was not designed to produce statistically valid quantitative results; therefore, the observations are not intended to reflect responses or sentiments that were more frequent than others. Nor are they intended to be a comprehensive restatement of the full notes taken across all sessions.

The observations list is a result of Be Culture's assessment that the topics have particular relevance to the campus climate and Strategic Equity Planning process because they a) communicate perspectives from the margins of the system that are at risk of being overlooked, b) have the potential to have an outsize effect on decisions, and/or c) reflect significant opportunities to address issues related to culture and strategy at RTC.

- Respondents across all categories expressed high aspirations for the role of RTC and the potential impact of the mission, as they understood it.
- RTC has an internal reputation for being generally welcoming and familial.
- The perception that the organization is highly relational can be connected to concerns by some about favoritism being the way that many things get done at RTC, reflecting a lack of other reliable systems. This includes concerns that Cabinet doesn't always follow its own rules or maintain confidentiality.
- Some expressed low confidence in the Climate Survey and Listening Session process, expressing that they have been asked for input before, but issues had not been addressed. Faculty respondents seemed particularly likely to share this concern.
- There is widespread understanding that DEI is expressed as a priority at RTC, though there are wide-ranging opinions about the efficacy or appropriateness of current efforts. Some supporters of this work expressed desire for there to be greater coordination and accountability to advance the effort. Others expressed concerns about reverse discrimination and/or marginalization due to firm religious beliefs.
- Some BIPOC employees expressed specific concerns about trauma and DEI values being performative rather than operationalized in ways that address historical and current barriers.
- There is likely lack of clarity about where disability/accommodation issues, gender, LGBTQ+, language access, College & Career Pathways (CCP) faculty and students,

and other issues beyond race and ethnicity fit relative to race in RTC's DEI values. That lack of clarity extends to the role of "zero tolerance" expectations and accountability to DEI expectations at RTC. Some requested new processes for addressing these issues. Others offered that there are processes underway (i.e., the Assessment and Care Team, Bias Response Team) that have the possibility to be responsive to these concerns.

- The college would likely benefit from a structured methodology for addressing interpersonal conflict among faculty, staff and (potentially) students, consistent with the college's committee to DEI and/or restorative justice.
- Some staff expressed a need for clear feedback that is tied to overall expectations.
- Some faculty and staff expressed lack of clarity about expectations related to duties and workload, including the sustainability of current workload, being asked to help at the "last minute," and potential for burnout. Some expressed a feeling of being stretched thin with fewer people available to do necessary work than at other comparable sized colleges.
- There is a widespread desire/expectation that RTC provide a supportive environment for students, faculty, and staff, with varied understanding of what that means.
- Some respondents connected the siloed nature of the current organizational culture to the challenges they experienced.

Recommendations

Feedback received in 2024 indicates that individuals expect action to be taken based on their input, with RTC held accountable if no actions are implemented. There is a strong desire for clarity around expectations, a better understanding of what a supportive environment entails, and awareness of available resources. However, there is currently a lack of consistent understanding of these expectations across campus. The siloed structure of RTC's campus further complicates achieving this clarity. Additionally, it is important to remember that this is a campus climate assessment—a tool designed to gauge how individuals are feeling at RTC, encompassing fundamental aspects such as the campus environment and interactions with others. Therefore, the Campus Climate & Data Equity Committee recommends the following actions:

1. Continuously audit **spaces to ensure the environment is welcoming** and comfortable for students and employees. This may entail RTC investing in:
   a. Proper heating, cooling, and air ventilation of all classrooms, offices, and shared spaces.
   b. Staffing to ensure clean and organized spaces.
   c. Well-appointed furniture and culturally relevant décor.
   d. Equipment that meets the basic needs of classroom and/or office functions.
   e. Lighting in dark areas that promote safety and security.
   f. Hang out spaces for students to study, relax, or collaborate with others.
   g. Accessible spaces inside, outside, and online.
2. Facilitate **professional development for faculty** to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to foster a culturally responsive sense of belonging in the classroom. This may include:
   a. Regular trainings for faculty.
   b. Accountability system to ensure best practices are occurring.
   c. Awareness of resources to help students.
3. Create **clear**, **differentiated processes for handling interpersonal conflict vs. conduct vs. complaints** at RTC that are easy-to-follow. This may entail investment in:
   a. User-friendly systems or processes where individuals may confidentially report their concerns with information securely stored.
   b. Training to objectively handle conflict.
   c. Promotion and broad communication of the processes.
   d. Tracking mechanism to ensure resolution.

4. Review **policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs)** with an equity lens to clarify expectations. A commitment to the following would be necessary:
    a. A prioritization process to review critical policies to improve equity at RTC.
    b. Training on how to review policies and SOPs with an equity lens.
    c. Regular prompts to review policies and SOPs, particularly outdated ones.
    d. The creation of standardized documentation of SOPs.
    e. Communication of a clear path through the approval process.
5. "Relaunch" **RTC's internal SharePoint site** as a hub for communications, documents, and information. This may include:
    a. Training on how to navigate and use SharePoint for all employees.
    b. Branding of the site for a cohesive, user-friendly experience.
    c. Broad communication of the site and resources available.
6. Conduct **events or workshops to promote cross-collaboration and relationship-building** to break down siloes and communication barriers at work. This may include things like:
    a. Leadership workshops
    b. Peer-to-peer mentoring
    c. Onboarding buddies/cohorts
    d. Affinity groups

Conclusion

While the recommendations presented by the committee are just a few, it is important to acknowledge that some action items are new, while others have been underway for some time and are still evolving. For instance, Campus Security has enhanced lighting and installed cameras across multiple buildings to ensure a safer environment. Several spaces, such as the first floor of Building J and Building D, have been or are being remodeled to create a more welcoming atmosphere for students. Affinity groups for both students and employees have been active for years, and events like college potlucks and leadership retreats continue to foster relationship-building and clarify expectations. These are significant achievements that RTC should continue to support. However, it is clear that further work is needed to consistently improve the campus climate at RTC.