An Assessment of Campus Climate among Hispanic & Women STEM Faculty Using the Psychologically Healthy Workplace Framework: A Qualitative Study

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Introduction

An Assessment of Campus Climate among Hispanic & Women STEM Faculty Using the Psychologically Healthy Workplace Framework: A Qualitative Study was designed to capture the experiences and perceptions about the workplace environment (climate) held by Hispanic and women faculty in a variety of STEM departments across four colleges at The University of Texas – Pan American. The semi-structured interviews asked respondents 15 open-ended questions that align with the five areas of the psychologically healthy workplace framework: involvement, work-life balance, growth and development, health and safety, and recognition. This study provides a baseline for our 5-year NSF Advance Institutional Transformation grant. Engaging in systematic data collection and analysis will help recognize the existing strengths and limitations of the current workplace climate; the goal is to provide reliable and valid information to help faculty and administrators develop a cohesive plan to benefit all faculty at the University.

Methods

Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted by both PIs between April – September 2013. We invited all full-time (tenured, tenure-track, and lecturer) women faculty across racial and ethnic groups in STEM (we employed the NSF definition of STEM fields which included the social and behavioral sciences and economics) and all full-time (tenured, tenure-track, and lecturer) Hispanic men in STEM.

- The initial invitation was sent via email in March 2013 to 88 faculty members from the College of Engineering and Computer Science, College of Science and Math, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and College of Business Administration (Economics).

- A reminder invitation was sent out one week later, and faculty who did not respond to either electronic invitation were contacted by telephone and invited to participate.

- The overall response rate was 57% (or 50 interviews out of a possible 88). 57% of women (and 60% Hispanic women) faculty accepted the invitation to participate, while 61% of men accepted the invitation. Of those 38 faculty who were recruited but not interviewed (13 men and 25 women), 11 (29%) opted not to participate while the other 27 never responded to our invitations or calls.

- Interviews took place in campus offices or a location selected by the interviewee. Participants were provided an Informed Consent form previously approved by the UTPA

Institutional Review Board. A short paper and pencil pre-interview survey of basic socio-demographic data preceded the face-to-face interviews. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to over 3 hours in length. 48 of 50 interviews were recorded for later annotation. Two participants opted not to have their interviews recorded so notes were taken during those interviews.

Because many faculty at UTPA are easily identifiable in this work environment, some combination of variables in this study **could** be identifying (for example, the combination of department and gender, or school and race/ethnicity). Therefore to protect the identity of study participants, as per the guiding rules of the IRB, results will only be reported at the aggregated level that allows for meaningful comparisons between groups but not identification of individuals. It is important to note that many participants expressed a general feeling of hesitation about providing full disclosure evidenced by "off the record" comments and repeated inquiries about the confidential and anonymous nature of the data being collected throughout the interview process. Concerns about retribution were voiced by some participants even though the procedures approved in IRB # 2013-001-01 do not allow the PIs to identify (directly or indirectly) any individual participant.

The primary outcomes of interest center on personal experiences at UTPA in terms of relationships with colleagues, administrators, and students, as well as the five areas of the psychologically healthy workplace framework: involvement, work-life balance, growth and development, health and safety, and recognition.

Characteristics of Faculty Respondents

- 60% of respondents were women and 40% were men.
- The female:male ratio in the STEM fields included in this study was 55:170; among Hispanic faculty in STEM the female:male ratio in the STEM fields included in this study was 15:33. Of Latino-origin participants in this study, about 41% were foreign-born while 59% were U.S. born. Latino-origin men were far more likely to be foreign born than their female counterparts.
- 20% of all respondents were full-time lecturers, 30% were tenure-track faculty, and 50% were tenured. 50% of both male and female faculty respondents are tenured.

Overview of Perceptions of Campus Climate

The data reported in this executive summary are *qualitative* data—they are the expressed views and opinions of faculty working at UTPA in STEM fields. Data is in the form of words and the method is inductive or based on reason that evaluates general propositions that are derived from specific examples.

Faculty expressed the full range of satisfaction with climate but overall campus climate is described in neutral to somewhat negative terms. In general, participants responded by talking about the campus climate and their personal experiences at the University in positive ways. Respondents initially indicated that "things are or have been good," however as many respondents reflected and elaborated through the course of the interview they, sometimes reluctantly, voiced more negative perceptions and experiences. Most females in our study could point to at least one example where they or someone they knew experienced unequal treatment on the basis of gender and/or ethnicity, or both. Major concerns related to climate issues included:

- The relative openness of the power structure in departments, specifically the distribution of power and decision-making in the hands of a few key faculty members, versus a more equal distribution regardless of the formal leadership titles. For instance, some respondents indicated that there is hostility toward those faculty who want to widen the circle of power to be more inclusive. In other words respondents expressed that opposition towards sharing power more broadly across the faculty exists in some departments.
- The path that needs to be pursued to address departmental climate issues seems to be unclear to some we interviewed. For example, when do you use the chain of command within your academic unit versus involving the compliance office or the EEOC office or the faculty union? This lack of clarity contributes to dissatisfaction.
- Some doubt that institutional change is coming and/or possible. Those faculty and administrators seen as causing problems or being unresponsive to concerns are perceived as not being held accountable. They percive a lack of public consequences for "bad behavior."

- There are concerns about the promotion of gender equity issues in academia in general and the Advance grant initiatives specifically. Some male respondents expressed concern that the focus on the hiring and retention of female faculty trades quality and rigor for diversity, while women respondents mentioned their concern that some male colleagues hold this belief. Others expressed the urgent need for faculty training programs for search committees that would address the many persistent misperceptions about hiring procedures that attempt to increase women and minority faculty in academia and STEM fields specifically.

Faculty Involvement

This component aims to examine the perceptions of STEM faculty about the efforts to involve them on campus in meaningful ways.[1] With a few exceptions, most faculty participants described their interaction with administrators outside their departments as "positive" or at least "neutral." Nevertheless, almost all respondents answered similarly to the question "Do you think there ought to be more people like you in leadership positions at UTPA?" and think there ought to be more people "like them" in leadership positions. A clear trend expressing a desire for more gender and other kinds of diversity in the leadership ranks emerged from the data. This sentiment was specifically expressed among the women we interviewed. When comparing gender across Hispanics only (both US and foreign born), ethnicity was also an important factor for most women and a small portion of men we interviewed.

At the department level, there was significant variance in people's experiences. Some respondents indicated that their departmental climate was generally collegial and there was a reasonable distribution of power and resources, and workload across various faculty and leadership constituencies. These departments tended to be smaller and were perceived as able to negotiate concerns/issues locally, as well as being responsive to faculty needs (flexible class scheduling, family-friendly work environment, and the like). Faculty in these departments expressed a sense of trust in the department leadership and peers. These instances, however, are in the minority.

A second perspective of departmental climate issues is one of feeling that the workplace is civil and professional but some interviewed faculty feel disconnected and isolated. In these departments, faculty describe a climate in which peer interactions are largely superficial, and

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[1] See http://www.apaexcellence.org/resources/creatingahealthyworkplace/employeeinvolvement/

decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a select few faculty (which may or may not include the department chair) who are perceived as acting in the best interest of the department but without input from the broader faculty base in the department. These decision makers are often not responsive to individual faculty needs. In some cases, there is recognition that department chairs have an increasingly high workload and departmental offices are understaffed. This second category represents the largest group of faculty respondents.

Another departmental climate perspective that was described by some faculty participants is one of dysfunction and conflict. In these cases, faculty voiced clear distrust of peers and departmental administrators, and talked about overt inequity in the distribution of workload, power and resources. Faculty report hostility and incivility during everyday interactions, fear of retribution for voicing concerns, and anxiety about reporting problems up the chain of command. Faculty in these departments described department chairs as inflexible and autocratic or they point to small groups of faculty (that may or may not include the department chair) that exert inappropriate levels of power. Faculty we interviewed who are outside of these departments expressed concern that these negative environments could ripple out beyond departmental boundaries and across colleges.

Overall, these data underscore the importance of the current efforts to improve departmental climate and culture to enhance faculty success and retention.

Finally, faculty interactions with students were reportedly very positive, with minimal exception. Almost uniformly across demographic distinctions, faculty discussed a strong connection with students at the university.

Work-Life Balance

"Programs and policies that facilitate work-life balance acknowledge that employees have responsibilities and lives outside of work and help individuals better manage these multiple demands. Conflict between work and other life responsibilities can diminish the quality of both work and home life for employees, which in turn can affect organizational outcomes such as productivity, absenteeism, and turnover. Efforts to help employees improve work-life balance can improve morale, increase job satisfaction and strengthen employees' commitment to the organization…"[2]

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[2] http://www.apaexcellence.org/resources/creatingahealthyworkplace/worklifebalance/

According to our respondents the current climate, generally speaking, does not allow for work-life balance or integration. Most interviewed talked about having to sacrifice one or the other in an attempt to juggle their responsibilities and demands. While some departments are relatively family-friendly, at the institutional level there is a need for policy development and implementation. Some respondents were very surprised to find out that parental paid leave, flexible work schedule, spousal hiring, and similar family-friendly policies do not exist at this institution. Others who were aware of the lack of policies expressed the need for extensive policy changes and were unable to prioritize which of the policies would be most important because they viewed all of these needs as crucial to creating a psychologically healthy workplace. Some faculty expressed that the lack of policy on these issues at the university level creates a climate where individuals in similar circumstances receive different outcomes, depending on individual-level decision-making at the department and college levels. Some respondents concluded that this can lead to resentment and lack of trust among faculty and administrators.

Some faculty reported having fairly family-friendly climates in their departments. For example, they talked about feeling comfortable bringing their child/ren to work, requesting family-friendly teaching schedules, and favorable circumstances for dual career families. However, relatively more respondents communicated feelings of isolation within their departments, and across campus. They experienced a workplace climate that is not accommodating to faculty with families. These faculty talk about having small, disparate pockets of allies, if at all. A dominant theme from our interviews is that faculty do not feel a strong sense of community on campus, particularly faculty with school-aged children.

Both men and women talked about the need for a family-friendly workplace climate and policies. The lack of community at the university exacerbates existing barriers to work-life integration, particularly for parents of young children. Both male and female faculty report being the parent with the most flexible work schedule, as faculty, and are often responsible for picking up and dropping off children at school, caring for sick children and parents, etc. Despite this similarity in tasks, there remains a perception that talking about these familial responsibilities will hurt female faculty disproportionately and reinforce gender stereotypes and biases among their colleagues. Finally, a minority of respondents expressed that while there are women in leadership positions at the University, many of these women do not have young children.

While few respondents mentioned social bonds with colleagues from campus, those faculty who are most satisfied with life at UTPA and in the region have created social bonds outside the university with family, churches, through athletics or parent networks. These outlets can serve to build community and provide much needed support/assistance as faculty attempt to integrate and settle in the area.

One of the questions posed to participants in our study was how to make UTPA a destination institution for women and Hispanic faculty. The general view was to consciously develop our brand as a "family-friendly" institution. Respondents talked about how these policies could be used as recruitment tools.

Faculty Growth and Development

"Opportunities for growth and development help employees expand their knowledge, skills and abilities, and apply the competencies they have gained to new situations. The opportunity to gain new skills and experiences can increase employee motivation and job satisfaction and help workers more effectively manage job stress….By providing opportunities for growth and development, organizations can improve the quality of their employees' work experience and realize the benefits of developing workers to their full potential."[3]

Most faculty respondents, across demographics, could point to examples of peer support in the form of general guidance. Respondents specifically mentioned colleagues reading drafts of manuscripts and/or grants, dealing with teaching and students interactions (sharing syllabi, etc.), and participating in new faculty orientation programs (at university and college levels). Some talked about being encouraged to become leaders, getting leadership training through programs like LEAP or Advance.

Most respondents felt a general sense of support for tenure and promotion success but found it difficult to point to particular examples of support they received in this area. When specifically asked, "How would you describe the male and female differences in terms of faculty members achieving tenure and/or promotion in the STEM disciplines? Do you have the impression there are gender differences by ethnicity?" many but not all, male respondents expressed either 1) full confidence in the idea that the tenure and promotion review processes are solidly based in a system of merit, and that socio-demographic variables such as race/ethnicity and/or gender do not play a role in tenure and promotion decision in contemporary times or; 2)

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[3] http://www.apaexcellence.org/resources/creatingahealthyworkplace/employeegrowth/

that they had not considered the possibility of different treatment by gender of ethnicity prior to the interview. Most women respondents, alternatively, talked about their perception that gender/ethnic issues were at play in tenure and promotion review. A significant proportion of the women, and some men, we interviewed provided specific examples of inappropriate comments made by colleagues about gender/ethnicity (explicit bias) or comments that reflect unconscious bias and stereotypical view of women and minorities (implicit bias). For example, some recounted incidents where colleagues questioned the wisdom of hiring women faculty because they are likely to become distracted by marriage, motherhood, or other familial responsibilities or that women who have spouses with comfortable incomes do not need to work.

Health and Safety

"Health and safety efforts include a wide variety of workplace practices that can help employees improve their physical and mental health, reduce health risks, and manage stress effectively…By investing in the health and safety of their employees, organizations may benefit from greater productivity and reductions in healthcare costs, absenteeism and accident/injury rates."[4]

To examine issues of health and safety we asked respondents what kinds of activities they engage in to deal with their own personal wellness. This is a major concern for the respondents, most expressed serious time constraints to appropriately address their personal wellness at all. Many expressed that the professional and personal demands they face precluded a healthy lifestyle. The lack of available facilities on campus was mentioned as a significant barrier to improving personal wellness. For example some faculty expressed concern about exercising and engaging in associated gym activities with their students at the Wellness & Recreational Sports Complex (WRSC). Others consider the WRSC membership fees to be prohibitive, and the limited hours at the alternative gym facilities in HPE II are barriers. Many faculty also mentioned the lack of pedestrian and biking friendly weather and infrastructure in the local area as problematic.

It is essential to note in this section on health, that recounting experiences of workplace climate issues resulted in a few cases of physical distress observed by the interviewers such as vomiting, crying, stomach pain and needing to stop and/or interrupt the interview. While these

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[4] http://www.apaexcellence.org/resources/creatingahealthyworkplace/healthandsafety/

reactions occurred in only a few cases, they may serve to illustrate the seriousness of these issues for at least these faculty.

Some faculty have adopted strategies for personal wellness such as maintaining a strict boundary between work and personal time, setting time limits throughout the day, or choosing research vs. teaching days. Health and safety issue are intertwined with the larger work-life integration component and will be explored more directly in year 3.

Recognition

"Employee recognition efforts reward employees both individually and collectively for their contributions to the organization. Recognition can take various forms, formal and informal, monetary and non-monetary. By acknowledging employee efforts and making them feel valued and appreciated, organizations can increase employee satisfaction, morale, and self-esteem...'[5]

The overarching concern across disciplines, gender, and other cleavages is that of being generally under-resourced. This includes salaries, staff support, lab facilities and support, start-up packages, travel and research funding, and an overabundance of opportunities for service. Faculty respondents discussed the essential need for at least some of these resources to be improved. There is a perception that salaries at this institution are not competitive and that the expectations for research productivity are not aligned with the requisite teaching and service responsibilities and available funding. Respondents acknowledged the constraints within which the university must operate, but continue to be frustrated by the incremental improvements being made.

While respondents acknowledge the availability of some limited resources and awards such as the Excellence Awards, FRC, FDC, URI, mini-stipends for junior travel across the institution, there is a feeling that the time that is needed to apply for all of these various small funding opportunities diverts valuable time and energy away from larger research projects and external funding opportunities, and even if successful are limited in impact. In other words, some faculty feel that they are acknowledged through these various programs, however that the costs associated with applying for these initiatives outweigh potential benefits.

There are mixed reports from faculty about their being recognized for accomplishments in their departments. For females, particularly Latinas, being recognized as a competent colleague and team player can backfire. The "reward" for being recognized is intense demands

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[5] http://www.apaexcellence.org/resources/creatingahealthyworkplace/employeerecognition/

in the areas of teaching and service by administrators, peers and students. Further, many of these service requests come without the accompanying power and/or titles to make decisions, release time, or monetary compensation. While some talked about service being pitched to them as opportunity to develop leadership skills, many felt overwhelmed and that these service demands detracted from primary research and career goals, as well as further complicated the life-work balance/integration. The reaction to this situation may include: 1) leaving UTPA, 2) withdrawing from university and departmental involvement over time, 3) continuing along the same path because of economic constraints, 4) making it work and being successful. The general feeling is that option #4 is unlikely and that the other options are not sustainable and can ultimately lead to professional and personal failures. Several interviewees, regardless of gender and race/ethnicity, mentioned that service overload and burnout lead them to consider jobs elsewhere. This is a serious issue for our institution to address because it has implications for retention.

Alternatively, there is also a feeling among a few respondents that women, particularly Latinas, receive *undue* recognition, or at least question/doubt exists about their actual merit/contributions. This has implications for the goals of the NSF grant at UTPA because perceptions exist that increasing the presence of women, and Latinas specifically, implies preferential treatment that is unwarranted. Sustained faculty training is needed to improve search, review, and evaluation procedures and address these notions of diversity.

Two final concerns were raised in this component. First, respondents mentioned a need for student professionalization in terms of interacting with faculty and using appropriate titles. For instance, respondents talked about fairly consistent difference in treatment by students of male and female faculty. Respondents noted the use of "Miss" or "Mrs." to address female faculty while they use "Dr." or "Professor" to address male faculty. Many women faculty talked about the efforts they undertook to educate students about this issue, and some felt this undermines their authority and expertise in the classroom. This is further complicated, at times, by similar behavior exhibited by peers in front of students. The second concern is that leadership and committee composition is not representative or adequately monitored. Some questioned who oversees whether committees and/or leadership roles are filled with a diverse set of faculty. For example, there seem to be a number of committees appointed over time that consist of only men, or a small subset of the same faculty time and time again.

Recommendations

Many of the climate issues that emerged from this study are areas of focus for the Advance grant at UTPA. For example, the Advance grant leadership team includes a policy component to deal with the lack of family-friendly workplace policies raised by respondents. The success of this component will be essential to institutional transformation at UTPA. Also, Advance established a recruitment component that has begun to address issues around faculty hiring and search committee training. Many faculty respondents acknowledged the success of these initiatives. However, there is an underlying concern that while increasing the numbers of women and Hispanic faculty at the university is vital to Advance's mission and can create a critical mass necessary for change, numbers alone will not improve the campus climate without broader cultural shifts within the institution.

The Advance grant also includes an education and empowerment component that has begun to address issues around leadership training and building a community for female faculty. Faculty respondents are aware of some of the results of this component, such as the development of the Women's Faculty Network. Our results suggest these initiatives need to continue to effect change at the institution. Anchoring diversity training to the institution's philosophy by embedding it into a variety of strategic places and faculty development events, could lead to diversity concerns being well-integrated into the institutional culture.

There is a significant need to understand the essential role that department chairs play in creating successful environments for faculty. Ensuring that department chairs have the necessary skills, resources, and support to perform this critical position and are effective once in the position is key to transforming UTPA's campus climate. A fuller set of recommendations will be presented in the forthcoming detailed report.

NSF ADVANCE Project: Campus Climate: A Qualitative Study of STEM Faculty (T1)

Pre-Interview (T1) Survey

Please complete this questionnaire prior to participating in your focus group today. Your answers are anonymous and all data will remain confidential.

1. Gender: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Race (circle all that apply): American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White
3: If applicable, what is your Hispanic/Latino/a origin? _____
4. Years employed in academia: _____
5. Years employed at UTPA: _____
6. Academic rank (Circle one): Full professor   Associate professor   Assistant Professor
          Lecturer   Adjunct/part-time/emergency hire
7. Where did you receive your PhD (or highest degree earned): _____
8. Place of birth (indicate state if outside Texas; region if inside Texas): _____. If your place of birth is different from where you grew up and were socialized, please indicate the latter as well: _____
9. Were you a first generation college student when you entered higher education?   Yes   _____ No_____
10. Have you ever attended a Hispanic-serving institution as a student at the undergraduate or graduate level?   Yes _____   No _____
11. Growing up, would you say your household earned (please check the correct category)
          _____Less than $10,000
          _____$10,000 to $14,999
          _____$15,000 to $24,999
          _____$25,000 to $49,999
          _____$50,000 to $99,999
          _____Over $100,000

12. Currently, would you say your household earns
          _____Less than $10,000
          _____$10,000 to $14,999
          _____$15,000 to $24,999
          _____$25,000 to $49,999
          _____$50,000 to $99,999
          _____Over $100,000

13. If you took an unpaid leave, could your household survive economically? Yes _____   No _____

14. Could you easily name 10 people in your professional network at UTPA? (examples would include people who provide you with information to help you do your work, people who help you think about complex problems posed by your work, or people who can strategize with you about your career)?
    If not 10, how many can you identify? _____

15. Could you easily name 10 people in your professional network in your field?
    If not 10, how many can you identify? _____

16. Could you easily name 10 people in your personal social network who support you outside of your professional responsibilities?
    If not 10, how many can you identify? _____

17. Have these social networks helped you with work/life and workplace interactions?
Strongly agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

NSF ADVANCE: The Campus Climate: A Qualitative Study of STEM Faculty (T1) Interview Questions

1. How would you describe the campus climate at UTPA for you personally? Is the department level better, worse, or the same than university level for you personally?

2. How would you describe the climate for [interviewee's racial and gender identifiers— Latina, Latino, or non-Hispanic women] faculty members and leaders in the STEM fields, defined by NSF as including the Social, Behavioral, Economic, and Natural Sciences, along with Technology, Engineering, and Math?

3. How would you describe the male and female differences in terms of faculty members achieving tenure and/or promotion in the STEM disciplines?   Do you have the impression there are gender differences by ethnicity?

4. Can you give an example of how your college, department, or faculty colleagues have *helped you become a campus leader/tenured faculty member*?

5. Can you give an example or two of how your college, department, or faculty colleagues have *supported and allowed you to develop to your fullest potential*?

6. Do you feel that your views and positions are adequately represented by the current leadership at UTPA?

7. Do you think there ought to be more people like you in leadership positions at UTPA?
   Probe: "like you" means whatever it means to you

8. In your opinion, how can UTPA create a climate that makes UTPA a "destination institution" for female faculty members in general? What about Hispanic female faculty?

9. What strategies have you developed to help you deal with work/life and workplace interactions?

10. What work/life issues (parents, single moms, caring for aging parents, personal wellness, partner benefits, spousal hires) are most important to you?

11. Can you give an example of a work/life conflict you have experienced and describe how you managed it at UTPA?

12. How would you describe your interaction/treatment by *administrators* at UTPA? Would you say that your gender and/or ethnicity impact(s) that treatment/interaction in any way? Please explain how.

13. How would you describe your interaction/treatment by your *peers/colleagues* at UTPA? Would you say that your gender and/or ethnicity impact(s) that treatment/interaction in any way? Please explain how.

14. How would you describe your interaction/treatment by *students* at UTPA? Would you say that your gender and/or ethnicity impact(s) that treatment/interaction in any way? Please explain how.

15. Is there anything you would like to add?