2026 Campus Climate Survey Report

Findings from the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Campus Climate Survey

Executive Summary

Sonoma State University administered the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Campus Climate Survey to students and employees in April 2026. A total of 1,120 members of the campus community participated. The survey assessed perceptions of campus climate for diversity and equity, institutional commitment, experiences with insensitive or disparaging remarks, discrimination and harassment, the impact of diversity-related activities, and interactions with people from different backgrounds. Sonoma State also included supplemental questions addressing institutional priorities.

Overall, students reported more positive perceptions of campus climate than employees. Seventy-four percent of students and 60% of employees rated the overall campus climate positively, while 66% of students and 61% of employees rated their own sense of belonging/community positively. Both students and employees rated their own sense of belonging/community more positively than the sense of belonging/community experienced by the campus community as a whole.

Perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity and equity were mixed and were consistently lower among employees than students. Fifty-nine percent of students and 52% of employees agreed that senior leadership demonstrates a commitment to diversity and equity. The largest student-employee difference within these measures concerned whether the campus is free from identity-related tensions, with 59% of students and 31% of employees agreeing.

Insensitive or disparaging remarks related to political affiliation or views were the most frequently reported type of negative remark, reported by 51% of students and 61% of employees. Employees also reported experiencing discrimination or harassment at a higher rate than students (24% compared with 15%).

Additional analyses examined whether selected survey results differed by race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Broad ratings of overall campus climate were generally similar across demographic groups, but differences emerged on more specific measures of institutional support and lived experience. LGBQ+ respondents reported the most consistent pattern of less favorable responses across these measures. Nonbinary respondents reported higher levels of gender-related disparaging remarks and discrimination or harassment, while respondents identifying with multiple races/ethnicities reported less favorable experiences on several measures.

Campus activities addressing diversity and equity were generally associated with increased support for diversity and equity among respondents. Activities related to racial/ethnic issues were reported as increasing support among 69% of students and 75% of employees. Respondents also reported frequent interaction with people from different backgrounds and generally high levels of comfort with those interactions, although comfort interacting with people who hold different political views was substantially lower than for most other groups.

Responses to Sonoma State's supplemental questions identified several areas of strength. More than three-quarters of students agreed that Sonoma State demonstrates a commitment to serving historically underserved students as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, provides effective support for basic needs, and uses teaching practices that support students from diverse backgrounds. The highest level of agreement was for the availability of welcoming spaces where students can gather, study, and build community. Lower levels of agreement were reported regarding Sonoma State's responsiveness to concerns about equity and the availability of information about resources for undocumented students.

Comparisons with other Master's Colleges and Universities indicate that Sonoma State's largest differences were concentrated among particular groups rather than across respondents overall. Several employee groups reported less positive perceptions of campus climate and institutional support than did their counterparts at other institutions, and some political, religious, and racial/ethnic subgroups showed comparatively large differences on selected measures. These findings should be interpreted in light of differences in respondent composition across institutions and the relatively small number of Sonoma State respondents in some subgroups.

Survey Administration and Respondent Characteristics

Sonoma State University distributed the HEDS Campus Climate Survey to employees and students in April 2026. A total of 1,120 members of the campus community participated, representing an overall response rate of 19%.

Table 1. Survey Participation

Population	Participants	Eligible Population	Response Rate
Employees (staff, faculty, administrators)	308	1,174	26%
Students	584	4,657	12%
Unknown (did not self-identify primary role)	228	0	--
Total	1,120	5,831	19%

Percentages in the following tables are based on respondents who answered each survey item.

Table 2. Respondents by Campus Role

Campus Role	Number	Percent
Undergraduate Student	535	59.4%
Graduate Student	49	5.4%
Faculty	98	10.9%
Staff	169	18.8%
Administrator	41	4.6%
Other	8	0.9%
Total Respondents	900	100.0%

Table 3. Respondents by Gender Identity

Gender Identity	Number	Percent
Woman	580	65.9%
Man	264	30.0%
Nonbinary	36	4.1%
Total Respondents	880	100.0%

Table 4. Respondents by Race and Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percent
White	426	49.4%
Hispanic or Latino	195	22.6%
Multiple Races/Ethnicities	133	15.4%
Asian	44	5.1%
Black or African American	24	2.8%
All Other Races/Ethnicities*	23	2.7%
International	17	2.0%
Total Respondents	862	100.0%

Note: Includes respondents who chose one of the following: American Indian or Alaska Native, Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or "Some other race or ethnicity: (fill in)."

Table 5. Respondents by Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	Number	Percent
Heterosexual	590	70.1%
LGBQ+	252	29.9%
Total Respondents	842	100.0%

Note: The "LGBQ+" category includes respondents who selected one of the following response options: Asexual, Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, Pansexual, Queer, Questioning, or Prefer to self-describe: (fill in). HEDS uses "LGBQ+" and not "LGBTQ+" as the label for this group as HEDS does not factor in whether respondents identified as transgender in Question 21. HEDS labeled respondents as "Straight (Heterosexual)" if they selected that option.

Summary of Respondent Characteristics

- 1,120 respondents participated.
- 65% of respondents were students and 35% were employees.
- 66% of respondents identified as women, 30% as men, and 4% as nonbinary.
- 30% identified as LGBQ+.

Subgroup Analysis of Survey Results

The descriptive results presented in this report, including comparisons between students and employees, are based on analyses provided by HEDS. HEDS also provided the comparison results between Sonoma State respondents and respondents at other Master's Colleges and Universities.

To further examine differences within the Sonoma State respondent population, Institutional Effectiveness conducted additional analyses using the survey data file provided by HEDS. These analyses examined selected outcomes by race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation, with a focus on overall campus climate, institutional support for diversity and equity, exposure to insensitive or disparaging remarks, experiences of discrimination or harassment, and selected Sonoma State supplemental questions. These analyses were intended to identify patterns that may not appear in overall results or in broad student/employee comparisons.

Race/ethnicity comparisons included respondents identifying as White, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, or multiple races/ethnicities. Respondents classified as International or All Other Races/Ethnicities were not included in the race/ethnicity significance tests. Because some demographic groups included relatively small numbers of respondents, subgroup findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Findings from these analyses are incorporated throughout the report and summarized later in **Differences Across Demographic Groups**.

HEDS Campus Climate Survey Dimensions

Campus Climate for Diversity and Equity

This section summarizes students' and employees' perceptions of campus climate for diversity and equity.

Table 6. Positive Perceptions of Campus Climate

Measure	Students	Employees
Overall campus climate	74.1%	60.0%
Campus environment regarding diversity	68.5%	57.6%
Your sense of belonging/community	66.2%	60.8%
All members' sense of belonging/community	57.1%	38.0%

- 74% of students and 60% of employees rated the overall campus climate positively.
- 68.5% of students and 58% of employees rated the campus environment regarding diversity positively.
- Both students and employees rated their own sense of belonging/community more positively than the sense of belonging/community experienced by the campus community as a whole.

Additional analyses found relatively few demographic differences in broad ratings of campus climate. Overall campus climate ratings did not differ significantly by race/ethnicity or gender identity. LGBQ+ respondents rated the overall campus climate somewhat less positively than heterosexual respondents, although this difference was not statistically significant. LGBQ+ respondents did, however, report significantly less positive perceptions on the broader Campus Climate for Diversity and Equity Indicator.

Institutional Commitment

This section summarizes respondents' perceptions of institutional commitment to diversity and equity.

Table 7. Agreement with Institutional Commitment Measures

Measure	Students	Employees
Campus free from identity-related tensions	58.8%	31.0%
Recruitment of historically marginalized groups is a priority	56.1%	50.7%
Retention of historically marginalized groups is a priority	54.7%	47.1%
Senior leadership commitment to diversity and equity	59.5%	52.3%

- 60% of students and 52% of employees agreed that senior leadership demonstrates a commitment to diversity and equity.
- 59% of students and 31% of employees agreed that the campus is free from identity-related tensions.
- Employees reported lower agreement than students across all institutional commitment measures.

Differences across demographic groups were more apparent on measures of institutional commitment than on overall campus climate. Respondents identifying with multiple races/ethnicities reported less positive perceptions on several measures of institutional support, particularly regarding recruitment and retention of historically marginalized groups. Nonbinary respondents rated senior leadership's commitment to diversity and equity less positively than men.

The most consistent differences were associated with sexual orientation. LGBQ+ respondents reported less positive perceptions than heterosexual respondents on the overall Institutional Support for Diversity and Equity Indicator and on each of its four component measures. The largest differences concerned retention of historically marginalized students, faculty, and staff and senior leadership's commitment to diversity and equity.

Experiences with Negative Remarks

This section summarizes how often students and employees heard insensitive or disparaging remarks about

different identities.

Table 8. Heard Insensitive or Disparaging Remarks Sometimes, Often, or Very Often

Topic of Remark	Students	Employees
Political affiliation/view	50.6%	61.0%
Age/generation	26.4%	38.2%
Gender/gender identity	26.1%	23.0%
Race/ethnicity	24.9%	20.3%
Sexual orientation	24.6%	16.3%
Religious affiliation	23.0%	22.3%

- Sixty-one percent of employee respondents and almost 51% of student respondents reported hearing insensitive or disparaging remarks about political affiliation/view.
- Over 38% of employees reported hearing insensitive or disparaging remarks about age or generation.
- About one-quarter of student respondents reported hearing insensitive or disparaging remarks about age/generation, gender/gender identity, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Patterns of exposure to negative remarks also differed across some demographic groups. Respondents identifying with multiple races/ethnicities reported hearing race/ethnicity-related and gender-related disparaging remarks more frequently than White and Hispanic/Latino respondents. They also reported hearing religion-related remarks more frequently than Hispanic/Latino respondents.

Nonbinary respondents reported hearing gender- or gender identity-related disparaging remarks more frequently than both men and women. LGBQ+ respondents reported hearing disparaging remarks about both sexual orientation and gender/gender identity more frequently than heterosexual respondents. These were among the more pronounced subgroup differences identified in the analysis.

Experiences with Discrimination and Harassment

This section summarizes students' and employees' reported experiences with discrimination or harassment.

Table 9. Experienced Discrimination or Harassment

Measure	Students	Employees
Experienced discrimination or harassment	14.8%	23.8%

- Employees reported experiencing discrimination or harassment at a higher rate than students (24% vs 15%).

Reported experiences of discrimination or harassment did not differ significantly by race/ethnicity. Differences

were evident, however, by gender identity and sexual orientation. Thirty-six percent of nonbinary respondents reported having experienced discrimination or harassment, compared with 19% of women and 13% of men. Among LGBQ+ respondents, 22% reported discrimination or harassment, compared with 15% of heterosexual respondents.

Impact of Campus Activities

This section summarizes the extent to which selected activities increased respondents' support for diversity and equity.

Table 10. Activities That Somewhat or Greatly Increased Support for Diversity and Equity

Activity	Students	Employees
Racial/ethnic issues	68.8%	75.1%
Gender/gender identity issues	63.6%	69.2%
Sexual orientation issues	62.3%	64.8%
Disability issues	58.9%	67.7%
Immigration issues	65.3%	67.2%

- Activities related to racial/ethnic issues increased support for diversity and equity among students (69%) and employees (75%).
- Employees were more likely than students to report increased support associated with several types of activities, including those addressing race/ethnicity, gender/gender identity, and disability.
- Immigration-related activities increased support for diversity and equity for more than six in ten students and employees.

Interactions and Comfort

This section summarizes respondents' interactions with and comfort interacting with people from different groups.

Table 11. Daily or Weekly Interactions with Different Groups

Group	Students	Employees
Different racial/ethnic identity	87.6%	93.5%
Different socioeconomic background	76.5%	89.5%
Different gender	88.6%	95.4%

English not native language	61.7%	76.1%
People with a disability	58.0%	68.2%
Different political view	57.7%	67.7%

Table 12. Very Comfortable Interacting with Different Groups

Group	Students	Employees
Different racial/ethnic identity	86.1%	85.0%
Different socioeconomic background	75.5%	84.7%
Different gender	74.2%	86.3%
English not native language	75.6%	81.3%
People with a disability	80.1%	72.4%
Different political view	38.4%	37.6%

- Students and employees reported frequent interactions with people whose gender or racial/ethnic identity differs from their own.
- Comfort levels were generally high across most groups, with lower comfort reported for interacting with people who hold different political views.

Sonoma State University Supplemental Questions

This section summarizes responses to supplemental questions developed by Sonoma State University to assess institutional priorities that extend beyond the standard HEDS Campus Climate Survey. These questions address support for historically underserved students, student success, academic support, and access to campus resources. Supplemental questions 1-3 were asked of all respondents, while the remaining seven questions were asked only of students.

Table 13. Responses to Sonoma State Supplemental Questions

SSU Supplemental Question	Employees	Students
1. Sonoma State demonstrates a commitment to serving Latinx, first-generation, and other historically underserved students as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI).	77.4%	76.8%
2. Sonoma State responds effectively when concerns about equity are raised by members of the campus community.	49.2%	56.6%
3. At Sonoma State, people from all backgrounds feel respected and valued.	45.2%	66.5%
4. Sonoma State provides effective support to help students address basic needs such as housing and food insecurity.		77.7%

SSU Supplemental Question	Employees	Students
5. Students are able to enroll in the courses they need to make timely progress toward graduation.		68.2%
6. Students can easily find and understand information about degree requirements.		71.5%
7. Teaching practices at Sonoma State support the success of students from diverse backgrounds.		77.2%
8. I have access to internships, research opportunities, or leadership experiences that support my academic and career goals.		68.6%
9. Sonoma State provides welcoming spaces where students can gather, study, and build community.		81.6%
10. Sonoma State provides clear and accessible information about resources available to support undocumented students.		61.1%

Note. Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents who selected Agree or Strongly Agree.

- More than three-quarters of students agreed that Sonoma State demonstrates a commitment to serving historically underserved students (77%), provides effective support for students experiencing basic needs challenges (78%), and uses teaching practices that support students from diverse backgrounds (77%).
- The highest level of agreement was for the availability of welcoming spaces where students can gather, study, and build community (82%).
- Approximately seven in ten students agreed that they can easily find and understand information about degree requirements (71.5%) and enroll in the courses needed to make timely progress toward graduation (68%).
- Students reported lower levels of agreement regarding Sonoma State's responsiveness to concerns about equity (57%) and the availability of information about resources for undocumented students (61%).

Responses to the three supplemental questions asked of all respondents were not uniform across demographic groups. Ratings of Sonoma State's commitment to serving historically underserved students as a Hispanic-Serving Institution were generally positive, with no significant differences by race/ethnicity or gender identity. LGBQ+ respondents, however, rated this item significantly less positively than heterosexual respondents.

More pronounced differences appeared on the questions about institutional responsiveness and community experience. Hispanic/Latino respondents rated Sonoma State's response to equity concerns more positively than White and multiracial respondents. They were also more likely than White, Asian, and multiracial respondents to agree that people from all backgrounds feel respected and valued. LGBQ+ respondents were less positive than heterosexual respondents about Sonoma State's responsiveness to equity concerns, while differences on the "respected and valued" item were not statistically significant.

Differences Across Demographic Groups

Additional analyses examined whether selected campus climate experiences differed by race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Taken together, the results suggest that broad assessments of campus climate were generally more similar across demographic groups than were responses to questions about specific experiences and institutional practices. Most of the statistically significant differences were small in magnitude, although several more pronounced differences emerged in reports of disparaging remarks and discrimination or harassment.

Race and ethnicity. Overall campus climate ratings and reported experiences of discrimination or harassment did not differ significantly by race/ethnicity. Differences emerged, however, on several measures of institutional support and exposure to disparaging remarks. Respondents identifying with multiple races/ethnicities reported less positive perceptions of institutional support on several measures and more frequent exposure to some types of disparaging remarks. Hispanic/Latino respondents were frequently among the more positive groups on measures of institutional commitment and on Sonoma State-specific questions related to equity and inclusion.

Gender identity. Overall campus climate ratings were similar among men, women, and nonbinary respondents. More substantial differences emerged in reported negative experiences. Nonbinary respondents reported hearing gender-related disparaging remarks more frequently than men or women and were substantially more likely to report having experienced discrimination or harassment. They also reported less positive perceptions of senior leadership's commitment to diversity and equity than men.

Sexual orientation. LGBQ+ respondents showed the most consistent pattern of differences across the measures examined. They reported less positive perceptions of the campus climate for diversity and equity and of institutional support for diversity and equity. They also reported hearing sexual-orientation- and gender-related disparaging remarks more frequently and were more likely to report having experienced discrimination or harassment. LGBQ+ respondents were also less positive on several Sonoma State-specific measures, including institutional responsiveness to equity concerns.

Overall, these findings suggest that differences in campus climate are more apparent in specific experiences than in broad evaluations of the campus as a whole. They also illustrate why disaggregated analysis is important: overall results can mask meaningful differences in the experiences of particular groups.

Comparisons to Other Master's Colleges and Universities

HEDS provided comparison data from 43 other institutions classified as Master's Colleges and Universities that administered the Campus Climate Survey during 2023-24, 2024-25, and/or 2025-26. These institutions provide a useful broad comparison group, but they should not be interpreted as closely matched peers. The composition of Sonoma State respondents differed in several notable ways from respondents at the other institutions. For example, Sonoma State respondents were more likely to identify as Hispanic/Latino, LGBQ+, politically liberal, and atheist or agnostic. Effect-size indicators identify the magnitude of differences between Sonoma State respondents and respondents at the other Master's Colleges and Universities. The findings below focus on differences HEDS classified as large.

Campus climate for diversity and equity. Several groups at Sonoma State reported substantially lower satisfaction with the campus climate for diversity and equity than their counterparts at other Master's Colleges and Universities. Among employees, particularly large differences were found for Hispanic/Latino employees, Asian employees, and employees from other racial/ethnic groups. Conservative employees also reported substantially lower satisfaction than conservative employees in the comparison group. Among students, conservative students, Jewish students, and students identifying with religious affiliations other than the categories listed separately in the survey reported substantially lower satisfaction.

Institutional support for diversity and equity. Faculty at Sonoma State reported substantially lower perceptions of institutional support for diversity and equity than faculty at other Master's Colleges and Universities. Large negative differences were also found among Asian employees, employees in "all other races/ethnicities," conservative employees, and employees identifying with other religious affiliations.

Insensitive or disparaging remarks. For respondents overall, the frequency of hearing insensitive or disparaging remarks was similar to that reported at other Master's Colleges and Universities. However, several groups at Sonoma State reported hearing these remarks substantially more often than their counterparts elsewhere. These included Asian employees, conservative employees, Jewish students and employees, employees identifying with other religious affiliations, and some other smaller respondent groups.

Experiences of discrimination or harassment. The overall percentage of Sonoma State respondents reporting discrimination or harassment was similar to the percentage at other Master's Colleges and Universities. Most demographic groups also did not differ substantially from their comparison groups. Two relatively small groups showed large differences: employees in the combined "all other races/ethnicities" category and Jewish students reported discrimination or harassment at substantially higher rates than their counterparts in the comparison group.

Interpretation. The comparative results suggest that Sonoma State's most pronounced differences from the other Master's Colleges and Universities are not broadly distributed across all respondents. Instead, the largest differences are concentrated among several employee groups and among respondents with particular political or religious identities. These findings should be interpreted in the context of differences in respondent composition across institutions, as well as the relatively small number of Sonoma State respondents in some subgroups.

Conclusion

Overall, the 2026 HEDS Campus Climate Survey results reflect several areas of strength as well as opportunities for improvement. Students generally reported more positive perceptions of campus climate than employees, while both groups reported frequent interaction with people from different backgrounds and generally high levels of comfort with those interactions. Responses to Sonoma State's supplemental questions also identified strengths related to the University's commitment to historically underserved students, support for basic needs, teaching practices, and welcoming campus spaces. At the same time, employees reported less positive perceptions of institutional commitment on several measures. Separately, insensitive or disparaging remarks related to political affiliation or views were the most frequently reported type of negative remark across respondents.

The subgroup analyses add important context to these overall results. Broad assessments of campus climate were generally similar across race/ethnicity and gender identity, while more distinct differences emerged on measures of institutional support and specific experiences. LGBQ+ respondents showed the most consistent pattern of less favorable responses across these measures. Nonbinary respondents reported particularly high levels of gender-related disparaging remarks and discrimination or harassment, and respondents identifying with multiple races/ethnicities reported less favorable experiences on several measures of institutional support and exposure to disparaging remarks. These findings illustrate the importance of disaggregating survey results, because overall patterns can obscure meaningful differences in the experiences of particular groups.

Comparisons with other Master's Colleges and Universities provide an additional perspective. Sonoma State's largest differences from the comparison institutions were concentrated among particular employee, political, religious, and racial/ethnic groups rather than across respondents overall. Taken together, the findings suggest that campus climate is best understood through multiple lenses: overall perceptions, student and employee experiences, differences among demographic groups, and comparisons with respondents at other institutions. The results provide a foundation for recognizing areas of strength, identifying where experiences differ across the campus community, and informing continued institutional attention to climate, belonging, equity, and inclusion.