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Penn State
College of Earth & Mineral
Sciences

Assessment of the
Learning, Living, and
Working Environment
(ALLWE)
Executive Summary

April 2019



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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report provides the findings from a survey entitled “Assessment of the Learning, Living, and Working Environment” (ALLWE), conducted in the Pennsylvania State University’s College of Earth and Mineral Sciences (EMS). In the 2018 spring semester, EMS contracted with Rankin & Associates Consulting (R&A) to conduct a College-wide study. Twenty EMS faculty, staff, students, and administrators formed the Environment Assessment Working Group (EAWG), which worked with R&A to develop the ALLWE survey instrument and to promote the survey’s administration in the 2018 fall semester. All members of EMS were encouraged to complete the survey.

Responses to the multiple-choice format survey items were analyzed for statistical differences based on various demographic categories (e.g., EMS position, gender identity, disability status) where appropriate. Where sample sizes were small, certain responses were combined into categories to make comparisons between groups and to ensure respondents’ confidentiality. Throughout the report, for example, the Faculty category includes tenure-line faculty, research/teaching faculty, postdoctoral scholars, and administrators with faculty rank.

In addition to multiple-choice format survey items, several open-ended questions provided respondents the opportunity to describe their experiences at EMS. Comments were solicited 1) to give “voice” to the quantitative findings and 2) to highlight areas of concern that might have been overlooked by the analyses of multiple-choice items due to the small number of survey respondents from historically underrepresented populations in EMS. For this reason, some qualitative comments may not seem aligned with the quantitative findings; however, they are important data.

Eight hundred ninety-four (894) surveys were returned for a 27% overall response rate. Table 1 provides a summary of selected demographic characteristics of survey respondents.

Table 1. EMS Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Subgroup	<i>n</i>	% of Sample
Position status	Undergraduate Student	432	48.3
	Graduate Student	177	19.8
	Faculty	175	19.6
	Staff	110	12.3
Gender identity	Women	384	43.0
	Men	477	53.4
	Trans-spectrum	17	1.9
	Missing	16	1.8
Racial/ethnic identity	Asian/Of Asian Descent	117	13.1
	Other People of Color	69	7.7
	White/Of European Descent	628	70.2
	Multiracial	47	5.3
	Missing/Did Not Declare/International/Unknown	33	3.7
Sexual identity	LGBQ	83	9.3
	Heterosexual	762	85.2
	Missing	49	5.5
Citizenship status	U.S. Citizen	681	76.2
	Non-U.S. Citizen	73	8.2
	Visa Holder	129	14.4
	Missing	11	1.2
Disability status	Single Disability	56	6.3
	No Disability	804	89.9
	Multiple Disabilities	31	3.5
	Missing	3	0.3

Table 1. EMS Sample Demographics

Characteristic	Subgroup	n	% of Sample
Religious affiliation	Christian Religious Affiliation	367	41.1
	Other Religious Affiliation	75	8.4
	No Religious Affiliation	379	42.4
	Multiple Religious Affiliations	36	4.0
	Missing	37	4.1

Key Findings – Areas of Strength

1. High Levels of Comfort With The Environment at EMS

Most survey respondents were “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with the overall environment at EMS (85%, $n = 760$), with the environment in their departments/program or work units (81%, $n = 231$ Faculty/Staff respondents), and with the environment in their classes (88%, $n = 673$ Faculty and Student respondents). Student respondents were significantly more comfortable with the overall environment than were Faculty and Staff respondents. Respondents with Disabilities and Low-Income Student respondents were significantly less comfortable with the overall environment than were Respondents with No Disabilities and Not-Low-Income Student respondents.

2. Faculty Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Faculty Work

Tenure-line Faculty

Most Tenure-line Faculty respondents held positive attitudes about faculty work at EMS and believed that research and teaching were valued at EMS. Some differences emerged based on gender identity, citizenship status, and racial identity, where the responses of Women Faculty, Visa Holder Faculty, and Faculty of Color were less positive than Men Faculty, U.S. Citizen, and White Faculty responses.

Research/Teaching Faculty

Almost all Research/Teaching Faculty respondents believed that research was valued by EMS, and more than half felt that teaching was valued by EMS.

All Faculty

Approximately three-quarters of all Faculty respondents thought that EMS was a good place to work. Similarly, they felt valued by faculty, staff, and students in their departments/programs and by their department/program chairs.

3. Staff Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Staff Work

Staff respondents generally viewed working at EMS positively. Staff respondents felt their supervisors and coworkers/colleagues gave them job/career advice or guidance when they needed it. Almost three-quarters of Staff respondents thought that EMS provided them with resources to pursue training/professional development opportunities. The majority of Staff respondents felt that their supervisors provided adequate support for them to manage work-life balance and that EMS provided them with adequate resources to accomplish their work. Almost three-quarters would recommend EMS as a good place to work.

4. Student Respondents – Positive Attitudes About Academic Experiences

Overall, Undergraduate Student respondents had positive perceptions of their experiences at EMS. Most Student respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that they had faculty whom they perceived as role models. Approximately three-quarters of Undergraduate Student respondents indicated that they felt valued by EMS faculty, staff and other students in the classroom. Some findings suggested that students with disabilities, first-generation students, low-income students, and students of color had less positive perceptions than did their peers.

In general, Graduate Student respondents also viewed their EMS experiences favorably. Most Graduate Student respondents were satisfied with the quality of advising they have received from their departments, had adequate access to their advisors, and felt comfortable sharing their professional goals with their advisors.

5. Student Respondents’ *Perceived Academic Success*

Student respondents generally perceived themselves to be academically successful at EMS.

Key Findings – Opportunities for Improvement

1. Experiences of Exclusionary, Intimidating, Offensive, and/or Hostile Conduct

- 13% ($n = 118$) of respondents indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. Of these respondents, 29% ($n = 34$) reported that the conduct was based on gender/gender identity and 28% ($n = 33$) reported that the conduct was based on position status in EMS. The remainder did not know the basis of the conduct.

Differences Based on Position Status, Racial Identity, and Gender Identity

- By position status, a higher percentage of Faculty respondents (21%, $n = 36$), Staff respondents (20%, $n = 2$), and Graduate Student respondents (19%, $n = 33$) than Undergraduate Student respondents (6%, $n = 29$) indicated that they had experienced this conduct.
 - A higher percentage of Staff respondents (50%, $n = 11$) and Faculty respondents (33%, $n = 12$) than Undergraduate Student respondents ($n < 5$) who had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct indicated that the conduct was based on their position status.
- By gender identity, a higher percentage of Women respondents (16%, $n = 61$) than Men respondents (10%, $n = 47$) indicated that they had experienced this conduct.
 - A higher percentage of Women respondents (46%, $n = 28$) than Men respondents ($n < 5$) who had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct indicated that the conduct was based on their gender identity.
- By racial identity, 10% ($n = 24$) of Respondents of Color and 13% ($n = 84$) of White respondents indicated that they had experienced this conduct.
 - A higher percentage of Respondents of Color (50%, $n = 12$) than White respondents (0%, $n = 0$) who had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct indicated that the conduct was based on their racial identity.

2. Respondents – Seriously Considered Leaving EMS

- Faculty: 54% ($n = 94$)
 - 37% ($n = 35$) interested in a position at another institution
 - 32% ($n = 30$) seriously considered leaving because they were recruited or offered a position at another institution/organization.
- Staff: 52% ($n = 57$)
 - 26% ($n = 29$) low salary/pay rate
 - 23% ($n = 25$) limited opportunities for advancement
- Undergraduate Students: 15% ($n = 63$)
 - 37% ($n = 23$) Did not like major
 - 32% ($n = 20$) Coursework too difficult
- Graduate Students: 25% ($n = 45$)
 - 51% ($n = 23$) Lack of a sense of belonging
 - 36% ($n = 16$) Environment not welcoming

3. Challenges

Staff Respondents – Staff responses shared negative perceptions about several aspects of their work life at EMS. Only one quarter ($n = 27$) of Staff respondents felt that the performance evaluation process was productive and that clear procedures existed on how they could advance at EMS. Only one-third of Staff respondents felt that EMS policies (e.g., Family Medical Leave Act) were fairly applied across EMS. More than one-third of Staff respondents indicated that their workload increased without additional compensation as a result of other staff departures. Almost half of Staff respondents believed that a hierarchy existed within staff positions that allowed some voices to be valued more than others. Less than half of all Staff respondents felt that staff opinions were valued on EMS committees or by EMS faculty and administration.

Faculty Respondents - Less than one-third of Tenure-line Faculty respondents felt that they were supported and mentored during the post-tenure years, and less than half thought that EMS faculty who qualify for delaying their tenure-clock felt empowered to do so. Half of Tenure-line Faculty respondents felt that faculty opinions were taken seriously by senior administrators.

Findings suggested that research/teaching Faculty respondents met several challenges in the College. In particular, they felt that the criteria for contract renewal were not clear and that the criteria were not applied equally to all positions. Less than one-third of Faculty (research/teaching) respondents felt they had job security and that their opinions were taken seriously by senior administrators.

Approximately one-quarter of all Faculty respondents felt childcare benefits were competitive and that EMS provided adequate resources to help them manage work-life balance. Less than half of all Faculty respondents thought that EMS provided them with resources to pursue professional development.

Student Respondents – Analyses of the Students’ survey responses revealed statistically significant differences based on disability status, first-generation status, income status, racial identity, citizenship status, and sexual identity, where students from backgrounds historically underrepresented at colleges held less positive views of their experiences than did their peers from “majority” backgrounds. Findings indicated that Undergraduate Student Respondents of Color were less likely than White Undergraduate Student respondents to perceive themselves as academically successful.

4. Meaningful Percentage of Respondents Experienced Unwanted Sexual Conduct

- 7% ($n = 60$) of respondents indicated that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact/conduct while at EMS.
 - 1% ($n = 8$) experienced relationship violence (e.g., ridiculed, controlling, hitting), most of whom identified current or former dating/intimate partners as the perpetrators.
 - 2% ($n = 16$) experienced stalking (e.g., following me or on social media, texting, phone calls), most of whom identified PSU students as the perpetrators.

- 4% ($n = 33$) experienced unwanted sexual interaction (e.g., catcalling, repeated sexual advances, sexual harassment), half of whom identified PSU students as the perpetrators.
- 2% ($n = 16$) experienced unwanted sexual contact (e.g., fondling, rape, sexual assault, penetration without consent), half of whom identified PSU students or acquaintances/friends as the perpetrators.
- Most respondents did not report the unwanted sexual contact/conduct, and gave the following reasons:
 - Incidents did not feel serious enough to report
 - Did not want to get the perpetrator in trouble
 - The conduct was so pervasive
 - Respondents felt they handled it themselves
 - The perpetrators were perceived as powerful in the community.

Conclusion

The ALLWE findings provide the EMS community with an opportunity to build upon its strengths and to develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. EMS, with support from senior administrators and collaborative leadership, is in a prime position to actualize its commitment to promote an inclusive College and to institute organizational structures that respond to the needs of its dynamic community.