
Taking the Pulse of **CAMPUS CLIMATE**

KEY FINDINGS OF THE AGB SURVEY
ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABOUT AGB

Since 1921, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) has had one mission: to strengthen and protect this country's unique form of institutional governance through its research, services, and advocacy. Serving more than 1,300 member boards, 1,900 institutions, and 40,000 individuals, AGB is the only national organization providing university and college presidents, board chairs, trustees, and board professionals of both public and private institutions and institutionally related foundations with resources that enhance their effectiveness.

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Taking the Pulse of Campus Climate

KEY FINDINGS OF THE AGB SURVEY ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Introduction

In recent years, many institutions have seen a surge in the number of issues related to diversity and inclusion on their campuses. From student protests and sit-ins for greater faculty/student diversity to various incidents of targeted harassment against students of a particular religious affiliation, a range of challenges abound. In the fall of 2016, AGB released the *Board of Directors' Statement on Governing Board Accountability for Campus Climate, Inclusion, and Civility*. The statement provided eight recommendations for how boards and presidents can effectively engage in discussions about these issues at their respective institutions.

As a follow-up to this statement, AGB surveyed trustees from its member institutions in December 2016 through January 2017 with the intent to learn about their views, knowledge, and understanding of how these issues have had an impact on their campuses and the role of their boards. The association received completed surveys from just under 1,000 board members, with 86.3 percent representing independent institutions and 13.1 percent representing public institutions or systems. The report that follows highlights key findings from the survey.

“*I care passionately about equity and educational opportunity. To me, it is reality. I get into debates with people who say, ‘Oh, why do you support diversity?’ My answer is, ‘Diversity is reality.’*”

—Jeffrey Trammell, former trustee, College of William & Mary, from “*Why Boards Must Become Diversity Stewards*,” *Trusteeship*, May/June 2014

Board Engagement and Understanding

Governing boards have a responsibility to act in a manner that is in the best interest of the institution or system they serve. To do so, boards are required to be engaged and knowledgeable on a broad range of issues, including those related to diversity and inclusion. When boards are well informed and educated on these issues, they can in turn create effective board policies and support the chief executive in his or her decision making.

UNDERSTANDING OF KEY TERMS

For boards to be knowledgeable about diversity and inclusion, they first must have a clear understanding of the nomenclature and values used within higher education to discuss these issues. The survey findings indicate that board members have a solid understanding of some key terms related to issues of diversity. Most respondents generally understood the terms *safe space*, *inclusion*, *freedom of expression*, and *campus climate*. Across both sectors, the term most understood among board members was *freedom of expression*. The majority of respondents (61.9 percent of public board members and 64.8 percent of independent board members) reported that they understand that term very well (Table 1).

What's not so clear for some board members are the terms *micro-aggression* and *trigger warning*. Fewer than a quarter of both public (24.6 percent) and independent (22.1 percent) trustees understand *micro-aggression* very well (Table 1). The degrees of understanding among trustees about these and other terms highlight the complexity of these issues and the need for ongoing board education. It's important that boards appropriately engage with the leaders at their respective institutions to understand if and how their college or university employs these ideals in the context of their own campus.

RECOMMENDATION ①

FROM AGB'S BOARD STATEMENT ON GOVERNING BOARD ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CAMPUS CLIMATE, INCLUSION, AND CIVILITY

An institution or system governing board should support the chief executive officer with trust, confidence, and the delegation of authority necessary to make critical and timely decisions consistent with institutional and system policy.

Taking the Pulse of Campus Climate
Key Findings of the AGB Survey on Diversity and Inclusion

TABLE 1. UNDERSTANDING OF KEY TERMS BY SECTOR

INDEPENDENT						
	Very Well	Well	Not Very Well	Not at All	Not Familiar With the Term	Total
Safe space	41.6%	44.0%	12.1%	1.4%	0.9%	100%
Trigger warnings	25.9%	37.7%	26.5%	5.2%	4.7%	100%
Inclusion	55.7%	38.1%	5.3%	0.6%	0.3%	100%
Freedom of expression	64.8%	32.2%	2.8%	0.1%	0.1%	100%
Microaggressions	22.2%	33.2%	31.1%	6.5%	7.1%	100%
Campus climate	46.4%	44.9%	7.5%	0.6%	0.6%	100%

PUBLIC						
	Very Well	Well	Not Very Well	Not at All	Not Familiar With the Term	Total
Safe space	42.4%	44.1%	11.0%	1.7%	0.8%	100%
Trigger warnings	27.1%	37.3%	26.3%	5.9%	3.4%	100%
Inclusion	60.3%	33.6%	5.2%	0.9%	0.0%	100%
Freedom of expression	61.9%	33.0%	5.1%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
Microaggressions	24.6%	35.6%	23.7%	7.6%	8.5%	100%
Campus climate	50.0%	40.7%	7.6%	1.7%	0.0%	100%

UNDERSTANDING THEIR ROLE

As stewards for their institutions, governing board members play an important role in overseeing and influencing various aspects of their college and universities, including the campus culture and climate. Board members unequivocally understand that they have a role in cultivating a positive campus climate. Almost all board members across both sectors—approximately 95 percent—agreed or strongly agreed that they understand their role in effecting a positive campus climate (Table 2).

TABLE 2. AS A BOARD MEMBER, I UNDERSTAND MY ROLE IN EFFECTING A POSITIVE CAMPUS CLIMATE.

	Public	Independent
Strongly agree	49.6%	42.7%
Agree	45.3%	52.3%
Disagree	3.4%	4.8%
Strongly disagree	1.7%	0.3%
Total	100%	100%

Most respondents also reported they feel comfortable discussing issues related to campus climate, inclusion, and civility. Approximately 95 percent of public and independent board members agreed or strongly agreed that they are comfortable discussing these issues (Table 3). The majority of public (81.4 percent) and independent (90.7 percent) board members also agreed or strongly agreed that their board is able to discuss issues of campus climate, inclusion, and civility in a productive way.

TABLE 3. I AM COMFORTABLE DISCUSSING ISSUES RELATED TO CAMPUS CLIMATE, INCLUSION, AND CIVILITY.

	Public	Independent
Strongly agree	56.8%	57.8%
Agree	38.1%	38.2%
Disagree	2.5%	3.5%
Strongly disagree	2.5%	0.5%
Total	100%	100%

Although governing boards and individual trustees may be able to productively and comfortably discuss these issues, many boards still are not devoting adequate time to these issues. More than a third (37.6 percent) of public board members and more than one quarter (27.6 percent) of independent board members disagreed or strongly disagreed that over the past 12 months their board has dedicated adequate time and attention to discussion issues of campus climate, inclusion, and civility (Table 4). As these issues continue to gain momentum on many campuses, boards may need to reconsider how much time they are or are not dedicating to discussions of campus climate, inclusion, and civility.

TABLE 4. OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS, MY BOARD HAS DEDICATED ADEQUATE TIME AND ATTENTION TO DISCUSSING ISSUES OF CAMPUS CLIMATE, INCLUSION, AND CIVILITY.

	Public	Independent
Strongly agree	29.1%	28.3%
Agree	33.3%	44.1%
Disagree	31.6%	23.3%
Strongly disagree	6.0%	4.3%
Total	100%	100%

BOARD MEMBER AWARENESS OF CAMPUS CLIMATE INCIDENTS

AGB’s 2016 Board of Directors’ Statement recommends that chief executives be fully transparent and collaborative with their governing boards about campus climate issues at their institutions. Boards can only make informed decisions when they are appropriately engaged and kept apprised of events on campus that may influence the climate.

More than half of all respondents—approximately 56.8 percent of publics and 54.2 percent of independent board members—received one or more reports related to incidents of harassment based on diversity at their institutions over the past two years (Table 5). Although most have received reports of this sort, a significant proportion haven’t received or don’t know if the board has received such reports. Approximately 43.2 percent of publics and 45.7 percent of independent board members reported that their boards haven’t received any reports over the past two years or don’t know if they have (Table 5).

TABLE 5. THE NUMBER OF REPORTS RECEIVED BY THE BOARD ABOUT INCIDENTS OF HARASSMENT BASED ON DIVERSITY IN THE PAST TWO YEARS

	Public	Independent
5 or more	13.6%	7.6%
3 to 4	17.8%	15.9%
1 to 2	25.4%	30.7%
0 or none	20.3%	24.5%
Don't know	22.9%	21.2%
Total	100%	100%

In addition to reports of harassment, many boards are also receiving reports about campus protests or other forms of social activism related to campus diversity and inclusion. This is true more so at public institutions than at independent institutions. Approximately 64.4 percent of public board members and 53.2 percent of independent board members have received one or more reports about protests or other forms of social activism that have taken place at their institution/system related to campus diversity and inclusion issues (Table 6). However, a large proportion of board members have not received any reports about student protests or don't know if the board has received such reports over the past two years. More than a third of public board members (35.6 percent) and nearly half of independent board members (46.7 percent) reported that their boards have not received any reports about protests or don't know whether the board has received such reports.

The differences among board members who have or have not received reports of protests or incidents of harassment may be for several reasons. It's possible that some institutions are experiencing more events of this sort on campus while at other institutions, these types of events do not rise to the board level. Given the possible reasons, it's prudent for all institutions to have clear policies in place to determine what information should or should not be provided to the board.

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TABLE 6. THE NUMBER OF REPORTS RECEIVED BY THE BOARD ABOUT PROTESTS BASED ON DIVERSITY IN THE PAST TWO YEARS

	Public	Independent
5 or more	9.3%	5.4%
3 to 4	22.0%	14.6%
1 to 2	33.1%	33.2%
0 or none	26.3%	32.3%
Don't know	9.3%	14.4%
Total	100%	100%

FUTURE INCIDENTS

Although most board members have received one or more reports of campus protests or activism, they have a range of opinions about the likelihood of such events occurring in the future. A larger proportion of board members from public institutions, more than one third (34.7 percent), believe it is *very likely* their institutions will experience protests about diversity and inclusion over the next two years (Table 7). Less than one quarter (19.1 percent) of board members from independent institutions think these protests are *very likely* in the future (Table 7). In contrast, more than a third of board members from independent institutions believe it's *not likely* that protests about diversity and inclusion will happen in the future, versus just 22.0 percent of board members from public institutions. Whether or not campus protests are likely to happen in the future, boards should be proactive by regularly reviewing their policies, in tandem with the chief executive, to ensure they can effectively respond to such events if and when they occur.

RECOMMENDATION 5

FROM AGB'S BOARD STATEMENT ON GOVERNING BOARD ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CAMPUS CLIMATE, INCLUSION, AND CIVILITY

Governing boards should ensure the implementation of an effective communication plan and receive regular updates from the chief executive and other administrators who are responsible for the implementation of campus and system policies regarding campus climate.

TABLE 7. HOW LIKELY IS IT THAT YOUR INSTITUTION WILL EXPERIENCE PROTESTS ABOUT DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS?

	Public	Independent
Very likely	34.7%	19.1%
Somewhat likely	34.7%	34.6%
Not likely	22.0%	39.8%
Unsure	8.5%	6.4%
Total	100%	100%

WHO ENGAGES WITH THE BOARD AND HOW OFTEN?

Equally important to the board’s role in overseeing issues of campus climate, diversity, and inclusion is their engagement with key stakeholders. Boards across both sectors are more likely to engage with faculty and students in discussions about campus climate, inclusion, and diversity than with other stakeholders (such as the external community or elected officials). More than a third of members of both public and independent boards reported that they *always* invite faculty to engage in board discussions about campus climate, diversity, and inclusion (Table 8). More than 44 percent of members of public boards and 35 percent of independent boards said they *always* invite students to board discussions with this focus (Table 8). Boards should strive to engage not only with internal stakeholders on campus, but also external partners in the communities around campus to understand their priorities and concerns.

However, it seems boards are not as engaged with external stakeholders on these issues (Table 7). External community stakeholders and elected officials are not invited to participate in these discussions as frequently as students and faculty.

TABLE 8. HOW OFTEN, IF AT ALL, ARE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING STAKEHOLDERS (NOT THOSE WITH AN OFFICIAL BOARD ROLE) SPECIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND AND ENGAGE IN BOARD DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CAMPUS CLIMATE, INCLUSION, AND DIVERSITY?

	Public				Independent			
	Faculty	Students	Elected Official	External Stakeholder	Faculty	Students	Elected Official	External Stakeholder
Always	35.7%	41.0%	20.3%	16.9%	40.5%	37.3%	4.5%	4.3%
Sometimes	40.9%	41.0%	26.3%	33.1%	40.6%	43.1%	22.3%	30.5%
Never	20.9%	13.7%	39.0%	36.4%	9.2%	12.9%	44.3%	38.4%
Don’t know	2.6%	4.3%	14.4%	13.6%	9.7%	6.8%	29.0%	26.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

RECOMMENDATION 7

FROM AGB'S BOARD STATEMENT ON GOVERNING BOARD ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CAMPUS CLIMATE, INCLUSION, AND CIVILITY

Governing boards, as a collective body, should seek direct engagement with students, faculty, staff, alumni, local communities, and other stakeholders to be certain that they have an understanding of their concerns and current priorities.

Board Policies and Practices

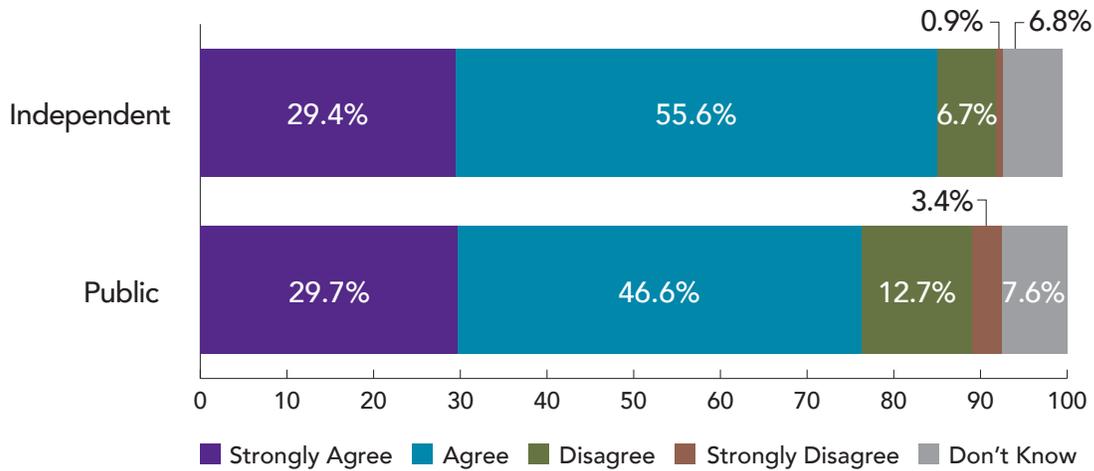
Boards “have a responsibility to uphold the mission, values, and educational quality for all who are part of their institutional community.”¹ To this end, boards must ensure that adequate policies and practices are in place to guide the institution on matters of campus climate. Doing so should be a strategic priority both for the current circumstances and for the future.

The vast majority of board members, across both sectors, believe that their institution/system has adequate policies in place to address issues of campus climate, inclusion, and civility on their campuses. Approximately 76.3 percent of public board members and 85.0 percent of independent board members agreed or strongly agreed with this statement (Figure 1).

Boards must ensure that adequate policies and practices are in place to guide the institution on matters of campus climate.

¹ AGB Board of Directors' Statement on Governing Board Accountability for Campus Climate, Inclusion, and Civility, 2016.

FIGURE 1. MY INSTITUTION/SYSTEM HAS ADEQUATE POLICIES IN PLACE TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF CAMPUS CLIMATE, INCLUSION, AND CIVILITY.



RECOMMENDATION 3

FROM AGB'S BOARD STATEMENT ON GOVERNING BOARD ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CAMPUS CLIMATE, INCLUSION, AND CIVILITY

Boards should periodically review campus climate policies and ensure that those policies are up-to-date and consistent with institutional mission and relevant laws and regulations.

Conclusion

Over the past 50 years, campus demographics have changed considerably, and so too have the needs of the student body. Campuses are now more diverse in terms of thought, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, political affiliation, and religion. With greater diversity comes a greater need for institutions to assess and cultivate a campus climate that allows everyone to flourish. Governing boards play a vital role in helping to create inclusive campuses through their oversight and leadership.

Many board members understand the language of diversity and inclusion, feel comfortable discussing these issues, and regularly engage with key stakeholders, such as faculty and students, on these matters. Yet there are still opportunities for boards to grow in their understanding of the complexity of these issues. Boards must not take for granted the value in regularly looking inward to determine if their policies and practices are still appropriate for the current climate and needs of their student bodies. As campuses continue to grow and change in terms of diversity, institutions must focus on building and maintaining positive learning and living environments. Board members are, and will continue to be, essential to this process.

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About the Survey

Survey invitations were emailed to a stratified random sample of 18,405 trustees from AGB member institutions, of which 15,755 represented independent non-profit institutions, 2,469 represented public institutions or systems, and 181 represented proprietary, for-profit, institutions. The survey was opened in November 2016 and closed in January 2017. A total of 949 completed responses were received (Table 9).

TABLE 9. SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY SECTOR

Institution Type	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Proprietary Institution	6*	0.6%
Public Institution	121	13.1%
Independent Institution	822	86.3%
Total	949	100%

*The data received from proprietary institutions is not reported due to small sample size.

References

Association of Governing Boards, "Why Governing Boards Must Become Diversity Stewards." *Trusteeship*, May/June 2014. agb.org/trusteeship/2014/5/why-boards-must-become-diversity-stewards.

Association of Governing Boards (2016). *AGB Board of Directors' Statement on Governing Board Accountability for Campus Climate, Inclusion, and Civility*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards.

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