

## **2020 University Climate Survey Focus Group Results**

### **OVERVIEW OF THE FOCUS GROUPS**

During the Summer of 2020, we conducted focus groups, each with of up to 20 participants, to gather information to supplement the specific issues raised by respondents in the 2020 University Climate Survey.

We conducted four student focus groups, on the topic of accessibility concerns, and on issues experienced by international students, LGBTQ+ students, and students of color.

We conducted four faculty/staff focus groups, on the topic of policy consistency, and on issues experienced by international faculty/staff, faculty/staff who are women of color, and faculty/staff who are women.

Each focus group was conducted during a weekday afternoon and lasted up to two hours.

#### **Moderator Information and Opening Script:**

Donald A. Saucier, Ph.D., conducted each of the focus groups. Dr. Saucier is a Professor of Psychological Sciences and the Faculty Associate Director of the Teaching & Learning Center at Kansas State University. He was invited to conduct the focus groups by Dr. Bryan Samuel, Kansas State University's Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. Despite being a middle-aged, straight, cisgender White man, Dr. Saucier was invited to moderate these groups because the Climate Survey Team wanted one moderator to provide consistency and structure to the conversations. Dr. Saucier has been active in K-State's diversity and inclusion initiatives, deeply involved and invested in K-State's teaching mission, and has conducted and published research on processes and expressions of discrimination related to gender, race, sexual orientation, and disability.

Dr. Saucier acknowledged his majority group membership to the focus group participants, and further stated:

*"I may not have had your experiences, but I am deeply interested to hear about them. We are here today because the voices at K-State have identified our theme today as an issue. The voices at K-State have compelled our administration to explore our theme through our discussion today. Our administration is listening, and I am committed to take our discussion today to our administration to make K-State a better place to work and learn. I am honored to work toward that goal with you today.*

*I want to address with you why I am moderating these focus groups rather than a member of our upper administration, such as Dr. Bryan Samuel. It was our concern that having an upper administrator attend the focus groups would potentially hinder our ability to have an open and honest conversation about these issues.*

*We want you to provide your honest comments and reactions during this focus group today. To allow you to do that anonymously, before we begin I am asking that you stop your videos during our discussion. I am also offering you the opportunity to select a name other than your own to use as an alias during our discussion. When you stop your video and change your name, we can better protect your anonymity during our discussion. Even your comments in the chat will be associated with your alias and not your real name. We will be recording this focus group's discussion to help with our analysis of our conversation, but we will not start the recording until you have had the opportunity to stop your videos and select aliases. Further, no one beyond the analysis team will have access to this recording, and no one on the analysis team will associate any comment with any individual person.*

*Our goal today is to identify patterns and trends in the discussion, not to identify any individual. As such, the questions will be phrased to get at types of issues that K-Staters face, how these issues impact K-Staters, and how to address these issues in the future through specific actions at K-State.*

*I do have to note that if anyone shares an experience in specific detail that is an instance of discrimination, harassment, sexual violence, etc., we do have to make a mandatory report to our Office of Institutional Equity.*

*You may make your comments and responses verbally during our discussion and/or by writing them into the chat. We have a list of questions that will guide our conversation today.*

*Are there any questions about our procedures today?*

*Now please stop your videos and select your aliases. We will start recording the focus group in a minute as we consider our first question for discussion."*

### **Question Schedule:**

The moderator asked the following questions to engage the participants in discussions during each of the focus groups:

***How do challenges related to \_\_\_\_\_ typically manifest at K-State?***

***How do these challenges hinder the success of K-Staters?*** (as a follow-up if needed)

***What are actionable steps that K-State can take to address these challenges?***

***Are there any other experiences, comments, or suggestions that you would like to share today before we conclude our discussion?***

### **Debriefing**

Dr. Saucier debriefed the participants and thanked them at the end of each focus group using the script below:

*“Thank you so much for sharing your experiences, comments, and suggestions this afternoon. I am so grateful that you participated today to help make K-State a better place. I will be summarizing our conversation and sharing it with the Climate Survey team. These results will be presented to our administration. They are listening – thank you for sharing your voices with me so that I can share your voices with them. If you need to reach out to me for any reason after this session, please feel free to do so. My email address is in the chat. Thank you again for contributing your voices today. It is now our job to use your voices to take meaningful action at K-State. We will publicize what these actions and outcomes are to the K-State community over this coming year. We may not be able to do everything that you suggested, but we are committed to working on this issue. Thank you so much for helping us make K-State a better place.”*

### **OVERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUP RESULTS**

Below is a summary of the major themes that emerged in each focus group in identifying the major challenges related to the issue or target group and the actionable steps suggested to resolve the issue at Kansas State University. Some participants provided additional information (e.g., by email) after the conclusion of their focus group, and their comments are summarized in the focus group reports as well. As indicated above, the objective was to collect general experiences, and this report is written so that the experiences and comments summarized do not reveal the identities of the participants.

#### **Focus Group: Student Accessibility Concerns**

##### ***Challenges***

**Instructors are not accommodating.** Several comments were made that referenced instructors being ableist, not working well with students, not accommodating students’ requests for recordings or notes, not responding to student emails, not providing support prior to documentation being submitted, not teaching or providing materials in accessible ways (e.g., teaching too fast; using words that are hard to spell; playing music that may not work for students with PTSD, ADHD, or TBI; having office hours or group study sessions that are difficult to get to; posting files that are not accessible); too much reading is required; universal design is not employed. Comments also referenced students’ fear of working with instructors, expecting resistance, and fearing future negative treatment. One comment emphasized that instructors, administration, and the system are the problem (not the Student Access Center). Specific colleges (i.e., Agriculture, Veterinary Medicine) were identified as hard to work with.

**Accessible content is not provided.** Several comments specifically discussed how course materials are not accessible. Comments mentioned how guidelines for recording content are not provided to students, note-takers who take notes for students with this accommodation are not perfect, online materials (which are easier to navigate at one’s own pace) are often not

provided or accessible, videos are not captioned, in-class content is not recorded or provided. Some comments discussed how the response to COVID-19 (i.e., K-State's move to remote teaching) was too extreme and magnified these challenges (e.g., internet issues), with online teaching removing some of the support that was previously available (e.g., office hours).

**Difficulties in going to the Student Access Center and in getting accommodations.**

Comments referenced how students have a real or perceived expectation of being stigmatized and/or stereotyped as a result of their going to the Student Access Center and requesting accommodations. Comments mentioned the process for getting accommodations is needlessly complicated and repetitive (i.e., having to happen every semester), changes in the website made it harder to find resources (e.g., text to speech software, audio recording pins), and that getting nontraditional accommodations is particularly difficult. Comments also referenced the financial expenses associated with accessibility and getting accommodations (e.g., the expense for getting a diagnosis). Comments discussed the lack of specialists and the long waits for appointments at Lafene, the difficulty of getting tutors, the difficulty of getting into classes (both physically and in terms of enrollment), the difficulty of scheduling extra times for exams due to scheduling conflicts and/or the inequity of having to take exams at different times (e.g., prior to review sessions), the loss of transportation services (and the inability of the golf cart to carry a wheelchair when it was available), decreased access to conveniences (e.g., food, recreational services, no shady areas to rest in), barriers in common spaces at the University (e.g., the noise in the Student Union), the need for students to be assertive or rude to be heard and to be accommodated (e.g., in help labs), and the difficulty of reporting barriers and noncompliance at the University. An overarching concern was expressed that centers supposedly devoted to advocating for accessibility and providing accommodations may present themselves as supportive in public settings, but be less supportive private, failing to practice their own principles of community and respect (e.g., name calling students).

**Personal responsibilities of the students.** Comments discussed how students who need accommodations may have or feel a personal responsibility to educate others about their disability, especially if they have a disability that is not visible (and then have to deal with stereotypes), and a responsibility to learn how to get their own support. Comments discussed how these challenges are present all the time, and that there are always people who are hard to work with.

**Consequences.** The difficulties and consequences of these challenges were elaborated through several of the comments. These included concrete consequences, such as having to invest more time in academic tasks than their classmates, having to restart or change academic majors or career paths, poorer academic performance, taking longer to finish school (e.g., having to retake classes or take fewer classes at a time), disengagement from academic experiences. These also included psychological and emotional consequences, such as feelings that one is unwelcome, unsupported, unaccepted, isolated, mistreated, and/or misunderstood; that others cannot or do not empathize with one's experience; issues with fatigue (e.g., from facing the psychological challenges and/or having to navigate an inaccessible physical environment); and experiences of self-doubt (e.g., imposter syndrome).

## ***Actionable Steps***

**Educate instructors about how to work with students.** Comments suggested that the University educate instructors about to deal with students who require accommodations. This included suggestions that awareness training be given to instructors about the realities and challenges of disabilities, the needs of veteran students, the concept of ableism, the need for empathy, the need for flexibility. Comments suggested that this training be mandatory for instructors and could be offered in course (e.g., the Principles of College Teaching). Comments also suggested that the University educate instructors about implementing universal design in their courses so that they are accessible for all students.

**Support practices that will help students succeed in class.** Several comments provided specific suggestions for ways that classes and resources could be created or revised to promote student success. These included using more diverse delivery methods for content; providing test guides; recording all in-class content (e.g., using Mediasite); providing notes, audio, video, subtitles, and scripts of content; offering more flexible deadlines and due dates for assignments; providing options for how students demonstrate and achieve learning outcomes; providing better organized, more condensed, and clearer course structures and student learning outcomes; and providing direct and realistic expectations for student work.

**Provide more structural support.** Several comments provided specific suggestions for how additional support could be offered to alleviate these challenges. These included using qualified professionals to develop and implement an action plan for support, as well as to have an external review of Kansas State University's practices to identify where the issues are and to offer recommendations for improvement. These also included the need for more staff at the Student Access Center, more peer support staff, more tutors and mentors, more convenient procedures for reporting barriers and noncompliance, placing student access representatives on University groups and committees that oversee and make decisions about these issues, and empowering the Student Access Center to have the final decision on student accommodations (rather than instructors). There was also an expressed need for a well-publicized public action plan that provides information and support for immunocompromised students, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other comments discussed the need for places, spaces, and departments to be redesigned to be more accessible. Specific comments here discussed the need for enforcement by Parking Services to prevent parking on ramps and in disabled parking spots, as well as the need to practice ice removal so that ramps (that everyone can use) are cleared prior to stairs (that not everyone can use). Another comment articulated the need to cross-tabulate the results of the Climate Survey across demographic variables to draw deeper meaning from the responses.

**Publicize the results of this process.** Comments indicated that while participants were happy this focus group was being conducted, if students' voices were heard, and heard often, we would not need this focus group. Participants expressed a desire to hear the results of this process, how is received by administration (who they believe is responsible for resolving these issues), and what solutions are explored and offered.

## **Focus Group: International Students**

### ***Challenges***

**Experiences of discrimination.** Several comments discussed how international students are targeted by stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination at the University by faculty, staff, and students. These experiences included instances of implicit prejudice and microaggressions, as well as more overt and blatant expressions of prejudice. Comments provided several examples, such as being asked “why they are here” and to defend their presence at the University, being asked when they would be “going back,” being asked aggressive and insulting questions, facing accusations about their value, having comments made about their attire, being told they are unapproachable, facing pressure to “act American,” being criticized for speaking another language or having an accent, facing attacks on social media, having their skills discredited, not being considered for scholarships when they were qualified, facing and then experiencing emotional negativity, being exposed to prejudicial comments made by other students in classes without the instructors challenging or addressing the comments. Comments also discussed the current situation of how having to work during unprecedented times of racial tension impacts African and Black students. Comments discussed how White colleagues tell African students they do not know what Black Americans are experiencing, do not have enough education about African history, do not understand deep connections about how racism extends beyond American borders – and creates emotional impacts on international students. Comments discussed the issues of intersectionality (e.g., being Black and international at the University), and discussed how international students fear speaking up about their experiences and concerns, or fear attending current activism events or protests, because they fear for their visa statuses (and the University did not inform them of their rights and protections to do so). Comments discussed the presence of a White nationalist organization on campus and how student money was used to support speakers who are offensive to international students. Comments discussed how rules for the Student Governing Association (SGA) allow American students to take fewer credits to allow their service in the organization, but are not allowed for international students (excluding them from representing their concerns as officers in the organization). Comments also discussed that implicit bias is a concern in SGA elections.

**Lack of support, information, and guidance for employment and other issues specific to international students.** Comments discussed several issues about employment, including the lack of opportunities, the reluctance of employers to hire international students, delays in visas, the need to stay active as a student despite assistantships not paying for course credits, Comments discussed the lack of knowledge that advisors, staff, and faculty have about documentation and visa needs, background checks, and work restrictions. Comments discussed issues with advisors and with staff at the Career Center not being aware of the obstacles that international students face in seeking employment, such as when they apply for internships, and not being aware of opportunities that are actually available for international students. Comments discussed University events, such as the Career Fair, being too narrow in their focus (e.g., on specific fields, disciplines, or majors). Comments also discussed structural issues about employment, such as visa restrictions that require international students to work on campus, and how that creates financial and other (e.g., being competitive for future jobs) disadvantages

and pressure (e.g., not able to take unpaid internships or to get paid for internships, unable to take positions in the local school district). Participants acknowledged that many of these issues are a product of federal law and are not unique to the University. Comments also discussed that access to and information about other opportunities, including scholarships and housing, for international students is limited. Comments indicated it is not clear if the information or guidance is available, and if so, where the information or guidance is (e.g., the resources that do exist are often spread across several sources).

**Lack of empathy for the experience of international students.** Comments noted this issue particularly in terms of support for the mental health of international students at Lafene and Counseling Services. Comments discussed that counselors need training and experience in cultural sensitivity (e.g., understanding cultural differences in perceptions and stigma of mental health challenges and illness, and in differences in the norms for respectful social interaction). Comments also discussed the need for more availability for appointments outside the normal workday due to their demanding workloads and for more efforts to be made to reach out to international students, and to provide better access to mental health services to them, given their vulnerable experiences.

**Issues with mentors.** Several comments discussed issues that international students (particularly graduate students) have had with mentors at the University. These included international students losing opportunities if their mentors left Kansas State University. Other comments discussed how mentors differ in how hard their students must work, how much vacation they allow, etc. Comments discussed how several programs have lots of international students who cannot leave or take a break, may have children without having childcare (e.g., due to the expense of University childcare), and that some mentors are very demanding and not empathetic to that experience. Comments discussed how international students struggle with mentors who work them too hard (e.g., late into evenings and on weekends), and have no ability to stand up to their mentors.

**Variability in the experiences of international students.** Comments conveyed different experiences of international students at the University. Some participants reported positive experiences with mentors, faculty, students, advisors, administrators, staff at the Career Center, etc., while others reported negative experiences. Comments expressed the need for these experiences to be more consistently positive (e.g., international students should not have to work to find the person who is sensitive to their needs and concerns).

**Consequences.** Several consequences of these challenges were articulated in the comments. Comments indicated that doing the academic work is not as big a challenge as, for instance, the financial challenges (due to low stipends, family expenses, visa work restrictions), and that “a little more money would change everything.” Comments indicated that the challenges listed above are a source of constant pressure, increase stress, and ruin the K-State experience. Comments indicated that participants may not recommend the University to others, may transfer to other universities, and that these challenges will negatively affect the enrollment of international students at the University. Participants indicated that they do not feel part of the “K-State Family” – they do not report being treated like members of a family,

and report that the behavior of the University is more important than the slogan. The comments discuss how these challenges require emotional intelligence and energy, negatively affecting the quality of the work done by international students, as well as their ability to devote time to other pursuits (e.g., SGA). Comments indicated that these challenges affect the ability of international students to feel they belong at the University, and cause international students to feel unwelcome and/or unappreciated, such that the challenges silence international students, create barriers, and discourage students from pursuing activities. One comment stated, in relation to American students, international students are “not living the same life they are living.”

### ***Actionable Steps***

**Multicultural awareness and sensitivity training.** Comments indicated that multicultural awareness and sensitivity training is needed to educate the University community (with specific mention of faculty, counselors, and housing and dining staff) about intercultural communication, implicit bias, microaggressions, offensive language and jokes. Comments indicated that KSunite is not sufficient, and specifically is not inclusive enough of international student interests and concerns. Comments also indicated that student organizations that threaten international students and/or their interests should not be allowed at K-State.

**Representation of international students in SGA.** Comments indicated a need for international student representation in everything international students will be participating in or affected by (e.g., judges, committees), at all levels (e.g., undergraduate, graduate, postdoctoral). Comments indicated that SGA is not representative of international students, and that SGA should be provided with multicultural awareness and sensitivity training, as well as training for how to represent the international student voices (comments indicated that previous statements by SGA representatives have advocated interests counter to international student interests). Comments also indicated that credit policies be revised to allow international students to run for SGA offices, and that more oversight should be devoted to SGA in general and its elections in particular.

**Support for the International Student Center.** Comments indicated that the Center is underfunded and is unable to provide resources (e.g., scholarships) to international students.

**Financial support for international students.** Comments indicated that international students, faculty, and staff bring contributions to K-State through their skills and experiences, and there should be recognition, appreciation, and support (e.g., financial) for those contributions, particularly in the form of scholarships.

**Prepare advisors to advise international students.** Comments indicated that the information and resources that are available should be consolidated so that they are easier to find and more accessible. Comments also indicated that the information and resources should be communicated more clearly and thoroughly to academic advisors, staff, faculty, etc., so that they can more assist and advise international students more proactively (e.g., in understanding rules about visas).



**Oversight of and equity in supervision and mentoring of international students.**

Comments discussed the need to have GRA contracts (which often state their work responsibilities as weekdays from 8AM to 5PM) match the official half-time appointment (20 hours/week). Several comments discussed how work expectations exceed the official time of the appointment, and that this should be rectified to be fair and realistic. Comments discussed the need for consistent guidelines for contracts. Comments also suggested that contracts make the net (versus gross) salaries for stipends clear. Comments also indicated that international students are also “preferred for exploitation” and that abuse of international students (e.g., excessive work demands) is more prevalent when research groups include only international students. Comments indicated this was because international students have more at risk (e.g., retaliation from mentors) and less ability to contest negative treatment than do local students.

**Support for international student interests during the COVID-19 pandemic.** Comments indicated that K-State must protect international students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Comments discussed how international students are stuck in their home countries, need to arrive in July to allow for an early start to the Fall semester, will need to come to the United States without their health insurance starting until August 1, and that health insurance overall needs to be clear in when/what is covered). Comments also discussed that it is very risky to travel during a pandemic; there are visa issues, travel restrictions and closed borders; it is expensive to travel especially with little notice to get flights; there is a good possibility they will not make it back in Fall and may need accommodations (e.g., online courses for the fall, the ability to defer acceptance for a semester or a year). Comments discussed that at the time of our focus group, K-State (not the SGA) had appeared to take no actionable steps to address these issues, and that international students “are freaking out.” Comments indicated that the changes presented to the campus community did not attend to international students’ concerns, and indicated an immediate need for a campus statement to specifically address these concerns for international students, even to say they are working on the issue and information will be forthcoming.

**Do something.** Comments indicated cynicism that anything concrete would be done as a result of the Climate Survey and this focus group. The participants want something to be done to improve climate for them at Kansas State University.

## **Focus Group: LGBTQ+ Students**

### ***Challenges***

**Experiences of discrimination and exclusion.** Comments immediately discussed experiences of being discriminated against and excluded at Kansas State University. These included being targeted by microaggressions; being left out of conversations; experiencing weird classroom dynamics, vibes, and greetings; as well as experiences with overt transphobia and homophobia. Comments mentioned specifically issues with instructors, including that some instructors often fear and/or have inability to interact with LGBTQ+ students, while other instructors think they are more well-versed in LGBTQ+ issues than they are. Consequently, they may allow majority students to dominate class discussions and let their offensive statements go unchecked, contribute to or allow awkward and/or offensive classroom atmospheres. Comments indicated that instructors and staff trivialize the acronyms, misgender students, do not use appropriate pronouns, ask for and expect leniency when they misgender or deadname their students, fail to admit when they were wrong or made mistakes, and do not validate the needs of their transgender students. Comments also indicated that transphobic professors are, and are allowed to remain, on campus. Comments discussed how class assignments are framed to cater to the majority students, that prompts are given from majority group perspectives, and that marriage and gender norms are given from a majority perspective. Comments discussed how instructors may singly out LGBTQ+ students in class discussion and may be comfortable putting the emotion labor onto students rather than assuming it themselves.

**Experiences of marginalization, even by diversity and inclusion initiatives.** Comments discussed how efforts at K-State to address issues related to diversity and inclusion focus on race and ethnicity, consequently fail to target the experiences of those who are LGBTQ+, and treat LGBTQ+ students as an afterthought. Comments indicated that administrators hired to lead diversity and inclusion efforts often have little to no LGBTQ+ competency, and are unable or unwilling to talk about or address LGBTQ+ issues. Comments also indicated that the efforts that do target LGBTQ+ issues treat these as a White issue and fail to acknowledge intersectionality (instead trying to categorize people into boxes that are inappropriate to the complexity of individuals). Comments indicated that LGBTQ+ students have to shoulder the burden themselves for education and efforts to address LGBTQ+ concerns, and feel pressure to prove themselves as authorities on their own experiences. Comments also discussed that instructors approach LGBTQ+ issues inappropriately, thinking it is okay in class to debate rights of LGBTQ+ students, or to give assignments that require majority group students to interview/observe LGBTQ+ students. Comments indicated that KSUnite is not a solution, and actually serves the majority rather than minority groups. Comments further indicated that the breakout sessions for KSUnite were not effective, that the speakers are often inappropriate for the event or in their comments. Comments stated the Wildcat Dialogues are slightly more effective, but still not a solution. Comments stated that K-State's approach to diversity is tokenism, and that even when minority group members may contribute, they must do so as one identity.

**Lack of accessible bathrooms for transgender and gender nonconforming students.**

Comments described that this has been an issue for some time, and that there appears to be no effort or priority to address this issue, despite repeated calls to address this issue, even failing to implement simple changes in bathroom signs that could address the issue in some cases. Comments described students having to leave the building they were in to find an appropriate bathroom that they were comfortable using, having to ask peers to watch the door while they used gendered bathrooms, experiences of vulnerability and risk when using the bathroom due to being along with hostile individuals who do not validate them and could harm them (such as by sexual assault). Comments indicated that the GWSS Department has put up posters on bathrooms, but these have been ripped up, torn down, or targeted by graffiti across campus, but there has been little attempt to catch or punish the perpetrators. Comments indicated that some students have tried to map out safe spaces on campus for their use, and indicated that all buildings should have safe, accessible options. Some students do not feel comfortable using public restrooms at K-State at all. Comments indicated that policy should allow transgender students to use their appropriate bathroom.

**Lack of support by services on campus.** Comments discussed how health services at K-State and the surrounding community do not provide adequate support for LGBTQ+ students. Comments indicated that staff are Lafene do not understand transgender identities, that there are no queer counselors, and that students only get short-term counseling and short-term solutions. Comments stated that there is a Christian supremacy at K-State, and noted that the main hospital in Manhattan is a Christian hospital. Comments stated that the Office of Student Life does not provide a safe space or a place to report issues and concerns, and that the Office of Integrity has failed to follow up on incidents brought to them.

**General lack of concern about these issues at Kansas State University.** Comments discussed how K-State is not a “family”, and how K-State is “not a safe place for transgender and queer students”, mentioning that concealed carry presents a real danger, and that the “best in Kansas is not good enough” (in reference to a recent article’s report about K-State). Comments discussed how students are now unable to change their names in the student directory (comments indicated they had been able to do so prior to the fire in Hale Library) and that this presents a danger to students. Several comments discussed that administration and colleges are not attentive to these issues and have not addressed these issues when they have been brought to their attention, and they should be held accountable. Comments discussed how complaints about LGBTQ+ issues are met with defensiveness, that issues are hard to report and there is an intense burden of proof on reporter, and that administration has both an inability and unwillingness to address these issues. Comments indicated that administration has to want to change, but will not do anything without immense pressure. A specific comment mentioned that administrators will not attend SAFE Zone training. Another comment discussed that the University Climate Survey was not revised to be less alienating after beta testing, and thus failed to ask questions about gender identities appropriately. Another comment stated that K-State does not understand LGBTQ+ research. Another comment stated that LGBTQ+ students are instructed to focus only on their education, and just move beyond “the other stuff.”

## **Actionable Steps**

**Hire LGBTQ+ faculty and staff.** Comments discussed a need to hire more LGBTQ+ faculty and staff because the University needs people who are knowledgeable about LGBTQ+ issues. Comments also discussed that LGBTQ+ faculty and staff should not be expected to do “extra” work toward diversity and inclusion that is not explicitly stated and compensated in their professional responsibilities. Further, comments stated that K-State does not have an LGBTQ+ office or center that is similar to those at our peer institutions, and that this should be resolved with additional hires, funding, and visibility.

**Use experts, not students, to do this work.** Comments discuss how student resources and emotional reserves can be depleted, and that resources exist in the world already – experts should be recruited (and paid) to provide this guidance and information. Comments discussed that paying expert speakers would be more beneficial than more meetings or “tokenizing events.” Comments also discussed how the participants of this focus group feel that they provided the labor of their participation for free, and that the information could have been gathered without their needing to participate – one statement was, “Don’t ask us. Google it.”

**Take action at K-State against prejudice toward LGBTQ+.** Comments discussed how student organizations have been allowed at K-State (i.e., America First, Turning Point USA), and have used University funds, that promote intolerance and hate toward individuals who are LGBTQ+, and these organizations should not be allowed at K-State. Comments indicated that hate speech is not free speech, and should not be protected as such. Another comment stated that K-State should “make homophobia unwelcome.” Comments discussed the need a service to receive reports of unsafe experiences that will investigate and follow up on those experiences.

**Revise the curriculum and other programming.** Comments discussed the need to review and revise the Diversity and Multicultural Overlay and the Human Diversity in the United States requirement. Comments discussed how courses used to satisfy these requirements do not fit the mission of the requirements, do not address “the hard questions”, and consequently fail to achieve their objectives by offering “easy loopholes” rather than real education. Comments suggested that courses offered by the GWSS and/or AMETH departments be required to fulfill these requirements. Comments indicated that students should have the opportunity to have these conversations in all of their classes, and that instructors should state outright that it is valuable to learn about diversity and essential to a KSU degree, and the curricular requirements should reflect this. Comments indicated that investment in this education will prepare students for doing this in their lives. Similarly, comments indicated that campus programming and events should adhere to this same mission, and should be led by experts qualified to lead them.

**Change K-State policies to be more inclusive and to address LGBTQ+ concerns.** Comments discussed that these include changing policies to provide appropriate and accessible bathrooms and allowing for name changes. Comments also discussed making intercultural competence as a condition for hires and part of performance evaluation standards.

**Do something transparently.** Comments indicated that Kansas State University must label situations for what they are, take responsibility, and take action to address the issues and concerns raised. Comments indicated frustration with previous inaction and cynicism that no real change will come from this process, with one comment wondering how long it would take before we conducted the next focus group because the institution is “trying to hear us” as its only action. Comments stated that the world will remember the University’s actions, but also the University’s inactions. Comments also called for the need for transparency about the actions that are taken to “make things better.”

## **Focus Group: Students of Color**

### ***Challenges***

**Experiences of discrimination and exclusion.** Comments indicated that participants experienced discrimination and exclusion in student interactions. These experiences included not being taken seriously by peers, having to prove themselves to their peers, being trivialized by peers, being stereotyped by peers, experiencing microaggressions (e.g., unaccepting body language, side eye). Comments also indicated that Student Government fails to represent or be attentive to their concerns and issues. Comments indicated that participants experienced microaggressions from faculty as well (e.g., in the form of misdirected jokes) and that they have had experiences of faculty looking at students of color to make comments during class or when the faculty themselves make comments related to race or ethnicity. Comments indicated that students may be more overt in their expressions of prejudice than are faculty. Comments indicated that participants experience discrimination in class settings, feel ignored in class discussions, feel that their opinions do not matter, have issues working with majority students on group projects, and fear negative reactions if they disagree, speak out, or complain (e.g., that the police will be called). Comments indicated that participants experience issues on campus, including being viewed as a threat by others, that others are afraid to approach them, and that they do not feel safe or comfortable on campus. Comments discussed how the educations and lives of students of color can be adversely affected if one person has a negative opinion or reaction to them. Comments discussed being at a disadvantage at job and career fairs where there they are treated less well, cared about less, and have less interest taken in them. Comments discussed experiences of having opportunities be withheld from them without providing information (e.g., financial holds, not being told about payment plans, late fees not articulated, not told about emergency scholarship or resources), being told they had no options when they actually did, trying to succeed as a first-year student and not being provided with guidance (e.g., not being guided through issues with financial aid).

**Experiences of marginalization, even by diversity and inclusion initiatives.** Comments indicated that participants have their experiences and statements questioned when they speak about their experiences. Comments described being tokenized and asked to educate others about their experiences and about issues related to race and ethnicity, that this is exhausting, and that others should do their own research about these topics. Comments discussed a specific incident when an administrator instructed members of the campus community to ask Black peers about what a noose means and why it is bad. Comments indicated issues with the annual KSUnite event. Comments indicated that KSUnite has lost its mission and message, that its purpose is confusing (after a comment stated that the first one was great, but it then evolved into “something different”). Comments indicated KSUnite is now more of a publicity stunt that has lost its meaning, is an excuse not to go to class for an afternoon, and is more focused on teaching majority group members than on supporting students of color. Comments discussed that initial excitement about KSUnite, with expectations that it would be welcoming and supportive, became disappointed when the event glossed over issues, speakers said “what we already know”, and no one was made uncomfortable. Comments indicated that

multicultural student organizations do not want to support events when they are just checked off the list by attending.

**General lack of concern about these issues at Kansas State University.** Comments discussed how K-State claims to be, but is not a “family.” Comments discussed that there is a general disrespect for diverse cultures at K-State. Comments indicated that the campus allowed intolerant student organizations (America First, Turning Point), the mocking of Juneteenth, etc., and that administration did not clearly condemn or denounce these groups or actions. Comments indicated that the excuse for not condemning the intolerant student groups of protecting their free speech failed to protect students. Comments discussed how the administration’s protection of the free speech of intolerant groups contributes to a climate in which students of color feel unsafe, and that these feelings are compounded when administration instructs students of color “to stand down” against intolerant groups or be libel for their own comments. Comments indicated that “freedom of speech” should not equal “freedom of consequence.” Comments indicated that K-State shows off its efforts (e.g., the multicultural center) but does not address the issues that arise in overt or meaningful ways, and that efforts are often more about projecting an image than creating a supportive climate. Comments indicated there is no transparency for consequences for those who engage in discrimination at K-State. Comments also discussed that, with a few notable exceptions, administrators and faculty have not engaged students of color in conversations about these issues, attended multicultural events, attended multicultural student organization meetings, etc., so that they can see the struggles of students of color “in real life, not just through tweets and reports.”

**Consequences.** Several consequences of these challenges were articulated in the comments. Comments indicated that these challenges add stress, result in participants disengaging or avoiding interactions to protect themselves. Comments discussed that these challenges result in negative mental health consequences that, amid education and financial concerns, create obstacles and disadvantage and create additional burdens for students of color that majority group students do not have to carry, and that these challenges may even result in suicide. Comments indicated that these challenges may cause students of color to face K-State not living up to the promise of supporting all students, seeming hypocritical, and could hurt enrollment, by causing student of color to drop out or transfer. Comments stated that it is hard to stay at a place when you feel like you are ignored, it is hard to get students of color to come to or stay at K-State, that racist incidents at K-State are well known, and it is hard to recommend K-State to other students of color. Comments discussing how feeling unwanted or unwelcome makes students of color not want to try, and to question their own abilities, motivations, and goals. Comments discussed that the mental health of students of color is not a priority and that our administration is not doing enough to make it a priority. Comments discussed that students of color do not get the empathy they need when they seek help for their mental health, how counselors need to have multicultural sensitivity, and that counselors of color are needed. Comments also indicated that students of color do not know who to go to when having issues in the dorms, especially when the issues are racial (e.g., derogatory terms), and that students of color need to know where to go to have their voice heard and that

something will be done, need transparency, need to know these processes will be supportive, and need to have these processes be clear and well communicated.

### ***Actionable Steps***

**Hire faculty and staff of color.** Comments discussed that students of color do not get the empathy they need when they seek help for their mental health, how counselors need to have multicultural sensitivity, and that counselors of color are needed. Comments discussed how staff burnout is an issue because there are not enough individuals (e.g., counselors, advisors, mentors) of color to serve students of color. Comments discussed how more faculty and staff of color are needed who can work with students of color and understand their struggles, show them opportunities, offer representation, and contribute to a community of people who are a base point for students of color. Comments discussed that faculty and staff of color so that students of color feel comfortable, and so that students of color may receive support their health, development, and success.

**Take action at K-State against prejudice toward Black, Indigenous, People of Color.** Comments discussed that the administration has not openly condemned racism or those who are racist, instead opting to play it safe politically, and discussed the need for administration to stand behind their students of color, without there needing to be an uproar from students of color to inspire that action. Comments stated that administration needs to do a better job of checking themselves when making statement and taking actions about whether it will convey the right message. Comments discussed dismay that multicultural students have brought forward issues repeatedly, and are told the issues are not serious, no action is taken, and the students have to continue to cope with the issues. Comments discussed a desire that administration not perceive these issues as political, because issues of fairness and equity are not inherently political. Comments discussed a desire for administration to proactively talk about and address issues of diversity and inclusion on campus, and not only doing so in reaction to severe public incidents. Comments discussed that it is “hard to feel like a family” when there are barriers to receiving, or asking for fair treatment, and that “treating people well should be the status quo.”

**Revise the curriculum and other programming.** Comments indicated a need for mandatory training for faculty, staff, and students in being inclusive, avoiding issues, and addressing situations that do arise. Regarding faculty and staff in particular, comments discussed that problems often stem from them not knowing how to project supportive behaviors, and that a set of tools should be provided that allows faculty and staff to better support students of color. For students, comments discussed variable opinions of Wildcat Warmup and Wildcat Dialogues, but indicated a continued need for mandatory cultural immersion training for students when they begin their educations at K-State that is a priority then throughout their education at K-State. Regarding KSUnite, comments indicated a need to rename, rebrand, and refocus KSUnite periodically. Echoing comments mentioned above the KSUnite has lost its meaning, comments discussed a need for KSUnite to have a clear mission and goal, and be more than “a kumbaya circle.” Comments indicated that, rather than promoting the idea of “family” (a notion that comments indicated is a line for recruitment that



does not represent the reality for students of color), KSUnite should address (not avoid) real issues, including microaggressions at K-State; shortcomings in departments (e.g., in support for students of color, funding); what colleges should be doing; inequities in the distribution of awards, scholarships, and grants. Comments discussed a need to make the conversations uncomfortable, about crossing the line at subtle levels, and that too much focus has been on extreme manifestations to try not to upset majority group students who need to learn to empathize with the discomfort students of color feel. Comments also discussed that all K-State campuses should have events, and that connections need to be made among the three campuses to get on the same page toward the same goal, close the gaps in communication, and that a team (possibly among the SGAs) could be tasked to coordinate these efforts. Another comment suggested that K-State publish an online journal on diversity to provide voice and representation for faculty, staff, and students of color.

**Create opportunities representation for students of color.** Comments discussed a need for K-State to provide opportunities for the voices of students of color to be heard and included in policy decisions, curriculum, and diversity and inclusion initiatives. Comments discussed the role of multicultural organizations in this representation, and discussed the need to support multicultural organizations, allow them to be part of the action plan, and communicate to and among the multicultural organizations better and transparently. Comments discussed a need for administration to be more involved with the multicultural community, to create student of color liaison positions to represent student concerns to the administration, and to allow students a path of direct connection of their voices to administration. Comments discussed a need to let multicultural organizations have a larger role in decisions in terms where K-State is trying to go in terms of its goals and priorities, because they are currently left out of these conversations. Comments indicated a lot of support for the multicultural student organizations (perhaps working together) to have more voice and involvement in the decisions made at K-State.

**Do something transparently.** Comments indicated that President Myers and the administration need to be more transparent about the next steps they will make to the campus safe, and to feel safe, for all students. Comments indicated that there needs to be better communication from administration, and that just stating they will address an issue (e.g., #BlackAtKState) is not enough – administration needs to state what they will do to address the issue. Comments discussed that administration hides behind statements and videos, but does not know how to be there for students. Comments indicated a desire to know what will happen in the 2025 plan toward this objective, and stated that plans to address these concerns and issues should be transparent, communicated clearly, and widely available. One participant noted their belief that K-State can be open, accepting, and encouraging of everyone if they develop a plan and genuinely pursue it. Clarify where we stand, projects their goal, say and show what we believe it, everyone is involved and no one is left out, articulate our goals and what we want to achieve, congratulate those who achieve our goals. Comments discussed that this should be a goal for K-State and its administration, that students should be a clear priority, that K-State should be clear and committed to reaching that goal, but that K-State has not shown its work or progress, and K-State's actions suggest at times that it is not a priority.

Comments indicated a need for transparent policy that is enacted to demonstrate that racism will not be tolerated at Kansas State University.