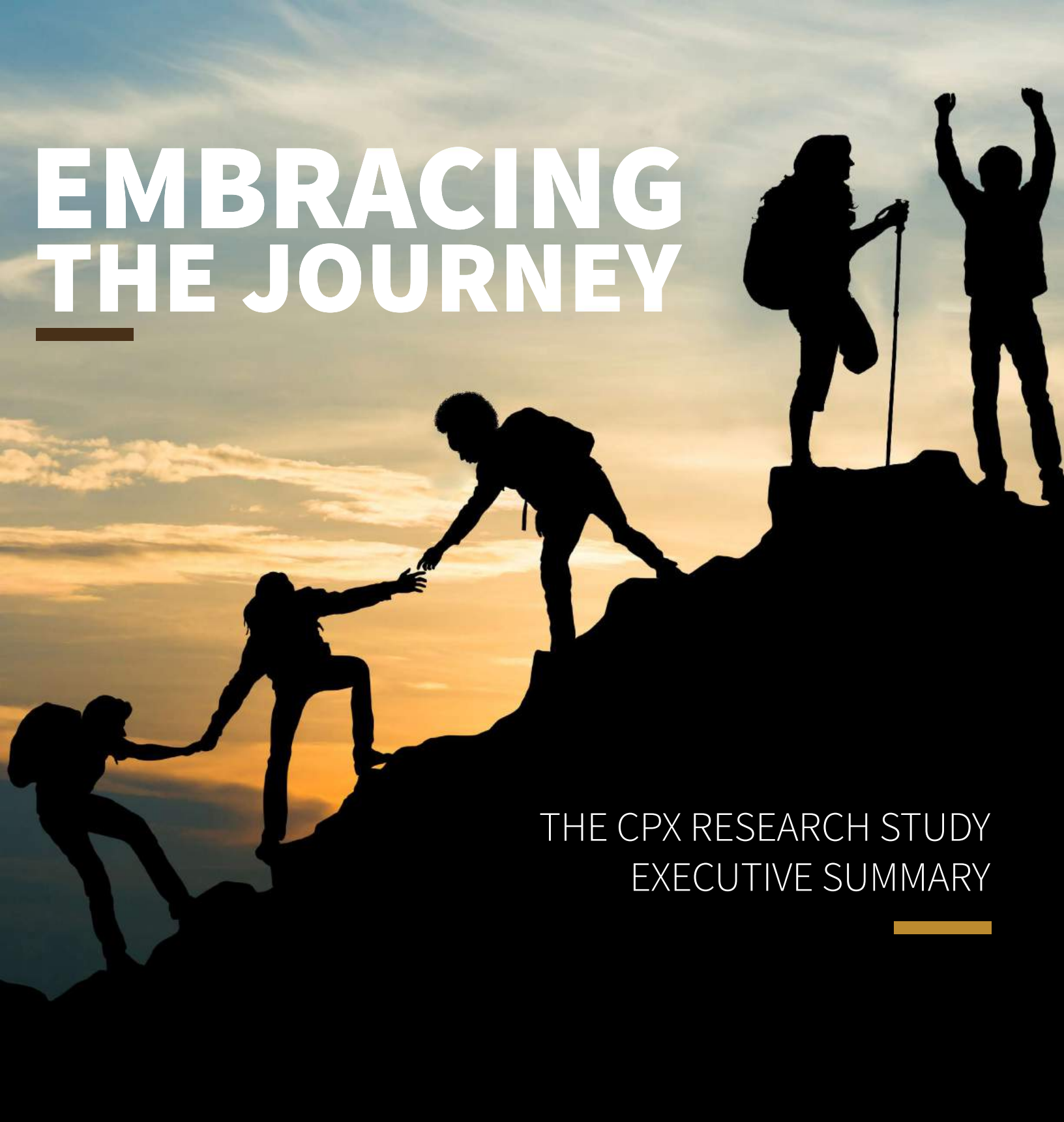


EMBRACING THE JOURNEY



THE CPX RESEARCH STUDY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2012, Cal Poly and President Jeffrey Armstrong have firmly established a commitment to diversity and inclusive excellence as institutional values and have worked with advocates to establish the foundational infrastructure for implementing these values. Out of that work came a call for an unflinching assessment of Cal Poly's campus climate, now offered in this report.

The Cal Poly Experience Initiative emerged in the winter of 2019, when senior leadership asked researchers from the Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership and Social Innovation to provide an objective third-party assessment of campus climate. Just before this, a series of difficult *diversity flashpoints* had left many on campus questioning the university and needing an expansive response of mission and interlocking activities to begin changing the DEI narrative at Cal Poly.

We engaged with thousands of community members to both establish a visible conversation about issues of diversity, equity and inclusion dynamics across the colleges and units, and to understand campus DEI dynamics at Cal Poly, using best-in-class research techniques and analysis. From this emerged evidence-based recommendations to support the institution's efforts forward.

We must remember that diversity and inclusive excellence is more than a numbers game; it is a cultural shift that transforms an institution at many levels into a vibrant, interconnected community of inclusion, advancing and elevating the institution *and its effectiveness* as a whole. A commitment to inclusive excellence not only initiates a journey for the institution itself but for each individual—student, faculty, staff and campus leader—who is responsible for their own personal development and serves as a team member advancing the institution's expedition to a better future for all. This report supports this journey, establishing a new base camp, founded on rigorous quantitative and qualitative data and data analysis, from which the team can evaluate and implement the next leg of this adventure.

Campus Climate and the CPX Research Project

On a campus, the term "climate" is used to discuss how individuals and groups experience their membership in the campus community (Hurtado and Associates, 1998) It summarizes the inclusivity dynamics of the organization, nested in broader socio-historical context of difference in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability and a near limitless range of social identities. In short, the presence of individuals from different backgrounds results in diversity; climate refers to the lived experiences of those diverse individuals and groups. Diversity and inclusion efforts are not complete unless they address issues of climate.

The CPX Research Project. Our research team used data gathered from one-on-one interviews, small-group listening sessions and online surveys to power our assessment. Three questions guided our efforts across all activities:

1. What is the lived experience of diverse groups at Cal Poly?
2. What are the key challenges and opportunities of diversity, equity and inclusion at Cal Poly?
3. What are core recommendations to help Cal Poly further support inclusive excellence?

Quantitative Data. Our research applied several well-respected and well-validated campus climate research frameworks, questions and methodologies. It mobilized a multi-level campaign strategy to drive a healthy level of survey participation. Following collection, data were weighted for representational accuracy. Student participant rates were consistent with university factbook data. For a full discussion, please reference the Cal Poly Experience (CPX) Research Study Student, Faculty and Staff Technical Reports.

Survey Respondents. Approximately 41% of students (8,749), 61% of faculty (894), and 60% of staff (1,127) responded to this census study of the Cal Poly Experience, a healthy response rate.

Qualitative Data (comments, written responses) were transcribed, coded and analyzed for themes and key insights using a traditional open-coding method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Mixed-Method Study Approach. These data are highly credible, grounded in best-in-class measures, in conservative but adequate analysis techniques and garnered very strong response rates. Further, the inclusion of so many different types of data offers several important benefits and helps us better interpret the data as well.

Listening Session Findings

Listening is foundational to embracing the journey of change. The process of being listened to allows participants reflect on the culture in which they work and learn. This listening is in many ways cathartic for those who have endured a traumatic time of heightened emotion, for example diversity flashpoints or microaggressions. Listening helps them to discover an emergent, better future.

In all, we spoke with nearly 600 Cal Poly students, faculty and staff from diverse subgroups on campus, as well as a small number of persons from the San Luis Obispo community. Three central ideas were heard consistently: 1.) The need for a multi-dimensional diversity, equity and inclusion plan that elevates the prior Collective Impact framework; 2.) Reports of a widespread culture of microaggression and resistance to the presence of diverse groups, with many individuals (not the university as a whole) professing no desire to prioritize DEI work; and 3.) The importance of confronting and overcoming the inertia of a legacy culture and a reputation of homogeneity.

Positives. While participants were generally critical of the university's DEI track record, there was a noticeable feeling that leadership was moving in the right direction and gaining momentum in what felt like a series of slow starts. Participants lauded a growing community of DEI champions, including many students at the grassroots level, plus clear steps taken by the university. Many wanted to see additional resources here. Diversity training and programming were noted as recent positives.

Challenges. Healthy recognition of challenges leads to outcomes. Participants identified both historic and contemporary cultural challenges for DEI at Cal Poly, from homogeneity to location to a past lack of leadership and change planning. Three key challenges emerged: 1.) A negative DEI brand image, a "good-old-boy school" known as "a White, wealthy school, where your diversity is not welcome." 2.) A definite need to diversify the campus community, especially leadership and tenure-track faculty. 3.) A desired shift in engagement with alumni and San Luis Obispo. In the eyes of many, the ultimate pathway to a stronger Cal Poly experience is to prioritize DEI, visibly commit and ultimately enhance ethnic, racial, economic, gender and other diversity on campus.

A Scorecard Assessment Framework for Unpacking the Cal Poly Experience

The in-person listening sessions gleaned a cadre of valuable insights that were reinforced by our data collection. For this report, we created a proprietary color-coded infographic scorecard allowing immediate understanding of patterns in the data, from green areas of clear strength to red zones of challenge. Notably, students, faculty and staff reported similar perspectives in their views about General Campus Climate, DEI Campus Climate, Institutional Commitment to DEI, Feeling Valued and Belonging, and Treated Fairly in San Luis Obispo. Many patterns replicate again and again.

Notably, DEI Climate was viewed as an area of concern across students, faculty and staff. The fact that so many on campus view the general climate as positive yet express concern about the DEI climate is unusual in our research experience and indicates a net positive—an extraordinary and widespread level of awareness about DEI issues and a concern for others even when one's own experience is comfortable. These results point to a wide-open door for action at Cal Poly.

The Cal Poly Student/Faculty/Staff Experience

Scorecards. Consistently across all three population segments (student, faculty, staff), *identity matters*. Those who were female (vs. male), LGBTQIA (vs. heterosexual), disabled (vs. no disability), financially challenged (vs. financially stable) or of underrepresented racial/ethnic backgrounds (vs. White) consistently reported different and more-negative experiences. This finding is consistent in the data and visible in the scorecards across our five core measures.

In addition to the standard bivariate models, we provided additional multivariate analysis that further delved into the relative impact of sex, sexual orientation, ability status, financial stability, and race/ethnicity on the outcomes of Dissatisfaction (“Dissatisfied” or “Very Dissatisfied”) and of Discrimination (“Yes”). These findings confirmed the data summarized in the scorecards, accentuating the depth of the results—namely, that *students, faculty and staff experience Cal Poly in different ways that are profoundly affected by their identities*. Across every measure of this study, diverse communities reported a less favorable experience than their majority counterparts.

The listening sessions and survey data largely reinforced these results as existing everywhere institutionally. In comments, those in diverse communities reported greater challenges with the Cal Poly experience. They reported feeling like “the other.”

While we have not seen this level of *consistency* across students, faculty, staff and dependent measures at a single university, the outcomes of the assessment are common among higher education studies of this kind, not unique to Cal Poly (Harper and Hurtado, 2007). What will set Cal Poly apart, however, is what both university leadership and the entire institutional community *do* with these findings—how they come together to embrace a collective DEI journey that can strengthen the Cal Poly experience, both institutionally and individually, building a better educational and work experience for all.

Strategic Diversity Leadership Recommendations

The “embracing the journey” metaphor at the heart of this report posits that each person is potentially a catalyst for positive change. Listening sessions gathered suggestion that focused on: 1.) Leadership instituting a campus-wide DEI action plan, complete with accountability, incentives, infrastructure, and resources (AIIR) and 2.) That the campus community deeply embrace an ongoing individual and collective journey of DEI leadership development at all levels—student, faculty, staff and senior administrative levels through awareness, learning, recruitment, retention, outreach, and community engagement efforts.

Recommendation 1. Engage in campus-wide dialogues about the CPX study results. Leverage CPX toolkits among leadership, faculty and staff for their personal DEI journey and to activate a series of campus-wide dialogues about results of the CPX study. Senior leader visibility is key.

Recommendation 2. Create a centralized Inclusive Excellence framework to guide the DEI action-planning steps of colleges, administrative units, and student organizations. Develop a 5-year DEI action plan, uplifting relevant Collective Impact recommendations. Identify a DEI lead and team in every college and major administrative unit. Establish a clear accountability process by holding deans and VP’s responsible for plan development and implementation. Establish a scorecard to track and measure progress over time and produce an annual public forum.

Recommendation 3. Develop an Inclusive Excellence Innovation fund to support small and large grants to drive new DEI initiatives that focus on the university’s most difficult challenges. Align the fund to the core DEI framework and challenges noted in the CPX study. Prioritize evidence-based interventions and collaboration. Spark a culture of innovation, looking for programs that can make a big difference if scaled. Support current programs that have a strong evidence base.

Recommendation 4: Develop a multidimensional DEI training, curriculum and professional development program. Create learning moments for all. Begin with an online training for all in the campus community, and a shared learning experience for all DEI leads. Find creative ways to acknowledge DEI training in annual performance reviews, merit and promotion discussions, and hiring opportunities. Develop a certificate program. Pepper DEI learning into pre-existing, relevant programs and provide release time for employee training.

Recommendation 5: Invest in the campus DEI units to create a stronger, more evidence-based approach to driving high-impact diversity and inclusion outcomes. Invest in infrastructure of units, committees and leaders who are doing the day-to-day work. Make targeted investments that ensure every unit has a funded DEI activation lead role. Reexamine all current DEI committees. Scale up the Cal Poly Scholars program. Develop a major faculty diversity program as the university's "big bet" and support retention, promotion, and leadership succession. Establish a staff leadership development program.

Recommendation 6: Develop the next phase of the CPX awareness campaign to create a positive brand halo and engagement both internally and externally with issues of diversity. Create awareness with alumni, the SLO community and campus citizens to spark a stronger culture of DEI at Cal Poly. Establish an appropriate messaging framework. Develop talking points for all leaders at Cal Poly regarding the CPX initiative. Drive development of the refreshed and DEI-strengthened Cal Poly brand. Conduct targeted outreach conversations with key board members, alumni, donors, corporate partners, others. Convene an external CPX-DEI advisory of supportive corporate partners, alumni, community leaders, and relevant influencers to support the university's strategies.

Recommendation 7: Develop an Inclusive Excellence taskforce to identify 2-3 short- and long-term solutions to issues identified by the CPX Study. Establish a Cal Poly DEI Community Taskforce to reach out to the San Luis Obispo community and identify 3-5 top strategies to create a more inclusive experience on campus and in the SLO community.

Concluding Thoughts and Next Steps

As these results and other research has shown, educational institutions need a clear DEI infrastructure and plan, not only for building capacity in times of calm, but for responding well and swiftly in moments of crisis. Now is the time to redouble past DEI efforts and accelerate them into the future at Cal Poly.

Today the university is experiencing the often-painful early stages that demonstrate how greater demographic diversity does not necessarily create inclusion and belonging. In many ways, diversity is just the beginning. The greater challenge is to create a new DEI culture, supported by educational and work environments that allow such diversity to enrich itself and thrive—to create a broad-based and secure feeling of community, inclusion and belonging. This survey was a significant step forward toward that goal.

On behalf of The Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership & Social Innovation, thank you for the opportunity to serve your intentions and efforts as you take advantage of this critical juncture to embrace the DEI journey and drive new impact in the world.



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