Appendix A
Comments Analysis – Question #103

This section of the report summarizes the comments1 submitted for the last survey question (#103)2 and provides examples of those remarks echoed by several respondents. Out of the 2,046 surveys received from the Fashion Institute of Technology’s (FIT) climate assessment, 1058 different people responded to one or more of the open-end questions. No respondents answered all open-ended questions. As the first several items were follow-up questions that allowed respondents to provide more detail about their answers to a previous question, the comments provided for those items are included in the narrative.

Additional Thoughts on Campus Climate

The final open-ended question allowed respondents to elaborate on any of their survey responses, further describe their experiences, or offer additional thoughts about climate issues or ways the College might improve the climate. Four hundred-six (406) respondents offered a wide range of comments. A few individuals applauded FIT for promoting diversity and inclusion and gave examples of the positive steps they have seen, including launching this survey and overall campus climate initiative. Suggestions were also provided.

- This survey is long overdue. I'm just happy that someone is finally paying attention to how tense and stifling the FIT atmosphere has become compared to how it was say 10 years ago. Even back then the evolution was in place. I'm not that bothered by it because I can deal with it. However, I can't help but notice how it's negatively affecting just about everyone around me.
- I am pleased to see the great level of effort being made toward creating a positive teaching and learning environment at FIT.
- This survey was amazing!
- Increased discussion about the many topics identified with diversity will result (I think and I hope), in increased patience, the ability to listen more attentively and to act with more thought.
- FIT has a very tolerant climate--I am proud to work here. Diversity of beliefs and lifestyles make FIT a very unique place for learning. We provide a life education, as well

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1 This report provides respondents’ verbatim comments.
2 The survey question was “This survey has asked you to reflect upon a large number of issues related to the climate and your experiences in this climate, using a multiple-choice format. If you would like to elaborate upon any of your survey responses, further describe your experiences, or offer additional thoughts about these issues and ways that the college might improve the climate, we encourage you to do so in the space provided below.”
as an academic and vocational education (no, there is nothing wrong with using the word vocational). Providing such a complete education for students from many religions, orientations, and economic situations helps them understand that they are part of a world (not just their OWN world), and that other world views are a learning experience that will help them in their careers and living a good life in general. You can live and believe whatever suits you, but so can others. We are ALL correct.

- **FIT has given me the opportunity to observe life in NYC and relate my environment to my studies. The courses are difficult and challenging but not unbearable. I have never been happier in my life.**

- **Fit has been doing a great job diversifying the faculty and students but shouldn’t be their main concern.**

- **Compared to a lot of colleges, FIT has improved in a short amount of time. So far, it has been an overall positive experience; however, the staff could use improvement. I believe having a program or international students club would help to promote diversity acceptance in the student population. I notice groups of friends are very ethnically homogenous, especially foreign exchange students. I also noticed that there are a number of faculty that have been disrespected because they may not be native English speakers, and students are focused on their accents.**

- **I feel that FIT needs to diversify the students and staff. I do not feel there is a fair amount of students nor faculty that are of Latino and African American decent.**

- **While I believe diversity is important and should be rewarded and promoted, it is difficult to support all the work that is going into addressing these issues when there are so many fundamental problems with the structure of the college. For example, the huge imbalance of adjuncts to full time faculty and being asked as an adjunct to put so much course development work in without compensation or coordination from full time faculty. There is a real lack of support for part time faculty that unfortunately reflects on the students in their already heavy load of classes and work.**

- **Everything is very comfortable and by observing other students, they feel comfortable too. I see no discrimination. The climate is very accepting towards all different kinds of students, faculty and staff, and just people in general.**

- **I have worked at FIT for many years and have seen a positive step forward regarding hiring practices and promotion. In the past I felt employees were hired and promoted based on who they knew, or had strong union relationships. I am glad to see more professionalism in HR and therefore more diversity. FIT is a great institution to work for and we should try to offer the opportunity the underrepresented.**

- **I feel that The Fashion Institute of Technology has done a great job at making anyone who attends, faculty, staff, and guests feel welcome. I am constantly engaged and intellectually stimulated in all of my classrooms. I feel lucky to be attending The Fashion Institute of Technology and am so grateful to all who have helped me along the way.**

- **I’m glad that this survey is being conducted. I hope the results will guide the college on strategic next steps and that real and meaningful action will take place. Another powerful action that would send a message to the FIT community that the colleges takes issues of diversity seriously would be if the college were to create an office of Diversity and Inclusion office and appoint a Diversity and Inclusion VP.**
Some individuals commented about their experiences with faculty in and out of the classroom, and as faculty members at FIT. Some offered additional suggestions on how faculty can improve the classroom climate as well as how FIT can support faculty members.

- I feel that the course objectives often relate to the young age of the students entering school, which results in a lower level of the program itself and attitudes from the Professors.
- When issues occur in the classroom, many students are afraid to talk to the Prof or the head of the department and present their opinion. Often they are afraid it will result in a lower grade or a non-pleasant confrontation. I wish there was a way to communicate and give feedback about classes before the end of the semester in a comfortable way.
- Another way FIT faculty enhances positive climate is by making students work with other students by giving group assignments, and also having class discussions.
- I believe that faculty members should better their classrooms by stopping bullying when it takes place and taking more initiative in harsh situations where a student's dignity is in jeopardy.
- If I had to make a suggestion, I feel the professors should be more patient with international students whose first language is not English. It is hard for them to understand as it is for the professors. Thank you.
- I feel that the majority of professors are great advocates for the students in their classes, and that sort of modeling enforces positive student-to-student relations. Within the classroom, I have never encountered discrimination, and have very rarely witnessed discrimination against another student. (And I do look out for that sort of thing.)
- The other thing that I think would benefit FIT is more mentoring for new faculty. The fashion Art department is full of talented and helpful faculty, but I had to seek them out. I was not trained in any way when I started here.
- Professors could be more thoughtful of the students. I know that some professors do not use Angel and do not like it which makes it very hard for us students to communicate with them. Also, the staff and the faculty overall could try and make it a better environment of the students and not be so stiff and scary.
- I feel that fit faculty genuinely care about us students. I always feel comfortable and am proud to go here.
- I believe that the professors should take the time to make sure that the learning disabled students know the class material by means other than written test. Or to have shorter test more often with less material.
- I have had more than one professor discuss the importance of not being fat. While this doesn't bother me, I can imagine that it bothers others. Obviously it's no mystery the industry cares a lot about appearance but I thought it was uncomfortable that a variety of my professors would go on to acknowledge the importance of being thin.
- I feel that some of the curriculum is not up to date with what is really going on in the real world. I think the programs, and professors and overall FIT staff need to be more on board with keep up to date with what is going to really help students become successful, and monitor more closely what is actually working, and what is a waste of time.
A number of other respondents were concerned with the exclusive nature of the campus community. This relates to socioeconomic status; physical appearance; position at FIT; religious affiliation; and, international status.

- Despite the very warm and cooperative climate of my department, it is largely white, which leaves room for improvement. Similarly the campus seems to reflect the socioeconomic climate of the US at large where higher positions seem largely dominated by white people.
- I feel that it is not necessarily race, gender, ethnicity or religion that's dividing the students, its social economic status and personal fashion choices that divides people there.
- I have noticed that during the holiday season, not all religions are represented at FIT. I don't see a nativity scene at FIT's Marvin Feldman Center, but I do see a Menorah. I also notice that Kwanza is represented in the President's Office. Shouldn't all religions be represented?
- A lot of people tend to be stand-offish in this school.
- Non-classroom faculty directly involved with students and teaching/learning need to be fully included in campus-wide faculty initiatives.
- Morale is low for employees who are in their 30-50s who have no opportunity to advance and very difficult times with childcare. Also, salaries across divisions are NOT equal (IT makes more in comparable positions compared to Academic Affairs and Student Services).
- The only climate I have a problem with is the social one. I have only encountered very nasty, self-centered students since I've been here. All of my peers seem to think that they can say or think whatever they want about anyone else, but they themselves are above judgment.
- As a new out-of-state student... I had a really hard time getting used to FIT and I found that no one made any effort in making me feel welcome. I think that more should be done during orientation to help new students socialize and feel more comfortable. Especially in the residence halls, I feel that not enough is done to help students get to know each other, which is frustrating because we are all living together. I do not know any of the other people on my floor. Overall, I just get the impression that people here aren't very friendly or welcoming.
- I feel like there is a bad climate when it comes to certain people that have more money than others. At a fashion school it is obviously important that you are well dressed to classes, and it class discussions having knowledge of brands is beneficial. However some people brag about their ability to afford designer names without realizing it, and to the people that can't afford the brands it makes them look obnoxious.
- I feel as if majors never mingle in classes at our school. We pass one another every day and very rarely know anyone from the outside of our majors.
- I think the greater issues are class based here on campus, as the school creates large rifts in service expectations and compensation based on tenure within the workplace, and this becomes a part of the overall climate, including inappropriate workplace ethic from both the haves and have nots.
FIT is a great place, but it still has pockets of networks that hinder inclusion. Often these pockets consist of people that have a sense of "entitlement." Moreover, there doesn't seem to be a "real" system in place that can interrupt these systems and install fairness. Over the years, I have been surprised as to how these networks, seemingly, continue to grow unchecked.

FIT IS A SECURE PLACE TO WORK. Employees remain here for that reason. However, it can be a GREAT place to learn and work. FIT leadership does not value all employees. They leave out staff in the decision making process. Every great leader / corporation values all employees when defining strategies for growth and change. Why isn't that happening here? Staff are never consulted or included in critical college decisions. This is what is missing at FIT. Staff delivers front line service to customers. We're the first ones students and parents see when they visit or contact the college. Why doesn't the administration what to hear what we have to say? We have to be included in all decisions at every level. We're the missing key to fundamental change at FIT. Invest and in us, ask us questions, implement our ideas.

As a non-degree commuter, coming in sporadically, there is a small sense of exclusion in that I am separated from the rest of the students that are living on campus, say, or are full time. To personify the feeling, it's as if people look at me and say "who do you think you are" or "I am superior to you". These could be based upon appearance and dress, but I have also noticed that as time goes by, I feel more and more integrated and welcomed.

As a result of the connections to the Fashion Industry I believe that it is often acceptable behavior to comment on people's weight and looks - particularly women. I am concerned about the pressure that puts on students and the impact on eating disorders and self-esteem and body image. It is common to hear people talk about appearances in a very catty/disparaging manner that makes it an uncomfortable climate for many.

Some shared their concerns with administrative offices, programs or departments on campus.

- Admission office staff should take time to see students with questions regarding their student status. From my experience, most staff in admission office rather as students to email them instead of making time to see them in person. I believe a lot of students especially international students. The campus securities are the worst and they need to know how to treat students and visitors with customer service skills. If they don't know how to assist students, maybe the school should replace them with swipe card system - like Baruch College.
- I can’t emphasis enough the importance of communication between departments.
- The hierarchy at FIT is difficult to negotiate and navigate. This slows down efficiency and confidence when looking for help/advise. Interdepartmental contacts are not always clear. There seems to be at times departmental disconnect, even antipathy (both academic & administrative alike).
- The security staff are VERY unwelcoming. I am not the only student who feels this way because it is often discussed - with classmates AND teachers
- I am tired of people in charge turning their backs on problems in the offices. Problems don't go away they only get worse if not dealt with.
• As a community we need to truly respect one another. There needs to be more real discussion with the top administrators and the faculty of the college. Not false conversations with outside consultants, but real conversations in which we share ideas and help to build on the true strengths of our community.

• I must say I received a surprisingly unhelpful response from a Human Resources employee when asked about questions concerning maternity leave and childcare.

• I find my department to sometimes be a hostile environment- the way faculty treat other faculty. I am not sure it is about diversity. I think it is more about internal politics, people not wanting to work, afraid of change and holding long grudges.

• I feel that staff should be more friendly and welcoming with any issues students have regarding registration, admission, or issues in their department.

• I sincerely believe that although my family is struggling financially, I have received no help from faculty or staff in finding ways to pay for school/ find a place to live while I am attending school. Because of this, I may have to leave FIT before I have completed my degree. I completely believe the reason why I have no received any financial aid/help finding money WHATSOEVER is because I am Caucasian. Racism works both ways.

A few respondents elaborated of the climate for People of Color and LGBTQ\(^3\) people in both positive and negative lights.

• The college has added more committee/programs but there is an inherent bias towards people of color.

• FIT has been a nice and eye opening experience for me, both as a woman and a person of color. I come from one of the most diverse cities, and when I say diverse I don't mean it just has many types of races and ethnicities, I mean it is very mixed-races, economic status, ideas, beliefs. Arriving to FIT I was taken aback due to a climate that I was not used to being around. Unfortunately, due to this I have not met many great people at FIT because ideas and just overall interest is just very different from mine. Although I appreciate FIT, I have Spring and Summer semesters until I am done and I cannot wait. I need more diversity and not just separate groups- unfortunately, that is what I got at FIT.

• I have noticed a definite stigma among groups, socioeconomic status and occasionally gay and or immigrant status.

• I think that FIT is a diverse college and I don't feel out of place being a Black student. I am happy with the way things are now, but there is always room for improvement.

• I am afraid that if too much focus is placed on diversity in hiring great candidates will not get a fair chance based solely on their race (reverse racism).

• FIT provides a wonderful safe haven for gay, lesbian and transgender students, who, sometimes for the first time in their lives, can be openly gay or lesbian or transgender without fear of being stigmatized or seen...The overall result is a climate of tolerance for

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3 Based on the literature identifying the differential experiences of sexual minorities (queer, lesbian, same gender loving, gay, lesbian, etc.) and gender non-conforming minorities (transgender, genderqueer, etc.) (Rankin, 2010; Beemyn & Rankin, 2011), this report provides analyses for sexual minorities using the acronym LGBQ and gender non-conforming minorities under the transgender umbrella. In the qualitative comments provided by respondents, we used the terminology they offered (e.g., LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBQ).
differences—not just tolerance, not just "separate but equal," just we're all here in this FIT stew together, regardless of any such differences. In short it enables people to see and respect one another as the equally noble, equally flawed, equally normal human beings that they are rather than to view others through the lens of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc. In this area, FIT is outstanding.

- Considering a lot of people at FIT fall under the LGBTQ spectrum, I found it almost shocking and upsetting that there was not one club/organization specifically dedicated to this community.
- Despite the very warm and cooperative climate of my department, it is largely white, which leaves room for improvement. Similarly the campus seems to reflect the socioeconomic climate of the US at large where higher positions seem largely dominated by white people.
- F.I.T. needs to do a better job in hiring which closely represents the market it's located in and encourage the people of color that it does hire to expand beyond clerical, security and maintenance positions.

A number of respondents also complained about the cold temperature throughout offices and campuses on campus. Examples of these responses include:

- I ... feel that ergonomics is not taken seriously here, or not understood well enough. So many people complain of being cold all day and being in pain at their desks, which I feel could be avoided or greatly reduced by better placement of monitor, keyboard, more supportive seating, and a healthier ambient temperature.
- FIT is an amazing school, my one complaint is the air conditioner! it’s freezing in here!!
- The temperature within the classes all around campus can be extremely cold all season along, which I don't like at times!
- The thermal comfort in the classrooms is often uncomfortable, many classes are too cold, which results students wearing their outdoor coats inside classrooms and getting sick. Besides the health matters it usually also causes hardship in concentration and creativity and causing an uncomfortable environment.