

# THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY 2013 VALUES & CULTURE SURVEY

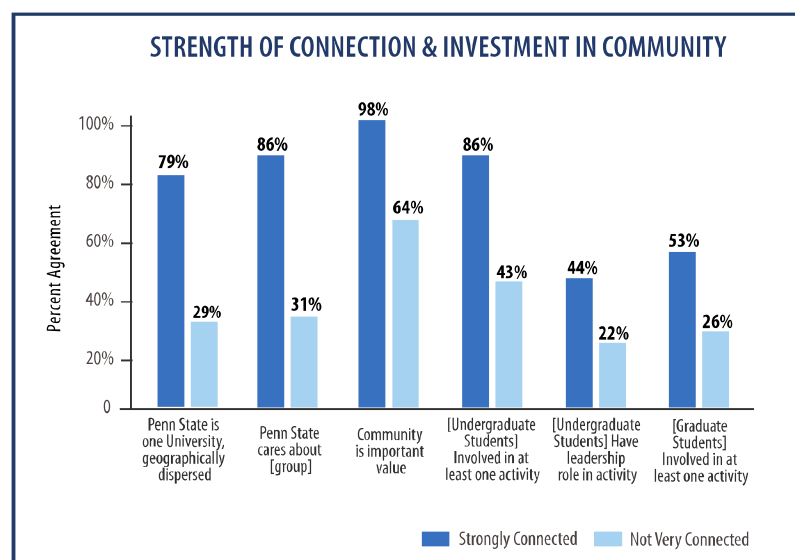
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April of 2013, The Pennsylvania State University (the University) contracted with the Ethics Resource Center (ERC) to conduct a survey of all faculty, staff, technical service employees, and students (both graduate and undergraduate) on all campuses. The project was part of a larger ongoing effort by the University to better understand its culture and the values that are commonly held among its members.

The Pennsylvania State University Values & Culture Survey was fielded from October 29 through November 22, 2013. A total of 14,655 members of the University community participated in the effort. The survey yielded a university-wide response rate of 13%; faculty and staff participated at higher rates (see table on right).<sup>1</sup> Analysis revealed that the respondents are representative

### SURVEY RESPONSE RATES (% of total pop. for each group)

Faculty	31%
Staff/administrators/technical service employees	40%
Graduate students	11%
Undergraduate students	7%



of the University; further analyses indicated no significant risk of a non-responder bias in the results.<sup>2</sup> This summary addresses key findings for the University overall.<sup>3</sup> Additional analysis will be provided for various demographic groups.

### *Strength of Connection to the Culture*

The data reveal that overall Penn State has a strong and engaging culture: almost universally, faculty, staff, and students feel connected to the University. Thirteen survey questions

were used to create a scale to measure the strength of connection to the culture.<sup>4</sup> Ninety-five percent of respondents were categorized as at least “moderately connected,” including 39% who were categorized as “strongly connected.” Five percent of respondents were categorized as “not very connected.” A

<sup>1</sup> Data were weighted based on composition of faculty, staff, undergraduate, and graduate students on each campus at the time of the survey distribution. A more detailed report about the methodology, “Summary of the Survey Process,” was submitted to the University on May 6, 2014, and is available upon request.

<sup>2</sup> Analyses comparing the demographics of those who responded to the survey with population data from the University Budget Office indicated that the respondents were representative of the University. Please see “Summary of the Survey Process” for more detailed information about representation and non-response bias.

<sup>3</sup> Data tables with summary statistics for each survey question were provided to the University. The purpose of this report is to highlight high-level themes and areas for attention.

<sup>4</sup> The questions measured how strongly a person feels connected to Penn State on a scale of 1 (low connection) to 5 (high connection). Individuals who, on average, scored 4 or higher on the questions were categorized as “strongly connected.” Those who on average responded with a 2 or lower were categorized as “not very connected.” The remaining individuals were “moderately connected” to Penn State (not shown in chart above).

strong connection to the University is linked to investment in the community and beliefs about its importance in a positive way (see chart on previous page).

There is also a positive connection between the community and personal values; ninety-five percent of those who are strongly connected to the University say that they have been able to maintain their personal values throughout their university experience.

### *Drivers of Culture*

The academic experience emerged as a primary means by which members of the community say they feel this strong connection to the Penn State culture. Half of all faculty participants (51%) said that teaching makes them feel most connected. For 59% percent of graduate student respondents, and for 27% undergraduate respondents, engaging in intellectual activity made them feel most connected.

Furthermore, when asked to identify the individuals who help define what success looks like at Penn State, respondents most often selected academics (see box on left).

#### **“WHO DO YOU RELY ON MOST TO KNOW HOW TO SUCCEED AT PENN STATE?”**

- **Graduate students:** Faculty or thesis/dissertation advisors (41%)
- **Undergraduate students:** Professors and instructors (39%)
- **Faculty:** Colleagues (32%)
- **Staff:** Supervisors (32%)

For undergraduate students in particular, attending or following Penn State athletic events (in general) is also a primary means of connection. Twenty-five percent said that this makes them feel most connected. The survey

included a question for all participants that asked if they believed football, in particular, was overemphasized within the Penn State culture. The data show that there is no consensus. Forty percent say football gets too much emphasis, 36% disagree, and 24% are neutral. Of those who say football is too important, 54% also say that the attention level is “about the same as other universities like Penn State.”

### *Core Values of the University Community*

The heart of a culture is its values: the ideals about how people should act that ultimately guide their decisions and behavior. At Penn State, there is widespread agreement regarding the values that *should* represent the community in the future.

Seven values were consistently cited as most important to the University community with regard to the future (see table on right). These included Integrity, Honesty, Respect, Excellence, Accountability, Responsibility and Community.

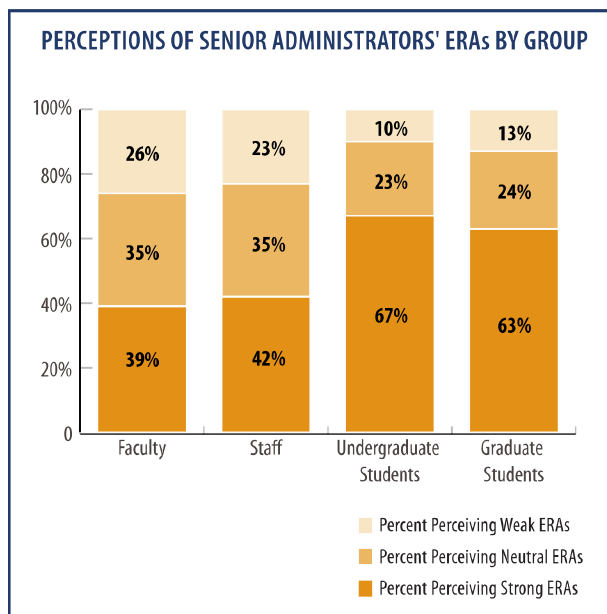
#### **MOST FREQUENTLY CITED VALUES<sup>5</sup>**

SHOULD BE IMPORTANT		
Rank	Core Value	Percent PSU Overall
1	Integrity	67%
2	Honesty	59%
3	Respect	57%
4	Excellence	54%
5	Accountability	47%
6	Responsibility	47%
7	Community	45%
8	Discovery	31%
9	Service	24%
10	Openness	20%
11	Courage	20%
12	Transparency	18%
13	Sustainability	16%

<sup>5</sup> This survey question asked respondents to select the top five values from a list of thirteen provided in the question that they believed should be important to the future in the Penn State community.

### Perceptions of Senior Administrators

Members of the Penn State community were asked a series of questions about the “ethics-related actions” (ERAs) of various groups, and six survey questions were used to show how powerful the impact of different groups can be.<sup>6</sup> Senior administrators emerged as an influential group; survey respondents who indicated that their senior administrators displayed these ERAs also indicated that they experience fewer ethics challenges. Specifically, they experience pressure to commit violations of policy or the law, and they observe improper conduct (see graphic to the right).<sup>7</sup>



Survey respondents also identified different individuals as “senior administrators,” indicating that a broad group of leaders across the University has the potential to make this positive impact. The three groups identified as “senior administrators” most often were President & VPs (35% overall), Board of Trustees (28%), and Deans and Department Heads (27%).

Across the University, 61% expressed a positive view of senior administrators’ ERAs. This result was largely driven by the more positive views that were expressed by graduate and undergraduate students (see chart at left).

<sup>6</sup> The ERAs as metrics were adapted from ERC’s research about the drivers of culture (see: Ethics Resource Center. (2005). *National Business Ethics Survey: How Employees View Ethics in Their Organizations 1994-2005*. Washington, DC: Ethics Resource Center.) These six questions measured how a person perceived the “ethics-related actions,” or ERAs, of senior administrators. Respondents were categorized as perceiving “weak senior administrator ERAs” if they, on average, disagreed with all questions. Respondents were categorized as perceiving “strong senior administrator ERAs” if they, on average, agreed with all questions. A third category captured those respondents who were, on average, “neutral” about all questions.

<sup>7</sup> Sixteen percent of respondents perceiving “weak” senior administrator ERAs experienced pressure, compared to 9% of those who perceive “strong” senior administrator ERAs. Seventy-three percent of respondents perceiving “weak” senior administrator ERAs observed misconduct, compared to 52% of those who perceive “strong” senior administrator ERAs.

### Observed and Reported Misconduct

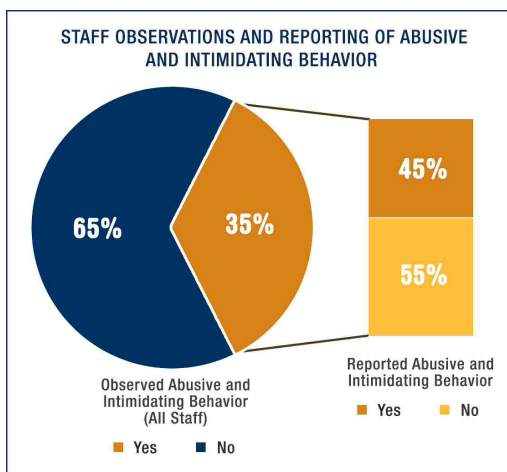
The survey collected baseline data about observed and reported misconduct on campus in order to help measure the impact of the University's programs in the future. Overall, 58% of survey respondents said that within the last twelve months they observed at least one type of behavior they considered to be "a violation of University policy or the law (see list below)."<sup>8</sup> By group, 59% of faculty, 48% of staff, 64% of undergraduate students, and 34% of graduate students said that they observed some form of improper behavior.

Overall, 26% of survey respondents who observed misconduct also reported it<sup>9</sup> to a University leader, manager, or other authority.<sup>10</sup> The highest number of respondents who observed wrongdoing and *did not* report said that they did not believe it was significant enough to report (69% overall). Across all key groups (faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students), at least 36% of those who did not report in any group said that they did not believe they could report anonymously, indicating unfamiliarity with the process.

Across all key groups, the largest percentages of people who *did* report misconduct said they went first to someone with whom they had an existing relationship. More than a third (38%) of staff reported to a supervisor; 47% of undergraduate students went to either an authority in the classroom or the residence halls; and 53% of graduate students went either to the person they work most closely with or another faculty member/instructor.

**"FOR EACH [OF THE FOLLOWING], PLEASE TELL US WHETHER YOU HAVE PERSONALLY OBSERVED THIS BEHAVIOR AMONG MEMBERS OF THE PENN STATE COMMUNITY WITHIN THE LAST 12 MONTHS."**

- Abusive or intimidating behavior that creates a hostile environment (e.g., bullying)
- Cheating, plagiarism, or other violations of academic integrity
- Discrimination
- Financial misconduct (e.g., falsifying expense reports, embezzlement)
- Research misconduct
- Stealing or theft
- Substance abuse by a faculty member or University employee
- Substance abuse by a student
- Other violations of University policies or the law (e.g., violations of the Student Code of Conduct or HR policy, including sexual misconduct)



### Ethics Experiences of Staff

The data suggest that staff members, in particular, are confronted with a significant ethics challenge. Forty-eight percent of all staff members said they observed misconduct; half reported it. However, eighteen percent of staff members who chose to report the misconduct they witnessed said they experienced retaliation – more than any other key group.

For staff members, the most frequently observed specific behavior (by 35% of all staff) was "abusive or intimidating behavior that creates a hostile environment (e.g. bullying)." See chart on left.

<sup>8</sup> This value was generated through a rollup that counted individuals as having observed misconduct if they said yes to at least one of the specific types of misconduct asked about in the survey.

<sup>9</sup> By group, 57% of faculty, 50% of staff, 19% of undergraduates, and 36% of graduate students reported at least one type of misconduct that they witnessed. These values were generated through a rollup that counted individuals as having reported misconduct if they said yes to reporting at least one of the specific types of misconduct asked about in the survey.

<sup>10</sup> The survey also asked individuals who observed misconduct and then reported it where they first reported the misconduct they observed; this question was presented with different options for each of the four key groups. For more information about reporting locations, please see the full data tables.

Importantly, these observations are significantly lower where supervisors are perceived to display ethics-related actions. Specifically, they observe “abusive and intimidating behavior that creates a hostile environment (e.g., bullying).” See chart below.



### *Suggested Next Steps*

ERC’s research over the past two decades has shown that many of the positive aspects of a culture can be strengthened, and challenges raised by community members can be eased through a concerted effort to identify, promote, and reinforce the University’s values. ERC therefore offers the following suggestions for the University to consider regarding next steps.

1. *Adopt one set of core values to represent all of Penn State. Promote the values and talk about what they look like in various settings.* Survey respondents widely agreed that a certain set of values should be considered important to the community in the future. This list of values should be narrowed, further defined, and promoted as the “core values” of the institution.
2. *Leverage the academic experience to apply the values.* Given their role as a primary driver of culture, Faculty Senate, deans, department heads and other academics should be incorporated into existing efforts to identify and apply the University’s core values. Other university departments, events, student activities, and groups should also be challenged to help drive the adoption of the core values across the community.
3. *Continue to make University standards and core values a primary focus of leadership.* Penn State should build upon the foundation of continuous improvement that has been established at the leadership level, in order to expand discussions about ethical leadership. For example, the University should provide regular training for senior administrators and the Board of Trustees on University core values and issues related to ethics and leadership.
4. *Foster environments where employees are supported and can raise concerns without fear. Hold managers accountable for inappropriate supervisory practices.* The University should examine management practices and educate supervisors about their role in establishing and maintaining an ethical workplace. Identify the specific areas within management where employees are not being



treated with respect and dignity. Take action against managers who are engaging in practices that are abusive or intimidating to their employees. The university should also take steps to ensure that staff are aware of the ways to report misconduct, and the systems in place to protect them when they do come forward.

5. *Position the Office of Ethics & Compliance as a primary recipient for reports of misconduct, and a resource in promoting the core values of the institution.* Over the past year Penn State has established an Office of Ethics and Compliance for the University. The office should be positioned and sufficiently resourced to support efforts to integrate the core values into the Penn State culture, and to support the university-wide hotline to receive reports related to ethics issues and other violations. Additionally, the Office should support efforts to extend ethics and compliance resources to all key groups on campus by collaborating with other offices also involved in receiving reports (e.g., Human Resources, Student Affairs).
6. *Share lessons learned about culture, ethics, and higher education.* To ERC's knowledge, no other major university has undertaken such a vigorous effort to understand its culture as Penn State. The University should therefore take steps to share its insights about culture with peer institutions, in order to benefit the broader community and help others in higher education.

#### *About the ERC*

The Ethics Resource Center (ERC) is America's oldest nonprofit organization devoted to independent research and the advancement of high ethical standards and practices in public and private institutions. Since 1922, ERC has been a resource for organizations committed to a strong ethical culture. For more information about the ERC, please visit <http://www.ethics.org>.