

## **The Pennsylvania State University Values & Culture Survey Summary of the Survey Process**

May 6, 2014

### **Introduction**

In April of 2013, The Pennsylvania State University (the University) contracted with the Ethics Resource Center (ERC) to conduct a survey of its community. 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.

Over a seven month period, ERC worked with the University to design, pilot test, and implement a survey of all faculty, staff, technical service employees, and students (both graduate and undergraduate) on all campuses. Analysis of the data is in progress and a report of findings will be provided separately. The purpose of this document is to summarize the survey process.

### **Definition of Culture and Key Metrics in the Survey**

The survey asked current members of the Penn State community about their perceptions of the University culture as they experience it on a daily basis. Metrics for the survey were based on a generally accepted definition of culture supported by academic literature, and also research conducted over the past two decades by ERC on organizational ethics cultures. The following describes the definition of culture, and therefore the goals driving the development of metrics that were central to the survey effort.

Like any organization, there are many aspects to the "Penn State culture," and what is thought of as "Penn State" is actually the sum of countless subcultures. The University is a large, multifaceted organization comprised of many campuses, colleges, offices, and student groups. Although no two people can be expected to experience the Penn State culture in exactly the same way, research has shown that in even the most dynamic and differentiated cultures (like Penn State), there is a set of formal and informal systems that are widely shared. Additionally, in complex cultures there are beliefs that are commonly held, and stakeholders have an experience of "the culture" as an overarching entity that embodies all its subcultures (Schein, 2004).

Clifford Geertz, a pioneer in the field of anthropology, defined culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions ... by which [people] communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge ... and attitudes" (1973, p. 89). Put another way, culture is "non-biological inheritance" (Hoebel, 1966, p. 52). Through the culture, members of a community learn about the behaviors that are considered to be acceptable, the activities that should be prioritized, and the

moments in the history of the group that still shape the way things are done. This is true whether the culture is a nation, a school, or a company (Schein, 2004).

At the heart of a culture is its values: the ideals about how people should act that ultimately guide their decisions and behavior. Members of the culture both explicitly and implicitly nurture certain values and discourage others by giving recognition, attention, or punishment. This dimension of an organization's culture is referred to as its "ethics culture."<sup>1</sup> An organization's *ethics culture* is the extent to which the organization makes doing what is right a priority and promotes and embodies its values. Ethics culture is the (often unwritten) code of conduct by which stakeholders learn what they should think and do, and then do it. Through the ethics culture of an organization, individuals learn which rules must be followed, and how rigidly; how people ought to treat one another; whether it is acceptable to question authority figures; if it is safe to report observed misconduct; and more (Ethics Resource Center [ERC], 2011). Ethics culture determines "how [stakeholders] understand what is expected of them, and how things really get done" (Trevino, Weaver, Gibson, & Toffler, 1999).

Research has shown that the ethics culture of an organization is a powerful influence on the behavior of its stakeholders, particularly when problems arise. The extent to which an individual will take a stand to uphold the values of the organization in the face of misconduct is largely dependent upon their views about the ethics of senior leaders, the support they are provided by trusted advisors, and the extent to which they believe that action will be taken if they come forward to report wrongdoing. For example, ERC's research has shown that when this "ethical commitment" is higher, rates of reported misconduct rise. In the 2011 *National Business Ethics Survey*®, ERC found that 56% of employees reported misconduct when they perceived the ethical commitment of their organization to be weak, compared to 82% of employees who perceived a strong ethical commitment in their organization (ERC, 2012, p.21).

The Penn State Values & Culture Survey was designed to help the University better understand the views of its community with regard to its overall culture as well as its ethics culture. The goal of the survey was to focus on several key areas:

- *Collective identity*. The extent to which stakeholders feel connected to the University. The section also explored the facets of the culture which influence their level of association.

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<sup>1</sup> In academic literature and in ERC research prior to 2012, the term "ethical culture" is used to refer to the ethical dimension of organizational culture. In 2012, ERC began to use the more neutral term "ethics culture," reserving "ethical culture" for instances in which an organizational is promoting positive, ethical values.

- *Institutional priorities.* Community members' assessment of the current institutional priorities as well as individuals' beliefs about what the priorities of the University should be in the future.
- *Ethics culture and core values.* Identification of the values that currently guide decisions and behavior at the University, as well as the values that they believe *should* be commonly held across the community.
- *Ethical leadership and commitment.* Investigation of whether the behavior of senior administrators, deans, department heads, and peers shows a commitment to ethics; whether these group prioritize, model, and support ethical conduct.
- *Personal experiences related to ethics and conduct.* The survey inquired about perceived pressure to violate University policies or the law; observations of misconduct in the past twelve months; decisions to report any misconduct they observed; and, when applicable, the results of their report, including whether they experienced retaliation as a result.

The input of the Penn State community garnered through the survey will help the University to articulate the commonly-held beliefs of its stakeholders so that existing values can be formalized, helping to guide decisions and behavior of all members of the community. Additionally, the data from the survey will provide feedback about current institutional priorities. Finally, the data will provide insight into the University's systems, including whether there is sufficient institutional support so that individuals can raise concerns without fear, report wrongdoing, and generally feel a part of the University culture. The survey was intended to provide a snapshot of the University culture as it currently exists, and also to provide baseline data to gauge the impact of future efforts to support the University community.

### **Overview of the Process**

The survey development process involved several phases: 1) Information gathering, 2) Questionnaire development, 3) Pilot testing & revision, 4) Implementation of the survey to the entire Penn State community, and 5) Implementation of an incentive drawing. Representatives from the Penn State community were involved in each portion of the process.

- Information Gathering – Before drafting the survey question set, ERC conducted individual and group interviews with more than 85 members of the Penn State community. Conversations in these sessions focused on stakeholders' priorities for the survey, the values that should be tested as “commonly held” across the University, and other questions about the Penn State culture that should be included in the survey. The Information Gathering phase included the following:

- *Planning meeting*, April 30, 2013. ERC attended the Freeh Implementation Committee meeting to discuss the goals for the survey, the various groups that would be incorporated into the planning process, and the timeline for the project.
- *In-person individual and group interviews*, June 3-6, 2013 and September 9-13, 2013. ERC was provided full access to a breadth of senior leaders and stakeholders. Participants included:
  - University President
  - Interim Provost
  - Members of the Board of Trustees
  - Chair, University Faculty Senate
  - Deans, Faculty administrators, Faculty members and Researchers (including faculty experts on ethics)
  - Senior administrators from University Park and Commonwealth Campuses, including (but not limited to):
    - Alumni Relations
    - Athletics
    - Business & Finance
    - Compliance & Ethics
    - Educational Equity
    - General Counsel
    - Government Affairs
    - Human Resources
    - Marketing & Communications
    - Outreach
    - University Libraries
  - Members of the Staff Advisory Council
  - Representatives from the Teamsters Local Union 8
  - Students and student leaders (graduate and undergraduate)
  - Freeh Implementation Committee
  - Freeh Implementation Advisory Council & Subcommittee on Ethics and Core Values
  - Athletics Integrity Monitor
- Questionnaire Development – Based on the input from the University community and ERC’s longstanding research, ERC drafted an initial survey question set and then further refined the questionnaire in collaboration with members of the Freeh

Advisory Council and the Subcommittee on Ethics & Core Values. Drafts of the survey were further reviewed by the University Staff Advisory Council and several undergraduate and graduate student leaders from several campus organizations. Overall the Questionnaire Development phase involved the following activities.

- *Conference calls to review the question set*, June, 2013. ERC participated in 23 meetings to receive feedback on the draft question set, involving approximately 58 University stakeholders, including (but not limited to):
  - Freeh Implementation Committee
  - Freeh Implementation Advisory Council (combined with Subcommittee on Ethics & Core Values)
  - University Staff Council
  - Student leaders (graduate and undergraduate)
- Pilot Testing & Revision – While a portion of the questions in the survey were based on ERC’s standard ethics survey questionnaire (and were therefore previously tested and validated), a number of questions were new and required testing. Furthermore, it was important to test the online delivery of the survey with the University’s servers, and also to be sure that survey questions were posed in a way that could be easily understood. Therefore, a pilot of the survey was conducted from August 9-19, 2013. At the time, the survey was called the Penn State Culture & Values Survey. This phase included the following activities.
  - *Pilot survey implementation*: Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to a group of 308 faculty members; 644 staff, administrators, or technical service employees; 2,555 undergraduate students; and 431 graduate students selected through a stratified random sample of the entire Penn State population. Additionally, all members of the Freeh Advisory Council and Subcommittee on Ethics & Core Values, members of the Compliance & Ethics Advisory Council, and the University Staff Advisory Council were invited to take the survey. The pilot survey achieved a 12.2% response rate.
  - *Briefing*: On September 12, 2013, ERC provided a briefing to the Freeh Implementation Advisory Council on the pilot survey process and selected results.
  - *Second round review of the question set*, September, 2013. Based on pilot survey results, ERC revised the question set and re-circulated it to the initial group of reviewers. ERC staff participated in another 10 meetings

to receive further feedback on the revised question set, involving approximately 24 individuals. Further feedback was also provided by the Freeh Implementation Committee and the Freeh Implementation Advisory Council.

- *Development of Communications Materials*, September, 2013. ERC provided support to the Culture Survey Communications Subcommittee as they developed a communications strategy and related materials to promote participation in the full survey. The University undertook a comprehensive effort to raise awareness about the survey, on all campuses. Promotions included:
  - Introduction to survey from Dr. Erickson sent via mass email
  - Weekly news stories posted to various Penn State newswires
  - Email messaging from Deans and Chancellors
  - Email messaging from HR units
  - Email messaging from University Staff Advisory Council
  - *Daily Collegian* ads
  - Promotional video
  - Twitter and Facebook messaging
  - Interviews with student-led media
  - Posters, banners, and fliers
- Implementation to the entire Penn State community – The Penn State Values & Culture Survey launched on October 29, 2013 and remained in field until November 22, 2013. Participants received an invitation email from the ERC, containing a link that directed them to the survey site. The total population invited to participate in the survey was 110,747; including all faculty, staff, administrators, technical service employees, undergraduate students and graduate students at all Penn State campuses, including World Campus. The final data set contains the input from 14,655 participants. Across the University as a whole, the response rate for the survey was 13.2%. For breakdowns of response, please see the “Response Rates and Margins of Error” section that follows.
- Incentive Drawing – In order to promote participation in the survey, the University dedicated funds to provide 20 iPad Air tablets to a randomly selected group of individuals who completed the survey and entered into a drawing to win. ERC administered the purchase of the iPads, the selection of recipients, and the distribution of the tablets.

In order to be eligible to win a tablet, survey participants had to register for the drawing. Upon completion of the survey, participants were invited to sign up to

win an iPad Air. Those who opted to participate were directed to a new site where they provided their name and contact information. Any information provided for the drawing was kept separate from survey data.

At the University's direction, five tablets were given to members of the University faculty; five were provided to staff, administrators, and technical service employees; five were given to University Park students; and another five tablets were given to students at other campus locations. Recipients' names were drawn on December 10, 2013, and those individuals were contacted by the ERC via email on December 13, 2013. Recipients were asked to complete and return a form to the ERC; forms are due by January 3, 2014. The tablets will be mailed directly to the recipients upon receipt of their completed form.

Throughout the entire survey process, ERC staff regularly reported on progress during the bi-monthly meetings of the Freeh Implementation Advisory Council (which included the Subcommittee on Ethics & Core Values).

### **Survey Instrument**

Given the unique nature of the University and the populations that comprise it, questions for the survey had to be tailored so that participants could answer as accurately as possible. For that reason, four versions of the questionnaire were developed and implemented. An initial screening question asked participants to describe their current position at Penn State; depending upon their answer, participants were directed to a set of questions designed for:

- Faculty
- Staff/administrators/technical service employees
- Undergraduate students, or
- Graduate students

Surveys varied in the number of questions asked of participants; a core set of questions were common to all. Each survey also contained branching patterns based on how a participant answered; therefore, no participants were asked the full set of questions. Each version of the survey also contained questions at the end to collect demographic information. The table that follows on the next page summarizes the survey length, the number of branching questions, and the number of demographic questions for each survey version.

Table 1. Number of Questions by Survey Version.

<b>Survey Version</b>	<b>Content Questions (Posed to All)</b>	<b>Branching Questions (Posed to Some)</b>	<b>Demographic Questions (Posed to All)</b>	<b>Total Number of Questions</b>
Faculty	42	25	17	<b>84</b>
Staff/Administrator/Technical Service	41	25	17	<b>83</b>
Graduate	40	25	17	<b>82</b>
Undergraduate	40	23	16	<b>79</b>

Questions in the survey were focused on the following dimensions:

- *Core Values of the University* – Each participant was presented with a list of values and asked to indicate the extent to which each value is currently important to the University community. A second question asked participants to select the five values from the list that *should be* most important to the University. Input from this set of questions will be used to help the University to develop a Values Statement to help guide decisions and behavior across the community.
- *Perceptions of Culture* – A series of questions were posed to gauge the extent to which participants feel connected to the University community (see discussion of collective identity in the previous “Definition of Culture section”). Additionally, participants were asked about the extent to which the behavior of senior administrators, deans, department heads, and peers shows a commitment to ethics and whether these groups prioritize, model, and support ethical conduct.
- *Awareness of Standards and Resources* – Participants were asked to indicate their level of awareness of University resources that a) establish or educate the community about standards of conduct (i.e. regulating ethical conduct in research), or b) provide support to individuals who have questions or who have observed violations of University standards (i.e. a means to confidentially report wrongdoing).
- *Key Outcomes* – As noted previously, when an organization establishes a strong ethics culture, positive changes result. ERC’s research has shown that certain outcomes can be expected from a concerted effort to strengthen a culture; therefore, several questions were asked in the Penn State Values & Culture Survey to gather baseline data, and to assess the current state. These metrics included:
  - Pressure to compromise University standards in order to succeed;
  - Observed misconduct on campus within the last 12 months;



- Reporting, or the extent to which individuals who observed a violation reported it; and
- Retaliation against individuals who reported wrongdoing.

### Response Rates and Margins of Error

The following tables indicate the response by the Penn State community to the survey effort. For each group and campus, the margin of error is also indicated. The margin of error is calculated for the 95% confidence interval and estimates the range in which we can be 95% certain the true population figure exists.<sup>2</sup>

Table 2. Final Response Rates & Margins of Error by Designation

Penn State Values & Culture Survey Final Response Rates & Margins of Error - Designation				
Designation	Total Population	Responses <sup>3</sup>		Margin of Error
Faculty	7411	2299	<b>31.0%</b>	+/- 1.7%
Staff/Administrators/Technical Service Employees	13171	5233	<b>39.7%</b>	+/- 1.1%
Undergraduate Students	77452	5689	<b>7.3%</b>	+/- 1.3%
Graduate Students	12713	1434	<b>11.3%</b>	+/- 2.4%
<b>TOTAL Penn State</b>	<b>110747</b>	<b>14655</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>+/- 0.8%</b>

<sup>2</sup> Margin of error means that within +/- X percent, a response given by a sample of survey participants is representative of the target population. The "confidence level" is the degree to which we can be sure that that is the case within a given "confidence interval," here 95%. For example, if 80% of responding participants on "Campus A" say they believe sustainability is very important to Penn State now, and the margin of error for that question in that sample of participants is +/- 5%, that means that a reader can be 95% certain that the true percentage of all members of this group who believe that sustainability is very important to Penn State now is between 75% and 85%.

<sup>3</sup> The "Responses" counts in Tables 2 & 3 reflect the counts of the final data set, or the "usable cases" for analysis. This includes some partially-completed surveys.

Table 3. Final Response Rates & Margins of Error by Campus

Penn State Values & Culture Survey Final Response Rates & Margins of Error – Campus Location				
<b>Campus Location</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Responses</b>		<b>Margin of Error</b>
Abington	4281	308	<b>7.2%</b>	+/- 5.4%
Altoona	4401	268	<b>6.1%</b>	+/- 5.8%
Beaver	860	101	<b>11.7%</b>	+/- 9.2%
Berks	3236	306	<b>9.5%</b>	+/- 5.3%
Brandywine	1751	149	<b>8.5%</b>	+/- 7.7%
Dickinson (Carlisle)	218	37	<b>17.0%</b>	+/- 14.7%
DuBois	841	90	<b>10.7%</b>	+/- 9.8%
Erie	4818	493	<b>10.2%</b>	+/- 4.2%
Fayette	1004	96	<b>9.6%</b>	+/- 9.5%
Great Valley	614	67	<b>10.9%</b>	+/- 11.3%
Greater Allegheny	788	108	<b>13.7%</b>	+/- 8.8%
Harrisburg	5103	403	<b>7.9%</b>	+/- 4.7%
Hazleton	1124	102	<b>9.1%</b>	+/- 9.3%
Hershey	2072	404	<b>19.5%</b>	+/- 4.4%
Lehigh Valley	1101	111	<b>10.1%</b>	+/- 8.8%
Mont Alto	1273	100	<b>7.9%</b>	+/- 9.4%
New Kensington	829	93	<b>11.2%</b>	+/- 9.6%
Schuylkill	1014	81	<b>8.0%</b>	+/- 10.4%
Shenango	693	62	<b>8.9%</b>	+/- 11.9%
University Park	61453	10247	<b>16.7%</b>	+/- 0.9%
Wilkes-Barre	747	91	<b>12.2%</b>	+/- 9.6%
World Campus	9748	712	<b>7.3%</b>	+/- 3.5%
Worthington Scranton	1435	89	<b>6.2%</b>	+/- 10.1%
York	1343	137	<b>10.2%</b>	+/- 7.9%
<b>TOTAL Penn State</b>	<b>110747</b>	<b>14655</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>+/- 0.8%</b>

### Limitations of the Survey Data

Given the response rates from the various groups, particularly the low response from both student groups, analyses comparing the demographics of those who responded to the survey with population data provided by the University Budget Office were conducted. First, chi-squared tests were conducted on demographic variables that were able to be matched to data from the University Budget Office: academic rank and appointment type

for faculty; age, gender, residency, and class standing for undergraduate students; and age, gender, residency, and degree status for graduate students. Results indicated that the survey distribution differed from the expected distribution. Random subsets were drawn from the data for each demographic matched to the population distribution in order to determine if any significant differences arose between the random subset and the survey population. One way analysis of variance tests determined that no significant differences existed between the random subsets and the survey population, providing evidence that the survey data can be considered representative of the Penn State population.

One other important concern is the extent to which there is a bias in the data because particular groups opted not to complete the survey. ERC examined the Penn State Values & Culture Survey data for evidence suggesting the presence of significant nonresponse bias. Time trend extrapolation was conducted on the data, which compared survey participants who completed the survey during the first seven days the survey was in field (“early responders”) to participants who completed the survey during the last seven days the survey was in field (“late responders”). This analysis also compared participants who completed the survey during the first fourteen days the survey was in field to participants who completed the survey during the last fourteen days the survey was in field. Theory suggests that individuals who answer a survey later, after more prodding through direct reminders and other communications, are more similar to those who do not answer a survey at all than those who answer a survey early (Armstrong & Overton, 1977).

After some statistically significant differences were found between early responders and late responders, the composition of each test group was adjusted to represent faculty, staff, undergraduate students, and graduate students by their representation in the overall Penn State population, thereby controlling for differences in answers attributable to the different populations. Faculty and staff were more likely to respond to the survey early, and undergraduate and graduate students were more likely to respond later. Controlling for population in this way appeared to account for much of the difference between early responders and late responders. Further, statistically significant differences did not appear in questions that were asked about a survey participant’s personal experiences at Penn State or beliefs and perceptions about themselves. Only in the set of questions that asked about their perceptions of other groups of people (e.g., “I believe that senior administrators are transparent about critical issues that impact Penn State”) did some statistically significant differences continue to appear; however, the mean differences for these questions are not large enough to impact the practical interpretation of these findings.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the mean difference between weighted groups for the question, “Senior administrators act as good role models of ethical behavior,” is -.117 (early responders’ mean = 3.319; late responders’ mean = 3.436); this difference is statistically significant. This is the largest difference found among tested questions.

The presence of nonresponse bias therefore cannot be definitively ruled out, but exists as one consideration that must be acknowledged when examining results as with any other survey research project. The amount estimated to be present in this survey does not appear to be enough to be a sufficient cause for practical concern. Combined with the results of testing conducted to examine the representativeness of the data, ERC believes that Penn State can be confident in the data and findings.

### **Next Steps**

A report of findings on the data will be provided to the University in the Spring, 2014.

### **About the ERC**

The Ethics Resource Center (ERC) is America's oldest private, non-profit organization devoted to independent research and the advancement of high ethical standards and practices in public and private institutions. Since 1922, the ERC has been a resource for institutions committed to a strong ethics culture.

For two decades, ERC has regularly fielded surveys of employees and other stakeholders in organizations of all types and sizes. Data from these efforts have helped organizational leaders to gauge their ethics cultures, to identify emerging issues, and also to develop programs and resources to help stakeholders consistently live out their values.

ERC's survey metrics are based on the Center's research in the areas of culture and ethics/compliance program effectiveness. ERC is widely known for its *National Workplace Ethics Survey* research, including the biennial *National Business Ethics Survey*®, and previous studies of other sectors, including the *National Nonprofit Ethics Survey*® and the *National Government Ethics Survey*®. Other ERC studies of culture include *The Importance of Ethical Culture: Increasing Trust and Driving Down Risk* and *Ethical Culture Building: A Modern Business Imperative*. ERC's culture metrics have been developed collaboratively with leading academics specializing in organizational culture.

For more information about the ERC or to download our research reports, please visit [www.ethics.org](http://www.ethics.org).

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