The Women’s Studies Advisory Council met on March 29, 2006 at 3:30 specifically to discuss the results of the Chancellor’s Climate Survey.

Present: Carol Lilly, Diane Wysocki, Trudy de Goede, Linda Van Ingen, Stan Lightner, Paula Rieder, Darleen Mitchell, Elizabeth Schnieder

Absent: Kate Benzel, Elizabeth Peck, Amy German, Barbara Amundson, Janice Fronczak, Beth Wiersma, Kerry Beldin, Nyla Khan. Some of those absent had sent written comments earlier in the week or later contributed to this report.

The main purpose of the WSA Council’s remarks is to ensure that future climate surveys conducted on UNK campus are done in such a way as to increase our ability to discover the sources of problems and to provide enough data to move toward resolving them. Therefore, this report is to be taken as constructive criticism toward preparing future research that adequately and effectively gauges the climate on campus.

The WSA Council agrees that a survey is an important tool for evaluating the climate on campus and we congratulate the Chancellor for his initiative in endorsing its use at UNK. Because such a survey is a highly technical and complex instrument, expert knowledge is required to create an accurate and effective survey. A climate survey seeking information based on the complex nuances of human relations relating to gender, ethnicity, race, class, and sexual orientation should be created by persons with expertise in those areas. It is imperative, then, that any future surveys are created by persons with recognized credentials in the areas being examined.

Without delving into the specific problems of this survey, we would say that a lack of expertise in areas of gender, race, and ethnic relations resulted in a survey which combined too much data. By combining the areas of gender, race, and ethnicity, the survey suggests that there are problems—and indeed there are problems in each of these areas—but the survey does not delineate the information to clarify the problem areas, and as a result, fails to suggest any resolutions. Similarly, positive areas of the campus climate are not recognized, areas that might provide role models for others.

WSA Council recommendations:
1) With current tight budgets, we recommend that the administration utilize the expertise from individuals already on the UNK campus who have qualifications appropriate for this project. They could construct a survey, or other appropriate research methods, that would clearly identify areas of concern with enough data to suggest resolutions.

2) An additional problem from the combined information is that various campus constituents are only minimally delineated (e.g., faculty, staff, and students). In the future, separate surveys should be provided for each population.
3) Future surveys would be more effective if they made use of “skip questions”. If respondents answer “no” to a question, they move on, but if they answer “yes,” it opens a whole new set of questions for them. Given the progressive nature of some questions relevant to these surveys, this approach would be useful.

4) We request that the data analysis of future survey results be presented in a more user friendly form. Tables that provide actual data are easier to read than line graphs. Also, wherever percentages are given, frequencies should be provided.

5) With regard to the executive summary and its implications for the survey rationale, we recommend that a more direct assessment be used. What is the rationale of the survey? Is it to confirm the status quo? Or to recognize problems? For example, the first sentence of the summary states, “In general, “UNK’s climate for gender equity and diversity was positive.” This statement does not represent the survey’s findings. As one reads through the survey results, a more accurate statement would have been: “In general, UNK’s climate for the married, white, heterosexual, population was positive.”

6) If the point of the survey is to discover how the underrepresented, under protected, minority populations—blacks, Hispanics, gays, women, physically handicapped individuals, religious minorities etc—feel about campus climate, then it needs to address those specifics. The current survey results told us that the climate is unsatisfactory given UNK’s role and mission (“The University seeks a diverse student body representing a wide range of ethnic origins, interests, financial resources, and aptitudes, provided that each student is prepared to benefit from the course of study in prospect.”) The underrepresented, under protected, minority populations on campus are dissatisfied.

- More than 1/3 of all minorities have experienced a prejudicial remark in the last 5 years based on their race or ethnicity
- 25% of women have experienced a prejudicial remark based on their gender in the last 5 years
- Statistics about gay and lesbian men and women were buried within the survey, but clearly there is some skewing since only 1% of respondents declared they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual, but 3% of all respondents said they had experienced a prejudicial remark against them on the basis of sexual orientation in the last 5 years.

To elaborate on just this one example: One may assume from the survey that GLBT respondents are few and their numbers are too small to be "significant.” However, if the purpose of the survey was to find out HOW minorities experience the climate on campus, aren’t these respondents necessary to the survey’s purview? If these numbers are too small for significant analysis, at the very least they ought to be taken into consideration some other way and not simply ignored. By failing to do this, the Climate Survey itself becomes yet another vehicle for institutional discrimination, "proving" that homophobia is not an issue and therefore not something the campus needs to address.
Other problem areas also clearly showed up in the survey, especially relating to service staff and particular colleges on campus. The survey further indicated serious problems at the departmental level, though it could not specify which departments had problems and which did not.

In conclusion, if the purpose of the climate survey is to describe campus minorities and their positions on campus, the survey does not effectively do that. Because the WSA Council understands that this administration genuinely wishes to improve campus culture, a survey and/or other research method should be used that describes current problems and moves toward solutions. The administration must engender the kind of trust that allows faculty, staff, and students to believe that once the critical problem areas have been pinpointed, work will immediately begin to eliminate them. A credible survey constructed by experts that addresses specific campus constituents, that gathers concrete information, and that clearly presents its findings, is necessary to change the current campus culture and create one that fully embraces its growing diversity.