1. **What is campus climate?**
   Dr. Susan Rankin, of Rankin & Associates Consulting, which is serving as the outside consultant for SF State climate survey, defines campus climate as, “the current attitudes, behaviors, standards, and practices of employees and students of an institution.” The climate is often shaped through personal experiences, perceptions, and institutional efforts.

2. **Why is a positive climate important?**
   Dr. Rankin’s research maintains that positive personal experiences with campus climate and positive perceptions of campus climate generally equate to successful outcomes. Examples of successful outcomes include positive educational experiences and healthy identity development for students, productivity and sense of value for faculty and staff, and overall well-being for all.

3. **Why is SF State conducting a climate survey?**
   The idea to conduct a campus climate survey originated from interested students, faculty, and staff who believed data from such a survey might be useful in planning for the future and improving the climate at SF State.

4. **Who will be conducting the survey?**
   The Campus Climate Assessment Project Steering Committee (CSSC) is charged with conducting SF State’s climate survey. After a review of potential vendors, a committee from Student Affairs & Enrollment Management selected Rankin & Associates Consulting to conduct the survey. Rankin & Associates reports directly to the committee. Although the CSSC will regularly update SF State about its progress, the Committee—in consultation with Rankin & Associates—is solely responsible for the development, implementation, and interpretation of the survey and its results. Dr. Susan Rankin (Rankin & Associates Consulting) is the consultant working directly with us on this project.
   
   Dr. Rankin is an emeritus faculty member of Education Policy Studies and College Student Affairs at The Pennsylvania State University and a senior research associate in the Center for the Study of Higher Education. She has extensive experience in institutional climate assessment and institutional climate transformation based on data-driven action and strategic planning. Dr. Rankin has conducted multi-location institutional climate studies at more than 170 institutions across the country. She developed and utilizes the *Transformational Tapestry Model* as a research design for campus climate studies. The model is a “comprehensive, five-phase strategic model of assessment, planning and intervention. The model is designed to assist campus communities in conducting inclusive assessments of their institutional climate to better understand the challenges facing their respective communities” (Rankin & Reason, 2008).
5. **Why was a non-SF State researcher selected for the project?**
   In reviewing efforts by other universities to conduct comprehensive climate studies, several best practices were identified. One was the need for external expertise in survey administration. The administration of a survey relating to a very sensitive subject like campus climate is likely to yield higher response rates and provide more credible findings if led by an independent, outside agency. Members of a college community may feel particularly inhibited to respond honestly to a survey administered by their own institution for fear of retaliation.

6. **How will the questions be developed?**
   The consultant has administered climate assessments to more than 170 institutions across the nation and developed a repository of tested questions. To assist in contextualizing the survey for SF State, and to capitalize on the many assessment efforts already undertaken, the CSSC was formed. The committee is responsible for developing the survey questions. The team will review selected survey questions from the consultant’s tested collection, and will also include SF State-specific questions, which will be informed by the focus group results.

7. **Why do some demographic questions contain a very large number of response options?**
   It is important in campus climate research for survey participants to “see” themselves in response choices to prevent “othering” an individual or an individual’s characteristics. Some researchers maintain that assigning someone to the status of “other” is a form of marginalization and should be minimized, particularly in campus climate research which has an intended purpose of inclusiveness. Along these lines, survey respondents will see a long list of possible choices for many demographic questions. It is reasonably impossible to include every possible choice to every question, but the goal is to reduce the number of respondents who must choose “other.”

8. **What is the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process for this study?**
   The primary investigator from SF State for the IRB process is Sutee Sujitparapitaya, Associate Provost for Institutional Analytics, at SF State. An IRB application will be submitted for the project. Once the project is approved, the survey will be administered.

9. **What will be done with data from the results?**
   Although the Committee believes the survey process itself is informative, we have sought and received commitment from the senior leaders that data will be used to develop an action plan for an improved climate at SF State.

10. **What is the response rate goal?**
    The target communities who will be invited to participate in the survey are all students, faculty, and staff at SF State. Every response matters and is valuable in providing the most beneficial feedback and results.

11. **How is a respondent’s confidentiality protected?**
    Confidentiality is vital to the success of campus climate research; particularly as sensitive and personal topics are discussed. While the survey cannot guarantee complete confidentiality because of the nature of multiple demographic questions, the consultant will take multiple precautionary measures to enhance individual confidentiality and the de-identification of data. No data already
protected through regulation or policy (e.g., Social Security number, campus identification number, medical information) is obtained through the survey. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the assessment, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Confidentiality in participating will be maintained to the highest degree permitted by the technology used (e.g., IP addresses will be stripped when the survey is submitted). No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties; however, to avoid interception of data, the survey is run on a firewalled web server with forced 256-bit SSL security.

In addition, the consultant and university will not report any group data for groups of fewer than five individuals, because those “small cell sizes” may be small enough to compromise confidentiality. Instead, the consultant and the university will combine the groups or take other measures to eliminate any potential for demographic information to be identifiable. Additionally, any comments submitted in response to the survey will be separated at the time of submission to the consultant so that they are not attributed to any individual demographic characteristics. Identifiable information submitted in qualitative comments will be redacted and the university will only receive these redacted comments.

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary, and participants do not have to answer any question and can skip any other questions they consider to be uncomfortable. Paper and pencil surveys are also available and will be sent directly to the consultant. Information in the introductory section of the survey will describe the manner in which confidentiality will be guaranteed, and additional communication to participants will provide expanded information on the nature of confidentiality, possible threats to confidentiality, and procedures developed to ensure de-identification of data.

12. **What will be included in the final summary reports?**
   The consultant will provide a final report that will include: an executive summary; a report narrative of the findings based on cross tabulations selected by the consultant; frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations of quantitative data; and content analysis of the textual data. The reports provide high-level summaries of the findings and will identify themes found in the data. Generalizations for populations are limited to those groups or subgroups with response rates of at least 30%. The Committee will review draft reports and provide feedback to the consultant prior to public release.

13. **What protections are in place for storage of sensitive data, including for future secondary use?**
   SF State has worked with the consultant to develop a research data security description and protocol, which includes specific information on data encryption, the handling of personally identifiable information, physical security and a protocol for handling unlikely breaches of data security. The data from online participants will be submitted to a secure server hosted by the consultant. The survey is run on a firewalled web server with forced 256-bit SSL security and is stored on a SQL database that can only be accessed locally. The server itself may only be accessed using encrypted SSH connections originating from the local network. Rankin & Associates Consulting project coordinator Dr. Susan Rankin will have access to the raw data along with several
Rankin & Associates data analysts.

All Rankin & Associates analysts have CITI (Human Subjects) training and approval and have worked on similar projects for other institutions. The web server runs with the SE-Linux security extensions (that were developed by the NSA). The server is also in RAID to highly reduce the chance of any data loss due to hardware failure. The server performs a nightly security audit from data acquired via the system logs and notifies the administrators. The number of system administrators will be limited, and each will have had required background checks.

The consultant has conducted more than 170 institutional surveys and maintains an aggregate merged database. The data from the SF State project will be merged with all other existing climate data stored indefinitely on the consultant's secure server. No institutional identifiers are included in the full merged data set held by the consultant. The raw unit-level data with institutional identifiers is kept on the server for six months and then destroyed. The paper and pencil surveys are returned to the consultant directly and kept in a locked file drawer in a locked office. The consultant destroys the paper and pencil responses after they are merged with the online data. The consultant will notify the committee chairs of any breach or suspected breach of data security of the consultant's server.

The consultant will provide the primary investigator with a data file at the completion of the project.

14. Why is this a population survey and not a sample survey?
The survey will be administered to all students and employees at SF State. Climate exists in micro-climates, so creating opportunities to maximize participation is important as well as maximizing opportunities to reach historically underrepresented or marginalized populations. Along these lines, the consultant has recommended not using random sampling as we may “miss” particular populations where numbers are very small (e.g., Native American students).

Since one goal of the project is inclusiveness and allowing invisible “voices” to be heard, this sampling technique is not used. In addition, randomized stratified sampling is not used because we do not have population data on most identities. For example, SF State collects population data on gender and race/ethnicity, but not on disability status or sexual orientation. So a sample approach could miss many groups.

15. What is the timeline?
This initiative will include five primary phases. The first will involve focus groups (Spring 2018), survey development (Spring/Summer 2018), survey implementation that will seek input from all students, faculty, and staff at SF State (Fall 2018), and reporting of results (Spring 2019).

Feedback
Your questions and comments are very important as we move through this process. We invite you to email these thoughts to equity@sfsu.edu. You will receive a response from either of the two Campus Climate Assessment Project Steering Committee Co-Conveners, Dr. Leti Márquez-Magaña or Dr. Manuel Alejandro Pérez.

Drafted April 1, 2018