Recommendations from the Inclusive and Transparent Communication Working Group

"There is a crisis of communication and respect at Stetson," the 2020 Campus Climate survey declared. Problems with communication and transparency on Stetson's campus are no surprise to any member of the community. We re all overwhelmed by endless e-mail, and a sense that we're not keeping up with what's happening. We're also working in systems built atop old power structures.

In late 2020, in response to the Campus Climate Survey's findings, the President's Cabinet formed three working group "to tackle umbrella issues impacting Stetson." The charge for our group was as follows:

This working group will review the community's impression of Stetson communication and make suggestions as to how Stetson University can become more effective and responsive at communicating with its diverse constituencies. This group may also choose to address how constituencies on campus formally and informally communicate with each other and suggest ways to increase and improve internal communication.

To accomplish these goals, we gathered data and discussed solutions in several ways:

- Meetings and discussions with individuals and groups, including with colleagues, our individual offices and departments, and groups such as the Faculty Senate
- A review of both the <u>2016 Rankin & Associates Consulting Campus Climate Assessment Project</u>, and the <u>2020 Pryor Educational Consultants Stetson DeLand Campus Climate Survey</u>, identifying areas of concern related directly to communication.
- · A form soliciting feedback from the community
- Discussions among ourselves and in four subgroups, which were focused on coordination of communication, crisis response, team and colleague communication, social media, and transparency.

We drafted recommendations and, in mid-April 2021, offered them to the Stetson community for feedback, and to be as transparent about both our process and our recommendations. We carefully considered that feedback as we made final revisions.

This draft report contains our final recommendations to the President's Cabinet. We've prioritized them with one of three designations:

- Critical: Immediately implemented or started by the end of calendar year 2021
- Crucial: Actions that should be implemented within the 2021–2022 academic year
- Soon: Actions that should be included within a three-year (2022–2025) strategic plan

Our goal was to move forward by creating new structures and a foundation for success, rather than trying to modify systems that are not currently working for us. We recognize that, even when outcomes are not helpful or actively harmful, most members of our organization act with the best of intentions. We also recognize that fundamental problems, such as trust and territoriality, can be obstacles to better communication and impede changes in systems, and these proposals alone cannot change that.

Far too often in the past, Stetson's working groups and task forces have made recommendations that are subsequently ignored. It is up to us as a community to hold our leaders and each other accountable.

In community,

- Veronica Fuentes, student and member of Student Government Association
- Arye Beck, student and member of the Student Athletic Advisory Committee
- Paul Boudreaux, Professor of Law, Stetson College of Law
- Jessica Day, Associate Director of Residential Education and Community Programs
- Andy Dehnart, Visiting Assistant Professor of Journalism, co-chair
- Adrienne DeLisse, Administrative Support, Dean s Office, Stetson College of Law
- Lisa Diliberto, Director of Communication and Marketing, Stetson College of Law, co-chair
- Ricky Hazel, Associate Athletic Director for Communications
- Alex Herron, Assistant Director of Alumni and Parent Engagement
- Paula Hogenmiller, Assistant Director of Arts & Sciences Graduate Programs
- Leroy Jackson, Assistant Football Coach
- Lyda Kiser, Executive Director and Title IX Coordinator
- Ngan Le, first-year student and member of Student Government Association
- Kiera McCarthy, Student Athletic Advisory Committee
- Landon Schneider, Communications Co-Chair, Student Bar Association
- Kate Stephens, Social Media & Interactive Marketing Manager
- Katie Thurstin, Head Rowing Coach

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1. Improve Our Electronic Infrastructure

critical Add racial justice and equity commitment statement(s) to stetson.edu's home page. Link to those statements and existing inclusion resources. While many departments, offices, and divisions have committed to addressing systemic racism, those statements are difficult to find, relegated to an "other" folder and bundled with the Campus Climate study. Our mostimportant work needs to be visible. Since last year, Rollins College has had a "We Stand for Racial Justice" statement and link to "what we are doing" as the second item on its home page, and for Stetson to not be as public with its commitments is embarrassing and fails both our current and future community members.

critical Rebuild the stetson.edu experience for internal audiences from the ground up, improving both internal and external users' experience. There is a lack of organizational cohesion across the website, and critical information can be difficult to find. The public-facing site was not designed to handle Intranet-like functionality, which has led it to becoming a dumping ground for internal information.

The public-facing website has recently been redesigned and has planned improvements in its hardware, software, and user interface. We support those efforts, in addition to ongoing user testing to ensure usability and accessibility for all audiences.

The new internal website should be an easy-to-use resource for all members of the community to find and publish policies, procedures, plans, and progress updates. It should incorporate easy methods for information sharing and collecting, replacing outdated practices such as gathering information via e-mailed documents. Existing tools—such as software used to report discrimination, academic concerns, or ethical violations—should have a common, unified interface.

The university must hire external information architecture and user interface experts to develop this new platform and ensure that design and navigation across all of stetson.edu follow best practices and meet existing standards for equitable access. It must also invest in additional staff resources to help manage web content, both in full-time content producers and staff liaisons across the university. Together, this will create a foundation for success.

crucial Create a communication dashboard that allows all Stetson community members to log in and explore 1) archives of all communication sent to that individual, and 2) individual options to choose how to receive information on a more granular level. For example, a student might choose to get financial aid information via text, e-mail, and mail, while they opt-out of event notifications, which would be archived on their dashboard. This may require an investment in software, but so much business is handled electronically that it is crucial.

crucial Limit e-mail by aggregating messages, and adopt priority systems. The Stetson community reports being overwhelmed by e-mail, in part because every single piece of business is conducted via e-mail. While rebuilding the website will take time, more immediately, volume can be decreased by grouping like messages. Stetson Today's morning e-mail messages do this, and so do communications from the Provost's office, which aggregate several announcements. This should become standard practice.

In messages sent to smaller groups, consider adopting systems to help recipients prioritize and process e-mail. For example, the admissions office's internal communications are marked as a "red ball" to indicate that the recipient should stop and take immediate action, or a "yellow ball," indicating that the message has key information, like a deadline, task, or action item.

2. Coordinate Communication More Effectively

critical Create a core group, modeled after Safer Stetson, to oversee central policy issues and communication procedures. Decisions affect all community members, but communication and coordination between them can be lacking. Representation on this committee should include staff, faculty, and students from both campuses, all colleges, and all levels. While Safer Stetson initially lacked representation from all stakeholders, it has evolved into a good model for a centralized committee and should ensure no constituents are excluded.

critical Coordinate a pre-release of information to select departments who may need to prepare for a change. We must ensure that information from decision-makers, especially VPs, is delivered to key department heads and supervisors to allow them to prepare. Too many people have reported being surprised by substantial changes that directly affect their work. For example, Student Life needed time to prepare their staff and office environment before moving from COVID tier 1 to tier 2, but first heard about the tier shift in a mass e-mail. Advance notice is critical to ensure that people have resources and time to create implementation plans.

constituents. University Marketing has effective onboarding training for social media and website maintenance and should create similar training for e-mail communication. This could be part of the brand guidelines and be included in employee onboarding, and should clearly define contacts for assistance and advice in areas such as social media or e-mail marketing. As University Marketing's 2019 Second Internal Communications Survey identified, their office can help foster better communication and can offer things such as:

- Tips for communicating better.
- Training to develop a communication plan for important projects.
- An overview of the communication channels at Stetson, and which are most effective with specific audiences.

Investigate e-mail providers and determine the most cost-efficient solution to adopt university-wide, so e-mail effectiveness can be tracked. The university currently uses multiple platforms (Emma, Razor's Edge, Constant Contact), and should determine if it would be more efficient to use a single platform for e-mail communication, especially in connection with our recommendation for a centralized communication dashboard.

Crucial Modify sender information on e-mail—e.g. "On behalf of Student Life", or "Alumni and Parent Engagement"—to help to ensure intended audiences know who e-mail is coming from.

3. Increase Clarity of Communication

critical Communicate with stakeholders as policies are being discussed and drafted. Many members of the community—administrators, faculty, staff, and students—report being blindsided by new policies that directly impact them. Those developing or modifying policy must publicly declare their work as soon as it begins. Once policies are public, they should be organized and archived on the new website.

Crucial Make all communication less wordy and more visual. Research has shown that individuals do not read on screens, they scan, yet most official Stetson communication consists of massive paragraphs of text. For e-mail messages, text needs to be condensed and more scannable, and other information should be presented more effectively. Longer messages should begin with a brief summary and can then offer links to more detailed information.

For the website, the <u>Safer Stetson page</u> is an example of more-visual presentation of information, but comparing it to <u>Elon's COVID-19 page</u> illustrates how much more we can do.

For policies, <u>Stanford's COVID-19 policies document</u> is an excellent example of clear, visual communication of critical information, as is <u>the School District of Indian River County</u>'s website.

Create a strategic, tiered plan to guide e-mail communication. Members of the Stetson community are overloaded by e-mail and yet still frustrated by lack of communication. Students report that e-mail is often too long and says too little, especially in times of crisis. Some have even created filters to trash any e-mail from stetson.edu. Stetson needs a clear, public plan that guides how information should be shared. Even those who open messages report not reading them fully.

4. Communicate Clearly about Crises

crucial Develop and make public a timeline for preparation and dissemination of communications identified in all emergency response plans. There are many types of crisis communication, as well as many offices, organizations, and individuals who need to be prepared to send appropriate and timely communication to their constituent group when an event occurs. While each area of the university has its own emergency/crisis plan, these have been limited to merely identifying a primary contact and when to implement the plan. University Marketing should provide oversight and support to the process and help craft the plans and templates for use by individuals who will be communicating during a crisis.

crucial Empower trained individuals to share information without requiring review, especially in those situations where a crisis exists for a specific group but may not exist for the wider university community. Too often important communication is delayed because it must pass through layers of bureaucracy. To do that, we should:

- Create templates for various types of messaging that are mindful of the effect messages
 can have on recipients. This will reduce lag time where required to craft language and
 ensures that critical content is present. These templates must be mindful of information
 that can be triggering, such as racial violence, gendered violence, gun violence,
 interpersonal violence, sexual assault, and stalking.
- Include relevant resources and information about how to report issues as part of those templates.

crucial Training should be provided to individuals across the institution who are responsible for crisis communication. That should include:

- 1. The process for identifying and preparing communication
- 2. The individuals tasked with creation and dissemination of communication
- 3. Developing templates for messages (as noted above, and which should be as uniform as possible across the institution)
- 4. The approval process prior to dissemination
- 5. A timeline for communication that clarifies a maximum deadline of when the communication is broadcast
- 6. Information on who is the individual(s) to be contacted for additional information

soon Each area of the university should identify potential incidents/issues they may need to communicate to their stakeholders. Existing crisis communication plans do not identify crises that may be specific to a subset of the university community which have the potential to damage relationships within the institution; the reputation of the institution and its members; and/or cause panic, anxiety, or distress. Potential issues may include:

Death of a member of the university community

- Natural disaster or weather event
- Facility damage (e.g. fire, flood, gas leak)
- Significant financial event
- Arrest of a member of the community
- Significant campus news or rumors (e.g. employees' dismissals, a student's account of the Title IX process published in student media)
- Social media posts
- Significant injury of a member
- Clery Act-required timely warnings (e.g. reported crimes, threats to the community, etc.)
- Violence/disaster event in the community (e.g. Pulse, school shooting)
- National political or societal event or disruption (e.g. mass shootings in Atlanta, Jan. 6
 Capitol insurrection, George Floyd)

5. Promote Equity and Inclusion with Transparency

critical Collect and make public faculty and staff hiring practices; demographic data from searches; and salaries for all existing employees. Stetson is not currently collecting nor reporting demographic data in its searches for new staff or faculty, though that is being explored by HR and the President's Cabinet.

Additionally, we support the Faculty Senate's fall 2020 request to that "Administration provide to the Senate Leadership and the University Compensation Committee comprehensive individual compensation data for all faculty, along with relevant demographic data and comparative metrics," which has "plans to analyze such data on the basis of equity in both full compensation and merit increases." That compensation data should also include staff, and be released internally.

We recommend this begin as soon as possible, because the diversity of our community begins with who we hire and extends to how much we pay them.

critical Create a unified, centralized location for reporting concerns, and, after complaints are filed, update complainants clearly and swiftly. Community members need to be aware of their options and the appropriate avenues for reporting concerns, from expression of concerns and formal grievances. We have multiple options—<u>EthicsPoint</u>, <u>Report-It</u>, <u>Title IX reporting options</u>, <u>Maxient</u>, <u>academic grievance processes</u>, student employment grievance processes, <u>faculty and staff grievance processes</u>—but it is not always clear which someone should use.

We must **integrate our existing platforms together** so that users have one accessible, clear, and centralized system to use across all campuses. Statuses should always be available to complainants. This will also ensure we are in compliance with our accrediting body.

In the Campus Climate survey, some respondents said they chose not to report harassment or other problematic communication, while those who did were disappointed with the outcome. For those who choose to report it, there must be an easy, clear mechanism for reporting abuse, harassment, and other prohibited behavior, and the current status and eventual resolution must be clearly communicated to those who do report.

crucial Consider who is being excluded, via responses from the Climate Survey and other feedback. All announcements and communications need to consider who is being included or excluded—based on what is being communicated. For example, an announcement directed specifically to faculty and students would leave staff members out. Be cognizant of the omission and only do it if it is warranted.

6. Encourage Open Communication

critical Affirm the community's right to speak freely. In 2019, Stetson's Board of Trustees unanimously <u>adopted and approved</u> the <u>Statement of Principles of Free Expression</u>, which protects "members of our community, including students, faculty, staff, and alumni, the broadest possible latitude to teach, learn, conduct research, read, listen, and dialogue without interference."

The Campus Climate survey made it clear that many individuals are not comfortable challenging those in authority or simply expressing their views. While a policy alone cannot change that, making this document more public—it exists as a PDF hidden on Stetson's website—and including it in conversations will increase awareness.

Supervisors should remind their employees of their employees' rights to challenge supervisors' ideas, while community members must be reminded of their responsibilities and boundaries that exist. The Statements of Principles of Free Expression is clear that community members may not engage in "expression that violates the law or otherwise violates University policy, including violence and threats of violence, unlawful harassment, defamation, invasions of privacy, violations of confidentiality agreements, or expression that otherwise interferes with the functioning of the University, including expression that prevents others from accessing learning opportunities."

Increasing education about equitable and anti-racist communication will help ensure community members understand their responsibilities and the impact of their communication.

crucial Adopt the CLaSS Principles for Conversations guidelines university-wide, and include conversations about conversation as part of regular business. This document identifies four strategies that are not rules dictating speech, but instead serve as excellent, helpful reminders of how to have effective conversations—especially challenging and difficult conversations. These principles should be distributed to team members, reviewed regularly in division and department meetings, and included in syllabi. Those who lead meetings, classes, and committees should regularly have conversations about how to have effective conversations.

7. Build Stronger Relationships

crucial Leadership must develop stronger relationships with their staff and community members. The lines of communication between staff, faculty, and administrators must be open without fear of reprimand or negative stigma. Leadership can build and strengthen relationships by scheduling time each semester to talk with individuals in their division and other departments they work with regularly. Multiple visits will increase comfort with both parties while building a foundation of trust and creating an opportunity for honest communication. Example questions include:

- How are things going outside of work?
- What resources would help you do your job better?
- What roadblocks or barriers do you struggle with that prevent you from doing your job to the best of your ability?

crucial Be open and clear about failures and action being taken to prevent it from occurring again. Well-intentioned people sometimes make mistakes that can cause harm. While that can be embarrassing and hard to discuss, we all must do more to be honest about our failures, whether it involves a student's classwork or the university's bungled response to a crisis.

The organization GiveWell has a page on its public website listing and detailing <u>"Our Mistakes,"</u> and Stetson should consider a similar, public model, documenting mistakes and, as GiveWell does, "Steps we are taking to improve."

For internal communication, the October 2020 letter from the Faculty Senate chair to the Board of Trustees also offers a good model, both in clear communication and in the admission of past failures and rectifying action—especially in section 3b.

Crucial Leadership should be transparent about action and roadblocks. If action is taken, leaders need to follow through to confirm implementation. If inadequate resources or other roadblocks prevent action, leadership needs to communicate this clearly, and share what can be done to resolve the issue.

Adopt a framework for leadership training so that supervisors and managers will be better leaders and communicators. In all companies, including ours, people in positions of power are often promoted out of convenience and/or length of service without adequate training to lead their teams. That is unfair to them and especially to those they lead. Those in supervisory roles should be given training to ensure they are effective communicators, actively listening to their teams, and leading in a constructive and empowering way. Consider having Stetson staff and faculty with expertise in management lead workshops.

Mork offers a model to "fix workplace injustice" with "things each of us can do, today, to create the kind of workplace in which we can all do the best work of our lives, and enjoy working together. Leaders can take active measures to prevent injustice. Observers can be upstanders, not silent bystanders. When someone is harmed by injustice, they can choose how to respond. When someone causes harm, they can address what they did in a way that makes them part of the solution rather than part of the problem."

Crucial Leadership must be more intentional when selecting methods of communication. Meetings are often held to share information that could be easily communicated in writing or other forms, while e-mail messages are sent asking for debate about important topics.

departments and divisions already. For example, the College of Arts and Sciences' division representatives solicit topics from faculty before all-faculty meeting agendas are set by the Dean's office. That makes meetings feel more open, and communicates that leaders are colleagues who wants to work together.

crucial Expand efforts to praise colleagues publicly. Under the heading "Our KIND Campus," messages from HR have included brief comments about colleagues and community members. Some identify people directly, while others are anonymous. This is a great model that should be expanded, so that appreciation is at the forefront of our communication, not assumed nor an afterthought.

Soon Key administrators should have office hours in public, adopting the model currently used by the Dean of Students and the Director of Public Safety, so that they are available, accessible, and visible to their staffs and the community. That includes leaders in the faculty, the student body, and administration.

continue informal forums with the president, allowing faculty, staff, and students to ask questions of the administration that are not moderated nor filtered. The president has held several virtual forums with faculty that do not have a specific agenda, and we support continuing and expanding this model. It's a welcome change.

Reconstitute the Campus Life Committee to increase faculty-administration collaboration. We support the Faculty Senate's request to reinstate this committee, which the Faculty Senate says will allow faculty to "collaborate with CLaSS on areas of overlap between academics and campus life," so that decisions such as "selecting commencement speakers and student award recipients" will be formal university business rather than be "invisible."

8. Embrace Imperfection

crucial Empower staff members who control official university social media accounts to respond immediately on behalf of the university. Social media is not the same as formal communication, so responses from the university on social media should not be treated as that, and certainly should not require approval. Those hired to manage social media must be empowered to do their jobs, and respond as human beings. Many corporations use this model, while some even have their social media managers sign their names and initials to tweets or replies (for example, see <u>Delta's response</u> to a customer).

This is separate from members of the university community's right to use social media as individuals who are *not* speaking on behalf of the university, but instead just communicating in ways that are permitted and protected by Statement of Principles of Free Expression.

crucial Communicate even when there is incomplete information. Too much communication is being hampered by lengthy approval processes and by a fear of not saying the exact right thing, and legal considerations. But that results in silence and a lack of communication, especially after incidents that generate social media conversation. In all of its communication, Stetson must embrace the idea that it is better to communicate imperfectly or be publicly uncertain than to not communicate at all. We can acknowledge concern without being specific.

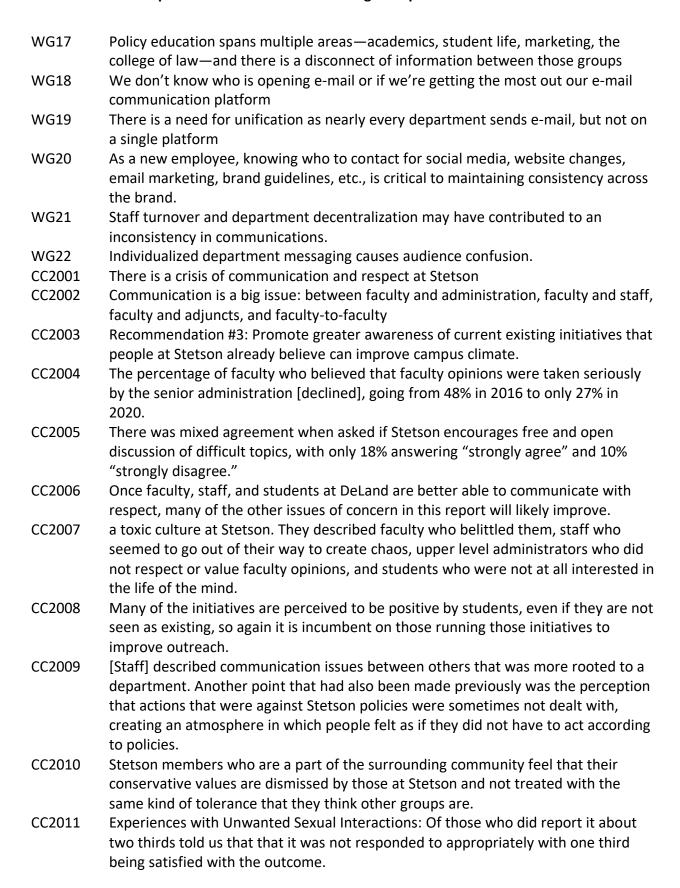
Appendix: Identified communication issues

The 2020 Campus Climate Survey identified many issues related to communication at Stetson University, which is one reason for this working group's existence. In our work during the spring of 2021, we identified other issues, problems, and areas of concern.

All of those issues are listed here. Those labeled WG are from our group's work, and are summarized broadly and in our own words.

Those labeled CC20 and CC16 are from the campus climate survey (2020) and the Rankin report (2016), and quote directly from those documents.

WG01	No racial justice statement on front page of web site (see rollins.edu for an example)
WG02	Interaction in social media spaces has made it easier to be connect and to support other colleagues, but also makes it easy to exclude people from the conversation
WG03	It's difficult to find information on the website, even when it is there
WG04	There are too many different systems and methods of sharing information
WG05	Faculty and staff are being volunteered for/told to be on committees above and beyond their workload/assignment
WG06	Disagreements are being communicated and/or perceived as a break-down in communication. Actual interaction and debate that's occurring—and the fundamental disagreements that have created an impasse—is not being communicated to the larger community
WG07	Website cannot be easily updated
WG08	Too much e-mail; e-mail communication is repetitive; e-mail messages are too long
WG09	Faculty, staff, and students don't know about all policies and procedures. There is
	no central place where policies and procedures are stores. Some are sent via e-mail and are easily lost; some are online but outdated; and other policies live in people's heads without ever being codified.
WG10	Staff members don't feel comfortable being critical of administration or faculty, or challenging their ideas
WG11	E-mail is for a general audience, but formatted in a way that makes it seem individualized, but actually demonstrates a lack of care for students
WG12	Need a system to respond to various crises in a timely fashion across the university. Each area of the University needs a plan with templates and a timeline for response that delineates responsibilities
WG13	Too much information is being shared about students' pasts via SSC
WG14	Lack of data/transparency about diversity of applicant pool for faculty/staff, and retention of faculty
WG15	Broken processes create work for staff and faculty
WG16	Select departments need information before it is released to the masses in order to prepare their surroundings or inform their team for what is about to occur.



- CC2012 Within the past year, have you experienced an accessibility barrier in any of the following areas at Stetson? Blackboard (18%), E-mail (13%), Electronic forms (13%), Electronic databases (9%), Electronic signage (9%), Forms (7%), Electronic surveys (7%)
- CC2013 Undergraduates were also more likely than faculty or staff to believe that the campus climate encourages free and open discussion of difficult topics.
- CC2014 Staff: As was the case with faculty, there was mixed agreement when asked if Stetson encourages free and open discussion of difficult topics, with only 18% answering "strongly agree" and 10% "strongly disagree."
- CC2015 Stetson has implemented a policy by which anyone could have their preferred name on their ID for no additional fee. While most faulty were unaware of this (71%), more staff (53%) and undergraduates (52%) did know about the policy.
- CC1601 Many respondents were concerned with the decision-making process used by the administration, particularly as it related to faculty input.
- CC1602 Thirty eight percent of respondents commented on the lack of transparency in decision making at Stetson.
- CC1603 Forty-four percent (n = 65) of Faculty respondents believed that Stetson Deland encouraged free and open discussion of difficult topics.
- CC1604 Lack of a clear process for resolving conflict. Eleven percent of respondents commented on the need for clear conflict management process.
- CC1605 Nineteen percent of respondents discussed issues related to the administrative decisions and decision-making process.
- CC1606 Stetson Deland would benefit from better publicizing all that the institution offers to positively influence the campus climate
- CC1607 Student respondents wrote about discrimination. They noted racist remarks online, derogatory slurs in person, and being heckled.
- CC1608 Twenty percent of respondents had concerns about technology-related issues in relation to accessibility
- CC1609 Locations of Experienced Exclusionary, Intimidating, Offensive, and/or Hostile Conduct: On social networking sites/Facebook/Twitter/Yik Yak (9.3%), On Stetson media (less than 5 individuals)
- CC1610 Twenty-nine percent (n = 307) of survey respondents observed conduct or communications directed toward a person or group of people at Stetson Deland that they believed created an exclusionary (e.g., shunned, ignored), intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile working or learning environment54 within the past year.
- CC1611 Locations of Observed Exclusionary, Intimidating, Offensive, and/or Hostile Conduct: On social networking sites/Facebook/Twitter/Yik Yak (16.9%), On Stetson media (3.3%)
- CC1612 Reporting of Observed Exclusionary, Intimidating, Offensive, and/or Hostile Conduct ... Of the respondents who reported the incident, 33% (n = 14) were satisfied with the outcome, 19% (n = 8) felt that the complaint received an appropriate response, and 33% (n = 14) felt that the incident did not receive an appropriate response.

- CC1613 Fourteen percent of respondents had concerns about the reporting process that kept them from reporting the sexual interaction to a campus official or staff member
- CC1614 Twenty-nine percent (n = 307) of Stetson Deland survey respondents indicated that they had observed conduct or communications directed toward a person or group of people at Stetson Deland that they believed created an exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile working or learning environment within the past year.