

STETSON UNIVERSITY

**ACADEMIC YEAR 2020-2021  
CAMPUS CLIMATE WORKING GROUP  
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DELAND AND  
STETSON UNIVERSITY**

# Campus Climate Working Group Report

## Relationship Between DeLand and Stetson University

### Background

Harry Truman once said, “In order to have good neighbors, one must be a good neighbor.” This basic truth underlies our committee’s efforts. Since 1883, Stetson University has been an integral part of the DeLand community providing a magnet for visitors, a home for thousands of students each year, and a historic landmark for the community it’s a part of. However, with any relationship, both parties involved need to communicate, respect each other’s differences and work towards a common goal of building an inclusive and vibrant community with each of us committed to our community’s growth, education, and optimization. We’ve been neighbors for over 125 years, but comments such as “DeLand needs Stetson more than Stetson needs DeLand” do not form the foundation for a mutually beneficial and strong relationship between us.

While we knew these issues were somewhat of an unspoken truth, it became more apparent within our latest Campus Climate Survey – a survey done every four years to assess issues around diversity and inclusion aimed at creating a better campus experience for all. The survey done in 2020 (the second of its kind) began to scratch the surface on this issue of Stetson’s relationship within the broader DeLand community through some new survey questions.

In the 2020 survey, respondents were asked if their experiences on campus were different from those they experience in the community surrounding campus. Several qualitative comments surfaced that addressed the relatively unsafe environment that is perceived off campus, many of which describe negative interactions with an off-campus population they view as less diverse and actively hostile to people different from themselves. On the other hand, Stetson members who are a part of the surrounding community feel that their conservative values are dismissed by those at Stetson and not treated with the same kind of tolerance that they think other groups are. (Campus Climate Report).

Coming out of that survey a working group was formed in January of 2021 to better understand the scope of the problem and identify tangible steps to improve the relationship between Stetson and the DeLand community. The overarching mission of our work was defined as:

*The purpose of this working group is to assess the various dynamics impacting the lived experiences of Stetson University community members in DeLand and DeLand community members with Stetson University. The working group will consult, identify opportunities to improve collaboration between the campus and the DeLand community to improve climate and experiences.*

### Working Group Members

<b>Savannah-Jane Griffin (Chair)</b>	Executive Director of Community Engagement and Inclusive Excellence
<b>Bud Hansen (Chair)</b>	Executive Director of PaCE
<b>Sara Scarpelli</b>	Director of Community Outreach Community School of Music
<b>Jack Roberts</b>	Assistant Coach Men’s Soccer
<b>Amber Finnicum-Simmons</b>	Bonner Program Coordinator
<b>Taylor Hibel</b>	AmeriCorps VISTA: Economic Development Coordinator
<b>Cisco Ortiz</b>	Director of Public Safety
<b>Daniel Schubert</b>	Assistant Director of External Operations
<b>Erika Lohmas</b>	Counselor
<b>Tamara Dolan</b>	Assistant Director of Donor Relations

## The Process

After a thoughtful review of the Campus Climate Survey we realized we lacked significant data to effectively articulate the problem and the magnitude of it. With less than ten verbatim responses, we knew we needed more feedback. Additionally, when evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of any relationship, all parties that comprise that relationship should be part of the discussion offering their insights and perspectives. While we felt we may have scratched the surface with a few comments from our internal Stetson audiences, we had not sought input from the other half of this relationship – the community itself. Our first step in our process was more data gathering – both from the community and a deeper dive with faculty, staff, and students on this issue.

## Internal Research

To validate what little we could glean from the Campus Climate Survey, we started within our own Stetson campus community to dive deeper into this issue.

A virtual focus group session was held on Values Day, February 11, 2021, where we engaged with twelve students. During the hour-long session, we started with a similar line of questioning that came from the Campus Climate Survey. As we continued to understand their feelings surrounding their experiences within the DeLand community, it surfaced very similar responses as we saw within the survey. This pool of respondents spoke about issues of feeling unsafe walking the streets in DeLand, homophobic responses from local businesses, political divisiveness, and issues surrounding mask wearing. A confirmation of sorts, but still a very small sample size.

## External Research

We continued to gather sources of information that could balance and complement the data we already had from the Campus Climate Survey and the Values Day focus group. A thorough review of the documents below was also helpful in guiding our thinking:

- [Biased Education Support Team 2019-2020 Report](#)
- [City of DeLand 2050 Report](#)
- DeLand Police Department 2020 Annual Report
- [Volusia Community Health Improvement Plan](#)

The external reports added some texture to the issue, but we still felt like the voice of the community had not been adequately heard. An additional survey was developed that would be fielded in April 2021 to three groups – DeLand businesses and residents, Stetson students, and Stetson faculty and staff. All three surveys would align around a similar line of questioning to compare and contrast sentiments across the three groups. Links to those surveys and number of responses are below:

Audience	Survey Link	Responses
DeLand Community	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/3d5u5969">https://tinyurl.com/3d5u5969</a>	117
Students	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/aajunfvw">https://tinyurl.com/aajunfvw</a>	60
Faculty & Staff	<a href="https://tinyurl.com/3nuv5z3n">https://tinyurl.com/3nuv5z3n</a>	62

To somewhat validate the sentiments expressed within the Campus Climate Survey, we asked quantitative questions about feelings of safety, experiencing a welcoming environment, open lines of communications, and how often they engaged with the Stetson campus (or DeLand community for internal respondents). But what may have been the most insightful were open ended qualitative questions on how each party can be a “better neighbor” and encourage open communication, engagement, and collaboration with the each other.

## Our Findings

The survey responses can be found in the links provided in the section above. Below is a summary of our findings from the surveys we distributed to each group:

### Student Survey

60 Total Responses

- 45% live on-campus in a residential hall
- 28% live off-campus in DeLand
- 26% live off-campus outside of DeLand

When asked how often they engage in the DeLand Community?

- 76% said frequently, occasionally.
- 23% said rarely, never

When asked how students would describe DeLand to a friend who has never been here?

- 64% neutral, favorable or offered positive criticisms
- 35% disapproving with negative comments

When students were asked if they feel safe walking in the DeLand community during the nighttime.

- 28% said always or often
- 28% said sometimes
- 41% said rarely or never

76% of the students that responded to the survey have been engaged in the DeLand community. The students described DeLand as cute, charming, quaint, with great businesses and restaurants. There were nine student responses that shared concern about racist behavior and political divisiveness happening in DeLand. There were also concerns brought up about individuals in DeLand not respecting health guidelines. 42% of students shared that they sometimes, rarely, or never feel safe walking in DeLand at night.

### Representative Comments from Students Thoughts on DeLand

*It's a great, quaint environment with many small businesses, good food, and beautiful scenery! However, there is a strong political divide between many of the on-campus students and older DeLand residents, resulting in some drama and adversity at times, which can be frustrating to observe.*

*DeLand offers a quaint downtown area within walking distance of Stetson community. The town offers restaurants, bars and shops galore! In terms of friendliness, most DeLand residents are quite welcoming and friendly, however, there are still remnants on the "old south" strong and present. Some folks are blatantly rude, racists, and in denial of Covid 19 which is such a shame because the overall community is so wholesome.*

### Faculty/Staff Survey

60 Total responses

- 58% live in DeLand
- 42% live outside of DeLand

When asked how often they engage in the DeLand Community?

- 88% said frequently, occasionally
- 12% said rarely, never

When asked how faculty/staff would describe DeLand to a potential new employee who has never been here?

- 69% neutral, favorable or offered positive criticisms
- 31% disapproving with negative comments

63% of staff and faculty respondents said they thought the relationship between Stetson University and DeLand were very good or good, while 35% said the relationship was average or poor. When describing DeLand, many people referenced the downtown area as small, quaint, and beautiful. 31% of respondents said there is racial and political divisiveness in DeLand.

## Representative Comments from Faculty/Staff Thoughts on DeLand

*DeLand has a picturesque downtown main street with quaint shops and restaurants. There are beautiful springs nearby and the beach is only a short drive away. DeLand can be a beautiful place to experience, especially for people who are White. As a White woman, I am welcomed. However, DeLand also has way too many vehicles brandishing confederate flags and other racist symbols. Black friends, colleagues, and students of mine have told me they've experienced being turned away from restaurants and feeling threatened and unsafe while in DeLand. For these reasons, my opinion of DeLand, overall, has declined significantly, but I truly hope that we at Stetson can have a positive impact on the city and its people.*

*A very pleasant historic (for Florida) downtown with nice independent and locally-owned shops and restaurants. A good and varied night life too. Very white, but not militantly so. The town as a whole is quite racially-ethnically and socio-economically segregated because . . . the South; but, again, not militantly so. Public schools are underfunded (Florida) with de facto segregation that mirrors the larger community. There are numerous natural delights within easy reach: river, parks, springs, and beach.*

*DeLand is a town struggling with defining its identity as it grows at a rapid pace. It's has "America's Main Street" but also has a neighborhood, just a few blocks away, with a 37% poverty rate. It has a blossoming liberal arts college with progressive leadership surrounded by a primarily republican residential tax base. It has beautiful historic homes, but is being taken over by bland new construction.*

*Cute, vibrant small town with lots to do especially on the weekends. A variety of great restaurants and places to meet friends or neighbors.*

## Community Member Survey

117 Total responses

- 83% business owners
- 91% reside in DeLand with 76% of those living here for more than 10 years

Qualitative responses

- 76% neutral, favorable or offered positive criticisms
- 24% disapproving with negative comments

The vast majority of DeLand business owners and residents see Stetson as a valued member of the community. Over three-fourths engage, visit or participate in Stetson activities on occasion or more frequently and they overwhelmingly feel safe and welcome when they do visit.

They love our beautiful campus and appreciate what it brings in terms of visitors, revenue, and general awareness to the area. And while they don't always agree with our mission, values or core essence, they want Stetson to be a good neighbor. A neighbor that is open and inclusive. One that contributes to the greater good of the community as a whole. And one that is proud to be "from here."

## Representative Comments from DeLand business owners and residents about Stetson

*When communicating, consider the community's perspectives. Not everyone has the same beliefs or views. If Stetson wants to be "inclusive" and "accepting", then communications to the non-Stetson communities should consider that reality.*

*Pre-Covid I think the University sorta stayed to themselves and seemed to do little advertising of events to the community - outside of sports and a few musical performances. Please do a better job of welcoming the community to your campus. . . it is also the City of DeLand's campus.*

*If principals of Stetson University had a stronger, more open and more direct relationship with the local newspaper, public misconceptions about what's going on campus could be overcome, and both parties would benefit.*

## Our Recommendations

After reviewing the data collected our team completed a visioning exercise that led us to creating overarching goals to strengthen the relationship between DeLand and Stetson University. From there we created action items for each goal. Three overarching themes emerged from our review of the data we collected. For each theme we created a goal and action steps. We put together an [Action Plan](#) for each goal. Below you will find a condensed version of our action plan:

### Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

**Goal 1:** Stetson will work directly with the City of DeLand to address issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

#### Action Steps:

- Stetson University collaborates with the City of DeLand to create a comprehensive diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility training for community members.
- Embed DeLand and Volusia County community leaders into university events.
- Build a robust scholarship program for DeLand and Volusia County residents.
- Support the City of DeLand being designated as an All American City through the National Civic League.
- Create an incentive that encourages faculty to invite community leaders into their courses as guest lecturers.
- Increase transportation options for students that do not have vehicles.
- Create a survey that addresses community members perception of Stetson and Stetson members perception of DeLand that is distributed every four years.
- Increase community access to space on campus.
- Complete a walkability study at night to assess the accessibility and safety when walking off-campus

### Engagement

**Goal 2:** Stetson will create opportunities and avenues for regular dialogue, activities, events, and educational opportunities to encourage engagement with the DeLand community.

#### Action Steps:

- Expand cultural credit opportunities externally within the community.
- Integrate within employee performance evaluation a component that measures and rewards community engagement.
- Create a collaborative discount program where businesses provide discounts upon proof of Stetson ID. Those participating businesses also receive discounts to Stetson events.
- Stetson increases our presence at DeLand community events.
- Increase number of student internships with businesses in DeLand and increase marketing of job opportunities in DeLand to Stetson students.

### Marketing and Communication

**Goal 3:** Stetson University will work with the City of DeLand to identify a procedural, sustained channel for open communication.

#### Action Steps:

- Create a Community Liaison staff position at Stetson University.
- Stetson websites will include DeLand resources and history on appropriate landing pages.
- Increase advertising of available community spaces on campus to external community members.
- Identify and promote programs for adult learners and community members.
- Create Stetson University Economic Impact Study/Value Proposition that can be shared externally.
- Identify spaces on-campus and off-campus to market Stetson events and community events

## Additional Recommendations

Once we completed our Action Plan our group talked about two items, we think would be very helpful in moving this work forward in the future:

1. **Structure and Resources:** To do this work well, we believe we need to assess Stetson University's current structure and resources that are in place to support this work. We have researched other institutions that do this work well and many of them have an administrator that leads and guides this work at an institutional level. Some examples include:
  - a. **Rollins College** – Assistant Vice President of Community
  - b. **Albion College** – Vice President of Belonging
  - c. **Loyola University New Orleans** – Vice President for Mission and Identity
  - d. **Siena College** – Vice President for Mission
  
2. **Assessment:** The current Campus Climate Survey only asks one question about individuals experiences in the DeLand community, which reads: *Is your experience on campus different from those they experience in the community surrounding campus?*

We recommend creating a survey that is distributed every 2-4 years that focuses specifically on the DeLand community's perception and engagement with Stetson University and Stetson Community members perception and engagement with the DeLand community. We believe this will help us gauge what our relationship is with the community and how we can continue to grow and strengthen our relationship.

## Next Steps

After Stetson Leadership reviews our report and provides feedback, we would like to present this information in Fall 2021 to the following groups:

- **Community partners:** City of DeLand, Mainstreet DeLand Association, West Volusia Chamber of Commerce
- **Students:** Student Government Association, Multicultural Student Council, Open Student Forum
- **Faculty:** Faculty Senate, Faculty Meeting, Open Faculty Forum
- **Staff:** Staff Advisory Council, All Staff Meeting, Open Staff Forum