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## Research poster: Nevada System of Higher Education college student climate change survey

Jenna Zulauf  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

Robert Futrell  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas, robert.futrell@unlv.edu*

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# Nevada System of Higher Education College Student Climate Change Survey

Jenna Zulauf, UNLV Sociology M.A. Student; Dr. Robert Futrell UNLV Sociology Associate Professor

NSF EPSCoR Nevada Infrastructure for Climate Change Science, Education and Outreach Policy Project; Policy and Outreach Component



## Project Summary

One of the starting points for understanding how to shape climate change policy and decision making is to clarify precisely what people know about the causes and consequences of climate change, where they get their knowledge, and what their attitudes and perceptions are toward mitigating climate change. The NSHE College Student Climate Change Survey takes a modest, but important, step in this direction by analyzing the knowledge base about climate change among an important subset of Nevadans—university students.

Specifically, the NSHE College Student Climate Change Survey assesses climate change knowledge among the two largest college populations in Nevada—UNLV and UNR. This population constitutes the next generation of Nevada citizens who will face the daunting task of addressing climate change impacts in the Great Basin and Southwest region, which is one of the most ecologically-diverse, politically-dynamic, and socially mixed areas in the West.

The survey will distinguish what this population knows about climate change, how they get their information, their myths or misperceptions about climate change, and their attitudes about addressing climate change both individually and as a society.

## Survey

The web-based survey consists of 56 items and takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey focuses on many facets of climate change including participants':

- importance placed on climate change in their everyday lives
- level of worry about climate change
- history of discussing climate change with others
- experiences of the natural environment
- self assessments of climate change knowledge and desire to know more
- sources of knowledge about climate change
- level of trust in various sources to provide truthful environmental information
- willingness to change political and consumer actions in reference to climate change
- beliefs about government responsibility to mitigate climate change.
- general focus toward immediate or future outcomes
- demographics

## Participants

Participants were recruited on a volunteer basis from UNLV and UNR populations enrolled during the Fall 2009 semester. Invitations to participate in the web-based survey were distributed during the second week of the Spring 2010 semester using a comprehensive list of student university email addresses provided by each institution. Follow up emails were sent the following week.

## Preliminary Results

To date, over 2,300 students have submitted completed surveys, and data collection will continue until February 5<sup>th</sup> 2010. Data analysis will begin in mid-February, and a final report will be complete by May 2010.

## Future Plans

The knowledge gained through this survey is an important part of efforts to create and tailor informal educational plans to college populations. The survey findings will be used in conjunction with the climate change science provided by other components in the NSF EPSCoR Nevada Infrastructure for Climate Change Science, Education and Outreach Policy Project. Specifically, these survey findings will be used to conceptualize and create a traveling educational exhibit to be displayed at museums in Nevada, Idaho, and New Mexico. The goal of the exhibit is to generate dialogue about the causes and consequences of climate change in the region.

## Guiding Research Questions

1. What are the dominant attitudes and perceptions of climate change among this population?
2. What are the general understandings and misconceptions of the causes, consequences, and mitigation strategies of climate change among this population?
3. From what sources does this population gather its environmental knowledge?
4. To what extent does this population take personal, consumer, and political action regarding climate change?
5. Does the knowledge that others have taken action increase the likelihood of this population increasing their personal, consumer, and political action regarding climate change?

## Contact Information

Jenna Zulauf  
zulaufj@unlv.nevada.edu  
Robert Futrell  
rfutrell@unlv.nevada.edu

Department of Sociology  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
4505 Maryland Parkway, Box 455033  
Las Vegas, NV 89154

