

Fall 2020 CU Boulder New Student Survey: Executive Summary for Matriculated Students

In this brief report we summarize key findings from the Fall 2020 New Student Survey. This survey asked admitted undergraduate students who had confirmed their enrollment at CU Boulder for fall 2020 to reflect on their decision to attend CU Boulder and to report their expectations about college life at CU Boulder.

The findings described in this report are based on only the new students who *matriculated* in fall 2020 (i.e., were still enrolled in classes at CU Boulder as of fall census).

Summary data tables used in this report are available in Appendix A.

RESPONSE RATES

Survey administration began May 4, 2020, and closed September 16, 2020. The survey was open to 10,117 students who confirmed their admission to CU Boulder for fall 2020. At the close of the survey, 8,163 students had taken the survey for an 81% response rate among confirmed students. However, some confirmed students ultimately cancelled or deferred their enrollment (i.e., “summer melt”). This report focuses on only the new (i.e., matriculated) students that attended CU Boulder this fall. Among the 7,731 new students at CU Boulder in fall 2020, 7,151 responded to the survey for a **92%** response rate (96% for first-time students, 79% for new transfer students).

CHOOSING TO ATTEND CU BOULDER

How CU Boulder ranked compared to other schools

- The great majority of survey respondents (75%) reported that CU Boulder was their first choice among the colleges to which they were admitted.

Top 3 reasons students chose CU Boulder

- Nearly three quarters (72%) cited “academic programs and reputation” in their top 3; 64% cited “the setting/location,” and 26% cited “the feeling that I would fit in socially.”

BELONGING AND COMMITMENT

[Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree]

Anticipated belonging at CU Boulder

- Survey respondents reported high expectations that they would have a sense of belonging at CU Boulder. For both first-time (FT) and transfer (TR) students, mean scores on the four item indicators of anticipated belonging were at or above “5=agree” on a 6-point agreement scale. Items assessed (1) viewing CU Boulder as home during the student’s undergraduate years, (2) placing importance on feeling like the student fits in on campus, (3) expectations of feeling that one belongs at CU Boulder, and (4) expectations of feeling a connection to the CU Boulder community.

Commitment to CU Boulder

- Survey respondents also expressed a strong commitment to attending CU Boulder this fall (mean=5.7 FT and TR) and confidence that choosing to attend CU Boulder was the right choice (mean=5.4 FT and TR). The mean score of 4.8 for FT and 4.9 for TR on “It is important to me to graduate from CU Boulder as opposed to another college or university” also reflects agreement that most students are committed to attending CU Boulder rather than another school.
- Disagreement on two items about possibly transferring to another university also reflect commitment to CU Boulder.
 - “It is important for me to get a college degree, but I’m not set on it being from CU Boulder” (mean=2.8 FT, 2.7 TR).
 - “I plan to transfer to another college or university before completing a degree at CU Boulder” (mean=1.8 FT, 1.6 TR).

SELF-EFFICACY

[Scale: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree]

- In general, survey respondents expressed confidence in their academic abilities as they begin their studies at CU Boulder. There are high levels of agreement that they consider themselves able to succeed as students at UCB (mean=5.4), to achieve good grades (mean=5.3), and to write clearly and effectively (mean=5.2). The mean is only somewhat lower (4.9) on their confidence in their math skills.
- Transfer students have modestly higher mean scores than first-time students on time-management skills (4.8 vs 4.6), test taking ability (4.8 vs 4.6), and study strategies (4.9 vs 4.6).

FINANCIAL STRESS

Financial Resources

- A somewhat larger proportion of TR, compared with FT, reported concerns about whether they and their family “have enough financial resources to pay for your first year at CU Boulder.” Thirty-nine percent of TR and 32% of FT students indicated “Definitely not” or “I think so, but it will be difficult.”
- The great majority of FT (82%) are using “family financial resources (e.g., from parents, relatives, spouse, etc.) to help cover the total cost of attending CU Boulder (e.g., tuition, fees, books, room & board, food, entertainment)” compared with only 61% of transfers.
- Whereas 63% of TR are using their “own personal savings” to help cover the cost of attendance, only 47% of FT are doing so.

Financial stress, concerns, and worries

[Scale: 1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Concerned/stressed/worried, 4=Very]

- Mean scores on four items of financial concern range from 1.8 to 2.1 for all respondents, indicating students are typically “a little” stressed, concerned, or worried about finances. Topics assessed were ability to pay for monthly expenses (mean=1.8), personal finances (mean=2.1), having enough money to pay for school (mean=1.9), and the economic impact of COVID-19 “on your ability (or your family’s ability) to finance your education” (mean=2.1).
- Mean scores are slightly but consistently higher among transfer students (range 1.9-2.2) than first-time students (range 1.8-2.1) for each financial measure, indicating TR students have more financial stress, concerns, and worries than FT students.

COVID-19 CONCERNS

Concerns about fall semester

[1=Not at all concerned, 2=Somewhat concerned, 3=Concerned, 4=Very concerned]

- Respondents’ highest levels of concern were “getting the full value of my tuition dollars if campus operations are not back to normal” (mean=3.0 FT, 2.8 TR), “ability to participate in activities in-person and on-campus” (2.7 FT, 2.5 TR), and “status of COVID-19 in Boulder, CO” (2.4 FT, 2.3 TR).
- Mean scores were somewhat lower (less than or equal to “2=somewhat concerned”) with respect to concerns about “personal health and wellness” (1.9 FT, 2.0 TR), “family income” (1.9 FT, 2.0 TR), “availability of flights” (1.4 FT, 1.3 TR), and “being far from family” (1.4 FT, 1.3 TR).

Remote learning

[1=Not at all well, 2=Somewhat well, 3=Well, 4=Very well]

- Nearly all (93%) survey respondents indicated that their “high school, post-secondary school or college switch[ed] from in-person to remote learning due to COVID-19.” Among those students:
 - More than half (55% of both FT and TR) indicated some difficulty in adapting to remote learning, reporting that they “adapt[ed] to the new remote learning environment” either “Not at all well” or “Somewhat well.”
 - The top 3 academic factors that were an obstacle to their successful transition to remote learning were “lack of motivation for remote learning” (73% of FT, 49% of TR), “lack of interaction/communication with other students” (65% of FT, 44% of TR), and “inability to learn effectively in a remote format” (54% of FT, 37% of TR).

APPENDIX: SUMMARY TABLES

Response Rates

Population	New (i.e., Matriculated) Students Only			All Confirmed Students		
	# Invites	# Responses	Response Rate	# Invites	# Responses	Response Rate
First-time Students	6,326	6,045	96%	8,191	6,875	84%
Transfer Students	1,405	1,106	79%	1,926	1,288	67%
TOTAL	7,731	7,151	92%	10,117	8,163	81%

Choosing to Attend CU Boulder

CHOOSING TO ATTEND CU BOULDER	FT	TR	ALL
Among the colleges that you were admitted to, how would you rank CU Boulder?	n=6,020	n=1,092	n=7,112
First choice	76%	72%	75%
Second choice	17%	12%	16%
Third choice or lower	5%	3%	5%
<i>Not applicable, I was only admitted to CU Boulder</i>	1%	13%	3%
What are the TOP 3 REASONS you chose CU Boulder?	n=6,022	n=1,092	n=7,114
Academic programs and reputation	72%	77%	73%
The setting/location	66%	56%	65%
The feeling that I would fit in socially	27%	21%	26%

Belonging and Commitment

BELONGING AND COMMITMENT	FT	TR	ALL
CU Anticipated Belonging (Mean item score; 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree)	n=6,015	n=1,087	n=7,102
I can view CU Boulder as my home during my undergraduate years.	5.3	5.1	5.3
It is important to me to feel like I fit in at CU Boulder.	5.3	5.0	5.3
I expect to feel that I belong at CU Boulder.	5.2	5.1	5.2
I expect to feel a connection with the CU Boulder community.	5.2	5.0	5.2
Commitment to CU Boulder (Mean item score; 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree)	n=6,011	n=1,085	n=7,096
I am confident I will attend CU Boulder this fall.	5.7	5.7	5.7
I am confident that choosing to attend CU Boulder was the right choice.	5.4	5.4	5.4
It is important to me to graduate from CU Boulder as opposed to another college or university.	4.8	4.9	4.8
It is important for me to get a college degree, but I'm not set on it being from CU Boulder.	2.8	2.7	2.8
I plan to transfer to another college or university before completing a degree at CU Boulder.	1.8	1.6	1.7

Self-efficacy

SELF-EFFICACY (Mean item score; 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree)	FT	TR	ALL
	n=6,011	n=1,085	n=7,096
I am confident in my ability to succeed as a CU Boulder student.	5.4	5.5	5.4
I believe that I can achieve good grades at CU Boulder.	5.3	5.4	5.3
I am prepared to write clearly and effectively.	5.1	5.3	5.2
I am confident in my note taking skills.	4.9	5.0	4.9
I have the math skills I need to succeed.	4.9	4.9	4.9
I am confident in my test taking ability.	4.6	4.8	4.7
I am confident in my time-management skills.	4.6	4.8	4.6
I am confident in my study strategies.	4.6	4.9	4.6

Financial Stress

FINANCIAL STRESS	FT	TR	ALL
Financial resources (% “Definitely not” or “I think so, but it will be difficult”)	n=6,002	n=1,079	n=7,081
Do you and your family have enough financial resources to pay for your first year at CU Boulder?	32%	39%	33%
Financial stress, concerns, and worries (Mean item score; 1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Concerned/stressed/worried, 4=Very concerned/stressed/worried)	n=6,001	n=1,079	n=7,080
How stressed do you feel about your personal finances?	2.1	2.2	2.1
How concerned are you about the economic impact of COVID-19 on your ability (or your family's ability) to finance your education?	2.0	2.2	2.1
How worried are you about having enough money to pay for school?	1.9	2.0	1.9
How concerned do you feel about your ability to pay for monthly living expenses (e.g., food, printing and supplies, housing costs, transportation, entertainment, etc.)?	1.8	1.9	1.8
Paying for CU Boulder (% Yes)	n=6,003	n=1,079	n=7,082
Are you using family financial resources (e.g., from parents, relatives, spouse, etc.) to help cover the total cost of attending CU Boulder (e.g., tuition, fees, books, room & board, food, entertainment)?	82%	62%	79%
Are you using your own personal savings to help cover the total cost of attending CU Boulder (e.g., tuition, fees, books, room & board, food, entertainment)?	47%	63%	49%

COVID-19

COVID-19: CONCERNS ABOUT FALL SEMESTER (Mean item score; 1=Not at all concerned, 2=Somewhat concerned, 3=Concerned, 4=Very concerned)	FT	TR	ALL
How concerned or not concerned are you about each of the following when you consider coming to CU Boulder in the fall?	n=5,982	n=1,065	n=7,047
Getting the full value of my tuition dollars if campus operations are not back to normal	3.0	2.8	2.9
Ability to participate in activities in-person and on-campus	2.7	2.5	2.7
Status of COVID-19 in Boulder, CO	2.4	2.3	2.4
My personal health and wellness	1.9	2.0	1.9
Family income	1.9	2.0	1.9
Availability of flights	1.4	1.3	1.4
Being far from family	1.4	1.3	1.4
COVID-19: REMOTE LEARNING	FT	TR	ALL
For students whose high school, post-secondary school or college switched from in-person to remote learning due to COVID-19:	n=5,752	n=805	n=6,557
How well were you able to adapt to the new remote learning environment implemented at your school in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? (% “Not at all well” or “Somewhat well”)	55%	55%	55%
Top 3 academic factors that were an obstacle to your successful transition to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic:	n=5,753	n=806	n=6,559
Lack of motivation for remote learning	77%	66%	76%
Lack of interaction/communication with other students	68%	59%	67%
Inability to learn effectively in a remote format	56%	50%	56%