



CU-Boulder Graduate Student Social Climate Survey Fall 2014 executive summary

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Background

In the late fall of 2014 a graduate student-specific campus social climate survey was administered at CU-Boulder. The survey was the culmination of joint efforts by the Office of Planning, Budget and Analysis, the Graduate School, and the United Government of Graduate Students (UGGS). 4,328 graduate students (2,561 doctoral and 1,767 master's level) were invited to participate in the survey. Overall, 1,603 graduate students (962 doctoral, 641 masters) responded yielding an overall 37% response rate (38% doctoral, 36% masters). These response numbers and rates provide reasonably reliable data upon which specific issues can be identified and responses to those issues can be designed and implemented.

In the spring and summer of 2015, the survey data were subjected to a comprehensive analysis. During this analysis phase a broadly representative Graduate Student Climate Task Force was created and was comprised of graduate students (from UGGS and from across campus), faculty, and representatives from the Ombuds office, Housing and Dining Services, the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance, the Office of Planning, Budget, and Analysis, and the Graduate School. The task force has been meeting regularly since August and has been engaged in focused discussions to understand and interpret the survey results, to begin to design and implement responses to the results of the survey, and to think about how to improve the campus climate more generally.

Data highlights

Selected summary data – respondents to Graduate Student Social Climate Survey (N=1,603; excludes Law students)

Harassment

- 10% (n=167) of the 1,603 graduate student survey respondents experienced some form of harassment.
- 12% (n=119) of 962 doctoral students reported experiencing some form of harassment; 7% (n=48) of 641 master's students reported experiencing some form of harassment.
- Of the 1,603 graduate student survey respondents, 7% (n=118) reported experiencing more than one form of harassing behavior (11% of women n=83; 4% of men n=35).
- Of the 1,603 graduate student survey respondents, 1-6% reported experiencing each of nine specified types of harassment (0-3% of men; 2-8% of women)

Harassment experienced	% female	N female	% male	N male	% total	N total
Unwanted or threatened physical contact	2%	13	0%	2	1%	15
Unwanted romantic/sexual comments	4%	29	0%	2	2%	31
Verbal hostility (shouting, profanity, excessive criticism)	8%	61	3%	29	6%	90
Hostile electronic communication	5%	34	2%	15	3%	49
Denial of access to resources (information, colleagues, etc.)	4%	30	1%	10	2%	40
Threats to academic status	3%	25	2%	17	3%	42
Undermining or impeding your research or other academic work	2%	14	1%	11	2%	25
Threats to employment status	7%	55	3%	26	5%	81
Talking negatively to others about you	3%	26	1%	11	2%	37
Other (please specify)	5%	40	2%	14	3%	54

Prior information – summer funding, student fees

“Before starting graduate study at CU-Boulder, did you receive accurate information about the availability of funding for you during the summer?”

Response	Graduate Students (omits Law)
No	34%
Yes	47%
Not sure/Didn't think about it	19%

NOTE: Percentages are based on the 1,379 survey respondents who answered the item.

“Before starting graduate study at CU-Boulder, did you receive accurate information about the amount of money you would have to pay for student fees?”

Response	Graduate Students (omits Law)
No	41%
Yes	47%
Not sure/Didn't think about it	12%

NOTE: Percentages are based on the 1,379 survey respondents who answered the item.

- 7% of graduate student respondents reported experiencing more than one form of harassing behavior (7.3% of women, 6.5% of men).
- Over all graduate student respondents, a higher percentage of women than men reported that harassment took the form of “unwanted romantic/sexual comments” (3.9% women vs. 0.2% men), “unwanted or threatened physical contact” (1.7% women vs. 0.2% men), or ‘denial of access to resources (information, colleagues, etc.) (4.0% women vs. 1.2% men).
- A slightly higher percentage of women than men reported that harassment took the form of “undermining or impeding your research or other academic work” (1.9% women vs 1.3% men.).
- The most frequently cited form of harassment was “verbal hostility” (5.6%), and “threats to employment status” (5.1%). Women reported that they experienced these forms of harassment at a higher proportion than men. A higher percentage of women than men also reported experiencing harassment across all nine manifestations of harassment.

Perpetrators of harassment

Graduate students were asked “By whom were you harassed? (Please check all that apply)” with response options reflecting the perpetrator’s campus role, e.g., “faculty (non-advisor),” “fellow graduate student,” “graduate advisor,” “post-doc.”

- The most commonly cited perpetrators of harassment were “faculty (non-advisor)” (4.4%) and “fellow graduate student” (3.8%).
- Higher percentages of women than men reported that the harassment came from “faculty (non-advisor)” (4.8% women vs. 3.5% men) or a “fellow graduate student” (4.2% women vs. 3.1% men).
- Higher percentages of men than women reported that the harassment came from an “administrator (2.6% men vs 1.9% women), “graduate advisor (1.9% men vs. 1.1% women), “post-doc” (0.9% men vs. 0.5% women), or “staff” (4.2% men vs. 3.1% women).

Other

An additional key concern identified in the survey was the lack of clarity in graduate student admission/offer letters with respect to the terms of acceptance and financial support that would be provided to students.

Summary of selected current and planned responses to the survey

Our ultimate goal is to reduce and eliminate any harassment of graduate students, regardless of the source, and to make our graduate students’ experience as positive as possible. To do so, some of the actions we are taking or planning include:

- The Graduate School and UGGS will work with every graduate program to create faculty liaisons for graduate students, positions that will be designed to protect student confidentiality in addressing sensitive faculty-student matters.
- Beginning in the summer of 2016, the Graduate School will, in collaboration with the Office of Faculty Affairs and the Faculty Teaching Excellence Program, offer workshops focusing on mentorship and department climate best practices.
- The Office of Faculty Affairs has agreed to include a department climate survey as part of the self-study that every department must prepare as part of periodic academic program review.
- The use of a more uniform and transparent offer letter format so that incoming students receive the most accurate and clear information regarding their program acceptance, as well as their levels of support.

- This semester, faculty in each department will meet to discuss the survey results and identify ways to more consistently follow the processes outlined in both the [Professional Rights & Duties of Faculty Members](#) and the [Graduate Student Bill of Rights](#).