



2021 Senior Exit Survey

Report of Findings

University of Colorado Boulder undergraduates who were intending to graduate in spring or summer 2021 were asked to complete the Senior Exit Survey (administered April 6 – June 30, 2021). The survey asked students to reflect on their experiences at CU Boulder—on campus, in the classroom, in their academic program/major—and about their anticipated professional and career plans. Students enrolled in multiple programs were asked to provide feedback on one of their programs, which was specified at the beginning of the survey.

We emailed survey invitations to all 5,517 students intending to graduate in spring or summer 2021. Forty-one percent of those invited submitted a survey (N= 2,283). Across schools/colleges, the response rate ranged from 33-64%. The respondents were generally representative of the population on demographic indicators, including gender, race/ethnicity, Colorado residency, and first-generation status.

This report contains a selection of survey results that are aggregated across all survey respondents. For more results from the Senior Exit Survey, including the full survey results, school/college results, and academic major-level findings, please visit <https://www.colorado.edu/oda/surveys/oda-sponsored-surveys/undergraduate-surveys/senior-exit-survey>.

Tables that summarize the numeric results referenced in this report are provided in the appendix. The “n” values shown in the column headings of each table indicate the maximum number of respondents who answered each question set.

It's important to keep in mind that this survey was administered in spring 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected the last three semesters of these students' college experience (since March 2020), and this impact is likely reflected in their survey responses.

Key Findings

- **76%** would choose to attend CU Boulder if starting their academic career again.
- **87%** are “proud to be graduating from CU Boulder.” but lower percentages reported a sense of belonging at CU:
 - **61%** viewed CU Boulder as their home during their undergraduate years
 - **59%** felt that they belong at CU Boulder
 - **57%** felt that they fit in at CU Boulder
 - **46%** felt a connection with the CU Boulder community
- **77%** would select the same major if starting their career again.
- **73%** are “proud to be a student in my major.” but reported a lower sense of belonging within their major:
 - **66%** felt welcome,
 - **60%** felt supported,
 - **58%** felt valued as a student, and
 - **52%** had a sense of community in their major.
- Overall, participants described experiencing a positive classroom culture in their major. Students report:
 - respectful treatment on the part of faculty (**84%**) and students (**81%**),
 - faculty intolerance of prejudice (**88%**), and
 - faculty and students challenging offensive comments (**74%** and **72%**, respectively).

- Very small percentages of respondents (**4-7%**) reported having had negative experiences that were related to aspects of their social identity.
- Roughly **two thirds** of respondents agreed that attending CU Boulder contributed toward their achievement of each of the 11 baccalaureate learning goals.
- Many survey respondents had participated in experiential education opportunities, the most frequent being:
 - **53%** participated in a *culminating senior experience*,
 - **43%** participated in an *internship or co-op*, and
 - **30%** participated in *academic student groups on campus*.
 - **28%** had on-campus jobs
- **54%** reported that they have a mentor at CU Boulder
 - 77% of those indicated that their mentor is a faculty member.
- **76%** expect their primary activity after graduation to be employment or seeking employment, and **20%** expect to be continuing their education.

Overall Satisfaction with CU Boulder and Academic Experience

If they were starting their undergraduate career again, more than three quarters of survey respondents would choose to attend CU Boulder (76%) and would select the same major (77%). In addition, 82% would recommend CU Boulder to a friend considering college.

The proportions of graduating seniors' reporting being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with four aspects of their education at CU Boulder range from only 39% for "preparation for the job market" to 74% for "your academic major." About six out of 10 were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with "student and campus life" (57%) and with "academic experience" (66%).

Sense of Belonging at CU Boulder

Although 87% of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that they are "proud to be graduating from CU Boulder," lower proportions reported those levels of agreement with respect to feeling "welcome in my major" (66%), feeling "supported in my major" (60%), feeling "valued as a student in my major" (58%), and having "a sense of community in my major" (52%). 59% "agree" or "strongly agree" that they "feel that I belong at CU Boulder," and 46% "agree" or "strongly agree" that they "feel a connection with the CU Boulder community."

Academic Program Experiences

Sense of Belonging in Major

Although 73% of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that they are "proud to be a student in my major," lower proportions reported those levels of agreement with respect to feeling "welcome in my major" (66%), feeling "supported in my major" (60%), feeling "valued as a student in my major" (58%), and having "a sense of community in my major" (52%). 59% "agree" or "strongly agree" that they "feel that I belong at CU Boulder," and 46% "agree" or "strongly agree" that they "feel a connection with the CU Boulder community."

Classroom Culture

The majority of respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that, in their major, students are treated with respect by instructors (84%) and by other undergraduate students (81%); that course instructors "have not tolerated the use of stereotypes, prejudicial comments, or ethnic, racial, or sexual slurs or jokes" (88%); and that course instructors "successfully manage discussions about sensitive or difficult topics" (79%). Just under three quarters "agree" or "strongly agree" that offensive comments made in class discussions have been challenged by instructors (74%) or by other students (72%).

Identity-based Experiences

The survey included six items that asked graduating seniors about negative experiences in their major that were related to aspects of their social identity. Overall, only small percentages of respondents (4-7%) reported that they “agree” or “strongly agree” that they have had these experiences, including, for example, “Because of my identity, other students have acted as if they think I don’t belong” (6%), “Because of my identity, I am left out of classroom conversations or activities in courses” (5%), and “I have had the experience of being excluded or marginalized from a lab or other class or workgroup due to an aspect of my identity” (7%).

However, when we restrict attention to students that identify as belonging to a marginalized group, we see somewhat higher percentages that report experiences in their major based on their identity. For instance, 5-9% of LGBTQ+ students, 20-24% of international students, and 6-11% of URM students (Black, Hispanic, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) reported identity-based experiences in their major.

Satisfaction with Academic Program

Curriculum and Post-graduation Preparation

Two thirds or more of survey respondents indicated that they are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the following aspects of their major: “clarity of degree requirements” (77%), “quality of faculty instruction” (73%), “opportunities for interaction with faculty” (72%), “overall curriculum” (70%), “advising on course selection, academics, and degree planning” (66%), “availability of courses you’re required to take” (67%), and “faculty concern for individual students” (66%). Smaller majorities of respondents are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with “quality of TA instruction” (64%), “availability of courses you want to take” (58%), and “preparation for graduate/professional school” (55%). Under half are satisfied or “very satisfied” with “preparation for employment” (44%).

Support from Professors in the Academic Major Program

High proportions of survey respondents (76-90%) reported that the professors in their major “occasionally” or “frequently” provided them with seven of the nine forms of support, including, for example, “help in achieving your professional goals” (82%), “emotional support and encouragement” (83%), and “advice and guidance about your educational program” (83%). Lower proportions of respondents indicated that professors in their major “occasionally” or “frequently” provided them with “an opportunity to work on a research project” (64%) or “a letter of recommendation” (56%).

Wider CU Boulder Experience

Experiential Education & Work Experiences

Graduating seniors were asked to identify, from a list of 16 educational experiences, those in which they participated while a student at CU Boulder. Eight-seven percent of the 2,123 seniors who answered these questions (N=1,469) indicated that they took part in at least one of the activities and 69% participated in two or more of the activities.

The top five experiences reported by seniors had 25% or more of students participating: a culminating senior experience (53%), an internship or co-op (43%), academic student groups on campus (30%), working at an on-campus job (28%), and having a formal leadership role in a student organization or group (25%).

About one in five graduating seniors also reported participating in volunteering/service work programs (20%), study abroad (19%), or undergraduate research experiences (19%). Only 13% indicated that they took part in none of the listed experiences.

Mentorship

Just over half of graduates (54%) have someone at CU Boulder they consider a mentor. Among those who have a mentor, the great majority (77%) indicated that their mentor is a faculty member.

Baccalaureate Learning Goals

CU Boulder has established 11 learning goals for all baccalaureate graduates. The percentage of students who “strongly agree” or “agree” that CU Boulder contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in these areas ranges from 63-66% for six of the goals. A higher proportion “strongly agree” or “agree” that CU Boulder contributed to the goal of “thinking critically, comprehensively, and creatively about texts, artifacts and problems” (71%) and to the goal of “working collaboratively and individually” (76%). A lower proportion “strongly agree” or “agree” that CU Boulder contributed to the goal of “contributing actively as a civically literate citizen of the community, the state and the world” (59%) and to the goal of “understanding and appreciating multiple historical and cultural viewpoints in their social contexts” (57%).

Future Plans

Anticipated Primary Activity after Graduation

Nearly half of graduates (49%) reported that, in the months after graduation, they expect their “primary activity” to be employment (including military service); more than a quarter (27%) expect to be “seeking employment;” and 20% expect to be “continuing my education.”

Employment Directly Related to Academic Major(s)

For those who plan to be employed after graduation and have already accepted a position, most have accepted positions having either a “considerable relation” (57%) or “some relation” (28%) to their major(s).

Plans to Attend Graduate/Professional School

Among graduates who specified a primary activity after graduation other than “continuing education,” 14% are planning to attend graduate or professional school or apply for an advanced degree within the next year, and 56% indicated that they may pursue an advanced degree at some time in the future.

Cross-time Comparisons

We administered an earlier version of the Senior Survey to students in April 2016. Of the 7,453 seniors invited to take part in the survey, 37% submitted a survey (N=2,757). We invited graduating seniors and non-graduating students with senior status to participate in that survey.

Although there is some overlap in the content of the 2016 and 2021 surveys, differences in item wording and/or response options greatly limit the ability to make cross-time comparisons. Working within these limitations, we selected survey items that assessed similar topics (e.g., satisfaction with aspects of their major, preparation for the job market) and compared the percentage of positive responses, or “% favorable” (e.g., Satisfied, Very satisfied; Very well, Generally well) from seniors:

- Overall satisfaction with the academic major
 - 82% responded favorably in 2021, compared with 74% in 2016
- Satisfaction with ...
 - Clarity of degree requirements: 77% favorable in 2021; 75% in 2016
 - Availability of courses you're required to take: 67% favorable in 2021; 62% in 2016
 - Availability of courses you want to take: 58% favorable in 2021; 47% in 2016
 - Opportunities for interaction with faculty: 72% favorable in 2021; 72% in 2016
 - Faculty concern for individual students: 66% favorable in 2021; 65% in 2016
 - Faculty instruction in the major: 73% favorable in 2021; 88% favorable in 2016
- Preparation for the job market: 70% of 2021 survey respondents and 65% of 2016 survey respondents responded favorably that CU Boulder had prepared them for the job market

- Future plans: In 2021, 49% of graduating seniors indicated that their “primary activity in the months after graduation” was most likely to be employment (including freelance, self-employed, part-time, etc.), and 20% indicated that their principal activity was most likely to be further education. In 2016, 67% of graduating seniors indicated that their “principal activity this fall” was most likely to be employment (full- or part-time), and 12% indicated that their principal activity was most likely to be further education.

Student Comments

At the end of the survey students were asked “Do you have any final feedback for CU Boulder?” More than 900 students wrote comments, many of which were lengthy and addressed multiple subjects. Several themes or topics emerged from a review of the written comments.

The university’s adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic had, as would be expected, a considerable impact on these spring 2021 graduating seniors; and the comments submitted by many of them express their frustration, disappointment, and unhappiness. Recurring topics included criticisms of the cancellation of graduation and the cancellation of spring break; not discounting the cost of tuition for an online, rather than an in-person, educational experience; insufficient resources available to address students’ mental health issues; and the perception that the university cares more about making money than about student welfare.

Students also took the opportunity to note positive impacts of their time at CU, e.g., “I think that the senior capstone project is a great experience especially for those who didn't have any internship experience and/or want to go directly into industry,” “CU Boulder did an amazing job at preparing me for my career with the variety of experiences we were given,” “I made a lot of progress towards finding myself and I academically and personally learned a lot and I am ready for the next steps of my life,” and “I'm very appreciative of and grateful towards CU's administration and everyone who helps make the student experience the best it can be. It definitely feels like you care.”

APPENDIX: TABLES OF NUMERICAL RESULTS

Overall Satisfaction with CU Boulder and Academic Experience

If you were to start your undergraduate career again, would you ...	% that “Probably” or “Definitely” would (n = 2,241)
<i>Select CU Boulder again</i>	76%
<i>Select the same major again</i>	77%
Would you ...	
<i>Recommend CU Boulder to a friend</i>	82%

[4-point Scale: Definitely not, Probably not, Probably, Definitely]

Overall, how satisfied are you with these aspects of your education at CU Boulder?	% “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” (n = 2,278)
<i>Your academic major</i>	74%
<i>Preparation for the job market</i>	39%
<i>Academic experience</i>	66%
<i>Student and campus life</i>	57%

[6-point Scale: Very dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Somewhat dissatisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Satisfied, Very satisfied]

Sense of Belonging at CU Boulder

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	% “Agree” or “Strongly agree” (n = 2,282)
<i>I feel like I fit in at CU Boulder.</i>	57%
<i>I feel a connection with the CU Boulder community.</i>	46%
<i>I feel that I belong at CU Boulder.</i>	59%
<i>I have viewed CU Boulder as my home during my undergraduate years.</i>	61%
<i>I am proud to be graduating from CU Boulder.</i>	87%

[6-point Scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Academic Program Experiences

Sense of Belonging in Major

In my major:	% “Agree” or “Strongly agree” (n = 2,201)
<i>I feel welcome in my major (like I belong).</i>	66%
<i>I have a sense of community in my major.</i>	52%
<i>I feel valued as a student in my major.</i>	58%
<i>I am proud to be a student in my major.</i>	73%
<i>I feel supported in my major.</i>	60%

[6-point Scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Classroom Culture

In my major:	% “Agree” or “Strongly agree” (n = 2,156)
<i>Offensive comments have been challenged by course instructors in class discussions.</i>	74%
<i>Offensive comments have been challenged by other students in class discussions.</i>	72%
<i>Course instructors successfully manage discussions about sensitive or difficult topics.</i>	79%
<i>Course instructors have not tolerated the use of stereotypes, prejudicial comments, or ethnic, racial, or sexual slurs or jokes.</i>	88%
<i>Students are treated with respect by other undergraduate students.</i>	81%
<i>Students are treated with respect by instructors.</i>	84%

[6-point Scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Identity-based Experiences

In my major:	% “Agree” or “Strongly agree”			
	LGBTQ+ (n = 407)	INT'L (n = 119)	URM (n = 304)	ALL RESPONSES (n = 1,984)
<i>I have had the experience of being excluded or marginalized from a lab or other class or workgroup due to an aspect of my identity.</i>	9%	24%	9%	7%
<i>Because of my identity, I am left out of classroom conversations or activities in courses.</i>	6%	20%	7%	5%
<i>Because of my identity, other students have acted as if they think I don't belong.</i>	8%	20%	11%	6%
<i>Because of my identity, faculty/instructors act as if they think I don't belong.</i>	5%	20%	6%	4%
<i>I have considered leaving the university because of negative classroom experiences related to my identity.</i>	5%	21%	7%	5%
<i>An aspect of my identity has been insulted or made fun of in the classroom.</i>	9%	23%	7%	7%

[6-point Scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Satisfaction with Academic Program

Curriculum and Post-graduation Preparation

Reflecting on your major, how satisfied are you with:	% “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” (n = 2,208)
<i>Overall curriculum</i>	70%
<i>Quality of faculty instruction</i>	73%
<i>Quality of TA instruction</i>	64%
<i>Opportunities for interaction with faculty</i>	72%
<i>Faculty concern for individual students</i>	66%
<i>Advising on course selection, academics, and degree planning</i>	66%
<i>Preparation for employment</i>	44%
<i>Preparation for graduate/professional school</i>	55%
<i>Clarity of degree requirements</i>	77%
<i>Availability of courses you're required to take</i>	67%
<i>Availability of courses you want to take</i>	58%

[6-point Scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Support from Professors

How often have professors in your major provided you with*:	% “Occasionally” or “Frequently” (n = 829*)
<i>Encouragement to pursue graduate/professional study</i>	79%
<i>An opportunity to work on a research project</i>	64%
<i>Advice and guidance about your educational program</i>	83%
<i>Emotional support and encouragement</i>	83%
<i>A letter of recommendation</i>	56%
<i>Help to improve your study skills</i>	76%
<i>Feedback on your academic work (outside of grades)</i>	79%
<i>Encouragement to discuss coursework outside of class</i>	90%
<i>Help in achieving your professional goals</i>	82%

[3-point Scale: Not at all, Occasionally, Frequently]

*As a new addition to the Senior Survey, these questions were tested by randomly presenting them to half of the survey recipients

Wider CU Boulder Experience

Experiential Education & Work Experiences

	% that participated (n = 2,123)
<i>Academic student groups on campus</i>	30%
<i>Leadership programs</i>	8%
<i>On-campus work positions</i>	28%
<i>Social student groups on campus</i>	17%
<i>Student government</i>	3%
<i>Student teaching</i>	10%
<i>Study Abroad</i>	19%
<i>Undergraduate research experiences</i>	19%
<i>Volunteering / Service learning programs</i>	20%
<i>Work with a faculty member on a research project</i>	13%
<i>Clinical placements</i>	1%
<i>Internship or Co-op*</i>	43%
<i>Culminating Senior Experience</i>	53%
<i>Course or lab assistant position</i>	16%
<i>Fieldwork or practicums</i>	7%
<i>Formal leadership role in a student organization or group</i>	25%
<i>Innovation and/or entrepreneurship programs</i>	6%
<i>None of these educational experiences</i>	13%

*Combines answers to two activities.

Mentorship

	(n = 1,040*)
<i>% Have a mentor at CU Boulder*</i>	54%

Mentor affiliation with CU Boulder:	% of those who have a mentor (n = 552)
<i>CU faculty member</i>	77%
<i>CU staff member</i>	10%
<i>CU graduate student</i>	6%
<i>CU undergraduate student</i>	4%
<i>CU alumna/alumnus</i>	4%

*As a new addition to the Senior Survey, these questions were tested by randomly presenting them to half of the survey recipients.

Baccalaureate Learning Goals

	% “Agree” or “Strongly agree” (n = 2,072)
<i>Thinking critically, comprehensively, and creatively about texts, artifacts and problems.</i>	71%
<i>Communicating clearly in written and oral forms for various audiences.</i>	69%
<i>Understanding and applying high ethical standards to all endeavors.</i>	62%
<i>Formulating and investigating research, creative work and open-ended questions.</i>	64%
<i>Sustaining complex arguments with appropriate evidence.</i>	66%
<i>Locating, evaluating and applying relevant evidence and technologies to solve problems in their disciplinary areas of study.</i>	66%
<i>Understanding and appreciating multiple historical and cultural viewpoints in their social contexts.</i>	57%
<i>Solving problems even with ambiguous, contradictory and controversial information.</i>	63%
<i>Participating in lifelong learning.</i>	65%
<i>Contributing actively as a civically literate citizen of the community, the state and the world.</i>	59%
<i>Working collaboratively and individually.</i>	76%

[6-point Scale: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, Agree, Strongly agree]

Students’ Future Plans

Anticipated Primary Activity after Graduation

	(n = 2,137)
% Employment (including Military Service)	49%
% Continuing Education	20%
% Volunteer/service work	1%
% Seeking employment	27%
% Other	3%

Employment Directly Related to Academic Major(s)

For those who plan to be employed after graduation and have already accepted a position, position has:	(n = 507)
% Considerable relation to my major(s)	57%
% Some relation to my major(s)	28%
% Not related to major(s)	16%

Plans to Attend Graduate/Professional School

Among graduates who specified a primary activity after graduation other than “continuing education”:	(n = 1,693)
% Planning to attend or apply within the next year	14%
% May pursue an advanced degree at some point	56%
% No, not interested	19%
% Not sure	11%