

Highlights from the Annual New Student Survey: Wave 2, Fall 2018 Cohort

Psychosocial Factors

- 8,325 University of Colorado Boulder freshmen and transfers were asked to complete the annual admissions survey in October of 2018. 36% (3,038) submitted a survey, and 46% (3,799) answered at least the first question.
- This report examines psychosocial factors after students have been on campus for one to two months.
- Items that assessed the same psychosocial factor were averaged together into a single factor.
- Respondents are generally doing well. The following table is sorted from highest to lowest average, on a scale of 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). On average, students reported strong commitment to CU Boulder, have high self-efficacy, feel valued on campus, have a sense of belonging at CU as well as within their major, are getting involved in activities, and are committed to their major.

Factor	Example Item	# Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N resp.	Average	Sd
Commitment to CU	I expect to graduate from CU Boulder.	3	0.78	3377	4.22	0.76
Self-efficacy	I believe that I can achieve good grades at CU Boulder.	3	0.85	3304	4.1	0.63
Valued	I feel valued as an individual on campus.	3	0.74	3376	3.94	0.68
CU Belonging	I feel that I belong at CU Boulder.	4	0.84	3376	3.89	0.82
Major Belonging*	I feel accepted by others in my major.	3	0.72	2769	3.74	0.75
Engagement	I've started getting involved in activities at CU Boulder (e.g., arts programs, athletics, student government...).	1	--	3372	3.63	1.14
Commitment to Major*	How certain are you that you will stick with your academic major?	1	--	2677	3.35	1.23

Table notes. Each question was assessed on a 5-point Likert scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*, except commitment to major, which ranged from *Not at all Certain* to *Absolutely Certain*.

Cronbach's alpha indicates how well the items all measure the same underlying construct. Ranging from 0-1, Alpha above .70 indicates that the items are measuring the same thing and can be combined.

* These questions were only asked of students who said they had selected an academic major.

The standard deviation (*sd*) shows how much responses varied around the average. Notably, there was more variability among students in terms of engagement and commitment to their academic major, and less variability around feeling valued and having self-efficacy.

Demographic differences. We examined whether each psychosocial factor depended on the following student characteristics: Residency, gender, transfer or freshmen status, ACO (Alternate College Option) status, first generation status, International status, Race (White vs. student of color (SOC)), and School/College. This revealed the following differences, which are also summarized in a table below:

- Compared to non-residents, residents report lower CU belonging, feeling less valued, and lower engagement.
- Compared to men, women report greater CU Belonging, feeling more valued, and greater engagement and commitment to CU Boulder. They also report lower self-efficacy.
- Compared to transfer students, freshmen report greater CU Belonging, feeling more valued, and are more engaged. However, they are also less committed to CU Boulder and less certain of their major.
- ACO and non-ACO students are quite similar, but ACO students are less certain of their major.
- Compared to non first-generation students, first generation students report lower CU belonging and engagement, and marginally lower self-efficacy and major belonging.
- International students are much more certain of their academic major than domestic students (and report marginally greater belonging in their major), but are less committed to CU Boulder, less engaged, and have lower self-efficacy.
- Whites report greater CU belonging than students of color, and are slightly less certain of their major.
- Compared to students in both Business and Engineering, those in Arts & Sciences reported lower

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engagement, were much less certain of their major, and experienced lower belonging within their major. They also reported lower commitment to CU Boulder, and felt marginally less valued.

- Comparing business to engineering students, business students reported greater self-efficacy and engagement. They also reported marginally greater belonging within their major.

Why do psychosocial factors matter?

The first question in the survey asked students to complete the statement “Overall, I am off to...”, with options “A great start”, “A very good start,” “A good start,” “Just an OK start,” and “Not a good start.” Responses to this question were strongly related to a student’s standing on the psychosocial factors. In fact, whereas demographic variables explained just 2% of how a student responded to this question, the psychosocial factors explained 41% of the variation in responses.

A similar pattern emerged when we treated commitment to CU Boulder as an outcome: the demographic variables alone explained merely 2% of commitment to CU Boulder, whereas the other psychosocial factors—CU belonging, self-efficacy, engagement, and feeling valued at CU—explained 44% of commitment to CU Boulder. Notably, CU belonging was by far the most strongly related to CU commitment, but self-efficacy and feeling valued were also significantly related; engagement at CU Boulder was not related to commitment.

Given that the psychosocial factors are strongly tied in with overall well-being at CU Boulder as well as commitment to CU Boulder, it is worth further investigating what experiences lead to having a sense of belonging and feeling valued on CU’s campus, and how CU Boulder can help bolster these sentiments.

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Group Differences

<i>Factors</i>	Resident (vs Non)	Women (vs Men)	Freshmen (vs transfers)	ACO (vs non)	First Gen (vs non)	Intern'tl (vs citizen)	White (vs SOC)	A&S (vs Bus + Eng)	Business (vs Eng)
CU Belonging	↓***	↑*	↑***	=	↓**	=	↑*	=	=
Major Belonging	=	=	=	=	↓+	↑+	=	↓*	↑+
Valued	↓*	↑***	↑**	↑+	=	=	=	↓+	=
Self-efficacy	=	↓*	=	↓+	↓+	↓*	=	=	↑***
Engagement	↓***	↑*	↑***	=	↓*	↓**	=	↓***	↑*
Commitment to CU	=	↑*	↓*	=	=	↓***	=	↓*	=
Certain of Major	=	=	↓***	↓***	=	↑***	↓+	↓***	=

Note. Arrows indicate the direction of the difference. For example, the down arrow (↓) in the upper left corner indicates that residents (vs non-residents) reported lower CU Belonging, on average across all other demographics. Stars(*) indicate the size of the difference; more stars indicate a larger statistically significant difference. *** $p < .0001$, ** $p < .001$, * $p < .01$, + $p < .05$. ACO = alternative college option. Gen = Generation. SOC = Students of color. Bus = Business. Eng = Engineering.