



## October 2017 Letter to Graduate Students

Dear CU Boulder Graduate Students,

Building a more inclusive, welcoming climate for University of Colorado Boulder graduate students is my top priority as dean of the Graduate School and vice provost for graduate affairs. As we look forward to the next graduate student surveys in 2018 and 2019, I am writing to update you on the progress we have made since the last graduate student social climate survey in 2014 and to share important new analysis of that survey with you. Although the survey data are now three years old, release of this new analysis is important both in the interest of transparency and because the results remain actionable.

### WHAT WE'VE DONE SO FAR

When I became interim dean in 2016, graduate students requested additional analysis of the 2014 survey. In response to these requests, the Graduate School partnered with Institutional Research (IR) and the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) on additional survey analysis. The [IR analysis](#) was released in January 2017, and with this writing I am releasing the [OIEC analysis](#). All analyses, including previous communications to the CU Boulder community about the 2014 graduate student social climate survey, can now be found [here](#).

We've taken many steps in response to previous analyses of the 2014 Graduate Student Social Climate Survey. Initiatives that the Graduate School has launched in partnership with the United Government of Graduate Students (UGGS) and other stakeholders include:

- The **Graduate Peer Mentoring Program**, piloted in the 2016-2017 academic year, aims to fulfill the need for peer mentoring across disciplinary boundaries and to build community among different graduate student populations. Building on the success of the pilot, the program has now doubled to almost 300 participants for the 2017-2018 academic year.
- In partnership with UGGS and New Student and Family Programs, the Graduate School now sponsors an **enhanced orientation for new graduate students** that better acquaints graduate students with CU resources that can help them thrive at CU Boulder and aims to create a more welcoming start to their graduate studies and their experience at CU.
- The Graduate School now also provides **orientations for new directors of graduate studies** to familiarize them with graduate student climate issues and Graduate School resources and policies so that they are better prepared to assist and support their graduate students.

- A **mandatory admissions letter template** more clearly explains funding, student expenses, and program information.
- A **6.5 percent increase in the graduate student base stipend rate** became effective in fall 2016, followed by a **5.9 percent increase** in fall 2017.
- Because the lack of an August paycheck was creating financial hardship for many of our graduate teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors in the opening weeks of the semester, the Graduate School announced a **revised pay schedule** that went into effect in fall 2017 and provides a half-month paycheck at the end of August.
- To ensure that we continue to address issues, the Graduate School also formed a Graduate Climate Advisory Committee, whose members are graduate students, staff, and faculty.
- In spring 2017, the Graduate School inaugurated **diversity recruitment fellowships** open to all disciplines.

In these and many other ways, we have engaged graduate students, faculty, and staff to create a more welcoming, supportive, and inclusive environment for graduate students.

## **NEW ANALYSIS**

In spring and summer 2017, the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) conducted demographic analysis of the 2014 survey results, particularly pertaining to differences in responses between master's and doctoral students and to differences among groups including gender-diverse students, underrepresented groups, and male vs. female students. This [new analysis](#) shows that:

- A majority of graduate survey participants report experiencing a positive social climate at CU Boulder.
- However, differences between demographic groups include the following:
  - Compared to men, higher proportions of women report witnessing more sexist comments from other graduate students and faculty, characterize their departments as being more sexist, and report experiencing hostile treatment. Women are also less likely to agree that CU is a supportive place for students from underrepresented groups. Women in doctoral programs are more likely to report that they have felt they were treated awkwardly by faculty because of some aspect of their social identity and more likely to report having been marginalized or excluded from a work group/lab for some aspect of their social identity.
  - Compared to Straight students, GLBQ+ students report experiencing a more negative social climate in the great majority of climate-related survey questions. Analyses showed that there are no statistically significant differences in retention between women and men, or across the five race/ethnicity groups. However, GLBQ+ students are more likely than Straight students to have withdrawn from the university (without completing a degree) between the time of the survey in fall 2014 and March 2017. (Please note: survey participants were

asked about their sexual orientation. Response options included: bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, queer, questioning, prefer not to state, and write-in response option. Respondents also had the option of not answering the question. Survey analysis categorized participants into three sexual orientation groups: GLBQ+, Straight, and No Answer. Gender identity was assessed by a different survey question. Survey participants who identified as gender diverse, including transgender man, transgender woman, genderqueer/gender-non-conforming, prefer not to answer, or who gave a write-in response are represented in all three sexual orientation categories [GLBQ+, Straight, and No Answer].)

- Compared to the other race/ethnicity groups, students from the combined category of underrepresented groups (URG) report feeling considerably less welcome, valued, respected, and comfortable at CU. They also characterize their programs as more racist, and they are more likely to report being treated awkwardly by other students and by faculty because of an aspect of their social identity and are more likely to report being excluded or marginalized from lab or group work.
- “Sense of belonging” at CU Boulder is the strongest predictor of responses to the question, “If you were to start your graduate career again, would you select this same university?” This was true for women, men, master’s students, and Ph.D. students. For female graduate students and for master’s students, the composite variable of six questions that assessed students’ receipt of accurate information about the availability of funding, training, and support and amount of student fees prior to starting graduate school was also a significant predictor of choosing CU Boulder again. For male graduate students, having experienced hostile treatment was a significant negative predictor of choosing CU again.

## NEXT STEPS

Several 2017-2018 initiatives will help us to act on this important new analysis:

- CU Boulder’s September 2017 **receipt of a five-year, \$1.1 million Department of Education [McNair Scholars Program Grant](#)** will help us to increase access to doctoral education for first-generation and low-income students and students from other underrepresented groups.
- The Graduate School and the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement (ODECE) are partnering with campus stakeholders on graduate student inclusive excellence initiatives. We take inspiration from student-initiated groups such as CU Café, which builds community among STEM students from underrepresented backgrounds and fosters their success in academia.
- The Graduate School is partnering with the Gender and Sexuality Center and other campus groups to begin **conversations about how to improve the climate for GLBQ+ graduate students.**
- The Graduate School is working with graduate student leaders and other stakeholders on ways to better facilitate networking and a sense of belonging among **graduate**

**students who are expecting children or who are parents**, as well as ways to better engage their needs.

- Through **focus groups and related venues**, the Graduate School will partner with offices on campus and with graduate students, faculty, and staff to determine other ways to improve program climate and support, to foster graduate students' sense of belonging at CU, and to investigate further the issues raised in the 2014 climate survey.
- In addition, we will partner with offices on campus to provide **comprehensive training for graduate students and faculty on discrimination and harassment policy and on the skills needed to create a more civil and respectful climate**.
- We will also continue to educate graduate students about **the Ombuds Office** as a confidential, impartial resource for managing and resolving conflicts with faculty and other graduate students, and graduate students on appointment about the **Faculty Relations Office** as a resource for informal advice, coaching, and mediation, managing and resolving conflicts with faculty, and learning skills in how to hold difficult conversations.
- The 2014 Graduate Student Climate Survey was an amalgamation of two different surveys, a survey given every four years regarding issues such as funding, fees, and mentoring/advising and a survey on social climate. To gain more in-depth understanding of these various issues and to act more quickly on them, we will give the two surveys separately, in consecutive years, beginning with **a survey on topics including funding, fees, and mentoring/advising in fall 2018 and surveys on social climate and sexual misconduct in 2019**.
- As we prepare for future administrations of the climate survey, **we will review the survey instrument for inclusivity** and expand it to collect information about experiences of students who are parents and experiences of students who are pregnant or considering having a child.

As we continue to engage with graduate students, faculty, and staff to act on the 2014 climate survey results and to look ahead to upcoming surveys, I invite you to contact me directly with questions, concerns, or thoughts. Together, we can make a positive impact on the experiences of graduate students at CU Boulder.

Sincerely,

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