

January 2017 Letter to Graduate Students

Dear CU Boulder Graduate Students,

Thank you for enriching our campus and community as students, teachers, researchers, artists, performers, and so much more. We are grateful for all that you do for CU Boulder, and we feel strongly that you deserve a welcoming and supportive environment that enables you to thrive.

In fall 2014, over 4300 CU Boulder graduate students were invited to participate in a Graduate Student Social Climate Survey, and 37% participated. In January 2016, the campus released a [summary of survey results](#). As Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Graduate Affairs, I'm writing at this time to share [additional survey results](#) with you, and to tell you about some of the initiatives the Graduate School, the United Government of Graduate Students (UGGS), and other members of the campus community have partnered on since the 2014 survey to enhance the experience of our graduate student population. I will also share these results and initiatives with CU Boulder faculty, staff, and administrators.

The additional results show how respondents in different CU Boulder schools and colleges answered questions pertaining to:

- how welcome they felt at CU Boulder and in their graduate program,
- whether they would choose CU Boulder, their field of study, and their advisor again if they were to start their graduate career over,
- whether they received accurate information prior to starting at CU Boulder about funding, fees, and graduate student teacher training,
- whether they had experienced and/or observed harassment,
- if they knew [where to report concerns about student or faculty conduct](#) (e.g. discrimination, harassment), and if they would feel comfortable doing so,
- if they were aware that the University has a [policy prohibiting research misconduct](#),
- whether they had encountered research misconduct at the University, and if they knew [where to report research misconduct](#).

Survey results:

The majority of all respondents strongly agreed (23%), agreed (48%), or agreed somewhat (19%) that they had felt welcome at CU Boulder during the semester of the survey. The majority also strongly agreed (33%), agreed (39%), or agreed somewhat (16%) that they had felt welcome in their graduate program. 84% would definitely (40%) or probably (44%) select CU Boulder again if they were to start their graduate career over. Most respondents would definitely (55%) or probably (34%) select the same field of study and would select the same graduate advisor (46% definitely, 36% probably). [Click here for more detailed school/college/division](#) results pertaining to these and other survey questions.

The issues we identified were the following:

- Many graduate students reported needing more accurate information pertaining to mandatory fees, the availability of summer funding, and the availability of training in how to teach classes.
- Although the majority of graduate students reported knowing where to go for help if they had concerns about student or faculty conduct (e.g. harassment, discrimination) and would feel

comfortable doing so, a significant minority did not or selected the option “Not sure/Didn’t think about it.”

- 16% of all respondents reported having experienced and/or observed harassment (defined as “behavior that is offensive, intimidating, or hostile and sufficiently serious to interfere with the ability to work or learn”). 66% did not experience and/or observe harassment, and 18% did not answer this question.
- Although 92% of all respondents did not believe that they had encountered research misconduct at CU Boulder (5% possibly, 3% yes), 31% reported not knowing where to report research misconduct if they were to encounter it. 33% knew where to report research misconduct, and 36% reported “possibly” knowing where to report.

Institutional Research and the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance are engaging in further data analysis from the 2014 survey that will take additional time. This further analysis, which I will release in spring 2017, will focus on comparisons by gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation for questions specific to social climate.

What we’ve done, and what we’re working on:

We’ve taken several actions since the survey to improve the climate for graduate students, and to align our graduate climate goals with the goals of the campus’s Inclusive Excellence initiative. For example:

- In spring 2016, the Graduate School collaborated with students, staff, and faculty to create an admissions letter template that more clearly explains funding, student expenses, and program information. This template is now mandatory for all units.
- After engaging with UGGS in late spring 2016, CU Boulder increased its investment in graduate student stipends by \$1.6 million, effective September 1, 2016. This additional investment resulted in a 6.5% increase to CU Boulder’s graduate student base stipend rate. We recognize that this is only a first step, and we look forward to continuing to work with UGGS on this critical issue.
- The Graduate School also formed a Graduate Climate Advisory Committee, which includes graduate student representatives (from UGGS and across the campus), faculty, Housing and Dining Services, the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC), the Ombuds Office, the Office of Faculty Affairs, Institutional Research, Career Services, and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement (ODECE). The Graduate School Executive Advisory Council, whose members are faculty from CU Boulder schools and colleges, is also involved in discussions of the graduate student climate survey.
- The Office of Faculty Affairs now includes a climate survey as part of each department’s periodic academic program review. These reviews take place in rotating cycles every seven years, and include annual updates in the years after the review. In addition, the self-study that every department must prepare for academic program review now also contains questions about the department’s efforts to foster a positive graduate student climate.
- In fall 2016, the Graduate School launched a new graduate peer mentoring program in partnership with UGGS. 150 students from across the campus are participating in the pilot program, which aims to fulfill the need for mentoring across disciplinary boundaries and to build community across different graduate student populations. We are also developing mentoring workshops and online mentoring resources for graduate students and faculty supervisors.
- Also in fall 2016, the Graduate School began offering orientations for new directors of graduate studies, in order to better familiarize them with graduate student needs, graduate climate issues, and Graduate School resources and policies.

- The Graduate School is currently partnering with UGGS and New Student and Family Programs to sponsor an enhanced orientation for new graduate students in August 2017. Our goal is to better acquaint new graduate students with CU resources that can help them to thrive at CU Boulder, and to create a more welcoming start to their graduate studies and their experience at CU.
- In meetings with graduate students, faculty, graduate directors, chairs, and deans, my colleagues and I in the Graduate School continue to emphasize the policies and values expressed in CU Boulder's [Professional Rights and Duties of Faculty Members](#) and the [Graduate Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Next steps:

Although we intend to continue to analyze, share, and act on the findings of the 2014 survey, in 2017 I will also work with UGGS, the Graduate Climate Advisory Committee, the Graduate School Executive Advisory Council, Institutional Research, the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance, and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement on a timeline and plan for the next graduate student survey.

Thank you again for your commitment and dedication as CU Boulder graduate students. I look forward to continuing to partner with you to enhance graduate education at CU Boulder, to build a more inclusive environment for our graduate students, and to promote graduate student achievement. Please contact me at Ann.Schmiesing@Colorado.Edu if you have questions, concerns, or thoughts about the 2014 Graduate Student Social Climate Survey, the survey results, or the climate for graduate students at CU Boulder.

Sincerely,

Ann Schmiesing, PhD

Dean of the Graduate School and

Vice Provost for Graduate Affairs

Ann.Schmiesing@Colorado.Edu

<http://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool>

CAMPUS RESOURCES:

- [Campus and community support services](#)
- [Options for where to report](#) sexual misconduct, protected class discrimination or harassment, or related retaliation (includes mandatory reporting information) and the [Report It](#) webpage includes confidential resources and other campus and community support resources
- CU Boulder's [definition of research misconduct](#)
- Where to [report research misconduct](#)
- [The Graduate School](#)