

University of Central Florida

College of Graduate Studies

Dr. Elizabeth Klonoff – Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and VP Office of Research

Survey Time Period – 2018/2019 Academic Year

Release Date: Spring 2019

The University of Central Florida and the College of Graduate Studies is dedicated to providing an inclusive and affirming environment by creating a climate of respect, civility, and understanding. To assess this institutional reality, the College of Graduate Studies conducted this survey to better understand the current graduate climate. No records indicate if a previous survey had been conducted and so this effort became even more important to establish a descriptive picture of the current context and provide the College of Graduate Studies with baseline data. Graduate students at UCF are numbered nearly 10,000 and span across 11 different Colleges and over 220 graduate programs. Our records indicate that 58% of our graduate students are women. UCF also has students representing a range of diverse backgrounds; in the Fall of 2018, students of diverse or minority backgrounds made up 51% of the overall graduate population. A further expression in our diversity is that there are graduate students from every state in the United States. As well, 13% of the graduate students are international and come from 135 different countries. This highlights that there is a very complex and diverse graduate population.

Consistent with a climate survey conducted by Virginia Tech University, it is clear that “aligning with the best practices recommended by the Association of American Colleges & Universities’ A New Rubric for Assessing Institution-wide Diversity, the results of this climate survey should stimulate conversations and self-reflection that assist university leadership in advancing institutional diversity goals, thus fostering greater understanding of how different areas of the institution align and interrelate” (Kirmmse & Diaz, 2013, p. 3). A message from this is that there is a need to further engage administration, faculty, and staff to better understand how graduate students integrate into their programs and within the institution. This is a call to UCF leaders to focus our efforts on best practices across the campus while at the same time concentrating on some of the barriers to inclusion and belongingness expressed by participants in this survey.

In Fall 2018, the College of Graduate Studies staff had been fielding questions and concerns about a variety of student issues at UCF. In response, Elizabeth Klonoff, the dean of the college, charged Associate Deans Dr. Barbara Fritzsche and Dr. Devon Jensen with conducting a Climate Survey to determine if the issues were isolated or part of a local or national pattern. The information would help inform changes that might be needed. Dr. Fritzsche and Dr. Jensen conducted the electronic survey from October to November 2018 and analyzed the data and wrote up this report during the Spring 2019 semester.

The goal of the survey was threefold:

- 1) to create a descriptive picture of the current graduate student climate at UCF;
- 2) to determine any specific trends and patterns, both positive and negative, in the graduate climate; and
- 3) to establish appropriate and relevant interventions to improve the overall graduate climate at UCF.

The design of the UCF Graduate Student Climate Survey came after a lengthy review of the literature and after reviewing a variety of survey instruments used by other graduate schools. In the end, we drew items from Chung et al.’s (2016) inclusion measure and from the climate survey used at Boise State University, for which permission was granted. For the purpose of the survey, we used the definition of climate as the “current attitudes, behaviors and standards of faculty, staff, administrators and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential” (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264).

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the central tenets of **INCLUSION**. Inclusion as it relates to climate is supported by the **OPTIMAL DISTINCTIVENESS THEORY**. This theory focuses on “human needs for validation and similarity to others (on the one hand) and a countervailing need for uniqueness and individuation (on the other)” (Brewer, 1991; p. 477).

In order to seek out an understanding of Graduate Climate at UCF as it relates to the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, Chung et al.’s (2016) scale provided a theoretical reference point. Chung et al. (2016) found that inclusion (belongingness and uniqueness) predicted turnover intentions, helping, health, performance, and creativity in work group samples. For Chung’s scale to have application in this context, it was necessary to convert “work group” to “graduate program/student” to form the basis of the analysis of the survey population. Chung’s scale showed high internal consistency coefficients on the Belongingness ($\alpha = .91$) and Uniqueness ($\alpha = .88$) measures. This theoretical

basis was essential in making sure the survey questions were measuring the concept of climate accordingly at UCF. Further to this, inclusion in graduate education happens at both the institutional level and at the department level” (Hirt & Mufo, 1998, p. 18). So relevant questions in the survey addressed climate in both environments.

Reflecting on the concept of inclusion, the survey included the following four sections:

- 1) Introduction with 1 question
- 2) Institutional climate with 16 questions
- 3) Demographics with 11 questions
- 4) Advising/Mentoring with 4 questions

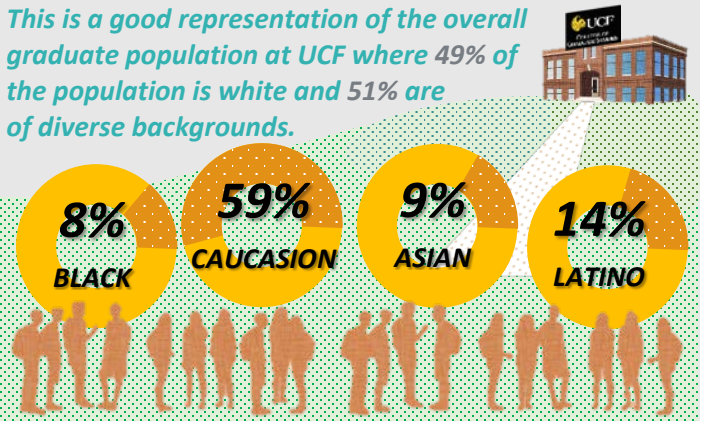
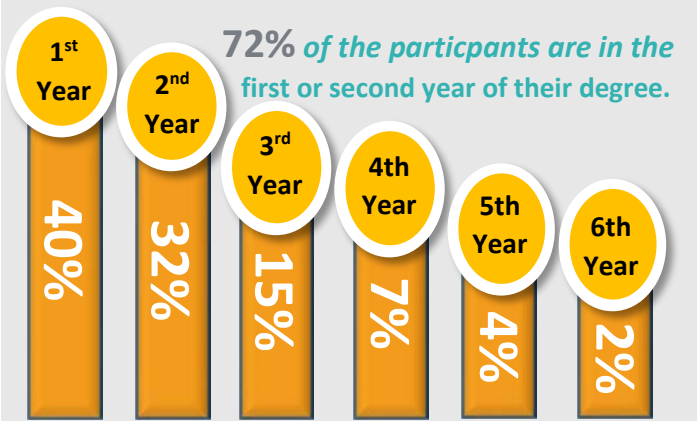
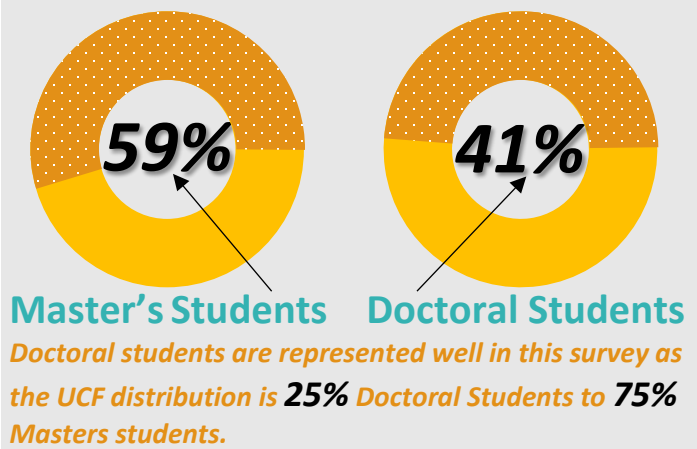
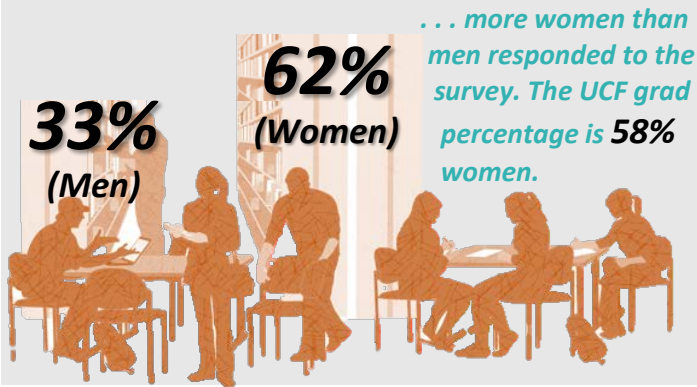
This equates to a total of 32 questions on the survey instrument. Of these 32 questions, there were two open ended questions used to gather some qualitative data related to the participant’s perception of the climate at UCF. The 32 questions addressed the following variables related to the climate at UCF for graduate students:

- Overall perception of climate
- Personal experience with climate at UCF
- Experiences as it relates to key constructs with the Social Climate
- Experience with Graduate Faculty
- Experiences of respect within the department or program
- Experiences of inclusion within the department or program
- Graduate students witnessing sexism, unwelcome sexual attention, or innuendo by graduate faculty
- Graduate students witnessing racism by graduate faculty
- Expressions of who in the graduate community students have seen discriminate, harass, or express hostility
- Personal experiences with discrimination, hostility, or harassment
- Knowledge of where to report bias, discrimination, or harassment
- Perceptions of potential retaliation for reporting bias, discrimination, or harassment
- Ability to voice concerns without potential for negative consequences
- Thoughts of leaving their program and potential reasons for this thinking
- Demographic markers such as legal sex, international student, race/ethnicity, highest education of parents, military service, length of time in program, and degree level
- Satisfaction with advising/mentoring from primary advisor
- Thoughts on specific experiences with primary advisor

In many of these variables, there were items that addressed both the positive and negative side of the participants experience with climate. For instance, on the question about experiences with their primary advisor, participants responded to a variety of metrics that were positive or negative in nature such as “is available to me when I need to talk about aspects of my program” and “yells or acts angry when interacting with me.” The question about experiences with graduate faculty addressed similar negative and positive metrics such as: “are clear in their expectations of students” and “use their power as professors to control graduate students.”

The survey was offered to all degree-seeking (masters and doctoral) graduate students attending UCF during the Fall 2018 semester. The survey collected relevant demographic information from the participants to provide a context to the descriptive intent of the survey. All efforts were made to maintain the confidentiality of the participants in the resultant data analysis and data are reported at the group level. The survey was administered electronically during the months of October and November. A query of UCF student records in PeopleSoft identified all the Knights email addresses for the survey participants. The survey link was then sent to all participants through email correspondence. There was a total of three reminders during this time period sent to the graduate population encouraging them to complete the survey. Each reminder only included participants who had not completed the survey. The survey was open for a total of five weeks after which a thank you email was sent to all those who had participated in the survey.

Who responded to the Climate Survey?



Education	24%
Sciences	18%
Engineering	16%
Business	10%
Health Professions	8%
Graduate Studies	8%
Humanities	7%
Nursing	4%
Rosen	2%
Medicine	2%
Optics	1%

Our sample population is similar to UCF's overall population. For instance, in Fall 2018, Engineering made up 18% of the Graduate population.



One purpose of this survey was to determine the context of the climate for graduate students at UCF. In this sense, the data were reviewed through a descriptive lens to create an image of the climate. As part of the design, the College of Graduate Studies had access to the entire population and it was hoped that all invited participants would contribute to the overall data. This did not occur even though multiple attempts and reminders were provided to complete the survey. In the end, 16% of the overall population of masters and doctoral students (N = 8435) provided data. What this means is that a sample collection of data of the entire population is available for analysis. From a research perspective, to be able to extrapolate findings out to the entire population, it is important that the sample population is representative of the overall group. It appears from the demographic data that this criterion was met. The demographic variables measured in the survey closely mirror the entire grad population. For instance, 62% of the survey respondents were women. When that is compared against the total population, women make up 58% of the total graduate student population. UCF offers a range of graduate degrees that operate within 11 different colleges. To understand the overall context of the climate, it is key to have a relative distribution of participants across these colleges. Figures 1 and 2 model this relationship between the sample population and the overall university graduate student population within the different colleges.

Figure 1. College Distribution of Surveyed Population

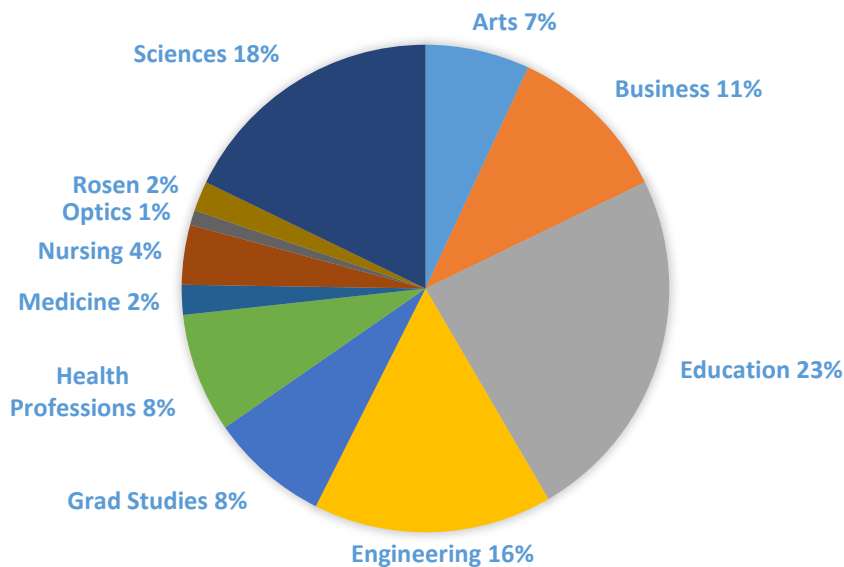
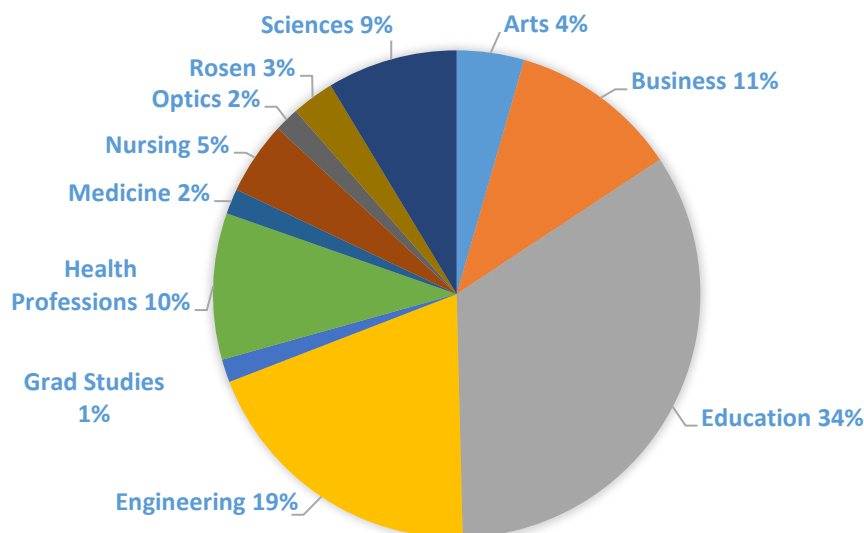




Figure 2. Fall 2018 College Distribution of UCF Graduate Population



Another demographic variable that showed a good representation between the sample population and the total population was with UCF's graduate International students. The institution has a solid population of international graduate students and it was important they were appropriately represented in this data. In the end, the sample population of international students closely mirrored the overall international to overall graduate student ratio.

Fall 2018 Total UCF Grad Population = **9,168**  **13%**
Fall 2018 Total International UCF Population = **1,210**

Surveyed Total UCF Grad Population = **1,345**  **15%**
Surveyed Total International UCF Population = **200**

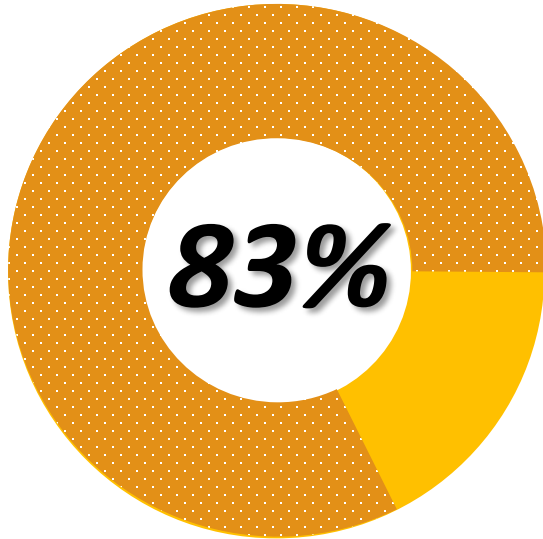
Graduate education is a unique experience within a university setting and the ability to connect to the institution and to the academic program plays a central role in student success. In fact, Terrell Strayhorn (2012) dedicated a book to this issue titled "College Student's Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students." As it relates to social climate and the intent of this survey, institutional and programmatic connection happens through inclusion as Chung (2016) described it. To establish inclusion of graduate students, universities dedicate time, energy, and resources to socialize students into the graduate community. This socialization process is very different for undergraduate students. At the undergraduate level, inclusion occurs through establishing a bond with the institution; whereas with graduate students, "students are socialized primarily into the discipline and secondarily into the institution" (Hirt & Mufo, 1998, p. 18). In this sense, the design of this survey was to measure the current perceptions and attitudes of graduate students as experienced at both the program level and the institutional level. What is inherent in this process is that climate – whether positive or negative – can be a gauge of student success. This is what makes understanding the climate important for UCF.

The other element linked to understanding the climate for graduate students at UCF is the students' health and wellbeing. A negative climate can increase levels of program separation in the students, increase anxiety, or cause high levels of stress. Byrd and McKinney (2012) noted in their work that:

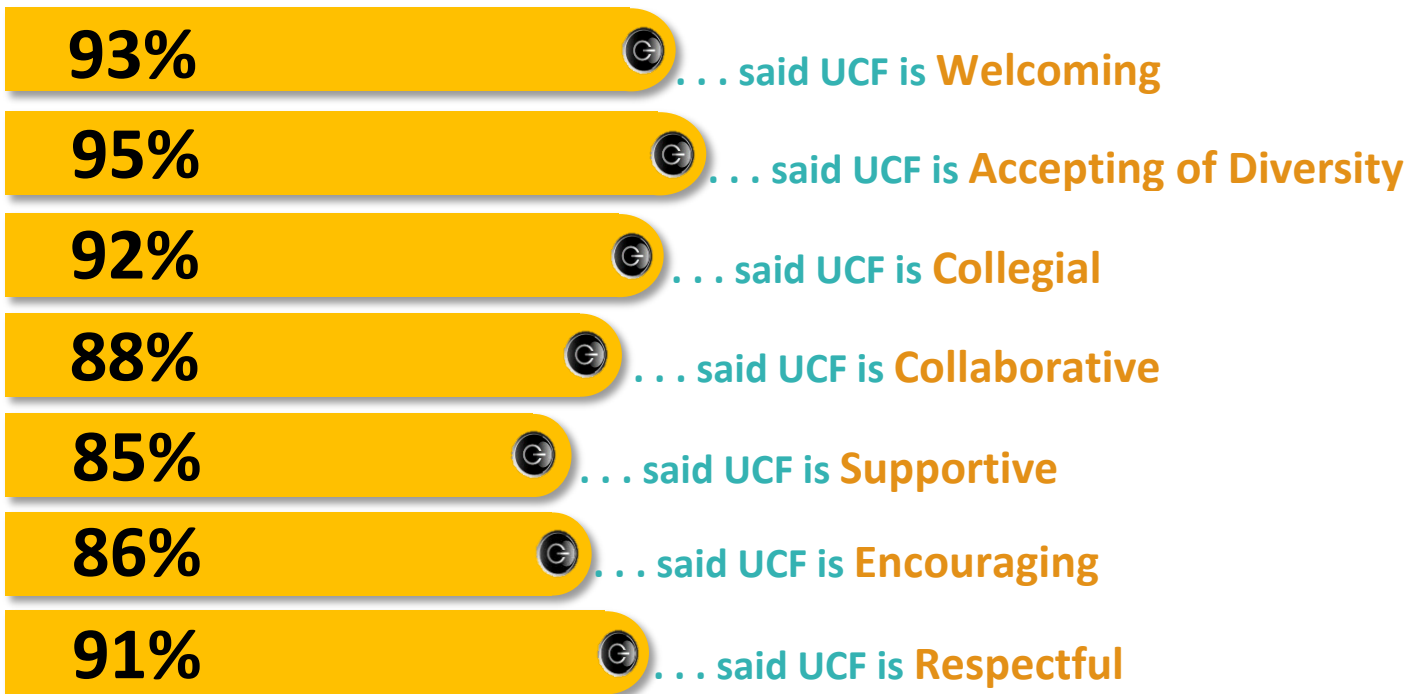
"...colleges and universities have reported unprecedented numbers of students in psychological distress. For example, 95% of campus psychological counseling centers surveyed in 2008 reported a significant increase in mental health issues among their students. Many colleges have also reported significant increases in students' utilization of counseling services, the severity of symptoms, and the duration of treatment" (p. 185).

What is important for UCF in the context of this survey is that graduate student health is best attributed to the ecological system of the academic environment (Byrd & McKinney, 2012). This is expressed with how the individual interacts with the institution and how the institution interacts with the individual.

An analysis of the data showed that there is a high percentage of graduate students experiencing a positive climate at UCF. This finding is very helpful to UCF in that it indicates the majority of our graduate students find UCF to be physically, emotionally, and an academically safe place. What is important here is that these positive climate ratings occur both at the discipline and the institutional level. The following data are indicative of this overall positive climate.



... of the participants indicated they were either **satisfied** or **very satisfied** with the overall climate at UCF



3 out of 4 . . .

participants said that they **have not seen discrimination, harassment, or hostility** toward graduate students while at UCF.

UCF Has A Good Social Climate Among Its Graduate Students



71% of graduate students feel that they can **be themselves** in their programs even when commonalities don't exist.

67% of graduate students feel **physically** and **emotionally safe** at UCF and who also report feeling **valued**.

61% of respondents feel that people **really care** about them in their grad program.

79% report experiencing the **benefits of graduate learning** at UCF.

72% of surveyed graduate students believe that **their graduate program** is where they are **meant to be**.

75% of participants say **student success** is **supported** at UCF.

70% of graduate students feel that they **belong** or are **listened to** and who also report feeling **connected** to their grad program.

70% of graduate students feel that they can discuss **divergent ideas** or **different perspectives** in their classes.



GRADUATE STUDENTS
say Grad Faculty . . .

76%
Help them **GROW**
as **SCHOLARS**.

79%
TREAT them
with **RESPECT**.

65%
Have **CLEAR**
expectations.

81%
Have high **ETHICAL**
standards.

3 out of 4
Graduate Students
have **positive ratings**
of
GRADUATE FACULTY
on these metrics.

74%
CARE about
their **TEACHING**.

68%
VALUE student
INTERESTS.

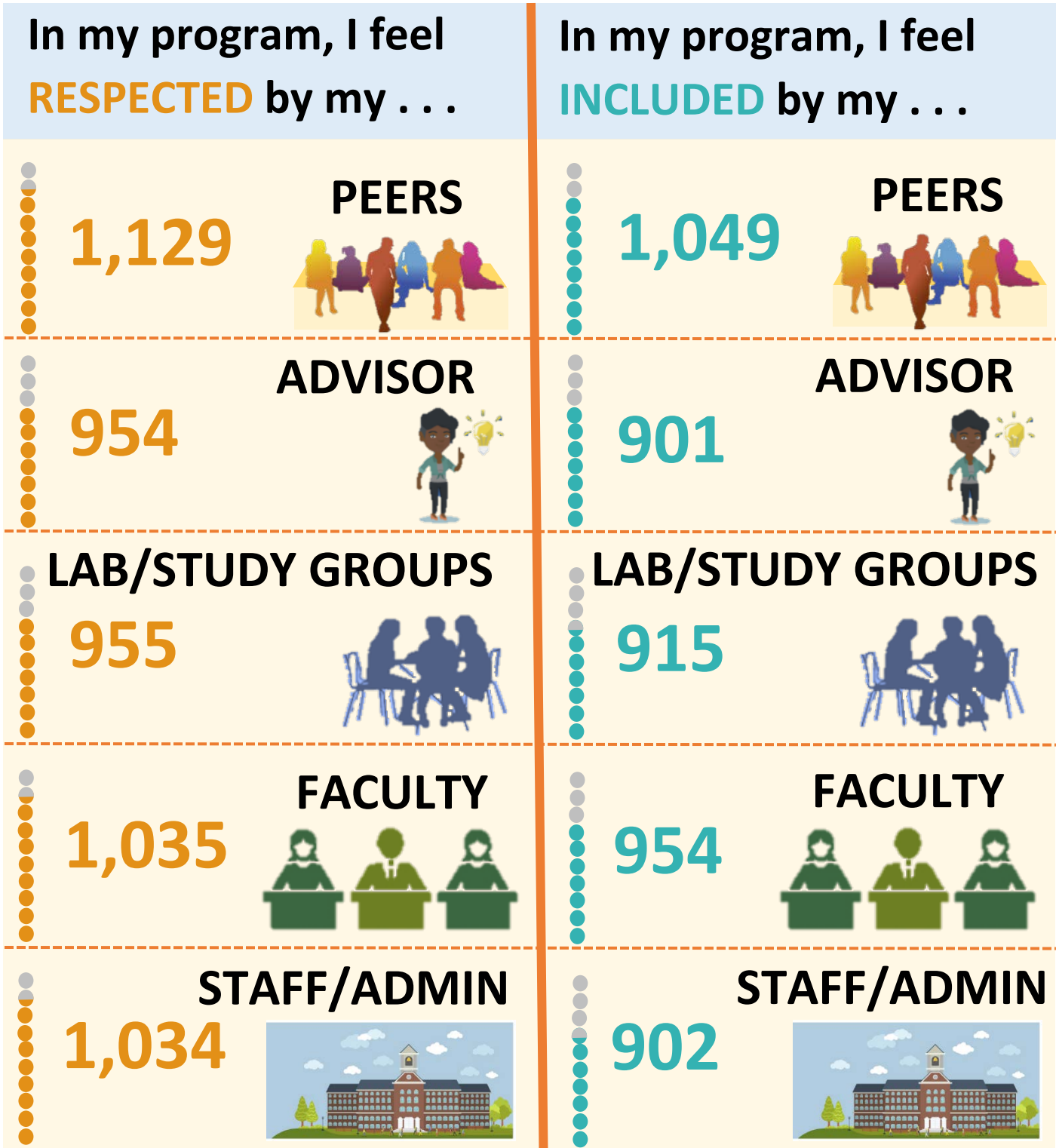
GRADUATE FACULTY



80%
Create a **SAFE**
LEARNING space.

75%
CARE about their
STUDENTS.

Respect and Inclusion: What is happening in their programs? Numbers of participants who indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements. Total Participants = **1,345**



Despite a large majority of graduate students expressing satisfaction with the climate at UCF, there were graduate students who expressed dissatisfaction. There are troubling elements associated with this because negative perceptions and experiences with social climate can have a detrimental impact on student success and health and wellness. In fact, Litzler, Lange, and Brainard (2005) found, in their literature review, that “negative perceptions about departmental climate during graduate school can hinder the development of relationships with faculty and peers that are critical to graduate students’ social and academic integration into academic departments” (p. 2). Also concerning is that a poor graduate climate can also negatively impact progress to degree completion. “Department and institutional climate influences degree progress and that student commitment to earning the degree shifts constantly in response to experiences in the department and with the university” (Girves & Wemmerus, 1988, p. 186). As graduate students struggle with different aspects of climate, it negatively impacts their commitment to the program and the degree. As commitment to the program weakens, so can progress to degree completion. When graduate students struggle with their program and institutional commitment, it negatively affects their health and wellness. Insights from research shows that positive experiences with social climate at both the academic program and the institutional level are essential for graduate student integration. The following data describes some of the various challenges the surveyed graduate students are experiencing at UCF.

What Have Been Your Experiences At UCF?

NOT WELCOMING

94 or 7% of the respondents.

That could mean 588 of all grad students have likely not felt welcome at UCF.

NOT ACCEPTING OF DIVERSE STUDENTS

68 or 5% of the respondents.

That could mean 425 of all grad students feel that UCF is not accepting of diverse students.

NOT COLLEGIAL

108 or 8% of the respondents.

That could mean 669 of all grad students feel that UCF is not collegial.

NOT COLLABORATIVE

161 or 12% of the respondents.

That could mean 1,006 of all grad students feel that UCF is not collaborative.

NOT SUPPORTIVE

202 or **15%** of the respondents.

That could mean **1,263** of all grad students feel that UCF is not supportive.

NOT ENCOURAGING

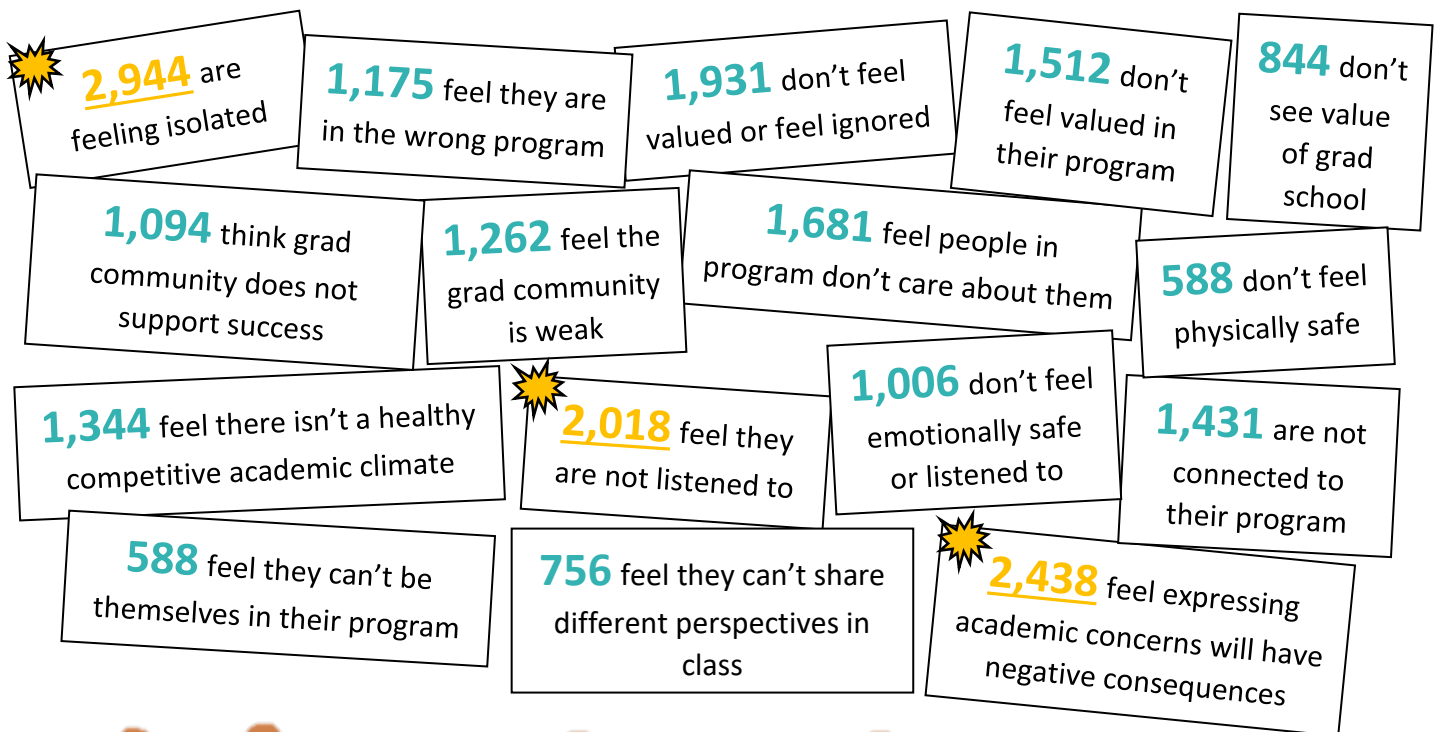
188 or **14%** of the respondents.

That could mean **1,175** of all grad students feel that UCF is not encouraging.

NOT RESPECTFUL

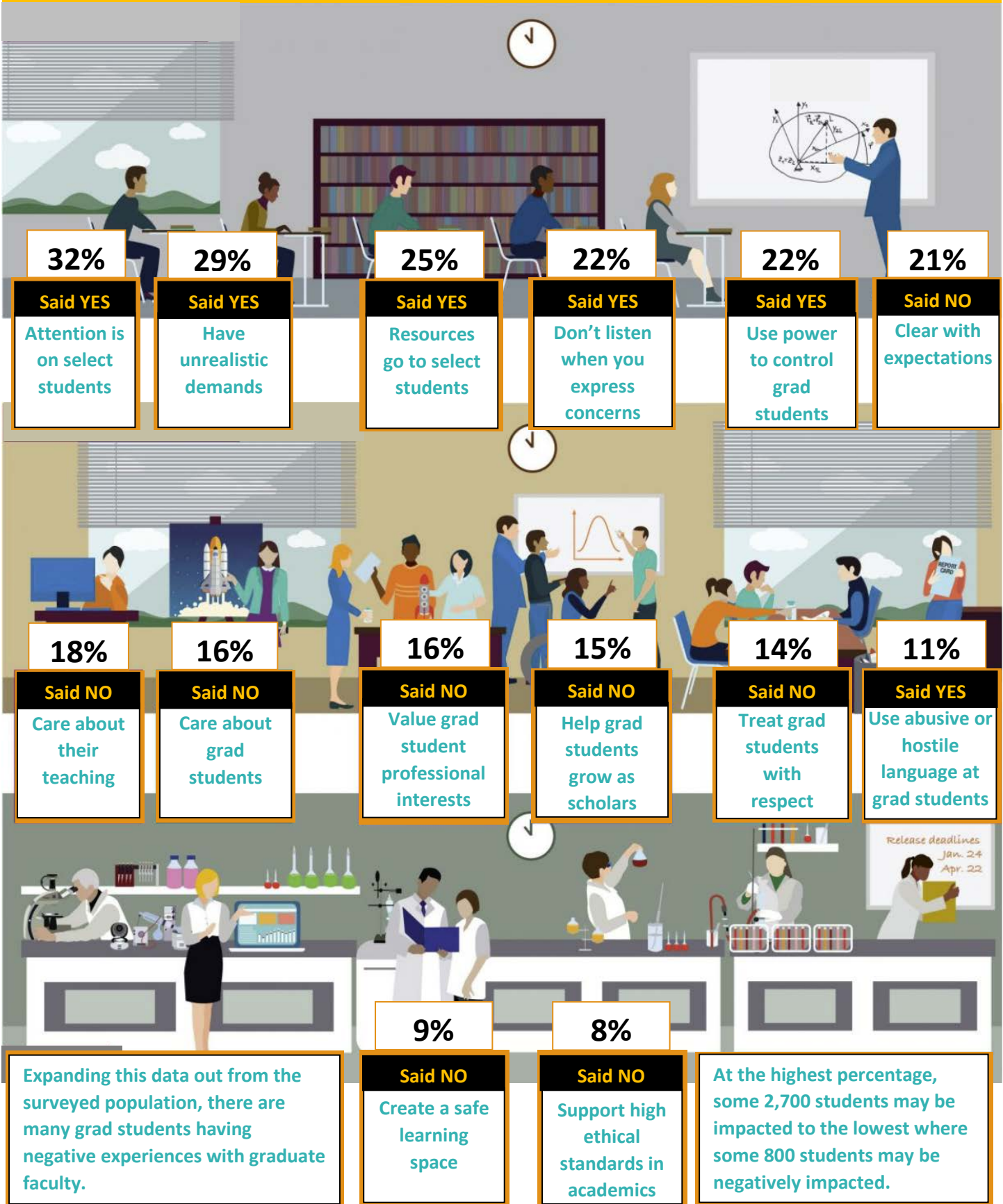
121 or **9%** of the respondents.

That could mean **756** of grad students feel that UCF is not respectful.



Using surveyed student's data, potential total numbers of graduate students having negative experiences with the Social Climate at UCF.

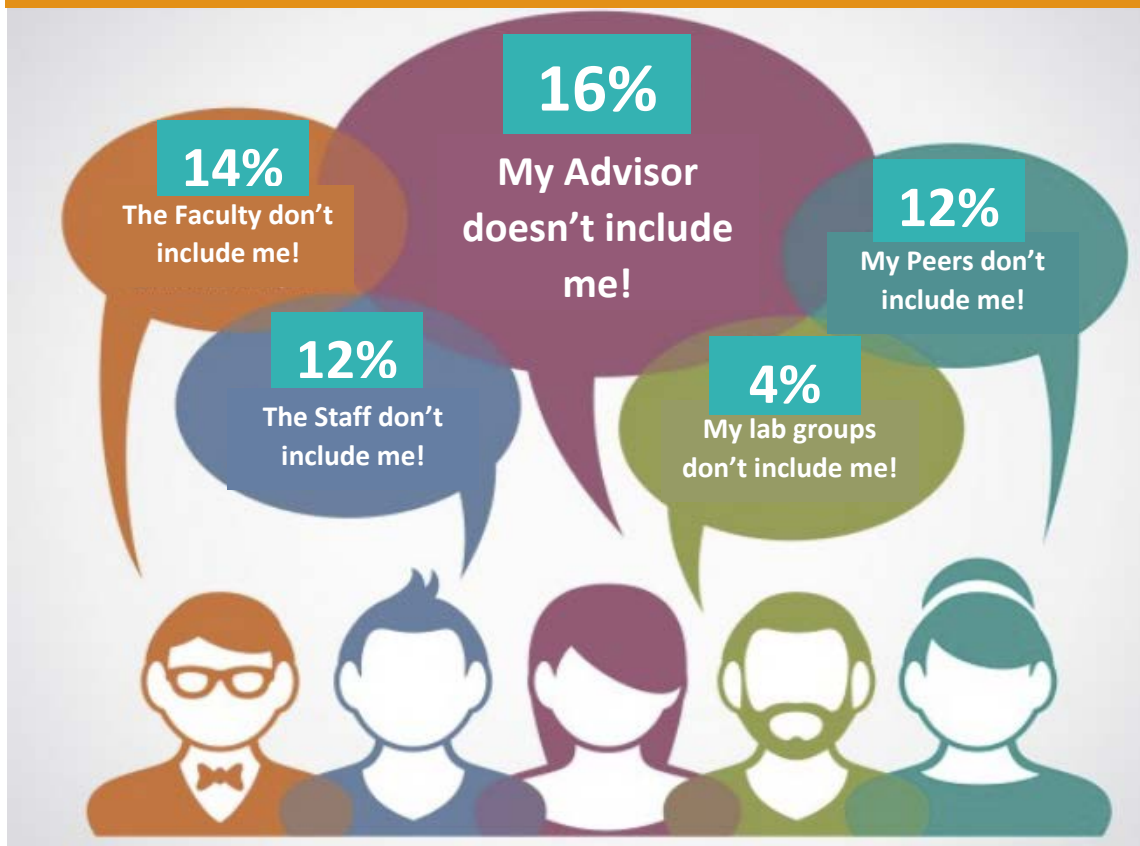
Perceptions of Negative Experiences related to interactions with Graduate Faculty

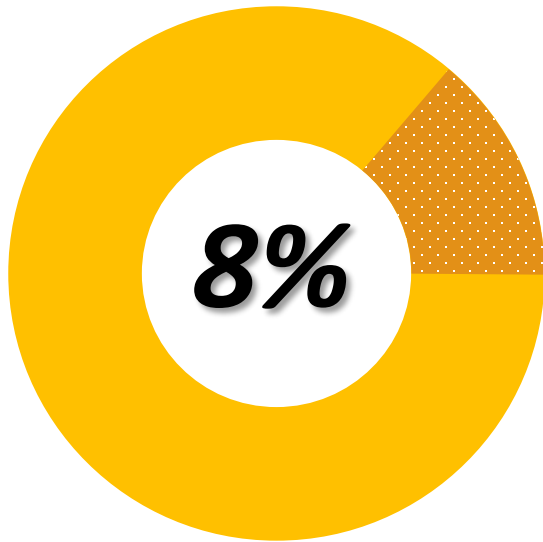


In my department or program, . . .



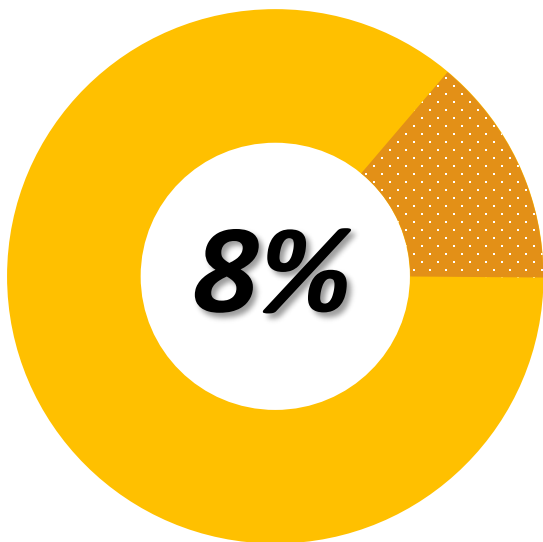
In my department or program, . . .





... of the participants indicated they have seen or experienced **sexism, unwelcome sexual attention, or innuendo** from **graduate faculty** to the point they are concerned for themselves or their peers.

That could equate out to **675** grad students who have seen or experienced **sexism, unwelcome sexual attention, or innuendo**.



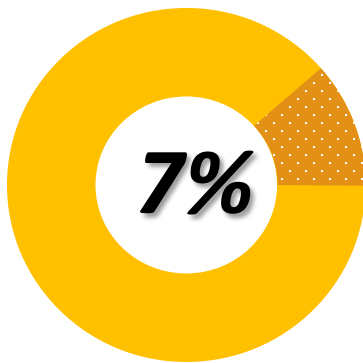
... of the participants indicated they have seen or experienced **racism** from **graduate faculty** to the point they are concerned for themselves or their peers.

That could equate out to **675** grad students who have seen or experienced **racism**.

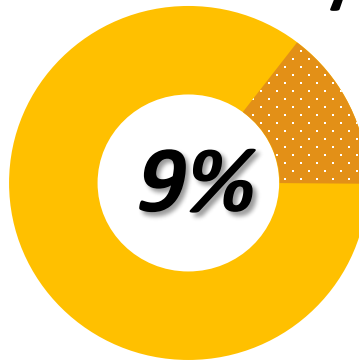


... of the participants indicated they have personally experienced **discrimination, hostility, or harassment** while a graduate student at UCF.

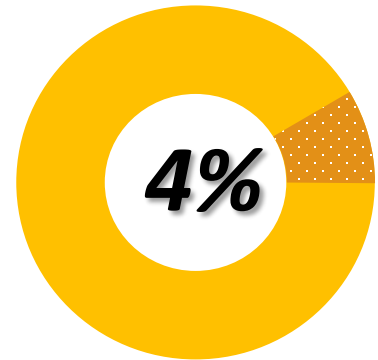
Peers



Grad Faculty

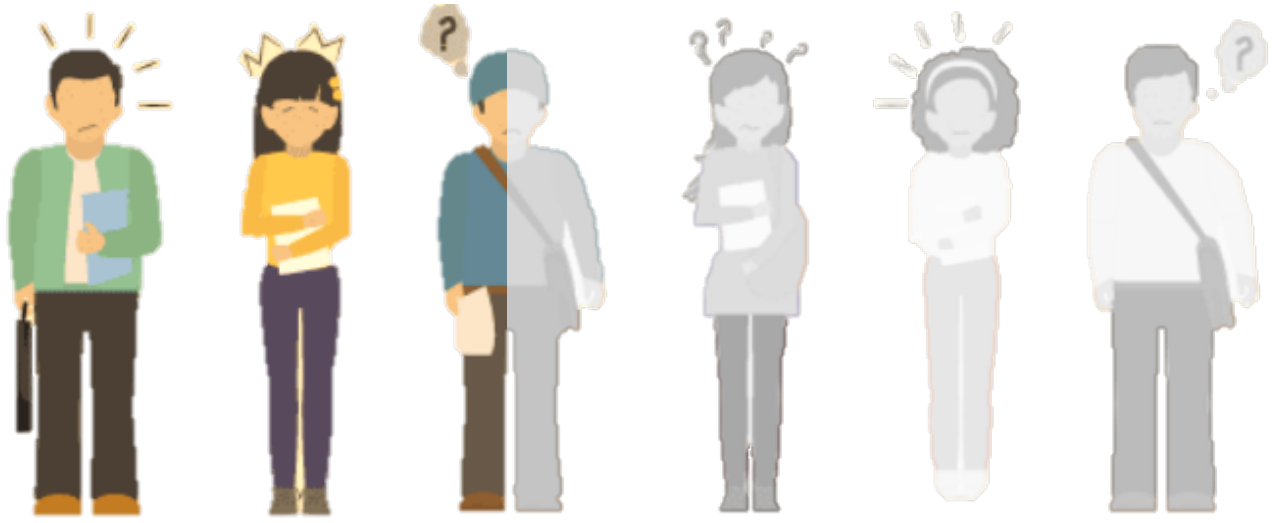


Staff

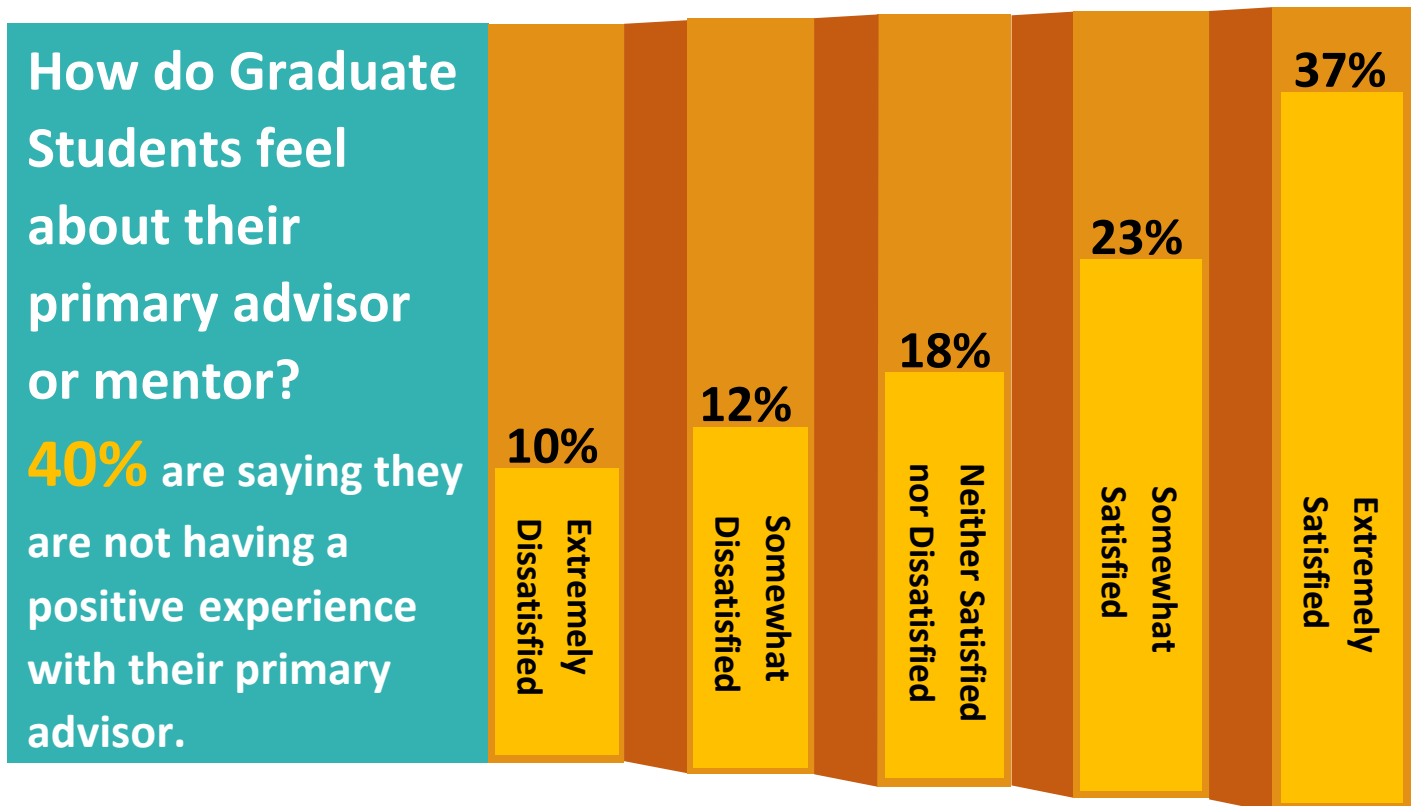


That could equate out to **588** grad students who have personally experienced **discrimination, hostility, or harassment** from their **Peers**, while **756** could have experienced it from **Graduate Faculty**, and **338** could have experienced it from **UCF staff**.

When asked the question: *Have you ever considered leaving your graduate program at UCF?*



... **39%** said they had considered leaving their graduate program. Some of primary reasons for wanting to leave the program included **school/life balance, poor interactions with faculty members, department politics, and financial reasons.**



The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to provide additional thoughts in a narrative form. Not all surveyed participants added extra thoughts, but many shared a range of comments as it relates to the climate here at UCF for Graduate students. These narrative responses are helpful to UCF in understanding core themes and possible action areas.

There were a total of **195 respondents** who chose to provide additional comments in the two open ended sections. Of those:

- **63 comments** had **positive** statements about the climate
- **132 comments** had **negative** statements about the climate

When those surveyed chose to say something positive about the climate, it was usually very brief and to the point. Very little description or detail was ever provided. So not much could be learned from these data. The following are some examples of positive statements:

“Overall, my experience at UCF has been an enjoyable one.”

“A wonderful experience and climate at UCF.”

“Our Faculty have listened to our concerns.”

“Difficult but rewarding program.”

“I am happy that I chose to continue my education here.”

“The graduate climate is welcoming and fosters a great learning environment.”

There were a variety of themes that evolved from the negative comments expressed by the participants. The dominant theme that emerged centered on **Advising**. There were two kinds of major constructs related to their concerns over advising.



Comments about **Infrastructure** expressed concerns over the mechanisms in place to support or provide information about advising. Related comments include:

“I don’t have a faculty advisor.”

“Many of us are unsure about what we need to do to graduate.”

“Graduate Advisor is difficult to reach and meet with.”

“I have never been assigned an advisor.”

“I’ve never been offered an advisor. Didn’t know we were supposed to have one.”

“I have had very limited interactions with my advisor.”

“I never hear from my advisor except when I need graduate paperwork done.”

The bulk of the comments highlighted the fact that they **did not have an advisor** or **didn't know who their advisor was**. Comments about quality in advising expressed concerns over the **nature of the relationship**. Related comments include:

"I had to change my first advisor because he had a bad temper and not professional behavior."

"You are made to feel as a nuisance."

"Some advisors are excessively demanding."

"I do not know one person that has felt supported by their advisor."

Students who reported problems with their advisor reported overwhelmingly that **they were not valued or supported**. The following are excerpts reflecting some of the more extreme faculty/advisor abuses mentioned in the survey related to this construct.

Several negative comments were made about faculty bullying:

"Assistant professors manipulate and use doctoral students to get first author publications that they have no part in writing."

"He threatened me to cut my funding."

"My advisor regularly threatens to throw objects in our lab if our publications are not accepted."

"Professor who constantly threatens his students and asks them to work during the weekends."

"You should implement talks or courses about bullying."

Several comments were made about discrimination:

"Minorities get assigned to the furthest possible [clinical assignment] locations from UCF."

"I often hear from the women about remarks that are not overtly discriminatory but come across as unsettling."

"Promoting a sexist culture in the department by treating female students unfairly."

"Some faculty members have expressed white supremacist views."

In addition to advising issues and faculty abuses, concerns were also raised about:

- **Poor quality of education**
- **Funding level and availability**
- **Lack of community**

Concerns were expressed that the **quality of education was poor, outdated**, and that **faculty did not care about teaching**. Some example comments include:

"My classes feel very pointless."

"This class format [online] is detrimental to my learning."

"UCF graduate program is too weak to prepare me to become a faculty member and does not help me find connections with future employers."

"They don't provide decent feedback on projects."

"Isn't getting us ready for a job."

“Professors do not care about their teaching.”

Negative concerns were raised about the **amount and availability of funding**:

“I feel like cheap labor.”

“Graduate school could pay us a living wage – or at least enough money to afford living in this city.”

“Graduate funding security is the most problematic situation with UCF.”

“It is very hard for graduate students to find a teaching or research assistantship position for summers.”

“Work assigned that extends past their GTA assigned hours.”

Concerns about **lack of community and caring** include:

“Nobody seems to care about the graduate students.”

“Hard to feel school pride when the school doesn’t care about me, just my money.”

“No sense of community among graduate students/programs; many of us are married and could use assistance with family issues such as housing and childcare.”

“For online students, the climate is nonexistent.”

The majority of respondents expressed **positive feelings** about the **social climate** of graduate school at UCF. Themes include:

- Acceptance of diversity, where many students feel as though they belong and can express their uniqueness
- Feelings of safety, respect, and educational quality
- Feelings that graduate faculty treat students with respect, support high ethical standards, and offer a safe learning environment

Yet, there was a notable sample of students expressing **negative concerns** about the **social climate**. Themes include:

- Poor, abusive, or non-existent advising
- Feeling isolated, ignored, disrespected, discriminated against, or bullied
- Not understanding how to report abuses (or fear of retaliation)
- Financial pressures, including low pay, high workloads, and job insecurity
- Feeling as though the quality of education is poor

What have we learned about the Climate at UCF among all graduate students surveyed?

This survey provided a valuable set of data as it relates to the current graduate climate at UCF. It was interesting analyzing the data and the story it revealed about our graduate students and their experiences here at UCF. There is several metrics to be pleased with and some really good direction on where improvement is needed. The climate survey process was well worth it and will be conducted every year moving forward.

- 75% of the respondents indicated that they perceived graduate faculty as wanting graduate students to succeed in their studies. To note, 81% felt that Graduate Faculty create safe learning spaces and support or encourage high ethical standards.
- The infrastructure and quality of advising were, by far, the most commonly cited concerns. Some of the concerns mentioned within the qualitative data were of a very serious nature burgeoning on the abusive.
- Negative concerns were expressed more often by women, international students, and in certain colleges.

- 83% of those surveyed expressed that the climate at UCF is good – especially with regard to UCF being: Welcoming, Accepting of Diversity, Collegial, and Respectful.
- A high percentage of the respondents experienced the value of graduate learning at UCF.
- While the majority of respondents reported no Discrimination, Harassment, or Hostility in their graduate program, we are seeing that 20% of the respondents reported personally experiencing or witnessing some form of discrimination.
- A high percentage of our students felt that our graduate programs help graduate students feel respected and included. It is most evident among their interactions with peers in their program. This is a strong metric as it relates to students feeling integrated.
- However, there is a solid number of graduate students at UCF who feel isolated. When the data are extrapolated out from the survey to the entire population, there could be some 3,000 students who are negatively impacted by feeling isolated.
- The majority of respondents felt that they can report serious issues of discrimination. Yet, there is an underlying concern among 43% of the respondents of the potential for retaliation.
- Many of those surveyed felt that their voice will be heard when reporting concerns of discrimination. They also believe that negative consequences will be kept to a minimum. There are some (15%) that perceive there would be negative consequences for reporting. This could probably cause them to be silent when issues of discrimination occur to them or to those around them.
- Nearly 40% of respondents indicated they have thought about leaving their program. School/life balance, finances, and interactions with faculty were cited as the three dominant reasons.
- There is a fairly significant group (43%) of graduate students at UCF who do not know where to go for academic or personal support with concerns they are experiencing at UCF.
- Three quarters of our students feel that UCF is a safe place for students of diverse backgrounds.

What have we learned about the Climate at UCF when separating the data among the two surveyed sub-groups of Masters and Doctoral Students?

These two groups of students have the potential of differing climate experiences due to the nature of their relationships with the institution and within their relative programs. A series of MANOVAs and t-tests were calculated to find distinguishing climate characteristics between Masters and Doctoral students. In general, there were statistically significant differences at p-values set at .05. Such differences should be interpreted with caution, as the sample sizes in each group were large and effect sizes were generally very small. The following lists the variables where there were statistically significant differences between Masters and Doctoral students.

- Overall, PhD students were generally more satisfied with the Climate
- Doctoral students felt UCF was
 - more welcoming
 - more accepting of diverse students
 - more collegial
 - more collaborative
 - more supportive
 - more encouraging, and
 - more respectful
- Doctoral students were less likely to report that there is a healthy competitive academic environment at UCF
- Doctoral students felt
 - less valued
 - less likely they would be listened to if they raised a problem, and
 - less emotionally safe
- Doctoral students indicated that they
 - felt more isolated

- felt more ignored, and
- felt more likely that expressing academic concerns will have negative consequences
- Doctoral students were less likely to say that there is a culture of community at UCF that makes graduate education work here
- Doctoral students felt more physically safe here at UCF
- Doctoral students had more responses on the negative spectrum on the survey items referencing graduate faculty. This would be things like treat students with respect or care about their teaching
- Doctoral students felt more respected and included by their direct advisor but felt less respected by graduate faculty in general
- The two core metrics of belongingness and uniqueness measured in this survey that connects inclusion with climate showed that doctoral students had statistically lower levels of belongingness and uniqueness when compared with masters students

What action items or interventions are planned from these results?

We appreciate all the graduate students who participated in this survey for sharing their meaningful and honest insights. A climate survey would not mean much if we did not act. After careful review, we have identified various areas we will be enhancing to create a better environment for all our graduate students. They include:

- 1) The College of Graduate Studies will be instituting a new Graduate Faculty Mentoring program to encourage and enhance healthy and productive advising relationships between graduate faculty and their students.
- 2) The College will be adjusting the New Graduate Student Orientation to communicate resources available to support students in a variety of areas. The College of Graduate Studies will also work with other colleges and programs to ensure consistent information about resources for students is communicated during orientations organized by those groups. This might include providing them with relevant materials listing those resources or attending their program level new student orientations.
- 3) We are instituting a new Annual Review protocol for all doctoral students. It will be a better means to track doctoral students through the entirety of their degree. Infrastructures will allow both students and faculty to report on student progress, areas for development, and success.
- 4) Graduate staff will be reaching out to colleges and programs across campus who had high ratings on social climate in this survey to learn about best practices and share them with other colleges that did not rank as highly in this area.
- 5) The College of Graduate Studies will continue to administer the Climate Survey on an annual basis. Future iterations will focus on breaking the data analysis out to sub-groups and sub-populations so we can more deeply understand the dynamics of social climate at UCF.

Respectfully prepared and submitted by:

Dr. Barbara Fritzche and Dr. Devon Jensen

Associate Deans – College of Graduate Studies

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UCF

GRADUATE

STUDIES



CLIMATE SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



UCF – College of Graduate Studies Graduate Climate Survey

Spring 2019 Executive Summary

In Fall 2018, the College of Graduate Studies administration and staff had been fielding questions and concerns about a variety of student issues at UCF. In response, Elizabeth Klonoff, the dean of the college, charged Associate Deans Dr. Barbara Fritzsche and Dr. Devon Jensen with conducting a Climate Survey to determine if the issues were isolated or part of a local or national pattern.

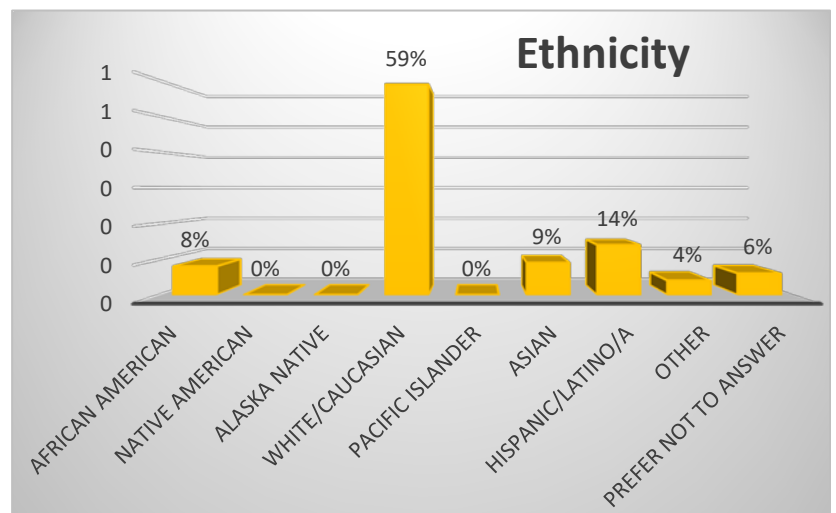
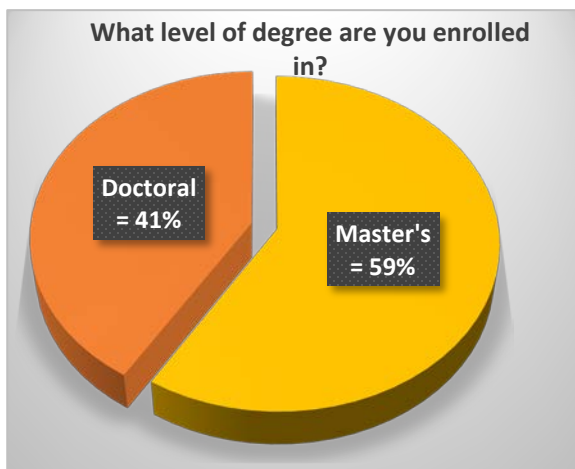
The goal of the survey was threefold:

- 1) to create a descriptive picture of the current graduate student climate at UCF;
- 2) to determine any specific trends and patterns, both positive and negative, in the graduate climate; and
- 3) to establish appropriate and relevant interventions to improve the overall graduate climate at UCF.

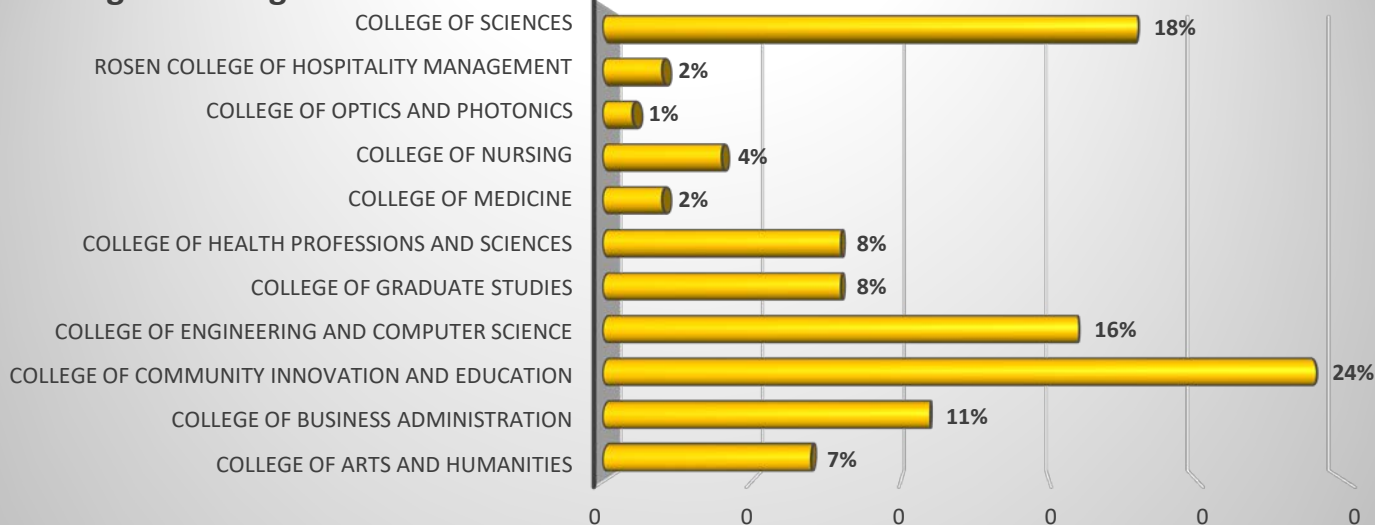
For the purpose of the survey, we used the definition of climate as the “current attitudes, behaviors and standards of faculty, staff, administrators and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential” (Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264). Further to this, inclusion in graduate education happens at both the institutional level and at the department level” (Hirt & Mufo, 1998, p. 18). The sections in the survey allowed the participants to respond based on their experiences with the institution, within their program, with graduate faculty, and with their advisors. So relevant questions in the survey addressed the concept of climate in both environments and with these different populations. The survey was offered to all degree-seeking (masters and doctoral) graduate students attending UCF during the Fall 2018 semester.

There was a total of **8435** graduate students invited through email to participate in survey. We received a recorded response from **1345** or **16%** of the students.

The following are some of the key demographic markers of the participants.



Percentage to College



The demographic data showed that the participants who completed the survey were a close mirror to the total UCF graduate population. This creates the opportunity to extrapolate the data and findings out to the entire population.

Data Highlights

- The infrastructure and quality of advising were, by far, the most commonly cited concerns. Some of the concerns mentioned within the qualitative data were of a very serious nature burgeoning on the abusive.
- Negative concerns were expressed more often by women, international students, and in certain colleges.
- **83%** of those surveyed expressed that the climate at UCF is good – especially regarding UCF being: Welcoming, Accepting of Diversity, Collegial, and Respectful.
- A high percentage of the respondents experienced the value of graduate learning at UCF.
- While most respondents reported no Discrimination, Harassment, or Hostility in their graduate program, we are seeing that **20%** of the respondents reported personally experiencing or witnessing some form of discrimination.
- **75%** of the respondents indicated that they perceived graduate faculty as wanting graduate students to succeed in their studies. To note, **81%** felt that Graduate Faculty create safe learning spaces and support or encourage high ethical standards.
- A high percentage of our students felt that our graduate programs help graduate students feel respected and included. It is most evident among their interactions with peers in their program. This is a strong metric as it relates to students feeling integrated.
- However, there is a solid number of graduate students at UCF who feel isolated. When the data are extrapolated out from the survey to the entire population, there could be some **3,000** students who are negatively impacted by feeling isolated.
- Most respondents felt that they can report serious issues of discrimination. Yet, there is an underlying concern among **43%** of the respondents of the potential for retaliation.
- Many of those surveyed felt that their voice will be heard when reporting concerns of discrimination. They also believe that negative consequences will be kept to a minimum. There are some (**15%**) that

perceive there would be negative consequences for reporting. This could probably cause them to be silent when issues of discrimination occur to them or to those around them.

- Nearly **40%** of respondents indicated they have thought about leaving their program. School/life balance, finances, and negative interactions with faculty were cited as the three dominant reasons.
- There is a significant group (**43%**) of graduate students at UCF who do not know where to go for academic or personal support with concerns they are experiencing at UCF.
- Three quarters of our students feel that UCF is a safe place for students of diverse backgrounds.
- Overall, PhD students were generally more satisfied with the Climate.
- Doctoral students were less likely to report that there is a healthy competitive academic environment at UCF.
- Doctoral students felt less valued, less likely they would be listened to if they raised a problem, and less emotionally safe.
- Doctoral students indicated that they felt more isolated felt more ignored, and felt more likely that expressing academic concerns will have negative consequences.
- Doctoral students had more responses on the negative spectrum on the survey items referencing graduate faculty. This would be things like treat students with respect or care about their teaching.
- Doctoral students felt more respected and included by their direct advisor but felt less respected by graduate faculty in general.

Overall Conclusions

The majority of respondents expressed positive feelings about the social climate of graduate school at UCF.

Themes included:

- Acceptance of diversity, where many students feel as though they belong and can express their uniqueness
- Feelings of safety, respect, and educational quality
- Feelings that graduate faculty treat students with respect, support high ethical standards, and offer a safe learning environment

Yet, there was a notable sample of students expressing negative concerns. Themes included:

- Poor, abusive, or non-existent advising
- Feeling isolated, ignored, disrespected, discriminated against, or bullied
- Not understanding how to report abuses (or fear of retaliation)
- Financial pressures, including low pay, high workloads, and job insecurity
- Feeling as though the quality of education is poor

Negative concerns were expressed more often by women, international students, and in certain colleges.

The infrastructure and quality of advising were, by far, the most commonly cited concerns.

What action items or interventions are planned from these results?

We appreciate all the graduate students who participated in this survey for sharing their meaningful and honest insights. A climate survey would not mean much if we did not act. After careful review, we have identified various areas we will be enhancing to create a better environment for all our graduate students. They include:

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