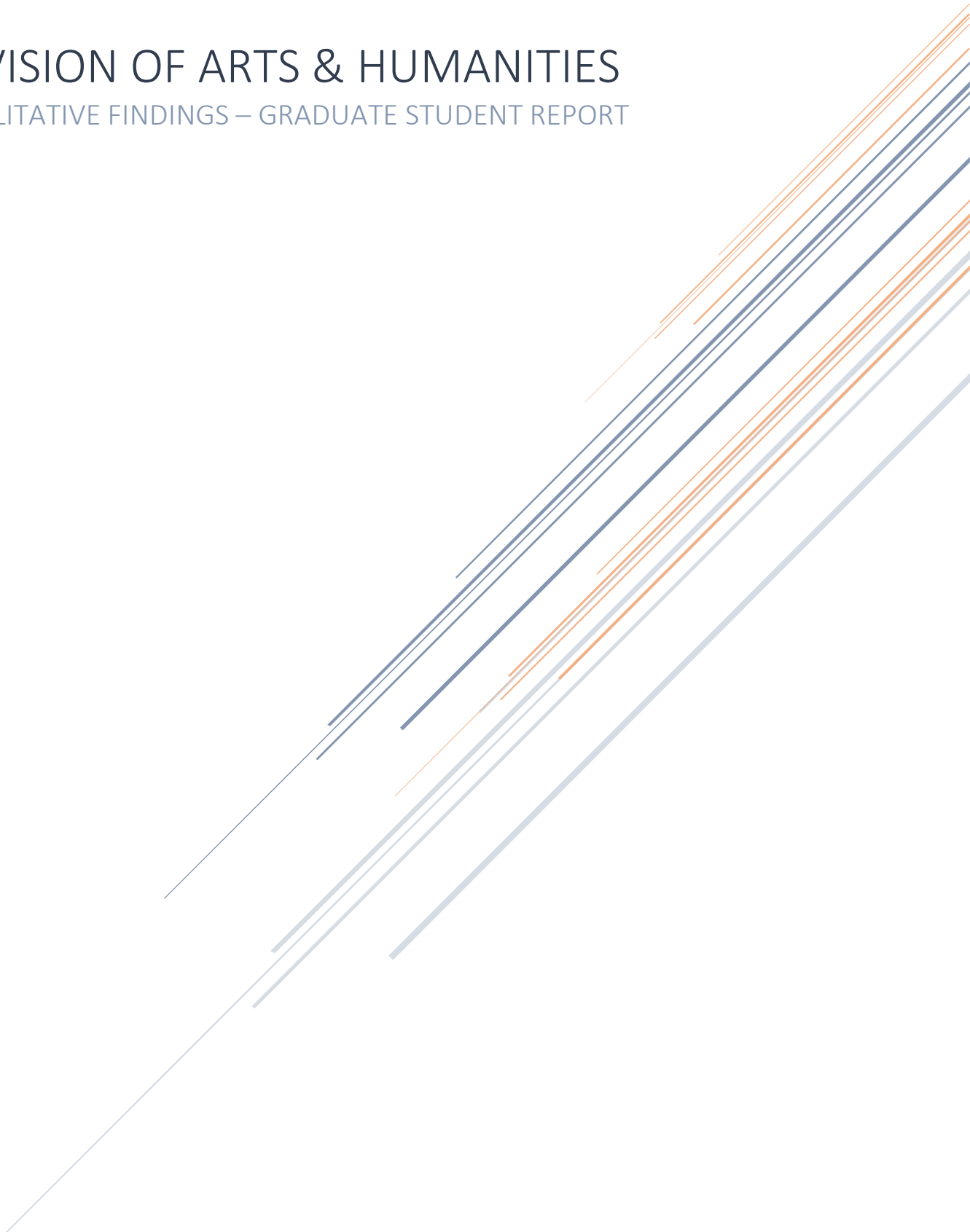


DIVISION OF ARTS & HUMANITIES

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS – GRADUATE STUDENT REPORT



ADMINISTERED BY HARVARD COLLEGE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

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Introduction

This report presents qualitative findings from graduate student responses to a climate survey administered to the Arts & Humanities Division in spring 2021. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate climate among faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students. Climate is a multidimensional construct and there are, therefore, a number of climate dimensions identified as targets of assessment in the literature. The focus of the graduate student section of the survey was on satisfaction (with one's academic program and with the climate in one's home department) and perceptions of inclusion and belonging, interpersonal justice, commitment to diversity and inclusion, communication and civil discourse, workplace incivility, accountability for wrongdoing, and adviser support.

Methods

Data Collection

HCIR developed the survey instrument, drawing on validated scales from the organizational behavior literature. Survey framing and processes were developed in consultation with Benita Wolff (Equity and Inclusion Administrative Fellow in the FAS Division of Science). The survey consisted of up to approximately 20 forced-choice/Likert-type items. Four open-ended items allowed participants to elaborate on their survey responses and/or to further describe their experiences as well as to provide suggestions about ways the climate could be improved.

Survey participants were asked to respond to four open-ended items:

- Q1: We see that you reported that you are treated differently by others in the community because of your identity. Please comment on these experiences.
- Q2: This survey has asked you to reflect upon a large number of issues related to the climate and your experiences in this climate, using a multiple-choice format. If you would like to elaborate upon any of your survey responses and/or further describe your experiences, we encourage you to do so in the space provided below.
- Q3: Please provide suggestions about ways the climate could be improved in your department.
- Q4: If your department is making efforts to improve the climate, please note any aspects of those efforts that seem promising.

Parallel items were administered across groups to faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students with the point of reference (i.e., department/program).

The survey was administered during the COVID-19 pandemic (March 30 - April 14). The pandemic was acknowledged in the survey and participants were instructed to think broadly about their experiences with climate in the department/program and about how the department has normally functioned pre-pandemic.

A total of 2,137 surveys were sent to staff, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students in 21 departments in the Arts & Humanities Division. The overall response rate was 44.9%. 738 graduate students were sent the survey and 353 responded, resulting in a 47.8% response rate for this subgroup. Response rates by question vary and are historically lower for open-ended items. 53 graduate students responded to Q1; 98 graduate students responded to Q2; and 109 graduate students responded to Q3.

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted on graduate student survey comments combined across departments. Responses to all four questions were downloaded from Qualtrics into a Word document, which in turn was downloaded to NVivo 12, a coding and qualitative data management program. Drs. Jenny Bergeron and Jeff Solomon then conducted a combined content and thematic analysis of the data by coding text items (ranging from a couple of words, in some instances, to multiple lines, in others) to classify the ways in which participants addressed the survey questions. A key limitation is that responses were obtained from only a small portion of the graduate survey participants and therefore open-ended comments may not be generalizable. The comments should be interpreted as representative only of the views of those who provided them. However, attempts were made to interpret results in light of the Likert-type items which had larger response rates. We use the comments to provide context for interpretation of Likert-type responses.

Summary

The vast majority of graduate student respondents (79%) were satisfied with the climate in their programs. In fact, 80% of participants reported that if they had to do it over again, they would choose their programs. However, despite these high percentages, there was also a high level of incivility reported for this group, and not everyone experienced their programs in the same way. In their comments students helped shed light on some of the issues that we observed from the numerical data, and offered solutions to address them, which we summarize below.

- Almost a third (31%) of respondents reported they were treated differently due to their identity (from the Likert-type items) compared to 14% of undergraduate students, 23% of faculty, and 18% of staff ($p < .001$). Comments in this category were negatively valenced and reflected being treated differently due to one's race, gender, gender identity, sexuality, religion, nationality, or social class.
- Graduate students were less likely to feel that there is demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion in their departments as compared to other A&H populations surveyed (61% of graduate students compared with 84% of faculty, 92% of staff, and 78% of undergraduate students [$p < .001$]). This group highlighted the need for a more diverse faculty, the desire for more diversity and inclusion trainings, the need to diversify the curriculum by way of including more women and racially diverse authors, hiring new faculty members to teach topics related to identity and social justice, and being more consistent in contextualizing historically marginalized and oppressed groups in the teaching of literature and works of art.
- 45% of participants disagreed that they felt comfortable dissenting with majority opinion. Graduate students had the lowest comfort levels across all metrics regarding civil discourse. In their comments, students addressed what some perceived to be the unwillingness of community members to talk through differences in point of view and the fear that some members of the community experienced of expressing alternative viewpoints in discussions surrounding controversial topics, such as race, gender, inequality, and politics.
- A high percentage of graduate student respondents experienced incivility (67%). Sources of incivility included both their peers and faculty members. Some graduate students described highly competitive and even hostile environments created by peers who gossip, make fun of others, treat their classmates condescendingly, and engage in bullying. Graduate students

reported that some faculty members have made hurtful comments, treated them condescendingly, and have bullied others. It is noteworthy that graduate students' reflections about faculty members' incivility towards one another included being placed in the middle of their disputes, which has created feelings of awkwardness.

- Across all measures of accountability for wrongdoing, graduate students reported the lowest levels of agreement. In their open-ended comments, students described the lack of a clear accountability system to address these issues and recommended the need for safe reporting channels, a clear process, and faculty trainings as a preventative measure to control incivility in the departments.
- While 88% of graduate students agreed that their advisers were generally available, comments in this category reflected the need for some advisers to be more present in the mentorship of their students. Other students described the challenges they are facing navigating the competitive job market and the perceived lack of consideration they receive from faculty surrounding this issue.
- There was a substantial gap in sense of community between graduate students, on the one hand, and the faculty, staff, and undergraduate students, on the other. Graduate students lagged behind the other groups by between 15 and 30 percentage points. Only half (51%) of graduate student respondents agreed that there is a strong sense of community within their departments. Students reported that the recent pandemic, the balkanization of departments and specialties, the shortage of free time to attend department events and gatherings, and the absence of faculty engagement at community events, and their lack of efforts to try to get to know their students contributed to the sense of lack of community.

Results

Identity

Almost a third of graduate student respondents (31%) reported that they were treated differently due to their identity. Comments in this category reflected being treated differently or experiencing the program differently due to one's race, gender, gender identity, sexuality, religion, nationality, or social class.

In some cases, comments fell into multiple identity categories. For example, participants (described below) reported being the direct targets of harassment, racist and/or sexist comments, and feeling like others in their department have treated them condescendingly or have downplayed their contributions due to the combination of both their race and gender (being female, a person of color, or self-identifying as Asian).

- *While some individual people in my department are wonderful and have supported me, my grad school experience as a woman of color has been ruined by the racist, sexist faculty (most of them probably see themselves as "good white liberals"), who sanction and legitimize the behavior of sexist, racist grad students and undergrads.*
- *I am one of the only Asian American women in the department and my identity prevents me from being part of a community that privileges white men and Asian students. I have also routinely been harassed by cis men (white and Asian) in the department who either touch me inappropriately or make offensive comments about my research and ethnic identity.*
- *I am the only Latinx person in the department and have, on multiple occasions, had faculty make*

racist remarks about Latinx people in my earshot. I also stopped attending happy hours in the department because male students would get into my personal space (or try to touch me or look down my shirt). I've had professors pit me against male students in class to bring a "female perspective" to hostile discussions about gender. One professor in particular seemed to take great amusement (he would lean back in his chair and smile and laugh) in calling on me to argue against other members of the class during discussions, rather than shutting them down and telling them that what they were saying was sexist. (We have since talked about it and he recognizes that this was not great behavior on his part, but the fact that we had to have that conversation sucks.) I am also queer and have had both faculty and students make homophobic remarks to me. I filed a Title IX report concerning homophobic and sexist remarks that a professor made during class, but it was dismissed for not meeting the threshold to qualify as sufficiently severe verbal harassment.

- *Basically, all of my marginalized identities have led to my being treated differently and opened me up to harassment, which has not been dealt with sufficiently (or at all) by the department or the university.*
- *Being a woman of color in this department sucks. People sexually harass me, fetishize me, ignore me, downplay my intelligence and contributions, expect me to take on extra administrative labor, and generally treat me as less than human.*

In most cases, participants addressed identity categories separately, as described below.

Race

In the open-ended comments, a handful of white graduate student respondents from across the division expressed the perception of being treated more positively by those in their departments (as compared to people of color), due to their identity as White males.

- *I am a white man and I have been in many classrooms and situations where I have experienced faculty treating me with more respect and generosity than they do my colleagues who are not white men.*
- *I know that I as a white person have received better treatment at the hands of faculty than some of my peers of color. I have heard a student use offensive language in a class presentation to describe queer people (referring to queer people as deviants) who went uncorrected by the professor. I have heard some faculty make sexist remarks about the work of female authors, and also apologize for rape in class.*
- *I think I get somewhat favorable treatment by certain faculty members because I'm a white male.*
- *As a white male American, I am not really in the best position to evaluate the climate of the department. With that caveat aside, I have not seen or heard of any bad behavior within [REDACT, department name]. In my own experience, the community in [REDACT, department name] is very welcoming, inclusive, and professional.*
- *I just assume that my gender and race figure into the way that people treat me. In my case, this probably works to my advantage.*

A couple of respondents explained how they assumed they were being treated differently in their interactions with others in their departments, due to unconscious bias.

- *Everyone needs to assume that they are racist, even people of color, because it is not up to them*

to be socialized into racism, it is embedded in the culture. Therefore racism operates at an unconscious level whether people accept it or not, and whether they like it or not.

In the quotes below, a few participants described others or themselves as being the direct targets of stereotypes, disparaging remarks, or dismissive comments about their contributions.

- *I've often heard disparaging, borderline racist, remarks made by other graduate students concerning poc graduate students.*
- *I think this would be an important step in welcoming diversity. Our department is not welcoming to students of color, who don't feel comfortable enough to continue on in the program. I would appreciate if the department would acknowledge how racism dissuades some students from progressing in our field.*
- *I have also experienced faculty or fellow students seemingly question my ideas and skills given my racial background, or the racial background of the scholars I cite within my work.*
- *There have been times where comments I have made to faculty regarding climate have not been treated as seriously as those made by my white peers (even when these points are the very same as my own).*
- *I also feel that our department has a problem with colorism. Darker-skinned people of color are more likely to be perceived of-- and spoken about-- as bossy, as taking up too much space, as disagreeable, or as intimidating/scary/angry in some way.*

In other cases, participants reported being singled out, put in the spotlight about their racial background, and asked to represent the voices of all of those in their identity group in discussions related to race.

- *I have also experienced that White graduate students and faculty are not always aware of their and others' identities in discussion spaces, and therefore bring up difficult topics in ways that make non-White graduate students feel uncomfortable, put in the spotlight. However, this lack of awareness also makes non-White graduate students feel not "seen" as non-White and therefore not acknowledged as people who have potentially experienced the racist behavior that the White members would like to discuss as if it's new information.*
- *Many of the faculty single out students of color (by assuming that they have to speak on topics of race, or by asking insensitive questions about what languages they speak, etc.).*
- *I have frequently been singled out in classes, usually given my racial background, to speak to issues that often fall outside of the scope of the class or seminar. Incidents like this have occurred in four of the seven courses I have taken within my department, or in office hours with an instructor I was being taught by.*
- *In one incident, a faculty member called me prior to accepting me to their seminar to inform me that "Material from people of your racial background will not be covered in this seminar," and went on to ask if I was still interested in the course. Following my express wish to be in the course, they informed me they were looking forward to me educating them on scholarship and art from my racial group.*

In another case, a participant reported feeling like their racial background is being ignored.

- *I feel that my racial background makes others in my department community uncomfortable. They want to include me, but would prefer I not talk about the uncomfortable fact that I'm*

different and might not share certain perspectives. I feel that it's taboo in the department to speak about one's racial background.

Others mentioned feeling like they have been cut out of discussions and not called on in class as often as others who are similar to the identity of the instructor.

- *[REDACT, faculty member] has a habit of cutting people of color off when they speak and frequently challenges suggestions of racism when reading texts.*
- *Some faculty members fall short of modeling inclusive leadership and inviting discussion participation in the classroom setting, which leads to unhealthy dynamics. For example, students who are more similar to the instructor in terms of identity and academic interests speak much more often and get more attention than those who are different. Some faculty members do not make the effort to invite those who are different to speak up and create space for a more inclusive mode of engaging with the materials.*

A few participants recounted being the frequent targets of microaggressions.

- *Microaggressions by faculty and members of my cohort.*
- *Microaggressions from several faculty members, particularly those in positions of power who carry out inexplicable behavior.*
- *Students gaslighting some of their POC peers without intervention from fellow students or faculty; and divisions of labor (e.g. reading assignments explicitly about race, extracurricular projects) that fall upon students of color in unequal or unusual ways.*

Finally, a couple of students reported incidents in which certain individuals' names have been mispronounced on multiple occasions, or when members of the same racial group have been confused with others in their racial group.

- *Multiple Asian and Black students have had the experience of being confused for other Asian or Black students by white faculty members, while I've never observed or heard of this happening to White, Hispanic, or Middle Eastern students.*
- *I've been witness to several microaggressions, including persistent mispronunciation/over pronunciation of the names of POC students for months into a semester....*

Gender

Comments in this category related to being treated differently due to one's being female, as well as being treated more negatively than their male counterparts in a general sense. As some respondents explained:

- *"Differently" can, of course, be interpreted in a variety of ways, both positive and negative. In the latter (negative) sense, I think that there are still a lot of assumptions about our profession that are shared by our senior faculty that leave little room for women and any 'qualities' (for the lack of a better word)....*
- *A certain member of the faculty has a history of treating female students (and other minorities in [REDACT, department name]) inferiorly to male (white) students.*
- *Women are treated very differently from men in our department.*

Other comments were focused more on the specifics of behavior. For example, female graduate students recounted (as a recipient or witness of others) being talked over, talked down to, and ignored by both male faculty and peers in their departments.

- *I have experienced that the discussion spaces in our department can be gendered. This can include men being permitted to take up disproportionate amounts of talking time, being permitted to talk over--if not raise their voice over--women, being permitted to talk amongst each other and not acknowledge the intellectual presence of the women in the room. This is particularly an issue among graduate students, not faculty, but not all of the faculty are trained to disrupt this dynamic.*
- *I feel I am talked over a lot as a female grad student, especially by male grad students.*
- *Certain male faculty members tend to talk down to the female graduate student population (which is the majority of the graduate student population in our department).*
- *I'm not sure how this should be addressed, but there are situations in which the gender dynamics between graduate students who are men and faculty who are women mean that I, as a graduate student, see a faculty member being talked over by a male graduate student.*
- *Some faculty members ignore female student communications and requests for support fulfilling academic requirements (such as completing exams), but are available and very responsive to male student requests and communications.*

Some students described being the targets of, or witnessing, disparaging remarks directed from men to women.

- *Finally, male graduate students have often failed to take my research seriously, and have, on occasion, openly made negative or mocking comments about my academic interests.*
- *Beyond students, have even seen professors direct rude, demeaning, sexist and/or racist treatment towards other professors, so there may not be much hope.*
- *It's often the case that people will make subtle, sexist comments under the guise of it being a joke.*

Some respondents felt like they were not being taken as seriously as males in their program because of their gender and have been the target of stereotypes (“raising a child equates to less serious” and “females being called too emotional”) and microaggressions.

- *I feel that some male faculty and graduate students do not take me as seriously because I am a woman. I have been told not to be so emotional etc. (when all I did was express disagreement in a calm way) and this is really hurtful, since women are often stereotyped as less rational than men.*
- *People in the department have made it clear to me that my status as a parent makes them think I am less serious about my scholarship or career than other students who are not parents. I have been told to hide my status as a parent from prospective employers, from students, and from other faculty members.*
- *While the department has a healthy and welcoming culture, I find that condescension and micro-aggression is a problem among a handful of male graduate students. It can be uncomfortable and intimidating.*

A couple of female students noted feeling like they somehow have to prove themselves more, work harder and take up more of the administrative duties in their programs as compared to their male peers.

- *It is a very sexist feeling department. Women are routinely made to "prove themselves" more than male peers (no leniency about course requirements Vs male peers, more trouble finding faculty supervision, etc.) are asked to do departmental service that male peers are not (e.g. organizing catering, engaging with students, etc.).*
- *It is made to feel like sometimes women graduate students are sometimes treated differently by faculty and held to different standards than men in the department (e.g., understanding that there is no room for failure, that excellence must be achieved 24/7, we must go beyond requirements to be successful). Sometimes, women are also given less respect by undergraduate students. This manifests in things like tone, attendance, acceptance of grades.*

Finally, a few comments related to incidents of Title IX violations in which males have made unwanted sexual advances and inappropriate comments towards women.

- *I am a female graduate student and there have been incidents in the past where male graduate students have speculated, or made inappropriate comments about, my dating life. There have also been some older male graduate students who show a pattern of sexualizing, and making advances towards, younger female graduate students, particularly those who are new to the department.*
- *Another faculty member has created an unsafe and unwelcoming environment for students by inappropriate touching and inappropriate sexual comments. This same faculty member is actively hostile towards LGBTQ+ students and women.*

International Status

Comments also related to being treated differently due to one's international status.

- *I think that members in the community have treated me differently and/or made certain comments or remarks on the basis of my international status.*
- *I have frequently been the target of microaggressions, especially on the part of my advisor, who frequently makes "jokes" about my country of origin and likes to point out how different I am from Americans/how different the American system is. My advisor also tends to treat me condescendingly and patronizingly even now that I am about to conclude my graduate degree, and I have often wondered if that is because I am a woman and he is a man, and so he feels entitled to speak to me the way he does.*
- *Maybe is just a cultural thing, but I feel sometimes other members of the community treat me in a condescending way.*
- *Because I am an international student from a particular country, I always feel that I am an exotic attention object rather than an equal colleague.*

Some international students described being received differently due to their accents.

- *I am not a native speaker, and that has had an impact in the way in which others relate to me or react to my interventions either in class or in social contexts.*
- *Language was not in the list, that's a shame: Students for whom English is not the first language, like myself, are not necessarily helped in that respect.*

- *In addition, I fear that the department is not very successful at integrating international students into the community, especially with regards to non-native English speakers.*

Other students recalled the lack of attention that faculty and peers give to learning how to pronounce the names of international students.

- *Several students as well as professors, including some of my advisors, have frequently gotten my name wrong throughout my time in the program.*
- *I doubt the figure in question is intentionally discriminatory, but I do think it's a bit ridiculous to not to know how to pronounce the names of international graduate students who have been in the department for years and even invented an "American" pronunciation of their name, at least learn the American version.*
- *Faculty could make sure they know how to pronounce students' names ahead of events where they will be introducing them or moderating a discussion of their work by asking the students....*
- *Faculty members regularly severely mispronounce the names of international students of color who have been in the department for years, not even taking the time to learn the "Americanized" versions of Asian names, and instead making something up on their own so that students are embarrassed at public events such as their G3 presentation.*
- *Also, faculty members in other departments can be more unprofessional than those in mine. They made fun of foreign scholars' names and talked about some languages pejoratively in class. These improper behaviors also made my academic experience at Harvard less satisfactory.*

A couple of international students reported being treated condescendingly by peers who assumed that they could not relate to the "American" system of academia or to American literature, given their being from another country.

- *I have felt being a person of color and an international student, I am often told that I don't understand the field and academia in America. Also have faced discrimination by fellow students often being called "unfamiliar" to academia, and feeling like I am less because of where I come from. I have also often felt excluded from conversation in group settings, not because I am silent, but because the group just don't follow up on what I say or dismiss what I have to say.*
- *Sometimes I feel like I'm treated as a token '[nationality]' student. I understand that it is exceptionally difficult in our department to manage the fine line of valuing diversity (in backgrounds, research, etc.), especially because the other end may easily lapse into a homogenizing approach that leads many to feel excluded. But it does anger me when students or faculty assume that I do not have in-depth knowledge of certain national literature that is not "mine", and this happens quite often.*

Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation

There were a handful of comments about sexual orientation and gender identity. Students recounted being the target of negative comments and being ignored, as well as others misusing gender pronouns.

- *Comments on clothing and sexual orientation.*
- *I see heterosexual, partnered, parents in my department receive preferential treatment on work and fellowship opportunities because their financial needs are perceived as more significant than mine.*
- *I've been regularly harassed by students, faculty, and staff for being trans, and the times people*

use my correct pronouns are few and far between.

- *I also feel like queerness is very silent in our department and I wonder why. Is it just 'not that present'? Are people being silenced, either passively or actively? Is it something else?*
- *[REDACT, faculty members] have been actively and aggressively transphobic, often in front of other faculty or staff.*
- *[REDACT, faculty member] clearly expresses distaste, disinterest, and even disgust at trans people.*

Social Class

Comments also related to how social class contributed to the lack of sense of belonging within graduate programs. Those from less privileged backgrounds described feeling out of place and struggling to fit in. A couple of students highlighted the lack of awareness on the part of their peers and some faculty members surrounding issues associated with their social standing.

- *Faculty don't expect that students might come from a first gen/low income background. Low income/first gen students often learn quickly to adopt the language and behaviors of those with upper middle class upbringings, and to feel that they should maintain this fiction to fit in, and not speak up when we are expected to live off of stipends/teaching pay that don't cover the cost of living, and preclude the possibility of starting a family.*
- *I felt particularly out of place coming from a different socioeconomic background, especially as this had impacted my ability to experience various aspects of [REDACT, field] training ([REDACT, activity], accepting unpaid internships, traveling abroad, etc.) prior to my entry into the program. It took several semesters to feel like I was accepted as having knowledge and experiences equal to my colleagues.*
- *Furthermore, there are huge social issues that intersect class/race in the department, probably reflective of Harvard writ large - the psychological and economic burden to complete work wears on students from less privileged backgrounds in a way of which the university/other students often seem oblivious.*
- *My Department has a lot of work to do to be the inclusive place it wants to be. I do see the intention and I value the effort. However, to truly be an inclusive place, students need more financial support. If I could do it all over again, I do not think I would choose to pursue this career or my program, primarily because of the financial burden it has placed on me and my family. I feel very little institutional support and often feel overwhelmed by the impossibility of completing my program primarily because of financial reasons. I believe students that come from wealthy, educated families and who have no family responsibilities rarely feel this way. I think of quitting every day.*
- *In our department in particular, there seems to be little acknowledgement that not all graduate students come from a financially privileged situation, nor do all enter the program with the same life experiences.*
- *One issue which is not openly talked about in the department is students' differing levels of financial security. Over the years I have noticed this as a factor which significantly impacts student progress to dissertation, and general student stress. However, owing to the understandable stigma around the topic, it is not openly talked about even amongst graduate students. I have not got an accurate sense of how many students this affects. Anecdotally, I have had or been privy to conversations with about nine graduate students during my time in the program about how to make ends meet. At least three of those students, like me, have routinely taken second jobs (most often low paid Harvard library jobs as they are plentiful) on top of the department teaching job, in order to stay afloat during the semester.*

- *Acknowledgement that some students are not from upper class families and did not attend Ivy League and prep schools before Harvard would be positive.*
- *More knowledge and consideration of financial hardships in graduate school.*

Religion

There were a handful of comments related to being treated differently due to one's religious beliefs, such as those that follow.

- *I feel looked at differently because of my religion.*
- *Other graduate students have made comments about my religious practices. I have also had other graduate students roll their eyes while I'm speaking.*
- *This is primarily - and perhaps only - by other graduate students. There emerges, at times, a sense of 'clique-ish' culture with respect to perceived religiosity of students and indeed faculty. I feel I am perceived and/or treated differently because I do not fit a certain mold of a traditional, Muslim female.*
- *There is also not enough acknowledgement of religious differences, and the fact that students are from all faiths and levels of religiosity.*

A couple of students noted the tension between their religious beliefs and more secular celebrations and interpretations of content discussed in classes that address religion.

- *Furthermore, I sometimes feel discriminated against on the basis of religion. Not so much against me as a Christian, but just against religious belief in general. I remember at some point I was in a class and the Bible was referred to as a fairytale (or something along those lines). I don't expect everyone to believe what I believe, but I DO think that we should always speak with respect of living religions. We shouldn't create an environment in which people feel uncomfortable for having religious beliefs.*
- *While there are a few faculty that I think of as "safe havens" in the department, and while staff, faculty, and fellow students (usually) maintain the outer gloss of polite discourse with one another and with me, I feel very strongly that there are strong implicit biases that work against openly religious students both in our department and beyond. The main form this bias takes is that the university and its intellectual authorities (faculty, other graduate students) are meant to represent an objective, rational, intellectually sound collective, and religious people are biased in favor of their religion and its associated worldview, and thus necessarily irrational actors on some if not all academic fronts. This is embodied quite concretely in materials distributed in classes I have been in, where two columns distinguish between the "academic" study of religion and the "religious" study of religion, the former being rational, objective, and balanced in every way, the latter being irrational, biased, and even extremist/fundamentalist/ultra-conservative, and a slew of other words with negative connotations. What disturbs me most about this is not the call to try and work against biases in "academic" work, but the inherent upper hand of objectivity that biased actors (faculty, students) unfairly claim for themselves in making these kinds of appeals. It makes it so that someone who is visibly Muslim (in this case) studying [REDACT, field] is necessarily blind to reality, and unable to be objective or balanced in their work. It is a deep and disturbing hypocrisy that I have seen perpetuated by both my peers and the faculty we work with and has made Harvard and specifically my department a very difficult place to be and move around in.*

Diversity & Inclusion

From the Likert-type items we learned that 61% of graduate student respondents agreed that there is a demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion within their departments. Comments in this category reflected the need for sustained attention to these efforts.

- *I think I'd really appreciate if faculty members can show awareness of and sensitivity to the fact that graduate students are holistic beings with complex identities and backgrounds. Especially since the beginning of the pandemic, I had found myself hoping that professors would be more aware that there are many factors that influence graduate students' academic success and general well-being than how disciplined or how hardworking they are. I have also been hoping that more professors would be sensitive to the many things happening in the world that make particular student groups (e.g. students of color; female students) feel unsafe and insecure.*
- *I am overall pleased with faculty, though I believe there is significant work to be done around creating a more inclusive environment for those outside of the social center (White, cisgender, etc.).*

Four common themes emerged regarding what is necessary for demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion, including the need for a more diverse faculty, better integration of identity in the study of literature and works of art, the desire for more diversity trainings, and greater faculty participation in diversity and inclusion efforts within the department. In the examples below, graduate students reflected on the need for a more diverse faculty across race, gender, sexual preference, and religion.

- *Faculty is overwhelmingly white, Christian, and straight, and the few minority faculty visibly overworked or have left in the last five years.*
- *Support more firmly the academic progress of young faculty and graduate students, especially female, LGBTQ+ and people from underrepresented backgrounds working at the department.*
- *Hire more faculty, ensure diversity of faculty on all committees, actively center queer and trans people and work instead of just letting in a smattering of PhD students across many years so we have no community or support or institutional memory.*
- *Hire more Asian and Indigenous scholars.*
- *We need more female and diverse tenured faculty.*
- *I strongly encourage the department to continue hiring younger faculty with strong consideration for gender and other minority backgrounds and/or those who take these things strongly into consideration--the arrival of new faculty in the past several years has relieved some of the former prevailing attitudes.*
- *The department does make an effort towards diversity and inclusion. This has yet to translate to tenured professors in the department.*
- *A more diverse (tenured!!!) faculty. This is unavoidable, if our program should continue. I know from some prospective students denying the [REDACT] Harvard Graduate Student offer that they did so because they did not want to have only the opportunity to work with "three white old men as primary advisers," or at least bearing the feeling that they dominate every major decision that is made in the department. It is a feeling people get after 3 days visiting--you can imagine how crucial it is for us here on-board, that something changes.*

Other participants recommended more trainings surrounding diversity and inclusion, including topics

related to: inclusive teaching practices, how to use gender pronouns, workshops on implicit bias and identifying micro-aggressions, and trainings on how to facilitate productive conversations around race and identity.

- *Faculty could better support graduate student teaching. This would include the development of a pedagogy training course, which students would take for course or teaching credit in their G2 or G3 years and would be taught by [REDACT, department name] faculty committee to learning/discussing/implementing recent and relevant scholarship on equitable, inclusive, and antiracist pedagogy.*
- *An overall yearly orientation on macro and micro aggressions.*
- *Encourage faculty, especially those in student-facing roles (e.g. chair, DGS, DUS), to work with anti-racism facilitators. Create a mandatory course for undergrads & grad students on the history of [REDACT, field] and how it has promoted white supremacy, misogyny, and colonialism, with an introduction to feminist, anti-racist, postcolonial, and queer theory.*
- *Train faculty and staff on how to use people's correct pronouns, train faculty to think about diversity beyond Black and White (and, while we're at it, to treat Black students with respect, compassion, and fairness).*
- *I know that the [REDACT] has hosted some events and conversations on anti-racism, but I would appreciate even more of that going forward, particularly to support faculty and TAs to be better prepared to facilitate conversations about race in the classroom.*
- *I also think specific training sessions for faculty and graduate students on implicit bias or other issues surrounding diversity, inclusion, and belonging would be useful.*
- *There could be some form of handbook to determine what is positive and negative interactions between individuals to neutralize imposter syndrome based on others' views and condescensions.*
- *I think it would be helpful to have some kind of formal talk or workshop for graduate students about issues of discrimination in the workplace (perhaps conducted by the Title IX or DIB office). It is important that graduate students can recognize instances of everyday sexism/racism/etc. when they occur, and have some kind of guidance or training as to how to deal with these.*
- *I think it'd be very helpful to create some real incentive for faculty members to attend diversity and inclusion training, as well as pedagogical workshops. It seems that many faculty members are pressurized to constantly produce first-rate research in their specialized fields to actually take time to improve the quality of their teaching and build relationships with their students (especially graduate students).*
- *More conflict resolution training and anti-racism training for faculty.*

There were a handful of quotes related to the need to diversify the curriculum by way of including more women and racially diverse authors, hiring new faculty members to teach topics related to identity and social justice, making inclusive pedagogy part of field exams, finding creative ways to integrate identity into the curriculum instead of treating it like a stand-alone topic, and being more consistent in contextualizing historically marginalized and oppressed groups in the teaching of literature and works of art.

- *Preparation for the field exam could emphasize the importance of preparing to teach a diverse array of texts.*
- *Hire scholars working in Black studies.*
- *Faculty could treat race, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of human difference not as "hot topics" up for debate in the classroom, but rather as discourses that we can approach more responsibly by doing rigorous research. There are more creative ways to weave identity through*

a course instead of having a "race" week, for example.

- *Our syllabi are bereft of women. I would appreciate it if the department made more of an effort to include primary texts written by women on the syllabi. I notice my graduate peers and I are using the GSAS workshop to continue work on topics which our syllabi do not cover.*

Finally, some students noted the desire for more faculty involvement in work to support diversity and inclusion efforts within departments. This included the need to intervene/moderate emotionally charged conversations surrounding identity.

- *I also think that most of the work regarding climate is done by graduate students who do most of the service work already in the department. This is incredibly burdensome on those graduate students, and seems unfair. I think the department would benefit from graduate students all pitching in more equally to improve and sustain a good department climate.*
- *I think many faculty are well-meaning and are willing to learn more about historic and contemporary forms of discrimination, particularly racism and sexism, but in my experience some faculty are not seeing and/or not disrupting when these dynamics come into play. I think this is compounded in settings with discussions among graduate students because it is often assumed that graduate students' discussions need less direction/intervention than undergraduate student discussions, or that attention to the classroom environment is more of an undergraduate teaching concern. Not every situation needs intervention, but more situations than are currently addressed do.*
- *There is not enough support for the people of the color in the department, including and not limited to professors intervening when students a) speak over their peers, b) monopolize class time, or c) go off on racist and otherwise problematic tangents. I've observed this in seminars with undergraduates as well as graduate specific courses. Faculty have a tendency to be too hands off in these moments, which leads to not all students feeling safe or even seen.*
- *There is a pronounced resistance to rocking the boat in any way. I have seen students bullying other students, professors reluctant to call out racism and sexism, and a general resistance to causing discomfort when calling people out. I have friends of color who are in substantial emotional distress over their treatment in the department. As a queer person, I have felt welcome, but not cared for.*

Diversity in Points of View/Inclusive Discussions

From the Likert-type items we learned that 55% of graduate student respondents agreed that they felt comfortable dissenting with majority opinion. 66% agreed that they felt comfortable sharing their viewpoints openly. Comments in this category highlighted what some perceived to be the unwillingness of community members to talk through differences in point of view and the fear that some members of the community experience in expressing alternative viewpoints in discussions surrounding controversial topics (such as race, gender, poverty, inequality, and politics).

In the quotes below students described being the targets of name-calling, disparaging remarks, and gossip and hostility for their conservative viewpoints. Some reported being silenced, having their comments twisted, and being labeled as hateful or racist. One student explained how this has intruded on their ability to engage in scholarly conversation on topics relevant to their work.

- *Given the current political climate, I feel like a few comments of mine have been grossly misinterpreted by both faculty and (especially) fellow graduate students in order to paint me (a white man) in as unfavorable a light as possible. Very little benefit of the doubt, and a great*

desire to concoct evidence of narratives of oppression and insensitivity where there are none. In many cases, faculty model this behavior, and graduate students subsequently mirror it. This, to my mind, trivializes actual crises of structural iniquity, racism, and sexism, as well as disincentivizing crucial solidarity among graduate students in a time where our current and future employment is as tenuous as ever. Most of all, there is a reticence to speak through disagreements like adults ought to, and instead a hair-trigger impulse to resort to gossip, exaggeration, innuendo, etc.

- *I've seen firsthand that those who espouse "conservative" positions (e.g., in a classroom discussion) take a much bigger risk than those who promote "liberal" views. Those who support or in some respect identify with (or are believed to identify with) so-called "conservative" views or values are rejected much more quickly and irrevocably than those who express "progressive" ideas.*
- *There is often political hostility against those who identify as conservative, especially if you are a white male. If you are a white male, your voice is not valued as much as others in this community. If you express conservative values or political affiliation, you are labeled a close-minded bigot. If I don't accept elements how certain movements are or have been promoted, portrayed, or politicized (LGBTQ issues, BLM, affirmative action, transgender policies, cancel culture, etc.), you are labeled as hateful. I do not feel comfortable expressing myself on campus. I fear being "cancelled," that my future may be jeopardized because someone has misconstrued something I have said or shared. I hide my beliefs and don't engage with others.*
- *Also, the social and political dynamics proper of the American context have dominated the discussion within the department, with little to no attention or respect for those who might come from other backgrounds or might also be able to contribute with different, complementary perspectives.*
- *I've also seen this "diversity-justified" silencing happen in classroom discussions, where literally an awkward silence descends upon the room if/when someone expresses a view about gender, reproductive rights, immigration, or some other controversial issue from a conservative viewpoint. There are strong social pressures for those who hold such views to stay silent, because they risk being labelled as "intolerant"--and thereafter written off--if they share their perspective.*
- *As a conservative, however, I do not feel comfortable expressing many of my beliefs, and I fear social and professional retaliation if my beliefs became known....What I perceive as a climate of ideological homogeneity also affects my ability to engage in scholarly conversation on topics relevant to my work. I have to overcome anxiety about social disapproval in order to express, for example, these (outside academia) ordinary and unobjectionable views: that most people who talk about "Western civilization" are not dog-whistling for white supremacy....When I don't speak up, however, I hear an assumption of universal agreement with very progressive views, as well as occasional jokes or disparaging remarks made about people who share my beliefs.*
- *I don't think I have any right to complain about this atmosphere; it's just what happens when the majority of a group think alike and assume that their shared political beliefs correlate with intelligence. I knew it would be more or less like this going in, and a braver person than I am could likely speak out freely. I do feel, however, for a colleague of mine who I think feels similarly alienated from the ideological climate. They have felt pressured to change the subject of their research to reflect their race and conform to current trends in the field, rather than pursuing the more traditional, unracialized research in which they are interested. It seems to me wildly inappropriate that people assume this person's identity should shape or determine his scholarly interests or his beliefs.*
- *I would appreciate it if in our public statements about diversity, inclusion, and belonging,*

philosophical and political beliefs were explicitly included alongside race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. In a time in which we hear of professors being fired, suspended, or removed from teaching over politically incorrect remarks (e.g. Sandra Sellers at Georgetown) or even misunderstandings (e.g. Greg Patton at USC), it would be reassuring to have a preemptive statement from the department that they will support their graduate students and junior faculty in cases of controversy, and that intellectual ideas expressed in good faith will not meet professional retaliation such as removal from teaching or withdrawal of letters of recommendation. This is a minor concern, but if we gave this issue even 1/10th as much attention as we give to race and gender-based harassment it would relieve a real source of anxiety.

Other students described the lack of tolerance for those with different intellectual viewpoints, which often results in hostile debates and personal attacks.

- *I think any "dissatisfaction" that I might have, and any negative experiences I've had, have come from a general conflation of theoretical/intellectual disagreements w/ personal relationships. I have felt at times that there are certain presumed intellectual orthodoxies that are quite difficult to question, in and out of my department. I'm not sure whether this could be addressed, or even if it should. It may just be a feature of academic life. But for many, the personal stakes of many of our intellectual discussions are extremely high, and so it can become extraordinarily difficult to separate debate and disagreement from personal valuations and antagonism. This may even be desirable or positive overall, but it definitely leads to experiences of discomfort and unpleasantness beyond that which mere academic disputes occasion.*

Finally, in the quotes that follow, a couple of students shared the perception of a culture in their home departments where individuals may be punished for expressing alternative points of view by those who hold power over their academic trajectories.

- *Non-conformity, difference in preference, or assertion of individual identity is often punished by withholding approval in other unrelated academic matters (e.g. signing up for classes, letters of recommendation for fellowships/grants, permission to participate in external research opportunities, signing off on dissertation related matters, etc.).*
- *However, the faculty do feel distant and I can't be sure whether this is a symptom of over-politeness during Zoom University or an unspoken hierarchy that cannot be challenged. For example, I have not disagreed with any professor in class or criticized any reading (often written by colleagues of the professor) because I worry that it will "put an x on my back" and I will be written off for the remainder of my time in the department as someone negative. It is intellectually un-stimulating to feel like I need to be on my best behavior in class, to feel that my early engagement with texts and arguments may have long-term effects on my career.*

Incivility

From the Likert-type items we learned that 67% of graduate student survey respondents experienced incivility in their departments. Comments in this category related to incidents of incivility that graduate students experience from peers and faculty members.

In the quotes below, graduate students described highly competitive and sometimes even hostile environments created by peers who spread gossip, make fun of others behind their backs, treat

classmates condescendingly, exclude others and bully. In some cases, this has created emotional distress.

- *I've had run-ins with particular individuals who for whatever reason are competitive, hostile or willing to make others look bad. One individual in particular is known for excluding others and saying false things about them in their absence. Most are relatively friendly and collegial, but I can't say it's a particularly warm and inviting department (or that Harvard is a particularly warm and inviting place).*
- *The competition that exists among graduate students has spiked to unhealthy levels because we all know how hostile the market is.*
- *I sometimes get the sense that a few of us feel a sense of competition, which is usually not necessary, since we're so different among each other and in our situation on the job market.*
- *Some of the other students are condescending/mean/gossipy, which might just be their personalities. Most of them are great, though.*
- *The faculty have been great and very supportive, but some of the graduate students have turned the department into a combative and fearful environment, one in which people are afraid to speak up in both academic and less formal settings out of a fear of mockery. It is not uncommon for one person's comments in class to circulate among all the graduate students in a very short time.*
- *There is a practice by certain graduate students of recording others speaking during class to later show others and make fun of that person.*
- *I have had a hard time specifically with condescending statements made by peers rather than faculty and staff. I find the faculty to be extremely supportive and positive, but some fellow students to be difficult to interact with.*
- *Problems I have encountered relate mostly to a small number of individuals who have condescending attitudes toward their peers and have been (likely indirectly) encouraged by faculty to behave in this way.*
- *For the most part, I'm very happy with my program. However, I have observed a few instances in which one particular graduate student bullied several peers at particularly stressful times in the semester. The graduate students who had been bullied confided in me that this experience made them feel undervalued and emotionally unsafe participating in group events in the department.*
- *I have had very difficult experiences with an individual graduate student in the program that makes it hard to feel fully comfortable in the department. This has affected my self-confidence and led to significant emotional distress on multiple occasions. It has never been clear to me who to share this information with.*

Other graduate students reported being the target of condescension, rude and hurtful comments, and bullying behavior from faculty. Graduate students noted that incivility is reported to come from only a small number of individuals within their departments which nonetheless can create an overall unpleasant environment.

- *In general, my department is an open and friendly place, but there are particular people who can sometimes practice rude and impolite behavior. During the pandemic, I felt it more severely when the communication was in Zoom and other people cannot see it, there were no witnesses. After several Zoom meetings with our new professor this fall, I was crying and felt powerless.*
- *While I listed "several occurrences" they were almost all related to one individual (another student). I'm not sure what a department is meant to do about a single person like that, especially when they are unaware of interpersonal issues, but I wanted to tell the truth.*
- *A certain senior faculty member is known throughout the department to favor male students,*

be a bully, and openly expressed distaste for teaching and supervising students. Something should be done about this individual.

- *There have been some issues with professors' professionalism and manner of speaking when dealing with graduate students in group and individual formats, and in one case, when addressing guest speakers.*
- *There is only one faculty member that I would tell students to avoid, but fortunately I have never felt threatened by him--I just think he can be very condescending. From what I have heard, our department is unusual in that respect.*
- *She has managed to bully her way forward with regard to students as well as the staff of the department.*
- *The one difficult issue I have had in this department was with a particular tenured professor who (I gradually discovered) had an issue with students who challenged her. I was able to avoid working with that particular professor and have otherwise had a really excellent experience. I feel cared for in my department!*
- *The most significant impediment on the way to improvement is [REDACT, faculty name], who uses almost every occasion to make his mark, offers barely any space for others to voice their thoughts, and I have seen him treating grad students (including myself) as well as colleagues with disrespect (sometimes without knowing it, I suppose). I've described several examples to a Title IX coordinator last fall who interviewed most grad students about the climate at our department, and thus I won't repeat any of that here.*

Noteworthy were graduate students' comments about faculty members' incivility towards one another, which has negatively impacted students' experiences in their programs. Participants reported feeling like they were being put "in the middle" of faculty disputes, which can create an uncomfortable environment.

- *When graduate students are admitted, they are unaware of the landmines of faculty conflict in the department. Faculty bring students into the middle of their conflicts and students are forced to remain silent because of the unequal power structure. There is a culture of remaining silent and sycophancy.*
- *Our chair of department is absolutely doing their best to make things better. We, as graduate students, can see how other faculty, particularly the former chair and the present DGS are undermining many of their efforts.*
- *[REDACT, faculty name] and the former chairs "conflicts" between the two of them not seldomly resulted in a hostile environment when we, as students could hear the "a"-word on the corridors. [REDACT, faculty name] interventions are highly fruitful--as fruitful as it can get, when the two former major antagonists ally to undermine the process. This is not anything [REDACT, faculty name] is sharing with us--it is blatantly visible to anyone.*
- *There is no departmental cohesion because all the core faculty have petty conflicts with each other. A previous department chair left their position without warning because of a conflict.*
- *Graduate student acrimony and internal conflicts among faculty has affected me repeatedly.*
- *In a very different situation, several years ago I was in a class where the professor at times refused to call on me or even look in my direction for most of the course, because they had a deep disagreement with my adviser. This was the most egregious experience of exclusion I've had at Harvard.*
- *My adviser has abused his power in relation to me because I am associated with faculty and scholars he dislikes (often for no good reason.) My adviser has retaliated in different ways to get back at me.*

Accountability for Wrongdoing

Participants also described the lack of a clear accountability system to address these issues.

In their comments students explained how a hierarchical system (run by those who have power over students' academic and career trajectories) absent of safeguards against retaliation inhibits students from coming forward with grievances. Currently, less than half of participants (47%) agreed that they would feel comfortable coming forward with a complaint.

- *As I have progressed in the program, I have felt it increasingly difficult to stand my ground in situations where I have been bulldozed or disrespected by my superiors (especially in teaching situations where boundaries between work and life are not respected), as they have so much power of my future career when it comes to references and letters of recommendation. I am aware of several individuals in the past who have struggled with these types of consequences and so my general sense of dynamics in the department has been one of disempowerment.*
- *Students do not dare to report on certain faculty's abusive behavior and acts of microaggression for fear of retaliation both when it comes to internal opportunities, and later on in their career. There needs to be a safe avenue for students to do that, without fear of retaliation.*
- *Another faculty member has created an unsafe and unwelcoming environment for students by inappropriate touching and inappropriate sexual comments. This same faculty member is actively hostile towards LGBTQ+ students and women. These concerns often can't be reported because, again, the abuser is [REDACT, faculty role]. I actively warn prospective students away from the department.*
- *Faculty have too much power over students' lives and this power almost always goes unchecked.*
- *Something fundamentally needs to change, on a systemic level, such that those who are capable of writing our letters even for jobs beyond academia are not also in a position where they have so much day-to-day power over those they supervise.*
- *Reducing opportunities for faculty members to retaliate against students would improve the climate. For example, for any course that is mandatory, ensuring that at least two faculty members are appointed as instructors and evaluate student work would reduce the likelihood of retaliation occurring against students--a problem that occurred during my first year of the doctoral program.*
- *[REDACT, department name] is an extremely hostile and unwelcoming environment. The small nature of the department makes it so that your department chair, Title IX coordinator, DGS, and adviser are often the same people. Therefore harassment and abuse can't be reported or acted upon because the abuser is often also the one you'd report abuse to. The faculty use their positions of power to control and place social obligations upon the students in a way that is unprofessional and inappropriate.*

Graduate students also described inaction on the part of faculty regarding holding their colleagues and other graduate students accountable for problematic behavior.

- *Holding people in the department accountable for their mistreatment of their colleagues would be an important start.*
- *I'd like to see the professors take more direct steps to mitigate bullying when they witness it or hear about it. For example, the professors could talk with the bully in a private meeting about classroom etiquette, which we should all be learning about over the course of our degrees anyway.*
- *In a department that is otherwise quite progressive for the university (though not without occasional clumsiness), professors who are problematic stick out and they neglect to do anything*

about those professors, gestures at complicity.

- *Of primary importance would be to take seriously student complaints and concerns. There was a letter campaign with regard to the behavior of one particular faculty member, whose behavior on the fronts described above has been particularly egregious, and who consistently makes inappropriate remarks to his practicing [REDACT], which went ignored by the department. That faculty member was given a promotion.*
- *The department could actually finally choose to acknowledge that there are serious problems of backbiting, hostility, and mistreatment, instead of perpetuating them and promoting the typical Harvard "take it or leave it" mentality when it comes to students being treated unequally and harshly.*
- *Whenever negative things are brought up in general meetings aka town halls, the typical faculty response is to say "my colleague would never x" (this seems to be getting better, but it was a very frustrating thing to hear your fellow grad students essentially being gaslit in public).*

Students recommended the need for both clear and safe reporting channels. From the Likert-type items in the survey we learned that only 38% of graduate student survey respondents agreed that there are clear channels for reporting.

- *I cannot expect professors with successful careers or secured power to change their manner or students from privileged backgrounds to learn to respect others. I can only hope for more channels to file complaints and for structural changes to alleviate the current power imbalance between students and professors.*
- *Clear channels of communication to report inappropriate incidents without fear of retaliation or worry of being seen as overreacting.*
- *Make clear channels for reporting incidents of violence, harassment, etc.*
- *I am not sure what the channels for addressing a problem or incident are in my department. At present, if I were faced with a situation I wanted to address, I would not know where to start.*
- *I think establishing a formal channel of recourse to protect students within the department in the event of harassment, discrimination, or prejudicial treatment with material consequences would help ease the concerns of many students and demonstrate that the department is serious about addressing some of the issues.*
- *I think there could be more anonymous ways of reporting issues, so that everyone feels comfortable doing so.*
- *Clear channels to report bullying. More protections against retaliation.*

Students also recommended the need for a clear process. Many explained not knowing what to do, where to start, or how grievances are resolved in the case of an event. In fact, only a quarter of students (24%) agreed that there is a clear process for addressing incidents of incivility.

- *There isn't always a clear sense of what to do when we're feeling excluded or otherwise ill-treated in our department, but when I brought something troubling to my adviser, my adviser promptly directed me to other resources, and I felt very well-supported.*
- *I don't know that we have mechanisms for reporting discourtesy, but I don't know that we need them--people disagree or are rude sometimes, and anyone can have a bad day. If it is motivated by bias or animosity beyond just having a bad day, there ought to be ways to address it. I have not encountered this.*
- *In filling out some of these survey questions though, I realized that I don't really know what the appropriate process is for reporting a problem if I were to have one (which I haven't, thank*

goodness!). It might be helpful to do more publicizing to students in [REDACT, department name] about the available resources to make departmental processes clearer.

- *Having been subject to what I consider bullying/humiliation from a faculty member (not my adviser), I wish that there was some clear way laid out for how to deal with situations like this. It was not sexual harassment, so I couldn't go to Title IX, but it was unclear what, if anything, I could do about the situation. I went to speak with a University ombudsperson, but they could only listen and offered very little in the way of anything that could be done. I also definitely did not want to report the incidents in any official capacity because I 100% feared retaliation plus other complications.*

Finally, other students recommended the need for faculty training as a preventative measure to control incivility in the departments.

- *All the faculty need training on basic professionalism and workplace ethics.*
- *I feel that Harvard should require faculty to participate in annual or biannual courses on how to appropriately engage in a workplace environment. Such a course should particularly focus on best practices in developing and maintaining a mentor-mentee relationship, best practices in teaching and engaging students, and how to respond to workplace conflict when you are in a position of authority.*
- *More faculty need to be trained/need to learn how to disrupt disrespectful dynamics.*

Advising

Not surprisingly, graduate students explained that experiences with advising are highly dependent on whom one's adviser is. Problematic advising relationships can adversely affect one's academic success, as highlighted below.

- *I feel that student experience within our department is highly contingent on personalities. Experiencing discontent with an adviser or faculty relationship can feel like a personal failure on the part of the student (i.e., an inability to assimilate to the departmental culture or a lack of independence or self-sufficiency). In my own experience, these feelings became a barrier to seeking help or change in those adviser relationships and ultimately hindered my academic success. Even though I have experienced many warm, positive, and encouraging faculty relationships in our department, one continuously negative adviser relationship in which I was regularly subjected to rude and callous comments continues to color my experience of the program and sense of myself as a scholar.*
- *I personally have been very lucky in my choice of advisers, though some of my colleagues have not. There are advisers who play favorites, overdetermine their grad students' plans, or ignore them.*
- *My adviser is great and has a clear understanding of what work load is appropriate at various points during the progress to degree (during coursework, during the summer, etc.) but other faculty members do not seem cognizant of this and demand high levels of work from students at inopportune (and in fact "illegal," in terms of what we're supposed to be doing but of course, no one reports it because they fear retaliation, etc.) times, or unevenly distribute work among their grad students.*

While 88% of graduate student respondents agreed that their advisers are generally available, comments in this category reflected the need for some advisers to be more present in the mentorship of their students. In the quotes below, students described feeling lost, discouraged, isolated, and like they

do not belong, due to their adviser's absence. In some instances, this has contributed to a "lack of academic progress and extended stays (8-10+ years)" for students.

- *Being a student in this department is weird. On the one hand, I am afforded substantial academic freedom and am lucky not to be too tightly bound to a path or project. On the other hand, this freedom is suffocating when I'm feeling lost, confused, or discouraged on a project.*
- *Meeting professors to discuss our research is difficult. It's difficult in the sense that it can be hard to actually schedule meetings, because of how busy they are. This is something you learn to expect, given that we all end up in that situation. It is also difficult in a more serious sense, in that (with a few exceptions) I feel like many of the meetings I do have are not helpful because the professor has not been involved along the way on the project, and I often feel like I'm interviewing for an opportunity to work with them rather than actually working with them. It can really feel like you're wasting a professor's time.*
- *I think that there can be a sense of disconnect when a graduate student has an adviser who is primarily disconnected with the [REDACT, department name] school (and this is often unavoidable because of our research interests!) My adviser is accessible to me one-on-one but I don't often see them at [REDACT, department name] events because they are understandably more involved with the community at [REDACT, other department name]. But this can lead to some feelings of disconnect/isolation.*
- *My adviser is similarly stressed to impossible levels--service to the profession, service to students... my adviser is exemplary, but is overworked. I feel extremely ungrateful rating their performance as though this were a consumer transaction between us. My adviser can't be available for a relationship with me and respond to the demands of their academic career.*
- *At times, expressions of faculty disinterest can contribute to students' feelings of a lack of belonging, which in turn contributes to a lack of academic progress and extended stays (8-10+ years) in the program. Since personalities can make or break a student's graduate experience....*
- *I understand everyone has a lot on their plate and faculty are not (solely) responsible for the social atmosphere of the department and mental well-being of students, but I would definitely appreciate more effort made to check-in with students, even on more "on-topic" things like their general academic progress. This does not have to be a big deal or structured thing, just a brief mention or 2-minute chat during a regular meeting would be fine. Some faculty do do this, others don't.*

While 84% of respondents agreed that their adviser strongly considers their career goals and aspirations, a couple of comments related to the struggles that some graduate students were experiencing navigating a competitive job market and the perceived lack of support and consideration they have received from faculty surrounding this issue.

- *I am extremely dissatisfied with our department's refusal to grapple with the realities of the job market. Most faculty have not applied for jobs in decades and seem to think that merely graduating from Harvard will guarantee us tenure-track jobs at R1 universities. I worry whatever advantages the Harvard name gives us will be cancelled out by the inadequate instruction we receive, the lack of opportunities to be instructor-of-record for undergraduate courses, the strange advice against publishing that several faculty give, and the manufactured scarcity of money/fellowships for research and conferences. I worry we are falling far behind our peer institutions.*
- *I know a number of students who have brought up how differently advising, timelines, and etc. are in other departments (exams second year, committee assembled after the prospectus, committee meets to discuss chapters together, etc.), only for the constant refrain "that will not*

work here." There is no interest in improving the student experience, and it creates a dynamic where students are profoundly anxious about graduating and the job search, with absolutely no support. The fact that [REDACT, department name] never publishes any information about job success rates only reifies this anxiety. Overall, it's an overwhelmingly aloof department, unaware of the constant microaggressions minoritized students face and uninterested in improving any sense of community or mentorship.

- *Transparency regarding job offers within the department could be a necessary improvement. Some faculty members could respond to emails more (sometimes there is no answer to urgent questions). Discussing and exploring job options beyond the academic world could be encouraging.*

In order to address problematic advising relationships, some students recommended that guidelines be revised and clarified, that faculty attend trainings on how to be better mentors, and that safe channels to provide feedback and to share concerns are established. A couple of students mentioned the need for improved advising during the first year which could take the format of an orientation/open forum for new graduate students where first years are paired with G2s who could serve as mentors.

- *I would suggest amending the guidelines for advising to more consistently adhere to a model of mentorship with firm and consistent avenues for students to report advising issues and more accountability and training for faculty members. In some ways, I think introversion, shyness, or conflict aversion are traits that doom a student in our graduate program or spell inevitable failure. Transparent mechanisms for sharing advising and larger program concerns as well as internal committee procedures for expanded training in and incentivizing active mentorship may be helpful changes.*
- *Advisors should receive training on how to give (constructive) feedback to graduate students and how to support them not only in their research but also as they try to find jobs (outside or inside academia). I often found myself in a position that I had to ask my adviser to take the time to help me. It's pretty clear that the faculty don't discuss advising, mentorship, and teaching with one another. There needs to be clear effort made to make these connections among faculty so that they can learn from one another.*
- *Training for advisers and faculties on appropriate boundaries.*
- *Firstly, I think it is very important that the department offer students an orientation to the department, to graduate academic life, and adviser-advisee relationships. Perhaps these things can be learned informally through older G students during normal years, but it has been extremely difficult to gauge expectations and department culture this year. Secondly, it would be nice if the G1s were assigned with a G2 upon arrival for at least one mentoring/welcome to the department meeting. The pairings don't need to be based on field, just a friendly face with departmental knowledge.*
- *I think that the first two years of graduate school are very difficult and involve a lot of uncertainty that can be very mentally draining and difficult. I think that the climate would be improved if there were more open forums to talk about these issues in the first two years (i.e. what makes for a good question, what seminars are for and how one might act in them, what an adviser/advisee relationship is supposed to look like).*

Community

Only half (51%) of graduate student survey respondents agreed that there is a strong sense of community within their departments. In their open-ended comments students described four factors that contributed to lack of community.

The first was the result of the recent pandemic, which especially affected those who were new to their programs and/or coming from abroad.

- *In addition, during the pandemic I was not asked during the whole semester how I am, however, I was an international student who lived alone for 10 months from March to December in a dormitory, absolutely alone in a new country. I felt like in prison. I was crying a lot of the time. Once I tried to say that it is not easy, I received the answer that everyone is in the same situation. I do not think so, I did not have my family or friends, and even cultural experience. And my situation was very different from the situation of my colleagues. So, I thought that if they do not care about me in general for many months, to say something about the rude behavior of a new prof is useless.*
- *I have marked that I feel a part of my community in less than absolutely stellar terms only due to the COVID situation and the fact that, as a first-year student, I have not been physically present and have yet to meet my colleagues properly.*
- *It is nearly impossible to build a firm support and professional network when we barely even know our fellow graduate students. It makes you feel helpless and hopeless.*

The second factor which has contributed to lack of community within departments is the balkanization of subfields within some programs. Students found it more difficult to connect with students and faculty, who are spread out across different departments in different locations and with different academic interests.

- *Overall, I think the [REDACT] department is a great place to be affiliated with, but there would be major potential in improving the community spirit among graduate students. This may be inherent to the fractured nature of our field with high specializations in each subfield that often don't stand in conversation, but I think more incentive to collaborate among graduate students, such as study groups or interdisciplinary workshops, would be great.*
- *The climate has mostly felt very supportive to me, but it takes a long time to feel like there's a sense of community. Everyone is so siloed in their own work and interests.*
- *An awareness of how the nature of producing work is different across subfields is also largely lacking.*
- *The department I am in is not the worst offender but most students here take many classes outside their department.*

A third factor was not having enough time to attend community events and gatherings.

- *Because we are so overworked (with work that I don't think is beneficial) we don't have much time to engage with the community.*

The fourth factor, and the one that received the most coverage, was the lack of faculty engagement and effort in trying to get to know students, which signaled a lack of caring and disinterest.

- *I am convinced that the department would grow stronger if all the faculty made an effort to regularly attend, encourage, initiate, and co-organize undergraduate and graduate student-led events out of a principle of solidarity with our department and our field.*
- *I would like to see that faculty would show more interest in knowing their students, especially their phd students, more deeply.*
- *Faculty rarely attend the student papers at our lunch talks, it would be great to get better faculty support here.*

- *My experience is that faculty just don't care about students--there is absolutely no sense of community, a constant abnegation of responsibility for students' professional development, and a deep and problematic lag between the current state of the field and what is being taught in classes.*
- *More opportunities to meet faculty members, and more consistent faculty responsiveness to email contact (most members of the faculty are very responsive and helpful, but some are harder to reach via email), would strengthen an already excellent experience.*
- *I feel like when I have meetings with faculty I will ask them many questions about themselves but they won't ask about me. That's absolutely fine and would be preferred during normal years. However, between that and online learning I feel unknown and I know some of my peers feel the same. It would be nice if professors could try to get to know their students on a personal level.*
- *There is this constant feeling that one must chase faculty down if one wants to be in touch with them, learn from them, work with them.*
- *Despite the very thoughtful and diligent efforts by the chair and DGS, who are unrelentingly wonderful, there is nevertheless no sense of community whatsoever in the "department." Only a few professors care about my existence. Most don't know who I am. It's difficult to answer questions about the department's climate, since there is no oxygen to create an atmosphere, much less a climate.*
- *Faculty could show that they value their graduate students by reaching out to them, if they seem to have similar research interests or could benefit from a course they will teach.*

Graduate students offered several suggestions about how to improve the sense of community in their departments, including having dedicated common spaces for community members to gather, holding informal social events, forums to discuss their writing and dissertation work, and events to hear about faculty research.

- *Introducing any semi-private common space in which there was room for graduate students to congregate, work, make coffee, schedule meetings, collaborate on TF work and ideally schedule meetings with students would, I think, have a marked and immediate effect on improving community among the graduate student body of the [REDACT, department name].*
- *A renewed commitment on the part of both faculty and graduate students to turn out to department events would help e.g. lunch in the library, post-colloquia drinks, beginning and end-of-semester gatherings, the department outing (when it happens!). The more we interact with each other outside of instructor/TF or adviser/advisee relationships, the easier relations are.*
- *More events to let students and faculty know each other.*
- *More forums to discuss our own writing--I would so love support about that and it feels very solitary not to have that be center-stage in post-coursework G years.*
- *More opportunities for faculty members to share info (esp broad info) about their fields of study with doctoral students would be great; also closed discussions with faculty members of advanced graduate students to speak about research in progress.*
- *More events connecting faculty and students.*
- *The sessions could, in a post-covid world, have more gatherings and social events so students get to interact with each other within their own sections, and not only within their own cohort.*
- *We need a genuine sense of community (one faculty event a year at an inaccessible park 45 minutes away is not helpful).*

Positive Comments

To conclude, we learned from the Likert-type items that most students in the Division reported having a very positive experience in their departments/programs. The vast majority reported that they were satisfied with the climate in the department (79%), and if they had to do it over again, they would choose their programs (80% agreed). The following are some respondents' positive impressions about their experiences in their programs.

- *Harvard is, maybe, not the most "up to date" in terms of the trendiest research topics (or at least that was its reputation when I decided to attend); but the faculty are kind supportive attentive humane and brilliant. I love this department, and I owe it, and my advisers, quite a great deal.*
- *I can only say good things about my program academically, and I would choose it again in a heartbeat. It's because I love my program and my field so much that I want it to do better. If I didn't care, I would have left a long time ago.*
- *I feel that our department has improved a lot in recent years in being more receptive to the needs of graduate students, and I feel my department handled the severest negative experiences that I had during my early years in the department with grace and care.*
- *I have found the department to be a genial, collegial atmosphere.*
- *I really like and respect many of the faculty, staff and students here. My adviser is excellent, and I have had many wonderful experiences at Harvard.*
- *I want to be clear that there are several faculty members in this department who I would consider exceptional, and with whom I feel completely comfortable discussing any range of topics.*
- *I'm really impressed with how much time and individual attention the faculty give us. I feel valued as an individual no matter what I want to pursue during my time here. I haven't seen any incidents of poor behavior but I'm sure that other members of the program would be quick to jump in and support the affected student.*
- *Look, I didn't come to study under world-renowned scholars to have my hand held... I have no problem with my adviser.*
- *My experience with advising in the department has been excellent--faculty are always incredibly kind, engaged, and generous with their time. It has helped me grow as a thinker tremendously, and I really appreciate all the effort that the faculty put forth towards advising.*
- *Overall, my experience with my faculty advisers has been overwhelmingly positive, and I feel extremely supported.*
- *The [REDACT] department is a welcoming, safe, and supportive environment for graduate students. The faculty and staff are invested not only in our professional development, but also in our personal well-being.*