

Department of  
ECOLOGY AND  
EVOLUTIONARY  
BIOLOGY

# Departmental Climate Study Report

2019 - 2020

**UCONN**  
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL  
ARTS AND SCIENCES



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB) wishes to be a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive academic community where all members are able to achieve their academic goals without harassment, intimidation, or bias. To realize this goal, we need to evaluate what problems currently exist. To this end, the Departmental Climate Committee conducted an anonymous survey of EEB community members (graduate students, faculty, staff, postdoctoral researchers) in the fall of 2019 asking questions about participants' overall experience in the department, and specific questions about harassment, bias, and openness. Because the survey was anonymous, the results are intended to guide general policy changes but cannot trigger specific investigations; any individuals who have witnessed or experienced harassment, bias, or intimidation are encouraged to contact the Office of Institutional Equity to file specific complaints.

About two thirds of the survey recipients responded. Overall, satisfaction with the department is very high: over 90% of respondents indicated they would recommend joining EEB to others. However, there were responses conveying strong negative perceptions of the department. Our goal should be to make the department welcoming and supportive for every single member.

The largest area of concern is mental health. Half of all respondents indicated that mental health difficulties had interfered with their ability to pursue their academic or professional goals. Their response was not correlated with overall satisfaction with the department, suggesting that these are not a reflection of poor departmental climate per se. However, the department can and must do more to provide support and create a climate where discussion of mental health is normalized and mitigating solutions are available. These include providing more information on mental health resources on campus, running community-building stress-busting activities, and featuring mental health issues in the Professional Development in EEB course for first year graduate students and at seminars.

In general, members of the department agreed that the weekly seminar is a respectful, civil space, where diversity and inclusion are considered when inviting speakers. The biggest problem identified here is that not everyone feels comfortable voicing questions. We recommend actions to improve the diversity of invited speakers (already an area of active effort), and encourage universal attendance and active participation.

Levels of discrimination in the department appear to be low; only 4 respondents out of 90 (< 5%) responding to these items reported experience with discrimination. However, the small number of discriminatory events indicated in the survey may be an under-estimate (due to reluctance to respond), and even one such event is too many. Most of the discrimination experiences were tied to gender. The department should craft a Values Statement, use supplemental Office of Institutional Equity trainings, invite scholars studying unconscious bias to present to the department, and provide workshops on recognizing and preventing unconscious (and overt) bias.

Levels of harassment are higher than discrimination (17%). These are overwhelmingly cases of derogatory or humiliating remarks in conversation or digital communications, and some bullying. In a small number of cases, respondents reported unwanted sexual attention or threats of physical violence. We seek to make this a community where such events never happen at all. Encouragingly, reporting rates are higher than the national average. As with discrimination, we propose a series of workshops and short trainings (e.g., 5-10 minutes at the start of seminar) that address how to avoid and respond to harassment as a target or a bystander ally.

Although numerical survey responses were broadly positive, written open-ended comments were more often provided by individuals who had negative experiences. Their statements are deeply concerning and point to a culture that is too often striking an unhealthy work-life balance, does not sufficiently recognize and reward all forms of good performance, and lacks the full trust needed for effective communication. Especially, we need to build a culture of trust between students, staff, and faculty, so that individuals can speak openly and seek help when they need it. This is especially crucial for improving the mental health of all members of the community.

# INTRODUCTION

The Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Connecticut is committed to providing an equitable, welcoming and productive environment for all its members. The Departmental Climate Committee developed and administered a survey in the Fall of 2019 to evaluate whether the professional climate in the department meets these expectations, to proactively identify areas for further improvement in the department climate, and to identify any existing problems.

This report contains the results of what is envisioned as the first in a series of ongoing “check-ups”; ideally recommendations of this report would be enacted, then the survey would be repeated every 2 years. The department can and should respond to even low levels of undesirable climate factors with strong affirmation of departmental values of inclusion and respect, and attempts to strengthen department culture. Our goal is for every member of the department to feel welcomed, supported and able to achieve their professional goals.

# METHODS

We developed the survey instrument (see the Survey Data Summary section for all of the survey questions/items) for this study using as a starting framework the publicly available [climate survey instrument developed by the Harvard Department of Government](#). That survey instrument consisted of more than 100 questions. In balancing a desire for information against an interest in making the survey short enough to facilitate high rates of response, we reduced and edited the list of questions as needed to adapt them to our department. Questions were grouped in sections corresponding to the following subject areas: Demographics, Overall Department Climate, the climate in department-wide Weekly Seminars, Seminar-Style Classes (we considered both of the latter important, but distinct, venues for exchange and discussion where civility is a key factor in climate), Discrimination and Harassment. Some conditionality was built into the survey questions (e.g., if a respondent answered “no” to a question about whether they had experienced harassment, they were not subsequently shown questions about how often they had experienced harassment).

The survey was built in Qualtrics, and administered in October 2019 via an email containing the survey link to all department faculty (including all emeritus faculty and faculty at regional campuses), graduate students (including BSMS students), postdoctoral researchers and staff. We did not attempt to survey undergraduate students; the Committee believes that undergraduates have a role and experience that is valuable but distinct from other groups in the department, and that assessing the climate for undergraduates is likely to be more appropriately done by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

We strove to be inclusive while still restricting participation in the survey to those whose experience in the department could be considered current: we included in the email list any student, postdoctoral researcher or staff member who had been enrolled and/or actively employed in the department between September 2017 and July 2019. We also included any staff who were not employed by the department but whose day-to-day work primarily involved interaction with members of the department. We excluded anyone who had joined the department after our July 2019 end date, as having joined the department too recently to have an informed perspective on the climate. We also excluded research technicians who worked only for 3-4 month summer contracts. The entry section of the survey asked emeritus faculty to forgo responding if they had not been active in the department in the previous two years.

The survey was open between October 4 – 28, 2019. Reminders to complete the survey were sent to the email list weekly during that interval and members of the committee used email, meetings, seminars, and other gatherings to encourage members of the department to respond to the survey.

The questions in this initial survey covered broad categories of participants' experience in the department rather than asking for details of particular experiences, although participants had opportunities via free-writing in comment boxes to go into detail. Questions used a 5-point Likert Scale (with 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree") of agreement with statements about respondents' experiences.

The survey was completely confidential; responses were not linked to respondent identity, and the survey was administered by an external survey expert (Dr. Tamika La Salle, in the Neag School of Education), who compiled the data, and reported only aggregate data to the Committee. In order to maintain anonymity Dr. La Salle summarized general themes emerging from free-written comments, and only exemplar quotes that characterize the themes, without identifiers, are included in the report. **No member of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, including the Department Head, has access to the raw data that might reveal the identity of a respondent through their combination of answers to survey questions.** This approach secured respondents' privacy, but also precludes the department from taking certain actions in response to specific experiences reported. Thus, no disciplinary or investigative actions can be taken in response to reported discrimination or harassment. Any individuals who have experienced or witnessed cases of discrimination or harassment are encouraged to [report these through the existing channels at the Office of Institutional Equity](#) so disciplinary actions and preventative measures can be pursued. Nonetheless, knowledge confers the power to act: the Committee expects the results to be useful to, and used by, the department in deciding how to commit attention and resources to strengthening department culture and climate.

# RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 100 participants, out of 166 who were emailed the link, completed the survey, a response rate of 60% (Figure 1). The complete demographics of the sample are reported in Section A of the Data Summary of this report. Faculty members were the largest group of respondents, and the majority of faculty members invited to participate (39 of 46) did so. Fewer than half of all graduate students who were invited to participate responded. Most staff and postdoctoral researchers who were invited responded, with staff participation somewhat lower.

## Survey Participants

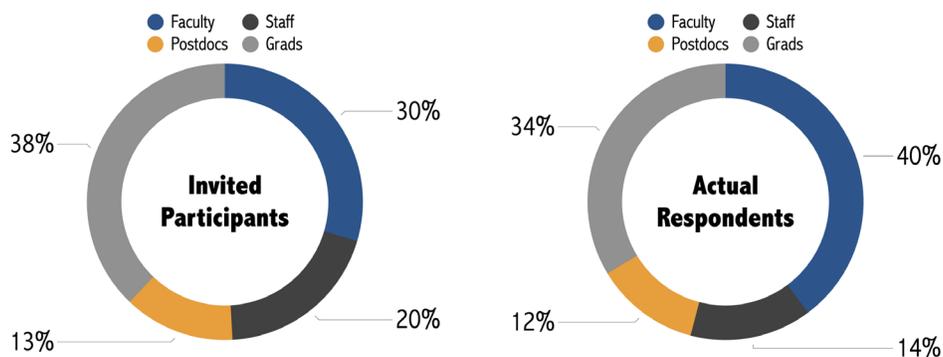


Figure 1: Department members invited to participate in the survey, and the respondents who actually participated

Respondents were not quite evenly split by gender, and were overwhelmingly white (Figure 2), as opposed to self-identifying as of a minoritized race or ethnicity. The response rate approximately mirrors the proportion of white to non-white department members invited to participate.

## Demographics



Figure 2: Gender and racial makeup of respondents

## Demographics

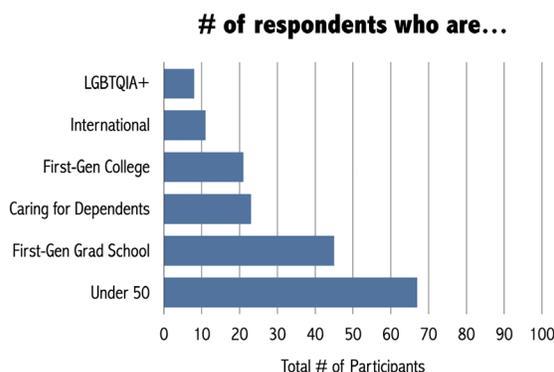


Figure 3: Characteristics of respondents who participated in the survey

The majority of respondents in the department are under 50 (Figure 3), and almost one quarter self-identify as caring for dependents. Forty-five percent of respondents are (or were) the first in their family to go to graduate school; one-fifth of all respondents are (or were) the first in their family to go to college. Fewer than 10% of respondents identify as LGBTQIA+.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: DEMOGRAPHICS

A higher response rate from graduate students, who represent the greatest number of department members overall, should be a high priority goal of the next iteration of the departmental climate survey.

- Additional communications to the graduate student population specifically in the weeks before the next survey launches, and tracking of the accumulation of graduate student respondents during the open survey period, with targeted reminders to participate, should be employed.
- Possibly the most important action the department can take to improve participation is an open and public response to concerns expressed in this survey. To feel motivated to respond, students and other community members must feel that their answers are valued and will lead to genuine action to improve the department.

This survey was not needed to establish that the make-up of our department does not reflect the diversity of the U.S. population, but the small numbers of non-white and LGBTQIA respondents is a reminder that departmental efforts to increase diversity in our ranks should be a high priority. This is especially true given recent events highlighting the lack of racial justice in the U.S., and the lack of BIPOC students and scholars in ecology and evolutionary biology, specifically.

- Establish and maintain a regular program of intra-departmental education on unconscious bias and structural racism in academic settings: at least annually, bring in (or locate and encourage attendance at) training; conduct a reading group on the history of racism in ecology and evolutionary biology (e.g., eugenics); bring nationally recognized scholars in on these subjects for our seminar series.
- The department should send representatives annually to national professional conferences for minoritized groups (e.g., SACNAS), for relationship building and recruitment.
- Reach out to and establish relationships with cultural centers on campus (e.g., the African American Cultural Center, the Rainbow Center), as a way to gain insight into why minoritized undergraduates are not choosing EEB as a major.
- Identify student groups on campus that focus on BIPOC or LGBTQI+ interests to target for outreach and recruiting.
- Establish, for course credit (or student work-study payment), an advisory board of minoritized EEB undergraduates to provide feedback on diversifying EEB. Provide compensation of some form for anyone doing work that advances the department's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts.

That nearly half of all our respondents are the first in their family to attend graduate school is a positive sign that our department is serving as a pathway to professional careers in ecology and evolutionary biology. It is also a sign that the department should not assume that all members of the department are already well informed about professional norms and pathways to advancement.

- The graduate first-year seminar Preparing for a Career in EEB is an important and successful model that could be expanded upon.

- Create and regularly offer additional professional development offerings for graduate students that explicitly convey and support pathways to advancement in the field (e.g., “How to Get a Job” seminar) at career stages beyond the first year.
- Create and offer professional development opportunities for members of the department who are not graduate students, especially postdocs and staff (e.g., workshops/seminars on demystifying higher education administration, how to negotiate, etc.).
- Encourage all members of the department to take advantage of professional development opportunities external to the department, to take advantage of capacity and expertise offered elsewhere. Normalize the pursuit of such opportunities as appropriate use of professional time by establishing a process for funding attendance, to the extent resources permit.

When almost one quarter of all department members have responsibilities for dependent family members, careful consideration should be given to the ways the department culture can foster success without creating conflict with those responsibilities. University and College policies create a larger culture on these matters within which the department must operate (e.g., parental leave policies); within those boundaries the department has the capacity to act independently.

- Hold a panel discussion or listening session with department members who have dependents to generate action and policy ideas.
- Take K-12 school day-care hours into consideration when scheduling department-wide events such as seminars. Avoid scheduling important professional networking opportunities (e.g., receptions for visiting scholars) outside of regular weekday working hours.
- Create, and publicly communicate, support for flexible working arrangements. Such arrangements are especially critical in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## RESULTS: GENERAL CLIMATE

The data for items relating to the overall climate in the department are in Section B of the Data Summary section of this report. Overall, approval of department climate is high (Figure 4); the mean and median of agreement with the statement “I am satisfied with the overall climate I have experienced in the EEB Department” were 4.16 and 4, respectively (when 5 = “Strongly Agree”). Ninety-one percent of all respondents used one of the top 3 agreement values. Half of all respondents strongly agreed with the statement “I would encourage a peer or colleague to join the EEB Department” agreement, and ninety-three percent of all respondents used one of the top 3 agreement values in response to this question. Half of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements covering whether the respondents felt welcome, valued, supported and recognized for their work.

### General Climate

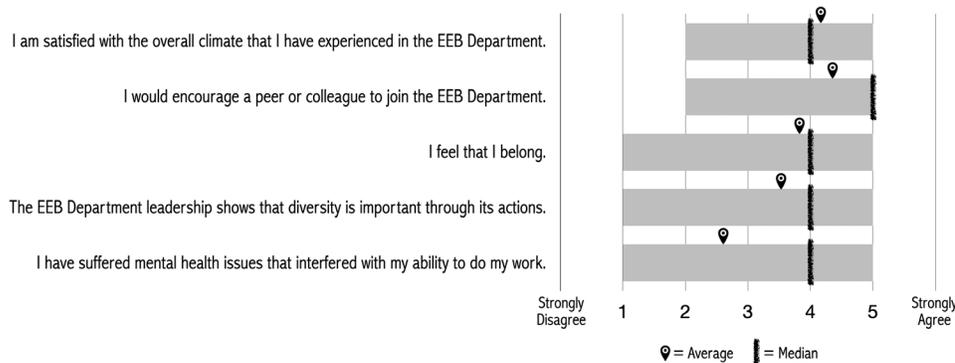


Figure 4: Degree of agreement with statements about the overall climate of the department

Nonetheless, these sentiments were not universally shared—at least a few people feel less than comfortable and sufficiently supported. The minimum rating registered was 1 (“Strongly Disagree”) on 13 of 16 positive statements about the department; 2 of the 3 statements with the widest variety of answers (which is to say, the largest number of respondents who disagreed at least somewhat) were “I feel that I belong” and “The EEB leadership shows that diversity is important through its actions”.

Mental health appears to be the topic of greatest concern (Figure 4). While the mean agreement with “I have suffered mental health issues that interfered with my ability to do my work” was 2.60 (which is to say, on average respondents have not suffered mental health issues), half of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Responses to the question about mental health did not correlate well with the rest of the survey. That is, whether individuals are suffering from mental health challenges has little bearing

on whether they indicated overall satisfaction with the department, or not. Privacy shields on this survey make it impossible to determine which demographic in the department is most likely to suffer mental health issues; nonetheless, recent national studies suggest that graduate students are particularly susceptible (see this [2018 Inside Higher Ed article](#) for a recent summary). Our survey was administered before the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is likely that the challenges and uncertainty associated with the pandemic have exacerbated challenges to mental health.

One statement on the survey, “The EEB Department places too much emphasis on issues of diversity, inclusion and belonging” was included in order to assess whether members of the department were unified in the belief that diversity, equity, and inclusion were important values. The responses were puzzling; the mean agreement with the statement was 1.89, while the median was 4, and the responses to this item did not correlate well with the rest of the survey (i.e. whether an individual agreed with this statement does not predict how they may have responded to other questions bearing on diversity or inclusion). We conclude that because the statement was the only one in this section phrased as a negative (thus, to *disagree* with the statement was to agree that the department should focus on diversity, equity and inclusion as goals) a large fraction of respondents were confused by the phrasing, and may have chosen a high agreement rating for this statement when their true response would have been disagreement. We conclude that this item was uninformative and should be rephrased in future iterations of the survey.

## ***RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: GENERAL CLIMATE***

While UConn has mental health resources for employees and students, the department itself currently has no explicit resources or support systems in place to help these members of our community. Resources and expertise for therapy and other interventions are greater outside the department; nonetheless the department can do much to educate, validate and relieve poor mental health symptoms. For example:

- Normalize discussions about mental health issues; bring it up in the First-Year seminar taken by all incoming graduate students, and distribute information on how and where to access [university mental health resources in an editable document](#) that all members of the department can add to. Provide a link to this document on the department web page; send an email reminding department members of its existence annually.

- Use one weekly seminar slot per year to invite speakers on mental health issues in academia. We suggest inviting Meghan Duffy (University of Michigan Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology), who is well-known for her work on mental health in graduate students, to give a half day workshop on supporting mental health in academia, along with a seminar on her research in aquatic ecology.
- Take 5-10 minutes of weekly seminar series to draw attention to mental health resources: a short presentation of resources available on campus; a campus mental health expert to lead mental wellness exercises; etc.
- Schedule and run short daytime (e.g., at the lunch hour) stress-busting, community building events, (e.g., chair yoga, ice cream, games). Participation of departmental leaders and faculty in these will communicate that taking a break, even when busy, is an important tool in remaining productive, and model a commitment to good mental health.

Despite laudable efforts to improve gender diversity (e.g., EEB was the first department nationally to attempt a gender-blind hiring process), and with excellent gender balance in graduate student and faculty populations, our department members remain overwhelmingly white, and non-LGBTQIA+. When even a few members of our community feel that the department leadership, mentors, teachers, and advisors are not demonstrating the importance of diversity and inclusion by their actions, we should seek ways to extend the work we are already doing. Suggestions for enhancing the department's efforts are distributed throughout the report (see Demographics, above), but it would be valuable to ensure that the department is communicating directly with all its members on the efforts being made to increase diversity, equity and inclusion.

## RESULTS: WEEKLY SEMINAR

The survey asked for responses to a series of statements regarding the climate in the department’s weekly public seminar series, in which researchers from other institutions are invited to visit, meet with members of the department, present their research, and respond during an open question and answer session. These seminars are the only professional setting in which the entire department gathers and interacts in one place at one time, and thus represent an important barometer of the departmental culture of professionalism, civility and respect. Summary data for this block of items is in Section C of the Data section of this report.

### Weekly Seminar

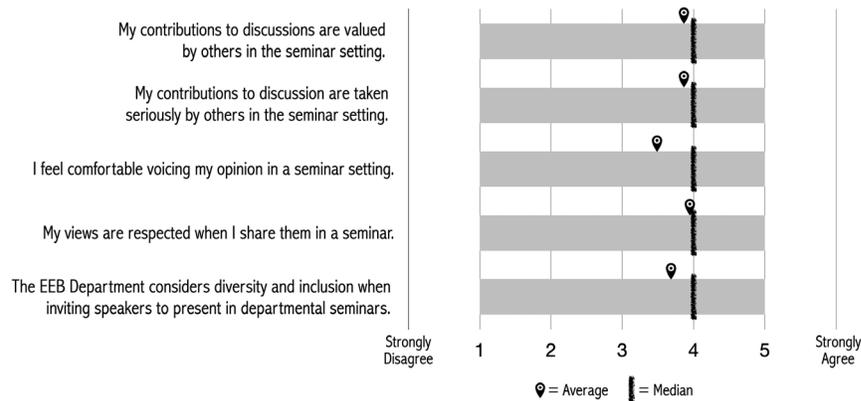


Figure 5: Degree of agreement with statements about the climate in department-wide weekly seminars

In general, members of the department agreed that the weekly seminar is a respectful, civil space, where diversity and inclusion are considered when inviting speakers (Figure 5). However, not everyone feels comfortable voicing their opinions in this setting. The statement “I feel comfortable voicing my opinion in a seminar setting” had the lowest mean agreement (3.48) and the highest variance (1.67)—which is to say spread of opinion among respondents—of any item in this section of the survey. This may have to do with factors other than a hostile climate (e.g., a lack of confidence in early-year grad students), but it is not possible to tease those factors out on a respondent population of this size without privacy concerns. Half of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The EEB Department considers diversity and inclusion when inviting speakers to present in departmental seminars” and 86% of all respondents used one of the top three agreement values, but the variance was comparatively high at 1.33, suggesting that at least a few members of the department feel that we could be giving this matter more consideration.

It appears there may have been some confusion among respondents about the difference between survey items that addressed the Weekly Seminar, which is open to everyone, and the survey items that addressed the graduate seminar-format (i.e., discussion) classes (see Seminar Classes, Figure 7, and below). In contrast to the Departmental Climate items, which were almost universally responded to, the Weekly Seminar items were skipped by 9-14% of respondents. The Seminar Classes items (which were presented to participants after those about the Weekly Seminar) were skipped by almost 30% of respondents, suggesting that respondents thought they were redundant. An alternative explanation is that skip rates in these sections of the survey may have been influenced by the number of participants who never participate in Seminar Classes (e.g., staff, emeritus faculty). The Committee received feedback external to the survey that indicated that staff, in particular, are not aware that weekly seminars are open to them, that topics often don't feel relevant to the staff roles, and there is at least some concern among staff that immediate supervisors may not approve of staff using paid time to attend Weekly Seminars.

## ***RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: WEEKLY SEMINAR***

We could be more explicit in communicating that seminars are for the intellectual enrichment and professional development of everyone in the department.

- Annual statements at the start of the academic year, directed in particular to new graduate students, postdocs and staff, may help make it clear that the participation of all members of the department at weekly seminars is important, valued, and encouraged.
- Devote a faculty meeting to a discussion of the value and implications of staff using paid time to attend seminars, and whether seminar topics could be expanded to include subjects of interest to staff. Encourage supervisors to be explicit in their encouragement of staff who wish to attend weekly seminars.

The department should strive to further improve, and communicate its interest in improving the diversity of speakers invited to present at the weekly seminar series.

- Make a practice of examining the complete roster of potential invitees that have been suggested by faculty and graduate students for a given semester; balance first invitations in order to ensure diversity and inclusion in the final pool of speakers.

- If the pool of suggestions is low in diversity, re-ask for suggestions, and explicitly identify low diversity in the suggestions as the reason for asking again. This not only serves to diversify the pool of suggestions, but communicates that the department is attentive to diversity and inclusion in its invitation process.
- Invite the [Project Biodiversify](#) staff to come and give their seminar/workshop to the department on using BioDiversify's repository of materials, which provide examples from primary research and the personal experiences of scientists that identify with underrepresented groups in biology, in teaching.
- Department members should be made aware of the [DiversifyEEB database](#) for identifying potential speakers. Use the "role models" identified in the [Project Biodiversify teaching materials](#) to identify potential speakers to invite.

Personal connections with the speakers ease a sense of discomfort at asking questions or voicing opinions for students. The department should make a more consistent practice of facilitating one-to-one interaction between graduate students and the seminar speakers.

- Encourage graduate students to attend the graduate-student-only lunch and to sign up for one-to-one meetings with the visiting weekly seminar speakers.
- Consider reserving a minimum number of one-to-one meeting slots with the speaker for graduate students.
- Provide department subsidized food at graduate student lunches with the seminar speaker for the students as an incentive to attend.
- Explicit encouragement from faculty advisors would demonstrate that they consider such interactions an important professional activity, and not "slacking off".
- Explicitly encourage visiting speakers to call on a diversity of audience members during the question and answer part of presentations.

## RESULTS: SEMINAR CLASSES

Seminar Classes are low credit, usually ungraded, discussion-based graduate level courses which frequently involve more than a single faculty member, and often include postdocs or staff. These are largely perceived as positive, respectful spaces (Figure 6). The summary data are in Section D of the Data section of this report. Most (> 91%) respondents agreed with the statements “My contributions to discussions are valued by others”, “My contributions to discussions are taken seriously by others” and “My views are respected when I share them”.

### Seminar Classes

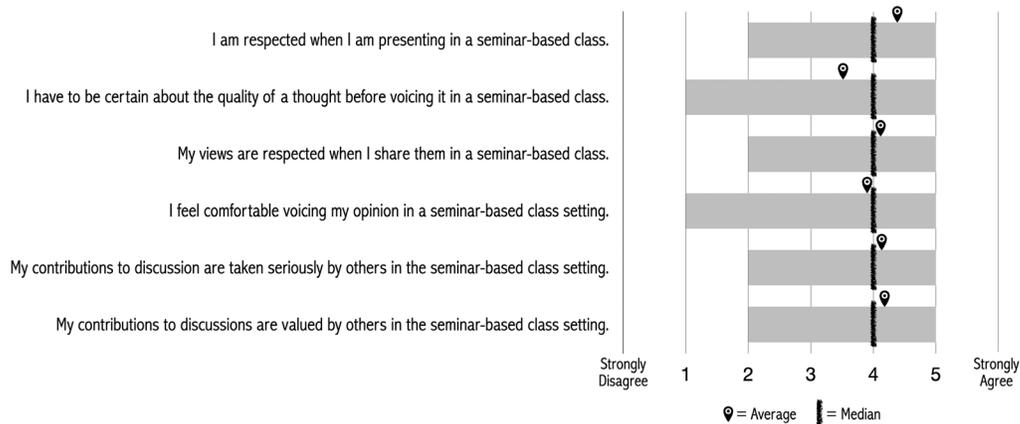


Figure 6: Degree of agreement with statements about the climate in seminar-style classes

Respondents were more mixed with respect to their level of comfort speaking in seminar classes; “I have to be certain about the quality of a thought” and “I feel comfortable voicing my opinion” had somewhat lower average agreements (Figure 7) had the highest and second highest variance (1.33 and 1.2, respectively) of the items in this section of the survey. Given that respondents largely agree that seminar classes are respectful spaces, the greater spread of responses to these items may simply reflect the span of confidence from first-year graduate students to senior faculty.

## ***RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: SEMINAR CLASSES***

Discussions in seminar classes are arguably the first, and most important, venues in which graduate students encounter models of interaction among professionals in academia. It is gratifying that survey respondents rate the climate in them as respectful, but more could be done to increase their value by ensuring equitable and inclusive discussions, and training students to be comfortable voicing opinions and ideas.

- Structure seminar classes to ensure that everyone speaks (e.g., pose a question that everyone in the room will answer by design) at least some of the time.
- Bring in a trainer to teach a workshop on strategies for facilitating equitable discussions (who speaks first, who speaks longest, who speaks most often, how to disrupt patterns arising from implicit bias, or perceived status hierarchies).

# RESULTS: DISCRIMINATION

Levels of discrimination in the department appear to be low; only 4 respondents out of 90 (< 5%) responding to these items reported experience with discrimination (Section E of Data Summary); the total number of discriminatory events was fewer than 20. The ideal rate of incidents of discrimination is zero, and low rates of reporting discrimination should be viewed with caution; low reporting rates sometimes indicate that respondents do not trust that their privacy is protected, and consider reporting discrimination a risk (T. La Salle, pers. comm).

Half of those who said they experienced discrimination formally reported the incident at the time (Section G, Data Summary). This survey did not ask to whom discrimination was reported or the outcomes of these reports. Reasons for not reporting were evenly split among not thinking anything would be done, thinking they would not be believed, or that it was not a serious enough offense.

Of those who experienced discrimination, a quarter of those experiences (Figure 7) involved unfair comments, with fewer incidences (in descending order of prevalence) of being denied full participation; being denied resources necessary to be successful; being denied pay raises or other professional advancement; being treated unfairly by an instructor; and being treated unfairly by a student. “Other” unspecified forms of discrimination accounted for another 25% of discriminatory experiences.

## Discrimination

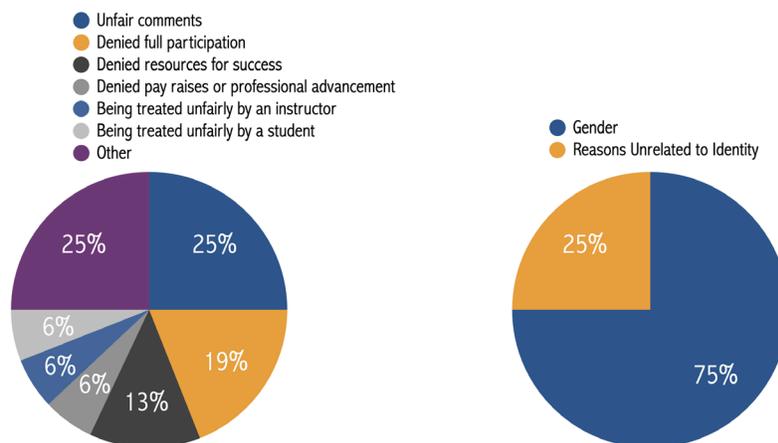


Figure 7: Forms and basis of discrimination reported by respondents to the survey

Most experiences of discrimination were based on gender; the remainder were reported as discrimination for “reason unrelated to my identity”. None of the reported experiences of discrimination were tied to race/ethnicity, mental health status, or sexual orientation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: DISCRIMINATION**

Many lines of research demonstrate that gender discrimination is widespread, and arises in many cases from unconscious bias which is equally prevalent in men AND women. University-mandated Sexual Harassment Prevention and Discrimination Awareness trainings constitute a single two hour session for new hires and graduate students, which likely has little effect on day to day behavior. The department has pro-actively considered unconscious gender discrimination in hiring processes, and should extend those efforts further to address day-to-day interactions.

- To date, the Department does not have a formal Values Statement. The department should write a formal Values Statement, with input from all departmental constituencies, and post it on the department web page. It should be disseminated to all members of the department annually to ensure that new members of the department are informed. Ensure that it is accompanied by a statement of unacceptable actions, and their consequences.
- The Office of Institutional Equity offers trainings to departments and could provide workshops in the department on what constitutes discrimination and the appropriate channels for reporting and addressing discrimination events.
- Invite a nationally recognized discrimination scholar to give a seminar on the forms and effects of unconscious bias in academic settings.
- Provide a workshop on recognizing and avoiding unconscious bias in a variety of professional settings (e.g., in letters of recommendation).
- Provide a workshop on “How to Have Difficult Conversations” or “Allyship”, to facilitate the ability of department members to challenge discriminatory behavior productively.
- Collaborate with the Women in Math, Science & Engineering (WiMSE) learning community to provide workshops for women in the department (on, e.g., dominance in professional interactions, or negotiation skills).

# RESULTS: HARASSMENT

Levels of harassment in the department reported in this survey are low, but higher than those of discrimination: 15 of 90 (17%) respondents to this section of the survey reported having experienced harassment at least once (Section F, Data Summary).

Formal reporting rates at the time of incidents of discrimination and harassment (50% and 47% respectively) in EEB are actually quite high compared to national statistics. For perspective, a [2016 EEOC report on workplace harassment](#) states, “The least common response of either men or women to harassment is to take some formal action – either to report the harassment internally or file a formal legal complaint.” (report emphasis, pg. 16) They cite studies showing that only 30% of individuals who experience harassment talk about it with an authority member from their workplace or union.

Just under half of those who reported experiencing harassment formally reported the incident at the time that it happened (Section G, Data). Just over 20% of the remaining cases were not reported because the respondent did not think it was serious enough to report. In 13% of cases that went unreported, the respondent did not report because the incident was off campus. Believing that nothing would be done, and feelings of shame, embarrassment or emotional distress each accounted for an additional 13% of unreported incidents, with fewer cases of incidents being unreported because the respondent had had previous negative experience with reporting, did not know what to do or who to tell, didn’t feel they would be believed, or did not want to get the harasser in trouble.

The data (Figure 8) suggest that the form harassment takes is mostly “conversational”—a combined 53% of the incidents reported in this survey were “Derogatory, embarrassing, or humiliating” remarks, emails, texts

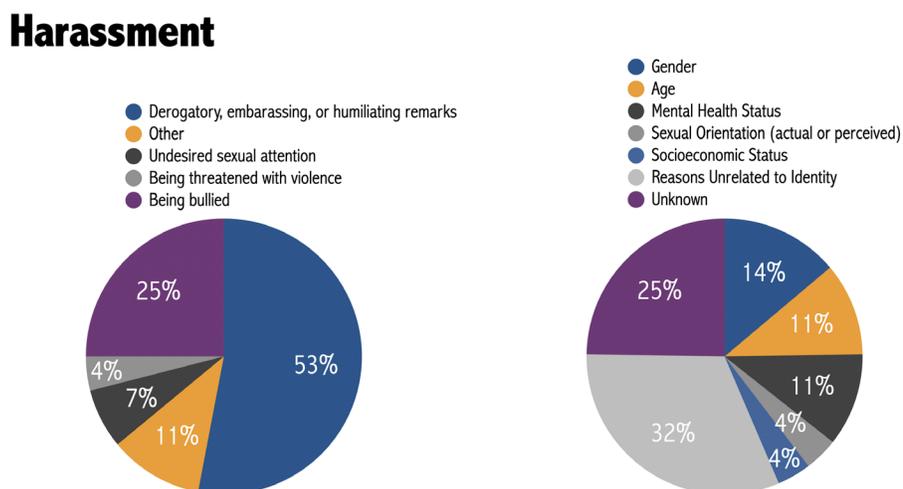


Figure 8: Forms and basis for incidents of harassment reported by respondents to the survey

or social media posts. One quarter of the incidents were reported as “being bullied”. Very small incidences of “undesired sexual attention” and, alarmingly, “being threatened with physical violence” were also reported.

Most reported incidents of harassment were not associated with aspects of the respondents’ identity (or were associated with factors unknown to the respondent), but 14% were associated with gender, 11% with each of age and mental health status, and 4% with each of sexual orientation and socioeconomic status (Figure 8).

## ***RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: HARASSMENT***

Even low levels of harassing actions, whether intentional or inadvertent, threaten our goal of making EEB a welcoming, inclusive and productive professional environment. Reports of respondents being bullied, or physically threatened, are of particular concern. While scholarly work is defined, to an extent, by critical feedback, it is vital that all department members recognize when their words and actions cross the line into bullying. Physical threats are absolutely unacceptable under any circumstance, and the department must ensure that all its members are safe. We suggest that the department take actions as suggested below, and then re-run the survey in 2 years. To the extent that the department convinces participants that their privacy is secure, and issues are addressed, we expect that the number of reported incidents may go UP when respondents learn to identify some behaviors as harassment or discrimination and/or trust us enough to respond honestly. If harassment has been underreported in this survey, a rise in reports will count as success in getting a more accurate assessment.

- To date, the Department does not have a formal Values Statement. The department should write a formal Values Statement, with input from all departmental constituencies, and post it on the department web page, and ensure that it is disseminated to all members of the department, annually, to ensure that new members of the department are informed. Ensure that it is accompanied by a statement of unacceptable actions, and their consequences.

- The Office of Institutional Equity offers trainings to departments; provide workshops in the department on what constitutes harassment and the appropriate channels for reporting and addressing harassment events.
- Devote 5-10 minutes periodically at weekly seminars for short talks/exercises on what counts as harassment, bias, or microaggressions.
- Provide a workshop on “How to Have Difficult Conversations” or “Allyship”, to facilitate the ability of department members to challenge inappropriate or harassing behavior productively.
- Provide department level training on communication skills, and navigating difficult topics—both how to be sensitive to others, and how to speak up for yourself and build confidence in your voice.

Unlike other professional peer groups in the department (grads, postdocs, faculty) staff do not meet regularly as a group and therefore have no mechanism to build community, communicate about issues among themselves, or advocate as an interest group to anyone in a position of power.

- Create a regular staff meeting, to facilitate communication, community building, and advocacy for staff concerns in the department.
- Designate a formal staff delegate to the faculty meeting.



<b>Word/Phrase</b>	<b>Number of Times Present</b>	<b>Positive Context</b>	<b>Negative Context</b>	<b>Neutral or Mixed</b>	<b>Themes</b>
mental health	<b>6</b>	0	6	0	Mental health affected by department work/dynamics
uncomfortable	<b>4</b>	2	2	0	Related to level of comfort approaching faculty to talk
harass, harassed, harassment	<b>16</b>	1	11	4	Direct experience, witnessing, and reports of harassment
anxiety	<b>5</b>	0	5	0	Anxiety as a result of department work/dynamics
support, supported, supportive	<b>23</b>	13	7	3	Feelings of the department being overall supportive
power	<b>4</b>	0	4	0	Power dynamics between (1) junior and senior faculty, and (2) faculty and students
collegial	<b>5</b>	5	0	0	Feelings of collegiality in the department
inclusive	<b>4</b>	1	3	0	In terms of guest speakers, course content, discussions
intimidate/intimidating	<b>4</b>	0	4	0	Experiences of intimidation by faculty and students
safe	<b>5</b>	2	2	1	Feelings of safety with other members of the department/as an employee in the department
respect, respected, respectful	<b>11</b>	3	8	0	Varying degrees of respect for avenues of research / Faculty respect toward students / Faculty respect towards staff
abuse, abused, abusive	<b>9</b>	3	6	0	Experiences of direct abuse/abuse of power
work, workload, teamwork	<b>24</b>	7	13	4	Overwhelming workload / Lack of teamwork / Work-life balance / Department is a good place to work
bias, biased	<b>8</b>	0	8	0	In terms of grading, favoring students, diverse viewpoints, demographic identity

Table 1: Themes emerging from free-written comments

## RESULTS: FREE-WRITTEN COMMENTS

Free-written comments give respondents the opportunity to express perspectives and feelings about the department climate that the numerical data fails to capture. Overall, thematic material from the free-written comments suggest that, even though the averages of the numerical scores are fairly consistently high, experiences are still polarized (see Table 1 for incidence of positive vs. negative associations of frequently used words).

Comments were split between respondents who perceive the climate as positive (who we hereafter refer to as Satisfied), respondents who perceive their own experiences as positive but perceive that some of their peers or colleagues have had unpleasant experiences (the Concerned), and respondents who do not perceive the climate in a positive light (the Dissatisfied).

### OVERALL CLIMATE

The number of comments on Overall Climate were skewed toward Dissatisfied remarks; this, set off against the numerical scores, suggests that those who are Satisfied did not feel moved to provide additional, free-written comments.

Respondents who are Satisfied with the Overall Climate in EEB are characterized by very positive comments, such as:

*“My personal experience with EEB has felt welcoming and inclusive - I feel respected and valued for my contributions, and encouraged to participate in outreach and collaboration with faculty and peers.”*

Dissatisfied respondents provided comments that identified important issues, which require attention, such as:

*“I think that as a whole the UCONN EEB department is great, but it suffers from academic wide problems. The competitive nature of academics invades every part of my life. I feel guilty for not working hard enough, I feel like a failure on a regular basis. I think part of this comes from the fact that only traditional successes (defenses, grants, publications) are celebrated and until that happens nearly all of the feedback someone will get is critical. Yes, critique is a key part of science, but I can't believe how seldom anyone says that I am doing a good job or my work matters.”*

*“I feel that there is a strong distinction made between professional staff and academic/research employees in EEB; as a staff member, I have the impression that my time and my work is less valued than that of those in other positions.”*

*“Burnout is horrible, everyone talks about work-life balance, but nobody acts on it. It feels disingenuous.”*

*“The department is only minimally inclusive to those with a spouse and/or children.”*

*“Mostly, it’s a problem of trust. I don’t trust any faculty in EEB to truly advocate on my behalf.”*

## **WEEKLY SEMINAR AND SEMINAR CLASSES**

Important themes that arose from free-written comments about these venues for interaction in the department had to do with intimidation, and respect, especially with respect to faculty/graduate student power imbalances.

Satisfied comments included:

*“I think the more recent organizers have been giving more thought to diversity in inviting speakers which is appreciated.”*

Concerned comments noted that faculty awareness of power imbalances are important for making seminar classes welcoming:

*“Seminar-based classes go best when the faculty involved are conscious of the danger of dominating the conversation and have explicit agreements about how to give the students at LEAST equal airtime.”*

Dissatisfied comments included:

*“While I feel comfortable in seminars, it is a common occurrence to be spoken over, and to have my statements reiterated by someone else. This is often by male graduate students, and especially male faculty.”*

## HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

Similar themes emerged from these sections of the survey. Free-written comments suggest that a few specific (unidentified for privacy reasons) instances of bullying, intimidation, and threats have induced mental health crises and withdrawal from departmental social activities.

Other Concerned or Dissatisfied comments included:

*“I hope this survey is a step in the right direction in terms of improving the way people treat each other in the department. I don’t need everyone to be my best friend, but to at least be respectful and collegial. Thank you for doing this!”*

*“I’ve experienced very little in the way of overt discrimination in this department, but that doesn’t mean that I haven’t learned to recognize that I get asked to do certain things, or not credited for certain things, because I am not male. The way in which these perceptions get dismissed or argued down is itself a sign of the problem.”*

*“Overall, there are some in the department who are biased against/have little respect for/fail to recognize the value of some areas of research outside of their own interests.”*

## FINAL COMMENTS

The free-written responses at the end of the survey were dominated by Satisfied comments, but still contained Concerned and Dissatisfied comments which the department should take seriously as warranting action.

Satisfied comments included:

*“I enjoy being part of EEB. I feel safe and appreciated here. Hopefully others have had similar experiences.”*

*“Personally, I have never experienced a better work environment than that within EEB, nor heard of other university departments that are more congenial to work in. I hope that others feel the same and value the creation of this survey as a way to discover whether their reality matches my experience.”*

*“Overall I feel respected and safe in our department, and I appreciate that the department is doing this survey to make this even better. As a graduate student, it is important to know those with more power above us (faculty, staff, etc) care about these topics.”*

Concerned comments included:

*“I don’t consider anything that has happened to me beyond what would be normally experienced in a work environment. Ninety-five percent of the time, EEB has been a great place to be.”*

*“I think that most people here experience EEB as an incredibly kind, nurturing, and supportive place. I certainly have. But I do know that there have been a handful of graduate students in the last eight years who have not experienced it that way, and felt that the ra-ra-ra EEB-is-so-great mentality made it really difficult for them to find a way to voice their difficulties. I appreciate this climate survey being run and I really hope that people are able to say the things they haven’t been able to say.”*

Dissatisfied comments included:

*“I believe that the experience of staff in EEB is likely very different from that of faculty, research professionals, or students. EEB seems like an extremely collegial and supportive academic environment, in which cooperation is more prevalent than competition and many members of the faculty work actively to promote diversity and equity in the department and in their fields. However, as a staff member I do not feel as if I am a part of that community, and at times feel less valued, overlooked, or even condescended to. Of course, this phenomenon is probably not uncommon in academia, and may in fact be far more pronounced in other departments, areas, or institutions.”*

*“The graduate student culture has had become quite toxic in the past few years and has started to garner a negative reputation among the other departments (and frankly the mental health service community on campus).”*

**SURVEY DATA SUMMARY REPORT:  
 UCONN DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY  
 DEPARTMENTAL CLIMATE, DISCIMINATION, & HARASSMENT  
 FALL 2019**

**A. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

<b>Total number</b> of survey participants:		<b>100</b>	
		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Percentage of participants identifying with each <b>gender</b> :	Male	51	51%
	Female	46	46%
	Third Gender/Nonbinary	0	0%
	Prefer not to say	3	3%
Percentage of participants identifying with each <b>race/ethnicity</b> :	White	86	89%
	Minoritized Race/Ethnicity	11	11%
Percentage of participants in each <b>departmental role</b> :	Dept. Staff (e.g. admin)	<b>14</b>	<b>14%</b>
	<i>Admin./Professional Staff</i>	5	22%
	<i>Lab Staff / Technician</i>	7	30%
	<i>Grant funded/end-date</i>	1	4%
	<i>UCPEA</i>	8	35%
	<i>AAUP</i>	0	0%
	<i>Research Associate/Assistant</i>	2	9%
	<i>Other</i>	0	0%
	Faculty Member	<b>39</b>	<b>40%</b>
	<i>Non-ladder</i>	7	18%
	<i>Junior ladder</i>	7	18%
	<i>Senior Ladder</i>	20	53%
	<i>Emeritus</i>	4	11%
	Graduate Student	<b>33</b>	<b>34%</b>
	<i>M.S. / Non-thesis / B.S.-M.S.</i>	5	15%
<i>Pre-candidacy Ph.D.</i>	9	27%	
<i>Post candidacy Ph.D.</i>	19	58%	
Post-Doc	<b>12</b>	<b>12%</b>	
Percentage of participants in each <b>age group</b> :	20-29	28	29%
	30-39	26	27%
	40-49	13	13%
	50-59	11	11%
	60-69	17	18%
	70-79	2	2%
	80+	0	0%
Percentage of participants identifying as <b>LGBTQIA+</b> :	8	8%	
Percentage of <b>first-generation college</b> participants:	21	21%	
Percentage of <b>first-generation graduate school</b> participants:	45	45%	
Percentage of participants <b>caring for dependents</b> :	23	23%	
Percentage of <b>international</b> participants:	11	11%	

## B. DEPARTMENTAL CLIMATE

ALL MEAN RATINGS ARE BASED ON A SCALE OF STRONGLY DISAGREE (1) TO STRONGLY AGREE (5).

Strongly Disagree with Statement		Neutral Toward Statement		Strongly Agree with Statement
1	2	3	4	5

**Average overall rating of department climate:** 3.96

**Average ratings of each item:**

I am satisfied with the overall climate that I have experienced in the EEB Department.	<u>4.16</u>
I would encourage a peer or colleague to join the EEB Department.	<u>4.35</u>
I feel that I belong.	<u>3.82</u>
The people in this department value me.	<u>3.98</u>
I can be my authentic self here.	<u>3.94</u>
I am recognized for my work in this department.	<u>3.88</u>
I am provided opportunities to make positive impact on community/society.	<u>4.12</u>
My personal accomplishments are recognized.	<u>3.93</u>
I am afforded opportunities to pursue my goals.	<u>4.21</u>
Good work is recognized by peers and colleagues.	<u>4.16</u>
I am made to feel like my work is useful.	<u>3.94</u>
My peers and colleagues support me when I am facing personal challenges.	<u>3.93</u>
My peers and colleagues support me when I am facing professional challenges.	<u>4.00</u>
I have access to the resources necessary for me to be successful in my career.	<u>4.02</u>
I have suffered mental health issues that interfered with my ability to do my work.	<u>2.60</u>
Department leadership shows that diversity is important across its actions.	<u>3.52</u>
The department places too much emphasis on issues of diversity, inclusion, and belonging.	<u>1.89</u>
Mentors/teachers/advisers are sufficiently sensitive to issues of diversity, inclusion, and belonging.	<u>3.67</u>

**Average reported extent to which work is limited/negatively affected by:**

Gender/gender expression	<u>1.88</u>
Race/ethnicity	<u>1.49</u>
Social Class	<u>1.64</u>
Political Views	<u>1.61</u>
Religious affiliation	<u>1.59</u>
Mental health	<u>2.23</u>
Family responsibilities	<u>2.07</u>
Another aspect of background/identity	<u>1.85</u>

### C. WEEKLY SEMINAR SERIES

*ALL MEAN RATINGS ARE BASED ON A SCALE OF STRONGLY DISAGREE (1) TO STRONGLY AGREE (5).*

Strongly Disagree with Statement		Neutral Toward Statement		Strongly Agree with Statement
1	2	3	4	5

**Average overall rating of climate in weekly seminars:** 3.77

**Average ratings of each item:**

My contributions to discussions are valued by others in the seminar setting.	3.86
My contributions to discussion are taken seriously by others in the seminar setting.	3.86
I feel comfortable voicing my opinion in a seminar setting.	3.58
My views are respected when I share them in a seminar.	3.94
The department considers diversity/inclusion when inviting speakers to present in departmental seminars.	3.68

### D. SEMINAR-BASED CLASSES

*ALL MEAN RATINGS ARE BASED ON A SCALE OF STRONGLY DISAGREE (1) TO STRONGLY AGREE (5).*

Strongly Disagree with Statement		Neutral Toward Statement		Strongly Agree with Statement
1	2	3	4	5

**Average overall rating of climate in seminar-based classes:** 4.06

**Average ratings of each item:**

My contributions to discussions are valued by others in the seminar-based class setting.	4.18
My contributions to discussion are taken seriously by others in the seminar-based class setting.	4.13
I feel comfortable voicing my opinion in a seminar-based class setting.	3.90
My views are respected when I share them in a seminar-based class.	4.11
I have to be certain about the quality of a thought before voicing it in a seminar-based class.	3.51
I am respected when I am presenting in a seminar-based class.	4.38

### E. DISCRIMINATION

*ALL MEAN RATINGS ARE BASED ON A SCALE OF STRONGLY DISAGREE (1) TO STRONGLY AGREE (5).*

Strongly Disagree with Statement		Neutral Toward Statement		Strongly Agree with Statement
1	2	3	4	5

**Average level of comfort talking to faculty or department authority about issues of abuse:** 3.80

Percentage of participants reporting **experiences of discrimination** in the EEB Department: 5%

Of participants who experienced discrimination, **reported forms of discrimination:**

Being denied pay raises, promotion or professional advancement	6%
Being denied the resources necessary to be successful in your scholarship or other work.	13%
Being treated unfairly by an instructor	6%
Being treated unfairly by a student	6%
Unfair comments in a EEB Department classroom, workshop, or other work environment	25%
Being denied full participation in a EEB Department classroom, workshop, or other work environment	19%
Other	25%

Reported incidents of discrimination **based on aspects of identity:**

Sexual Orientation (actual or perceived)	0%
Gender Identity	75%
Race/Ethnicity	0%
Pregnancy	0%
Marital Status	0%
Nationality	0%
Disability Status	0%
Political Views	0%
Religion	0%
Age	0%
Socioeconomic Status	0%
Veteran Status	0%
Mental Health Status	0%
Reason unrelated to my identity	25%
Other/Unknown	0%

Average number of reported incidents of discrimination perpetrated by **the same individual:**

None	0%
1-3	75%
4-6	25%
7-9	0%
10 or more	0%

Average number of reported incidents of discrimination perpetrated by **different individuals:**

None	0%
1-3	50%
4-6	50%
7-9	0%
10 or more	0%

## F. HARASSMENT

ALL MEAN RATINGS ARE BASED ON A SCALE OF STRONGLY DISAGREE (1) TO STRONGLY AGREE (5).

Strongly Disagree with Statement	Neutral Toward Statement	Strongly Agree with Statement
1	2	3
4	5	
<b>Average level of comfort talking to faculty or department authority about issues of harassment:</b>		3.76
Percentage of participants reporting <b>experiences of harassment</b> in the EEB Department:		17%
<b>Of participants who experienced harassment, reported forms of harassment:</b>		
Derogatory, embarrassing or humiliating remarks or gestures		39%
Derogatory, embarrassing or humiliating emails, texts or social media posts		14%
Being bullied		25%
Being threatened with physical violence		4%
Experiencing physical violence		0%
Undesired sexual attention		7%
Other		11%
<hr/>		
<b>Reported incidents of harassment based on aspects of identity:</b>		
Sexual Orientation (actual or perceived)		4%
Gender Identity		14%
Race/Ethnicity		0%
Pregnancy		0%
Marital Status		0%
Nationality		0%
Disability Status		0%
Political Views		0%
Religion		0%
Age		11%
Socioeconomic Status		4%
Veteran Status		0%
Mental Health Status		11%
Reason unrelated to my identity		32%
Other/Unknown		25%
<hr/>		
<b>Average number of reported incidents of harassment perpetrated by the same individual:</b>		
None		0%
1-3		73%
4-6		13%
7-9		7%
10 or more		7%

Average number of reported incidents of harassment perpetrated by **different individuals**:

None	7%
1-3	80%
4-6	13%
7-9	0%
10 or more	0%

## G. OUTCOMES OF DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

*ALL MEAN RATINGS ARE BASED ON A SCALE OF STRONGLY DISAGREE (1) TO STRONGLY AGREE (5).*

Strongly Disagree with Statement		Neutral Toward Statement		Strongly Agree with Statement
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

	DISCRIMINATION	HARASSMENT
Percentage of participants who <b>formally reported</b> the incident(s):	<u>50%</u>	<u>47%</u>
If applicable, <b>reason(s) for not reporting</b> the incident:		
I did not think it was serious enough to report	<u>33%</u>	<u>21%</u>
I did not think anything would be done	<u>33%</u>	<u>13%</u>
Fear of negative workplace consequences	<u>0%</u>	<u>13%</u>
Fear that it would not be kept confidential	<u>0%</u>	<u>0%</u>
Did not want to get the person in trouble	<u>0%</u>	<u>4%</u>
Did not know what to do or who to tell	<u>0%</u>	<u>8%</u>
The incident was off campus	<u>0%</u>	<u>13%</u>
Feelings of embarrassment, shame, or emotional distress	<u>0%</u>	<u>13%</u>
Did not feel I would be believed	<u>33%</u>	<u>4%</u>
Negative previous experience with reporting	<u>0%</u>	<u>8%</u>

**As a result of the incident(s)**, extent to which participants:

Considered leaving the EEB Dept. for a different UConn Dept.	<u>1.91</u>	<u>2.00</u>
Considered leaving UConn altogether	<u>2.27</u>	<u>2.79</u>
Considered pursuing a non-academic career path	<u>2.45</u>	<u>2.89</u>
Discouraged others from joining the EEB Dept.	<u>1.91</u>	<u>2.32</u>
Discouraged others from pursuing an academic career path	<u>2.09</u>	<u>2.21</u>
Experienced a negative impact on mental health	<u>2.91</u>	<u>3.63</u>

## REFERENCED LINKS

<https://gov.harvard.edu/government-department-climate-survey>

<https://equity.uconn.edu/reporting-form/>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/12/06/new-research-graduate-student-mental-well-being-says-departments-have-important>

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1w8btDySA7KBH4jB8hhRGEHwXhBCJevI5/view?usp=sharing>

<https://projectbiodiversify.org/>

<https://diversifyeeb.com/>

<https://projectbiodiversify.org/materials/>

<https://www.eeoc.gov/select-task-force-study-harassment-workplace>