

Princeton Astrophysics Climate Survey 2018 – Public Summary

Fall 2020

The Department of Astrophysical Sciences conducted our first department-wide climate survey in November 2018, with a department-internal report produced in Spring 2019. 91 out of 150 department members participated in the survey. The survey was run by the Princeton Office for Institutional Research, with resulting data and anonymized comments passed to the climate survey committee. The demographic breakdown of survey participants by role, gender, and race/ethnicity is shown in Fig. 1. The survey responses were split by gender or by role, but not by race/ethnicity due to small group sizes. This is a brief summary of the main findings as well as the actions we, as a department, have taken to address them. The next survey is due to take place in Spring 2021.

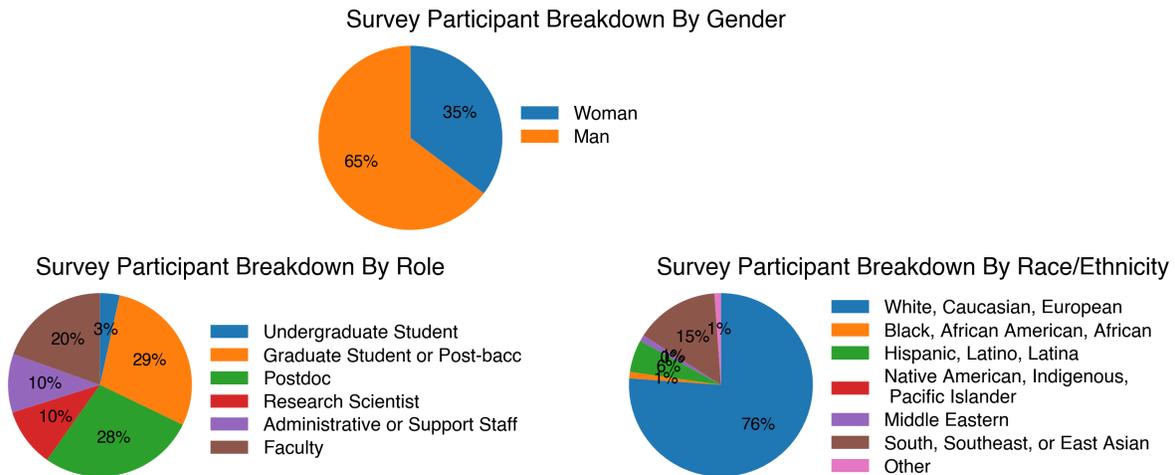


Figure 1: Fraction of participants by (a) gender, (b) departmental role, and (c) race/ethnicity.

Positive Aspects of the Climate

Comments described the department as warm, friendly, welcoming, and open. They cited a sense of familiarity and interaction as beneficial in contributing to a good atmosphere. In response to the questions, the majority of people (more than 80%) agreed with the statements that they are comfortable with the climate in Peyton Hall, and at Princeton (Fig. 2). A similar majority also agreed that the department cares about a positive climate, and takes seriously and acts upon the values of diversity and inclusion. Department social events are valued in creating a good atmosphere. Intellectually, the majority of participants (more than 80%) agreed that they have adequate opportunities for stimulating scientific discussions. The majority of department members report that they feel their peers treat them with respect.

Areas for Improvement¹

Comments from many respondents welcomed the survey, with fewer than half of the students and post-docs agreeing that there was yet adequate department discussion of climate issues^[2]. Comments suggested that despite good intentions, the department could do more to foster an inclusive climate, including training toward countering unconscious biases^[6]. The demographic chart showed a strong skew to White and Asian participants, reflecting the overall department demographic, and comments called for a commitment to recruiting and supporting a more diverse group of people^[1]. Research productivity was reported to be a source of stress by the majority of students and post-docs^[4], and while many respondents reported feeling comfortable discussing personal challenges with

¹Relevant actions described in the next section are indicated with [number]

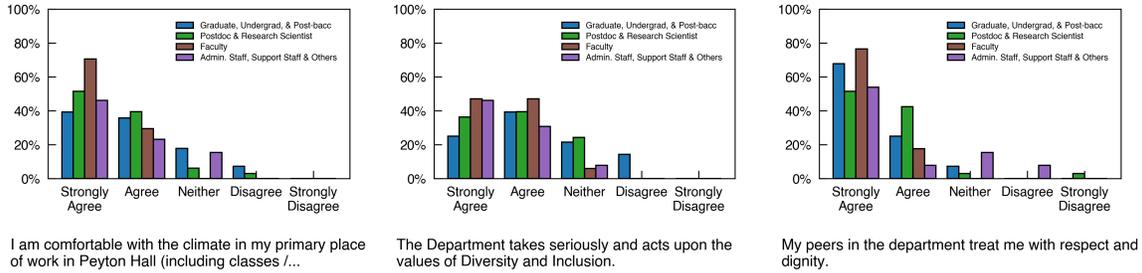


Figure 2: Agreement with positive statements about department climate broken down by role.

peers or staff, only half reported feeling comfortable discussing these with their primary supervisor; suggestions included making mental health resources more accessible^[6]. More than half of the students and post-docs reported that the department’s expectations were unclear concerning career outcomes, and comments encouraged more resources to explore options outside academia^[5]. Only a minority of students and post-docs reported feeling comfortable asking questions at colloquium or the post-colloquium lunch, and comments suggested adjustments to Astro Coffee (our daily journal discussion) and post-colloquium lunch to be more welcoming to junior people^[3]. The majority of people agreed they were happy with their workspace in Peyton Hall and able to be productive, but comments identified an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) noncompliant meeting space in the building^[7], and noted some challenges of overcrowding and noise from hallway conversations and neighboring offices.

Suggested Actions, and Departmental Responses

1. *Demonstrate a top-down commitment to supporting diversity when hiring, admitting graduate students, and inviting speakers.* **Actions taken:** As a department, we had discussions on this and related issues in summer 2020, resulting in a departmental Action Plan for Equity and Inclusion, with new faculty role of Equity and Inclusion Coordinator.
2. *Host regular talks and discussion about department climate, equity, and inclusivity.* **Actions taken:** Held summer 2020 colloquium series focusing on equity and inclusion; started series of EDI talks with Physics department for 2020-21. Started regular astro-justice journal club. Created department climate webpage including actions taken to promote inclusion.
3. *Re-structure Astro Coffee (journal discussions) and post-colloquium lunch to support open discussion where all are valued.* **Actions taken:** Held a dedicated department-wide discussion on Astro Coffee and adjusted the format of Astro Coffee to aim for better inclusivity, run by a rotating list of graduate students, postdocs, and faculty.
4. *Clearly define expectations for graduate students and post-docs.* **Actions taken:** Created a graduate student handbook with expectations agreed on by both the faculty and students, and created a post-doc manual.
5. *Provide resources and encouragement for non-academic career paths.* **Actions taken:** Started ‘Outside Academia’ series of monthly discussions with alumni in careers outside academia.
6. *Provide training and resources for all members of the department to learn about unconscious bias, mental health, and inclusivity.* **Actions taken:** Working with the university to provide cohort-based training for the department.
7. *Review accessibility within department meeting spaces.* Action not yet taken.