

**University Council Minutes**  
**April 22, 2024**  
**3:30 PM**  
**145 Steger Hall Conference Center and Zoom**

**Present:** Tim Sands, (presiding), April Myers, Kim O'Rourke, Cyril Clarke, Amy Sebring, Laurel Miner for Daniel Sui, Frances Keene, Aimée Surprenant, Rachel Holloway, Alan Grant, Debra Stoudt for Laura Belmonte, Tsai Lu Liu, Kevin Pitts, Julia Ross, Lara Khansa for Saonee Sarker, Lee Learman, Tyler Walters, Natalia Guerrero, Joe Merola, Rachel Miles for Robert Weiss, Evan Lavender-Smith, Janice Austin, Jennifer Jones, LaTawnya Burlison, Callan Bartel, Kiera Schneiderman, Shahed Sanuri, Alex Efird, Rachel Maizel, Yohan Sequeira, Riley DeHority, Emily Tirrell, Gary Long, Nicole Pitterson, Stuart Feigenbaum, Rodney Gaines, Charles Lowery, Virginia Buechner-Maxwell, Renee LeClair, Amber Robinson, Melissa Faircloth, Kelly Oaks, John Gray Williams, Eric Glenn, & Francisco Carvallo for Dave Close

**Absent with notice:** Bryan Garey, Paul Winistorfer, Stephanie Trout, Kari Evans, William Storey & Sally Shupe

**Absent:** Menah Pratt, Daniel Givens, Paul Knox, Dwayne Edwards, Daniel Hindman, Lujean Baab, & Serena Young

**Guests:** Monty Abbas, Mark Sikes, Caitlin Armstrong, James Bridgeforth, Zai Cook, Becca Berglie, Felicity Bilow, Lori Rose, Doyee Byun, Catherine Cotrupi, Ashley Dayer, Kayla Dean, Poorvesh Dongre, Holli Gardner Drewry, Carol Geary, Aaron Gross, Leslie Howe, Katie Hundley, Soumil Joshi, Justin Lemkul, Monique Logan, Julie McClafferty, Kat Nelson, Olivia Ryan, Demetria Somervell, & Stacey Wilkerson

Dr. Sands called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. A quorum was present.

**1. Adoption of Agenda**

A motion was made and seconded to adopt the agenda. The motion carried.

**2. Announcement of approval and posting of minutes of April 1, 2024**

Dr. Merola noted that these minutes have been voted on electronically and can be publicly accessed on the Governance Information System on the Web (<http://www.governance.vt.edu>).

**3. Unfinished Business**

Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs  
Resolution CGPSA 2023-24A  
Resolution to Protect Against Caste and Caste-Based Discrimination

At the April 1 University Council meeting, second reading was deferred to May 6, 2024.

**4. New Business**

Commission on Faculty Affairs  
Resolution CFA 2023-24D  
Resolution to Amend Article IV and Clarify Sections of the Faculty Senate Constitution

Justin Lemkul presented the resolution for first reading. This resolution defines the faculty types that are eligible for membership in the Faculty Senate and eliminates the cap on number of senators permitted. This resolution also clarifies research faculty and their representation as well as explains processes for selecting alternate senators. Additionally, this resolution will update language in the Faculty Senate Constitution to be consistent with language in the University Council Constitution.

Commission on Faculty Affairs  
Resolution CFA 2023-24E

Resolution to Endorse the Statement on the Responsible Use of Research Metrics at the University Level

Rachel Miles presented the resolution for first reading. This statement is meant to be educational and used as guidance. It is important for the university community to be aware of the information collected on the use of metrics in research and the relationship to faculty promotion, tenure, and awards. This statement is not intended to be university policy and has been approved by the Faculty Senate.

Commission on Faculty Affairs  
Resolution CFA 2023-24F

Resolution to Revise Faculty Handbook Language on Nominations to University Distinguished Professor and Alumni Distinguished Professor

Justin Lemkul presented the resolution for first reading. This resolution revises the Faculty Handbook to give the President and the Executive Vice President and Provost an opportunity to make nominations for University Distinguished Professor and Alumni Distinguished Professor. This will provide an additional path for faculty to receive this recognition and will not impede nominations being made using the existing process.

Commission on Faculty Affairs  
Resolution CFA 2023-24G

Resolution to Update the Faculty Handbook Description of Expectations for Promotion and Tenure

Justin Lemkul presented the resolution for first reading. This resolution clarifies evaluating contributions for clinical faculty, specifically with the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine and the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine.

#### **4. Presentation**

Rachel Maizel, President of the Graduate and Professional Student Senate, gave a presentation on the GPSS climate survey results (attached).

Dean Surprenant provided the following opening remarks:

“I wanted to begin by thanking Rachel and her colleagues for carrying out these climate surveys, compiling the results, and sharing them with the various departments and the University Council. It has been a great deal of work including a great deal of emotional labor. Thank you.

“Given our limited time here today we will be concentrating on the areas where improvements are necessary and not identifying and celebrating the wonderful stories of support and empowerment. Those are plentiful, however.

“Engaging in difficult conversations surrounding graduate student climate issues is not only important but also necessary for fostering a supportive and inclusive academic community. These discussions provide a place for us to address concerns such as mental health, work-life

balance, diversity, equity, and inclusion, which profoundly impact the well-being and success of graduate students.

“Treating graduate students well is not just a matter of ethics; it's a strategic investment. When graduate students feel valued and respected, they are more inclined to engage their intellect fully in their research and scholarship. They become more resilient, more creative, and more productive. These students are the next generation of scholars, scientists, and leaders. By nurturing their talents and supporting their growth, we ensure a continuous stream of fresh perspectives and novel solutions to the complex problems facing our world.”

After: “I intend to form a Working Group on Graduate Student Climate and Success. The Working Group on Graduate Student Climate and Success is intended to address the concerns detailed today. This working group will be responsible for conducting a comprehensive review of current practices, policies, and experiences related to graduate student climate. The ultimate goal is to ensure a supportive and inclusive environment for all members of the academic community, particularly graduate students, who are integral to the mission and success of our institution.”

Rachel Maizel will provide an executive summary that will be distributed to University Council at a later date.

## **5. Announcement of Approval and Posting of UC Cabinet, Commission, and Committee Minutes**

These minutes have been voted on electronically and will be posted on the University web (<http://www.governance.vt.edu>). Note that the purpose of voting on minutes of the University Council Cabinet, Commissions, and Committees reporting to University Council Cabinet is to accept them for filing. University Council Bylaws require that policy items be brought forward in resolution form for University Council action.

- University Council Cabinet  
March 11, 2024  
March 25, 2024
- Commission on Administrative and Professional Faculty Affairs  
November 8, 2023  
February 14, 2024
- Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity  
November 15, 2022  
February 21, 2023  
March 21, 2023  
April 18, 2023  
September 19, 2023  
October 17, 2023  
November 17, 2023  
February 20, 2024
- Commission on Faculty Affairs  
September 29, 2023  
February 23, 2024  
March 22, 2024

- Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs  
March 13, 2024
- Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies  
March 20, 2024  
April 3, 2024
- Commission on Outreach and International Affairs  
March 21, 2024
- Commission on Staff Policies and Affairs  
October 24, 2023  
February 27, 2024  
March 26, 2024
- Athletics Committee  
March 21, 2024
- Climate Action, Sustainability, and Energy Committee  
February 26, 2024
- Transportation and Parking Committee  
March 12, 2024

## **6. Adjournment**

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 4:34 p.m.

# 2023-'24 GPSS Climate & Culture Survey

**Rachel Maizel, Charly Hartle, Zabrina Lewis, Trevor Jeyaraj, and Tori Engler**





# Acknowledgments:

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## **GPSS Climate & Culture Committee:**

Charly Hartle (Entomology, *defending*)  
Zabrina Lewis (Biological Systems Engineering)  
Trevor Jeyaraj (ASPECT)  
Tori Engler (Fish & Wildlife, *defending*)

## **Physics Ad-Hoc Committee:**

Nicholas W.G. Smith (*graduated*)  
Andrew Gustafson  
Sarah Healy  
Gyang Chung  
Alma Robinson (Advanced Instructor, Dept.  
DEI Committee Chair)  
Bryan Hanson (Graduate Ombudsperson)

## **Additional Acknowledgements:**

Dean Aimee Surprenant (Dean of Graduate  
School)  
Professor Mark Pitt (Physics Dept. Chair)  
Professor Camillo Mariani (Director of Graduate  
Program Physics)  
Dean Kevin Pitts (Dean of College of Science)

# Thank you



# Introduction:

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## Goals:

1. Understand where we are at the University, College, and Departmental levels.
2. Identify strengths and *areas of growth*

## Background:

1. Inspired by the Physics Ad-hoc Committee.
2. Students in Fall 2023 self selected which departments to survey.
3. November-December: Entomology, Fish and Wildlife, Sociology, English, Engineering Education, and Mechanical Engineering surveyed.
4. March-April discussions with departments on individual results.
5. **April 22nd** talk as a community overarching themes.

# Disclaimer:

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To respect student's anonymity as well as maintain confidentiality and trust we will not be showing specific department breakdowns besides physics (*already publicly available*).

We will be as clear as we can while protecting confidentiality and trust.

We want to be clear that this survey is not intended to ostracise or guilt any individual party or place individual blame... Well-meaning people may be skeptical of this whole endeavor, so we hope that the information provided here, directly from the experiences of the graduate student body, demonstrates that there are areas of concern than need to be addressed.



# Top Two Recommendations and Asks:

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1. Identify policies, practices and procedures that need to be changed to protect students from the institutional structures in place enabling mistreatment. Graduate students must be a main part of this conversation.
2. The University issue (a) a public statement prioritizing addressing these areas and (b) support both CGPSA and recognize that this is a community wide effort that will affect all constituencies.

# Survey Respondents:



Department	Total respondents that completed the survey	Percentage	Graduate School Climate Survey '22
Entomology	21	~48%	~44%
Fish and Wildlife	43	~45%	~48%
English	29	~53%	~33%
Sociology	15	~33%	~28%
Engineering Ed.	27	~49%	~39%
Mechanical Engineering	105	~32%	~26%
<i>Physics***</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>~57%</i>	<i>~44%</i>



# Survey Filters:

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Percent of completed respondents  $\geq 18\%$  for each of the 6 filters

## Sexuality/Gender Filters:

- **Heterosexual (Het) Cisgender(Cis) Male**  
Selected “Male” and “Heterosexual”
- **Non-Heterosexual(Het)**  
Did *not* select “Heterosexual”
- **Non-Cisgender(Cis) Male**  
Did *not* select “Male”

## Race Filters:

- **White Heterosexual(Het)**  
Selected “Heterosexual” and *only* selected “White”
- **Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME)**  
Did *not* only select “White”
- **BAME Non-Cisgender(Cis) Male**  
Did *not* only select “White” and did not select “Male”



# Outline:

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## Main areas of Growth/Mistreatment:

- **General areas extracted from student open-ended section**
  - **Further Broken down into *general themes***
- 1. Racial or Nationality Motivated Mistreatment
- 2. LGBTQ+ Motivated Mistreatment
- 3. Sexual or Gender Motivated Mistreatment
- 4. General Academic Abuse and/or Bullying
- 5. Ableism Motivated Mistreatment
- 6. Student Perception of Mistreatment Not Being Handled Effectively
- 7. Funding Related Concerns or Mistreatment

*Will address in  
Exec Summary*



# Racial or Nationality Mistreatment:

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There's too many to list... so we are just presenting a few

## 1. Misidentifying/misaddressing BAME students

- Mispronouncing/misspelling names repeatedly
- Inability to differentiate between students
- Incorrectly assuming race/nationality

## 2. Dismissal of identity

- Invalidating students' lived experiences
- Ignored or dismissed due to nationality

## 3. Financial exploitation

- Feeling targeted due to international status

## 4. General mistreatment, etc.

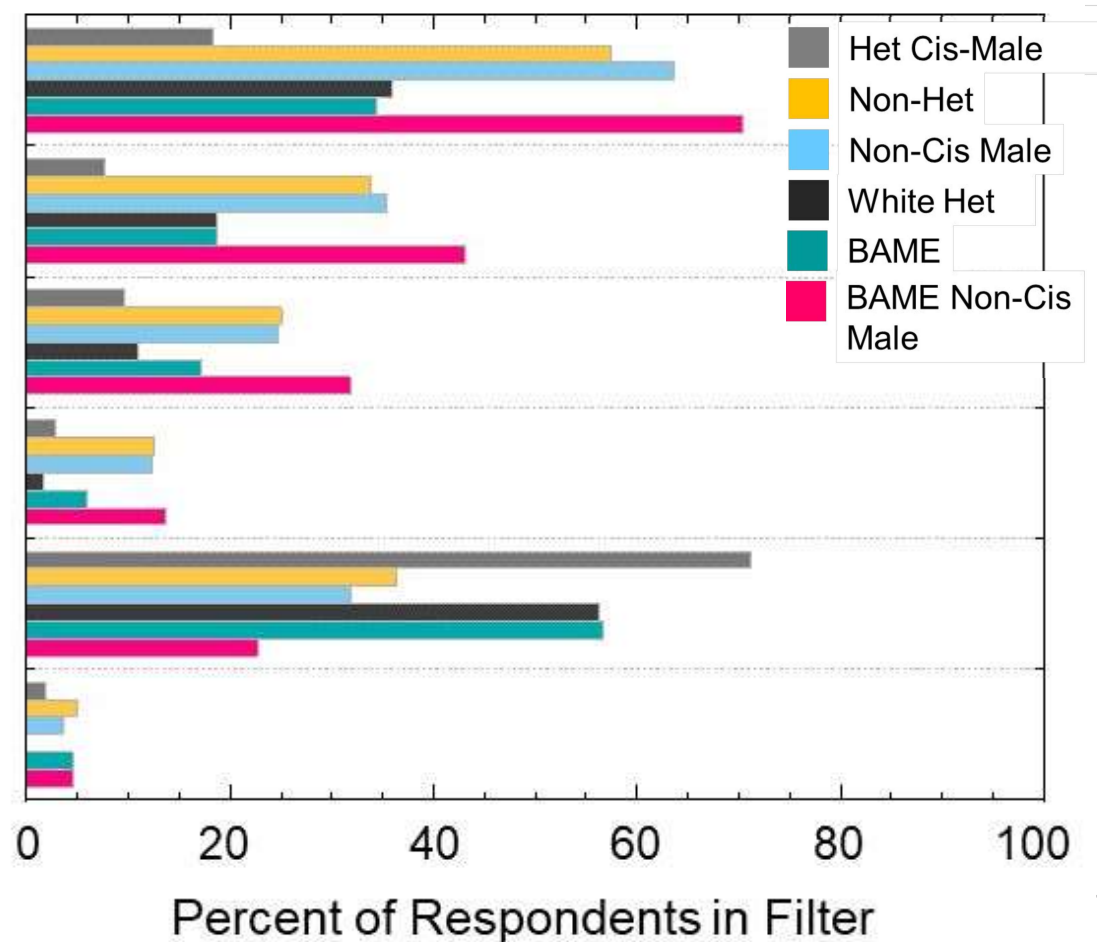
- Slurs
- False color blindness
- Boundaries violated
- Increased judgement

# Racial or Nationality Mistreatment:



Mark all that apply if you have ever experienced or witnessed the following:

- (a) Racial insensitivity
- (b) False color blindness/ invalidating of racial or ethnic identity
- (c) Racial hostility
- (d) Denied equitable research opportunities, funding, or resources
- (e) None at all
- (f) Other

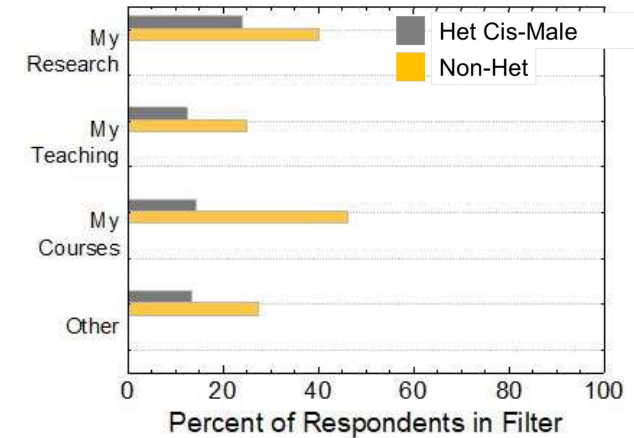


# LGBTQ+ Mistreatment:



## 1. Disrespect/disregard for identity

- Identity used to de-legitimize their work
- ~50% of non-het students feel like a spokesperson for their identity in courses
- General disrespect



## 2. General transphobia/queerphobia

- Jokes
- Purposeful misgendering and deadnaming
- Slurs
- Harassment



# Sexual/Gender Mistreatment:

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## 1. Bullying

- Condescension
- Being told don't belong
- Extreme harshness
- Treated differently than cis-male peers
- Being disparaged or lied about

## 2. Sexual jokes, etc.

- Jokes
- Lewd comments or suggestions

## 3. Uncomfortable working conditions

## 4. Harassment

- Clear Title IX violations

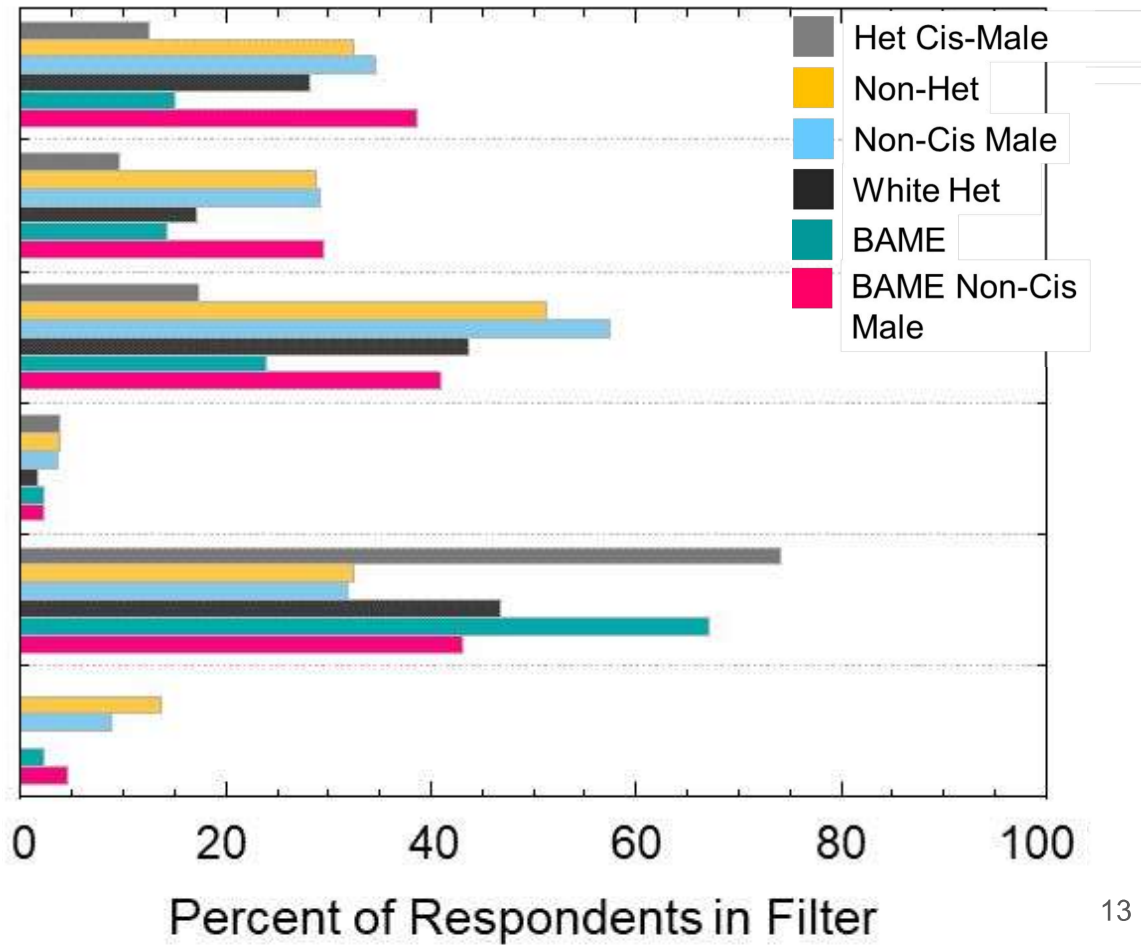


# Sexual or Gender Motivated Mistreatment:



Mark *all that apply* if you have ever experienced or witnessed the following:

- (a) Sexually based remarks or jokes that made you (or another) uncomfortable
- (b) You or another person's personal or physical boundaries encroached on
- (c) Being condescended, insulted or overly questioned
- (d) Opportunities to network were falsely advertised
- (e) None at all
- (f) Other





# General Academic Abuse/Bullying:

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There's too many to list... so we are just presenting a few

## 1. Toxic work environment

- Fearful environment
- Gaslighting
- Berating and verbal abuse
- Driving students to "mental health crises"
- Advisor taking anger out on students
- Name-calling
- Emotional abuse

## 2. Threatening students academically

- Threatening to withdraw help, graduation, termination, etc.

## 3. Ignoring safety protocols → unsafe working environment

## 4. General bullying/abuse

- Retaliation for speaking out
- Condescension, dismissive, shutdown, etc.
- Excessive criticism
- Excessive work hours



# Ableism Mistreatment:

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## 1. Lack of accommodations

- Feel like disability is never considered or accommodated without students having to put in a lot of legwork
- Perceived retaliation for requesting accommodations
- Refusing to provide accommodations despite accommodation letter

## 2. General discrimination

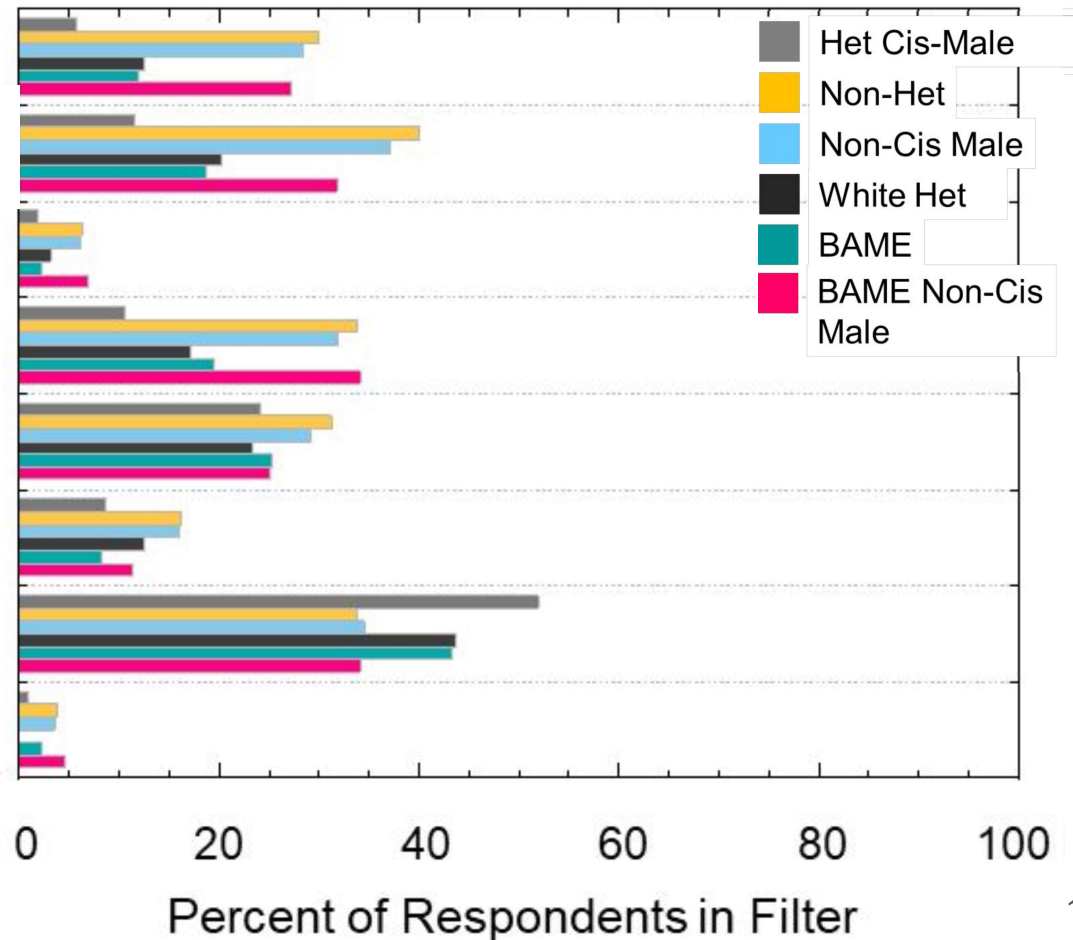
# Effects of Mistreatment

# Mistreatment-Academic Effects:



Indicate if experiences of mistreatment have affected *you* academically (mark all that apply)

- (a) Had difficulty attending classes/meetings
- (b) Had difficulty concentrating on course-related tasks**
- (c) Had to withdraw from a course or take an incomplete
- (d) Seriously considered leaving the program**
- (e) Had difficulty completing research duties
- (f) Had difficulty preparing/completing core exams (quals, prelims, etc.)
- (g) Did not affect at all
- (h) Other

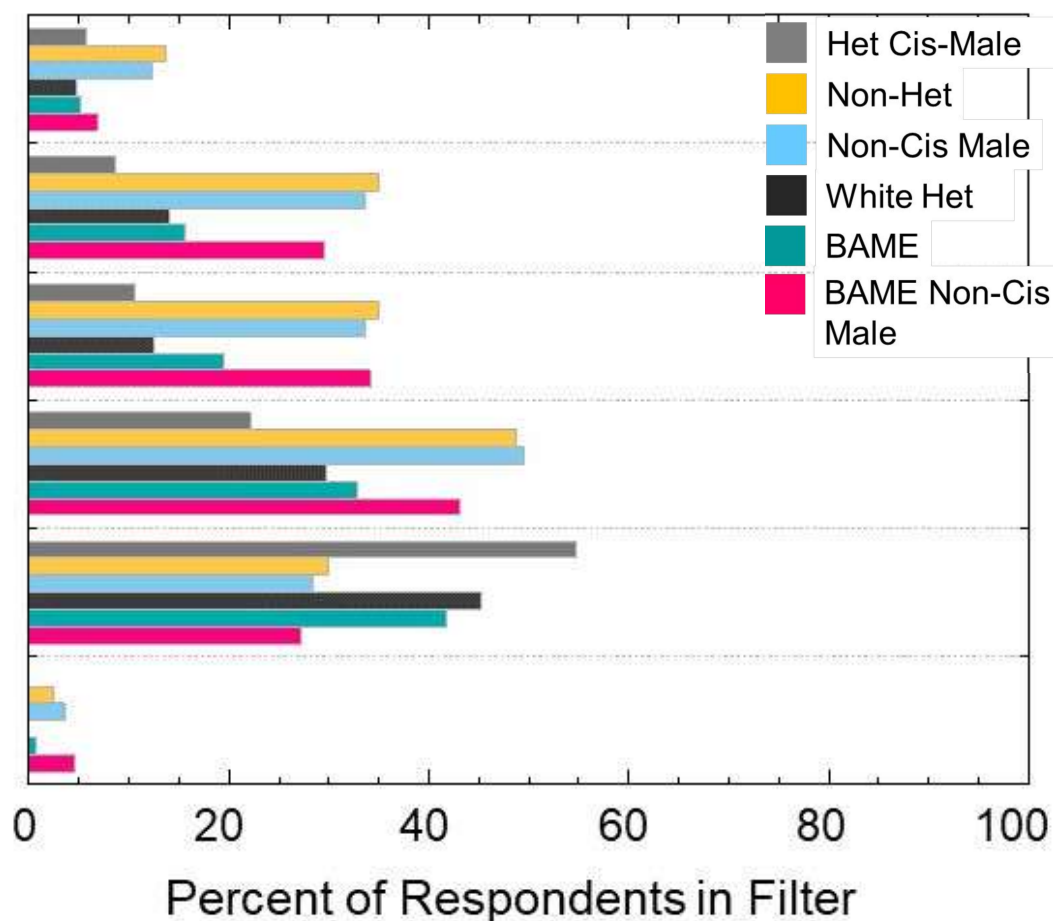


# Mistreatment-Day-to-Day Effects:



Indicate if experiences of mistreatment have affected *you* day-to-day (mark all that apply)

- (a) Changed offices or considered changing offices
- (b) **Avoided departmental or professional events**
- (c) **Changed daily routine to avoid certain people or places**
- (d) **Felt uncomfortable voicing your opinion or thoughts**
- (e) Did not affect at all
- (f) Other

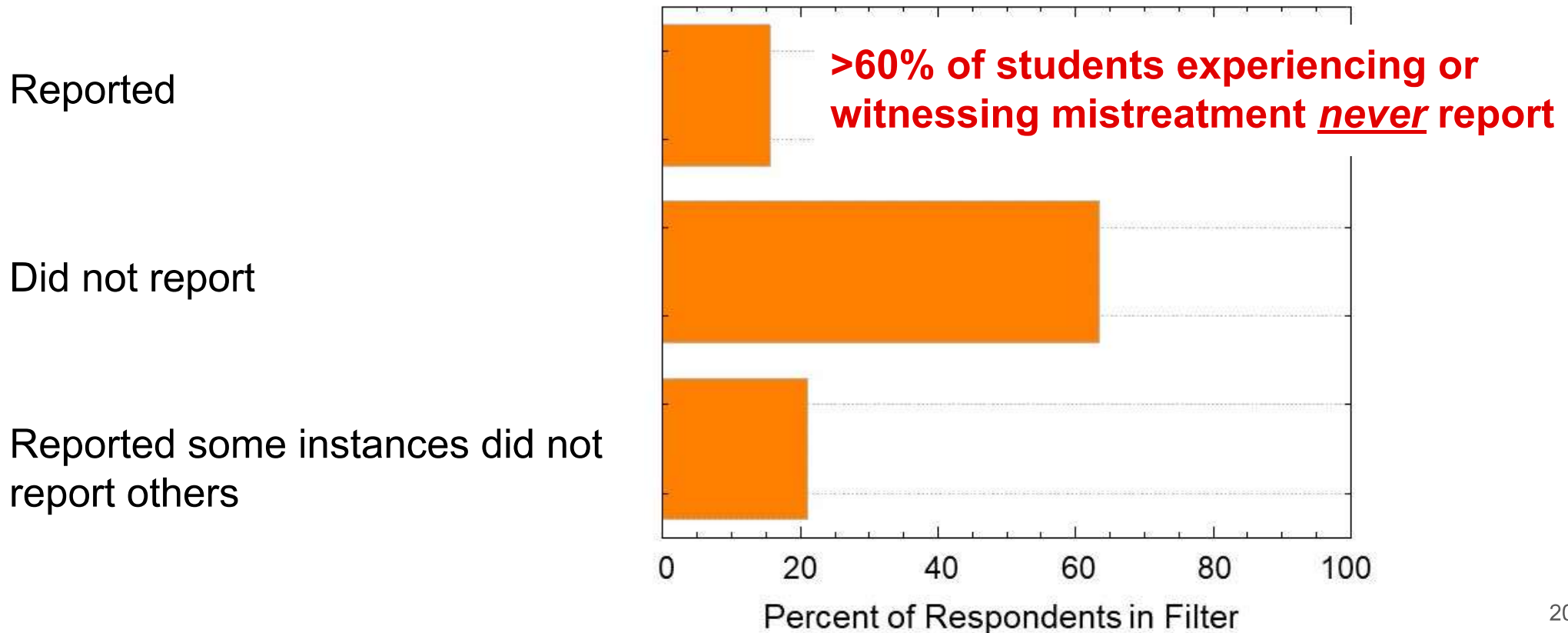


# Reporting



# Reporting:

**Question to the audience:** What percentage of students experiencing or witnessing mistreatment report to appropriate channels?





# Barriers Preventing Reporting:

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## Open-ended

Students were asked why they chose to report or not to report

## Why not?

Evaluated students responses picking out instances where they described why they chose *not* to report.

## Coding Themes

Sorted responses into 6 general themes



# Barriers Preventing Reporting:

**Question to the audience:** *Why* do you think students chose not to report?

Fear of Retaliation

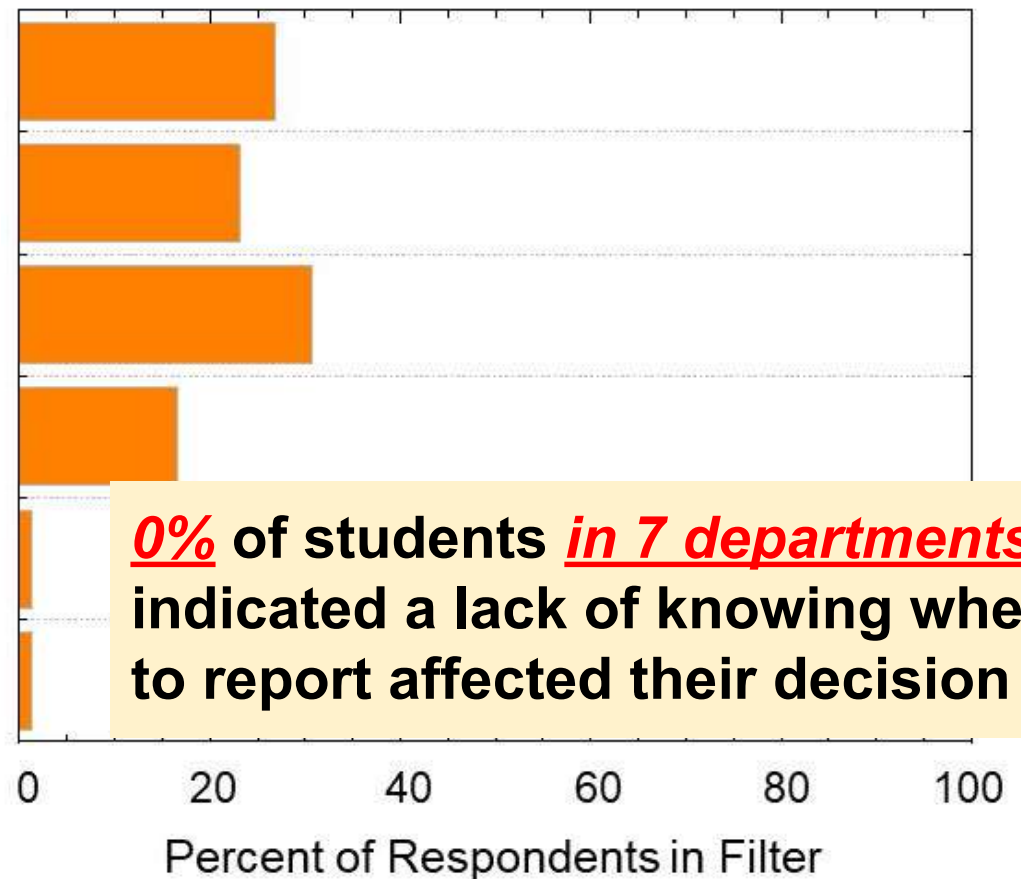
Didn't believe anything meaningful would be done

Didn't feel it was there place to report or was asked not to

Didn't believe it was severe enough/didn't want to get someone in trouble

Someone else reported it

Didn't want to stress the victim



# Student Recommendations:

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1. Work with PRIDE center for better LGBTQ+ training for **all** members of department.
2. Increased accountability in cases of mistreatment (e.g. take disciplinary action against faculty or staff mistreating students).
3. Listen more to student complaints about mistreatment.
4. Promote healthy relationships between advisors and students.
5. Monitor trends/concerning track records for faculty members.
6. More mandatory mentoring training and mental health resources for advisors.
7. Allow students to rotate labs

**Stay tuned, Executive Summary  
*coming soon!***

**Thank you**

# References

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UCR Climate Committee, *Study Group on University Diversity Campus Climate Report*, Tech. Rep. (University of California Riverside, 2007).

MIT Newsletter, “A study on the status of women faculty in science at mit,” (1999).

Frances A Houle, Kate P. Kirby, and Michael P. Marder, “Ethics in physics: The need for culture change,” *Physics Today* **76**, 28-35 (2023),

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*Improving Department Climate: Tools and Resources for Departments and Department Chairs*. (n.d.).

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<https://fas.columbia.edu/improving-department-climate-tools-and-resources-departments-and-department-chairs>



### Opening message:

We would like to thank you for your time and participation in filling out this survey. The goal of this survey is to provide a unique chance for a critical evaluation of the department and is an important stepping stone in improving the overall climate and culture. We ask that you be candid in your assessment of the climate of your department. These responses will provide us with valuable insight into what recommendations should be made to the department and University, as well as which issues should be addressed with priority.

We hope we can use this opportunity to have everyone's voices heard and accurately determine the culture of the department through this survey. We would like to emphasize that this survey is confidential. The GPSS Climate and Culture Ad-hoc Committee **will not release any of your raw data collected from this survey** to anyone outside of the Ad-hoc committee. We will submit a summarized report to the department, University, and GPSS utilizing the aggregated data to highlight the findings and to make recommendations. This report will make all efforts to remove identifying information within the data to minimize fears of retaliation.

The survey has about 30 questions and will take 10 minutes to complete. All questions are voluntary; answer only the questions which you are comfortable with.

We appreciate your participation.

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### **Confidentiality Statement:**

We appreciate your authentic and candid responses to this climate survey. We are taking measures to ensure that the data collected within this survey remains anonymous. Any reporting of the data will make every effort to ensure that the individual responses remain confidential. For example, no one outside of the ad-hoc committee will read your responses, and all identifying information within the responses to the open-ended question will be redacted to ensure confidentiality. This survey does not collect your IP address or email in an attempt to offer further anonymity.

If something does need to be reported to the office of Title IX they will not be able to do anything without your permission unless there is an imminent threat to your or others' safety. They will also not have your email or IP address so it will be difficult for them to identify the respondent.

If you find that this survey triggers the need to further share your experience in your program and you would like to talk with a confidential and informal resource, please feel free to reach out to the Ombuds for the Graduate School community at [gradombud@vt.edu](mailto:gradombud@vt.edu).

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### **Support Resources:**

At the bottom of each page of the survey, there is a link that will take you to confidential and non-confidential resources. If you need help taking the survey due to language or accessibility considerations please contact the survey team

Resources:

- **Office of Graduate Ombudsman**
  - [Gradombud@vt.edu](mailto:Gradombud@vt.edu)
  - 540-231-9573
- **Katie Polidoro Title IX Coordinator**
  - email: [polidoro@vt.edu](mailto:polidoro@vt.edu)
  - 540-231-1824

- To report “Gender Based Harassment and Violence” to Title IX directly via reporting form
- **Women’s Center at Virginia Tech**
  - [Womenscenter.vt.edu](http://Womenscenter.vt.edu)
  - [wcsupport@vt.edu](mailto:wcsupport@vt.edu)
- **Cook Counseling Center**
  - General/emergency appointment call 540-231-6557 to schedule
- **TimelyCare** (24/7 on-demand mental health support)
- The **Office for Equity and Accessibility** [oea.vt.edu](http://oea.vt.edu)
- **Dean of Students Office** [dos.vt.edu](http://dos.vt.edu)
- **Schiffert Health Center** [healthcenter.vt.edu](http://healthcenter.vt.edu)
- **Services for Students with Disabilities** Office [ssd.vt.edu](http://ssd.vt.edu)
- **Student Conduct Office** [studentconduct.vt.edu](http://studentconduct.vt.edu)
- **Virginia Tech Police Department** [police.vt.edu](http://police.vt.edu)
- The **Raft Crisis Hotline (FREE)** is a program of NRVCS (New River Valley Community Services) that offers free paraprofessional phone counseling services to the community. If you are in crisis or need someone to talk to, call Raft now at 540-961-8400. More info: <https://newriverville.wpengine.com/raft/>
- **RESPOND 24/7 crisis line (FREE)** – A mental health assessment and referral service of Montgomery Regional Hospital and Lewis Gale Hospital. Call 540-776-1100 or 800-541-9992

**Definition of identity** = a combination of characteristics, attributes, or behaviors that make us who we are. E.g. sexuality, race, gender, beliefs, etc., are all integral parts of identity.

For each of the following 4 statements select all that apply...

	Faculty	Post docs/Staff	Departmental Leadership	Graduate Students	Undergrad Students
I see people who share my identity in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have seen mistreatment of those who share my identity in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel valued as an individual by...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



I have felt ignored or disregarded by

How often have you experienced or witnessed others experience mistreatment from...

	0 times	1-2 times	3-5 times	6-8 times	9 or more times	Unsure
Faculty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post docs/staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Departmental Leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other graduate students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Undergraduates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each of the following statements select all that apply...

	My Research	My Teaching	My Courses	Other
I have experienced/witnessed mistreatment in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt/feel valued as an individual in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been talked over, ignored, or condescended in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel, or others have been, a spokesperson for my(their) identity in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How likely would you be to encourage a prospective colleague or friend who resembles you (in background/identity) to work or study in your department at Virginia Tech?

- Very unlikely
- Unlikely
- Neutral
- Likely
- Very likely

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From your first day at Virginia Tech until now, have you experienced or witnessed any of the following forms of gender or sexually-motivated mistreatment? **(mark all that apply)**

- Sexually based remarks or jokes that made you (or another) uncomfortable
- Your or another person's personal or physical boundaries encroached on
- Being condescended to, insulted, slighted, or overly questioned
- Opportunities to network were falsely advertised, (e.g. An invite to a meeting outside of the university which was advertised as a chance for discussion of work/research but which was actually intended as a date)
- None at all
- Other

Other

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From your first day at Virginia Tech until now, have you experienced or witnessed any of the following forms of racial or ethnically motivated mistreatment? **(mark all that apply)**

- Racial insensitivity (i.e. someone shows a lack of tact or understanding towards those of a different racial background)
- False color blindness/invalidating racial or ethnic identity (e.g. diminishing someone's experience by saying something like "I don't see color")
- Racial hostility (e.g. had someone express jealousy or hostility surrounding the notion that people of certain race or ethnicity get unfair advantages and benefits due to their race or ethnicity)
- Denied equitable research opportunities, research funding, or lab/resource access
- None at all
- Other

Other

Since your first day at Virginia Tech until now, if you are a student of South Asian origin/descent, have you encountered any instances of caste-based discrimination or bias in your department and/or the University? Please briefly describe

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For each of the following questions please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement. If I were to experience or witness mistreatment I would feel comfortable reporting the situation to..

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
My advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The majority of professors for courses I am(was) enrolled in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Office of Title IX	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any Grad Students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Office of the Graduate Ombudsperson	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Department Leadership	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each of the following questions please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The University has physical structures in place that reduce friction for my or others' identity and/or disability (e.g. gender neutral bathrooms, braille signage, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

My Department has physical structures in place that reduce friction for my or others' identity and/or disability (e.g. gender neutral bathrooms, braille signage, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Department treats cases of mistreatment seriously.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel if I reported cases of mistreatment to University avenues (e.g. Title IX, OEA, etc.) it would be handled effectively.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel if I reported cases of mistreatment to Department avenues (e.g. Department Leadership, Faculty, etc.) it would be handled effectively.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Department takes effective measures to prevent mistreatment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each of the following, please indicate your level of agreement with each statement:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel that my work in this program is meaningful to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with my progress in this program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I have the opportunities to contribute professionally in ways that I value.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel supported by my advisor (or temporary advisor)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate if experiences of mistreatment have affected you *academically* in any of the following ways (**mark all that apply**)

- Had difficulty attending classes or meetings
- Had difficulty concentrating on course-related tasks such as assignments or exams
- Had to withdraw from a course or take an incomplete

- Seriously considered leaving school or program
- Had difficulty completing research duties
- Had difficulty preparing and completing mandatory exams (e.g. qualifying, preliminary, pre-defense, defense, etc.)
- Did not affect at all
- Other

Other

Please indicate if experiences of mistreatment have affected your *day-to-day life* in any of the following ways (**mark all that apply**)

- Changed offices or considered changing offices
- Avoided departmental or professional events
- Changed daily routine to avoid certain people or places
- Felt uncomfortable voicing your opinions or thoughts
- Did not affect at all
- Other

Other

Please indicate the frequency to which the following have added stress to your time at Virginia Tech:

Never      Once or twice      Sometimes      Frequently      Constantly      N/A

Mistreatment from fellow graduate students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mistreatment from faculty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mistreatment from staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mistreatment from undergraduates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interactions with advisor (or temporary advisor)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall workload	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching responsibilities (when you were/are a GTA)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

### Are you a domestic student?

- Yes
  - No
  - Choose not to respond
- 

### What is your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender male
- Transgender female
- Genderqueer/non-binary
- Two-spirit
- Agender

- Bigender
- Androgynous
- Choose not to respond
- Other

Other

What is your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual or straight
- Homosexual or gay
- Bisexual
- Pansexual
- Asexual
- Demisexual
- Choose not to respond
- Other

What is your race or ethnicity? (**mark all that apply**)

- White
- Black or African American
- Person of African-descent
- Asian or Asian American

- Native American or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian (and/or) other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Multi-racial/two or more races
- Please self-describe in the space below if the above categories do not capture your race/ethnicity well
- Choose not to respond

Other, self describe:

What is your religion or belief system?

- Christianity
- Islam
- Judaism
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Sikhism
- Jainism
- Atheism
- Agnosticism
- Choose not to respond
- Other



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Do you identify as an individual with a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

---

If you answered that you have ever witnessed/experienced an instance(s) of mistreatment or invalidation of identity we would appreciate you taking the time to share. We understand and appreciate that this is a personal question and would just like to remind you that the **department leadership will not read any of these responses.**

---

If you ever witnessed/experienced an instance(s) of mistreatment or invalidation of identity please indicate whether or not you reported it to the appropriate channels?

- Reported
- Did not report
- Reported some instances did not report others

---

Please briefly share why you chose to report or not.

What are 1-2 actions you'd like to see the department and/or University take towards improving the culture? (please specify in response whether a department or University action or both)

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What are 1-2 questions you would like to see in future departmental climate surveys?

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Please indicate on the following scale how effective you think this survey is:

- Ineffective
- Somewhat ineffective
- Neutral
- Somewhat effective
- Effective

Is there anything else you'd like to add or share? This is your opportunity to do so.

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We would like to thank you for your time and participation in filling out this survey. We ask that you be candid in your assessment of the departmental climate. These responses will provide us with valuable insight into what recommendations should be made to the departmental leadership as well as which issues should be addressed with priority. This survey, and your responses, provides a unique chance for critical evaluation of the department and is an important stepping stone in improving climate

We would also like to thank all who bravely shared their stories and/or signed the petition which made this survey and student-led ad-hoc committee possible. We hope we can use this opportunity to have everyone's voice heard and accurately determine the culture of the department through this survey. Please take this opportunity to let your voice be heard.

We would like to emphasize that this survey is confidential. The ad-hoc committee will not release any of your raw data collected from this survey to anyone outside of the ad-hoc committee, including department leadership and the university. We will submit a summarized report on May 15th to department leadership and Dean Surprenant utilizing the aggregated data to highlight the findings and to make recommendations. This report will remove all identifying information within the data to minimize fears of retaliation.

The survey has about 30 questions and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

All questions are voluntary; Please answer the questions which you are comfortable with.

We appreciate your participation and hope this is a step forward to enact positive change in our department community.

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**Confidentiality Statement:**

We appreciate your authentic and candid responses to this climate survey. We are taking measures to ensure that the data collected within this survey remains anonymous. Any reporting of the data will also ensure that the individual responses remain confidential. For example, no one outside of the ad-hoc committee will read your responses, and all identifying information within the responses to the open-ended question will be redacted to ensure confidentiality. This survey does not collect your IP address or email in an attempt to offer anonymity. The department leadership and Dean Surprenant will only receive a summarized report sanitized of identifying information. After we submit the summarized report all of your raw data will be deleted from the platform.

If something does need to be reported to the office of Title IX they will not be able to do anything without your permission unless there is an imminent threat to your or others' safety. They will also not have your email or IP address so it will be difficult for them to identify the respondent.

If you find that this survey triggers the need to further share your experience in your program and you would like to talk with a confidential and informal resource, please feel free to reach out to the Ombuds for the Graduate School community at [gradombud@vt.edu](mailto:gradombud@vt.edu).

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**Support Resources:**

If you have questions or need help taking the survey due to language or accessibility considerations please contact the survey team via [gradombud@vt.edu](mailto:gradombud@vt.edu).

We also recognize that these questions may trigger emotions that cause distress. Please recognize the various resources available to assist you in those moments:

- [Office of Graduate Ombudsman](#)
  - Email: [Gradombud@vt.edu](mailto:Gradombud@vt.edu)
  - Phone: 540-231-9573
- Katie Polidoro, *Title IX Coordinator*
  - Email: [polidoro@vt.edu](mailto:polidoro@vt.edu)
  - Phone: 540-231-1824
  - [To report “Gender Based Harassment and Violence” to Title IX directly via reporting form](#)
- Women’s Center at Virginia Tech
  - Website: [Womenscenter.vt.edu](http://Womenscenter.vt.edu)
  - Email: [wcsupport@vt.edu](mailto:wcsupport@vt.edu)
- Cook Counseling Center
  - Phone: 540-231-6557
- [TimelyCare](#) (24/7 on-demand mental health support)

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How many years have you attended graduate school in the physics department at Virginia Tech?

- 0-1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years
- 3-4 years
- 5 or more years

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Are you a domestic student?

- Yes
- No

Choose not to respond

---

### What is your gender identity?

- Male
  - Female
  - Transgender male
  - Transgender female
  - Genderqueer/non-binary
  - Two-spirit
  - Agender
  - Bigender
  - Androgynous
  - Choose not to respond
  - Other
- 

### What is your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual or straight
  - Homosexual or gay
  - Bisexual
  - Pansexual
  - Asexual
  - Demisexual
  - Choose not to respond
-

Other

---

What is your race or ethnicity? (mark all that apply)

White

Black or African American

Asian

Native American or Alaska Native

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx

Middle Eastern or North African

Choose not to respond

Other

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What is your religion or belief system?

Christianity

Islam

Judaism

Buddhism

Hinduism

Sikhism

Jainism

Atheism

Agnosticism

Choose not to respond

Other

Do you identify as an individual with a disability?

Yes

No

Choose not to respond

For each of the following questions please indicate your level of comfort expressing opposing views in:

	Very uncomfortable	Somewhat uncomfortable	Neutral	Somewhat comfortable	Very comfortable	N/A
Lab Meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In Seminars	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In Classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each of the following five statements select all that apply...

**Definition of identity** = a combination of characteristics, attributes, or behaviors that make us who we are. E.g. sexuality, race, gender, beliefs, etc... are all integral parts of identity

	Faculty	Post docs/ Staff	Departmental Leadership	Graduate Students	Undergrad Students
I see people who share my identity in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have seen the mistreatment of those who share my identity in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have experienced or witnessed others experience mistreatment from...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



I feel valued as an individual by...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have felt ignored or disregarded by...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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For each of the following four statements select all that apply

	My Research	My Teaching	My Courses	Other
I have experienced/witnessed mistreatment in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt/feel valued as an individual in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been talked over, ignored, or condescended in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel I, or others have been, a spokesperson for my(their) identity in...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

---

How likely would you be to encourage a prospective colleague or friend who resembles you (in background/identity) to work or study in the Physics department at Virginia Tech?

- Very unlikely
  - Unlikely
  - Neutral
  - Likely
  - Very likely
- 

During your time at Virginia Tech have you experienced or witnessed any of the following forms of gender or sexually motivated mistreatment? (mark all that apply)

- Sexually based remarks or jokes that made you (or another) uncomfortable
- Your or another person's personal or physical boundaries encroached on
- Being condescended to, insulted, slighted, or overly questioned

- Opportunities to network were falsely advertised, (e.g. An invite to a meeting outside of the university which was advertised as a chance for discussion of work/research but which was actually intended as a date)
- None at all
- Other
- 

Have you experienced or witnessed any of the following forms of racial or ethnically motivated behaviors during your time at Virginia Tech? (mark all that apply)

- Racial insensitivity
- False color blindness/invalidating racial or ethnic identity
- Racial hostility (e.g. had someone express jealousy or hostility surrounding the notion that people of certain race or ethnicity get unfair advantages and benefits due to their race or ethnicity)
- Denied equitable research opportunities, research funding, or lab/resource access
- None at all
- Other
- 

Have you experienced or witnessed invalidation of experiences due to identity during your time at Virginia Tech?

**For example:**

- *Someone told me that they “don’t see color” or we should not think about race anymore*
- *Someone did not believe me when I told them I was born in the U.S*
- *Someone told me that the person who offended me or made me uncomfortable “didn’t actually mean it” or is “actually a really nice person”*

- Yes
- No
- I’m not sure
-

For the following questions please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I often feel under scrutiny by the people in my department	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often feel supported by the people in my department	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I have to work harder than others to be perceived as a legitimate physicist in my department	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I have to work harder than others to be perceived as a legitimate physicist in my research group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel as though I have to work harder than my colleagues to be treated fairly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If I were to experience or witness mistreatment I would feel comfortable reporting the situation to...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My advisor:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The majority of professors for courses I am (was) enrolled in:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Office of Title IX:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Any graduate students:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Office of the Graduate School Ombuds:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Department leadership:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each of the questions in this section please indicate your level of agreement with the statement.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
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The university has physical structures in place that reduce friction for my or others' identity and/or disability (e.g. gender neutral bathrooms, braille signage, etc.):	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The physics department leadership empathizes with students experiences:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The physics department leadership understands student experiences:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The department treats cases of mistreatment seriously:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The department intentionally/unintentionally perpetuates mistreatment:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel if I reported cases of mistreatment it would be handled effectively:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The department takes effective measures to prevent mistreatment:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each of the following, please indicate your level of agreement with each statement:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel that my work in this program is meaningful to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with my progress in this program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I have the opportunities to contribute professionally in ways that I value	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel valued for my work in this program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please indicate if experiences of mistreatment have affected you academically in any of the following ways (mark all that apply)

Had difficulty attending classes or meetings

- Had difficulty concentrating on course-related tasks such as assignments or exams
- Had to withdraw from a course or take an incomplete
- Seriously considered leaving school or program
- Had difficulty completing research duties
- Had difficulty preparing and completing mandatory exams (e.g. qualifying, preliminary, pre-defense, defense)
- Did not affect at all
- Other

Please indicate if experiences of mistreatment have affected your day-to-day life in any of the following ways (mark all that apply)

- Changed offices or considered changing offices
- Avoided departmental or professional events
- Changed daily routine to avoid certain people or places
- Felt uncomfortable voicing your opinion or thoughts
- Did not affect at all
- Other

Please indicate the frequency to which the following have added stress to your time at Virginia Tech:

	Never	Once or twice	Sometimes	Frequently	Constantly	N/A
Mistreatment from fellow students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mistreatment from faculty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mistreatment from staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Mistreatment from undergraduates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interactions with advisor (or temporary advisor if first year)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall workload	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching responsibilities (when you were/are a GTA)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you answered that you have ever witnessed/experienced an instance(s) of mistreatment or invalidation of identity we would appreciate you taking the time to share. We understand and appreciate that this is a personal question and would just like to remind you that the department leadership will not read any of these responses.

If you ever witnessed/experienced an instance(s) of mistreatment or invalidation of identity please indicate whether or not you reported it to the appropriate channels?

- Reported
- Did not report
- Reported some instances did not report others
- N/A

Please briefly share why you chose to report or not to report:

What are 1-2 actions you'd like to see the department take towards improving the culture?

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What are 1-2 questions you would like to see in future departmental climate surveys?

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Is there anything else you'd like to add or share? This is your opportunity to do so.

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# 2023 Physics Department Graduate Student Climate Ad-hoc Committee Executive Summary

Rachel Maizel,<sup>1</sup> Nicholas W.G. Smith,<sup>1</sup> Andrew Gustafson,<sup>1</sup> Sarah Healy,<sup>1</sup> and Gyang Chung<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Physics, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 2023, the authors of this report, along with Alma Robinson and Graduate Ombudsperson Bryan Hanson, were charged with conducting and analyzing a survey of the graduate students in the Virginia Tech Physics Department (henceforth referred to as "the Physics Department"). The survey asked questions about departmental climate, focusing on cases of witnessing, experiencing, and reporting mistreatment. We hope this report will not just be an accurate analysis of the current climate but also a first step towards improving the experiences of those in our Physics community. After completing this analysis, our primary recommendation is for **the creation of a student-led working group involving faculty and department leadership to discuss ways to improve the departmental climate.**

At the time of the survey, there were 87 graduate students in the Physics Department. Sixty students began the survey, with fifty completing it. To analyze the survey, we broke the responses into six different filters (each filter has at least 10 respondents).

### Gender and Sexuality Filters:

1. **Heterosexual(het) Male:** Answered "male" for gender and "heterosexual" for sexuality
2. **Non-Heterosexual(het):** Did not answer "heterosexual" for sexuality
3. **Non-Male:** Did not answer "male" for gender

### Race and Nationality Filters:

1. **White Heterosexual(het) Domestic Male:** Heterosexual Males who answered only "white" for race and "yes" to "Are you a domestic student?"
2. **Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME):** Did not answer only "white" for race;
3. **BAME Non-Male:** Did not answer only "white" for race and did not answer "male" for gender.

As we will discuss in more detail, we find main areas of mistreatment in the form of gender/sexually motivated mistreatment, LGBTQ+ mistreatment, and racially motivated mistreatment. These instances of mistreatment have sizable effects on students' academic and daily lives in the Physics Department. We see the groups that share the highest levels of witnessing/experiencing mistreatment are also those who feel least comfortable reporting it within the department and have less faith in the handling and prevention of mistreatment.

Before getting into the details of this survey, we would like to say that this report is not intended to place blame or shame on any particular person or group. We understand that this report covers many sensitive topics and that well-meaning individuals may be skeptical of this endeavor. Still, we ask that all meaningfully engage with the information provided here. Also, we ask that you do not push the respondents of this survey for more information. Even with good intentions, doing so may place the student in an uncomfortable and compromising position and negatively impact the honesty of responses in future surveys.

## II. MAIN AREAS OF MISTREATMENT

### A. Gender/Sexually Motivated Mistreatment

To begin, we consider the responses to the question, "have you experienced or witnessed any of the following forms of

gender/sexually motivated mistreatment? (mark all that apply)" (see Fig. 1 for list).

We see consistently in Fig.1 that non-het and non-male individuals report witnessing/experiencing higher levels of mistreatment than het males for *all* categories of sexual mistreatment. In particular, *nearly half* of non-het students indicate that they experienced or witnessed physical boundaries being encroached on and being condescended, insulted, slighted, or overly questioned. Over 40% of non-males report the same. Non-male BAME students likewise report being condescended, insulted, etc., as the most frequent form of sexually-based mistreatment.

Within the open-ended section, students were asked "if they had ever witnessed or experienced an instance(s) of mistreatment or invalidation of identity." All instances of sexual or gender-motivated mistreatment were identified. To preserve anonymity, we will not share any of the raw data. Instead, we have broken down the sexual/gender mistreatment into ten general themes: physical boundaries being violated, sexualized or treated inappropriately, unwanted comments about appearance, sexual jokes or comments, being held to different standards, being overly questioned, favoritism, revisionist history or lack of recognition, a normalization or minimization of abuse, and general sexually motivated mistreatment. The top three most frequent themes are in bold below.

1. **Sexualized/treated inappropriately:** Non-males are sexualized, repeatedly hit on, and made uncomfortable by ambiguous advances in the work setting, etc.
2. **Demeaned/spoken over or overly questioned, etc.:** Non-male students are frequently spoken over, have their ideas dismissed, are overly questioned, or have their ideas repeated back to them by male peers claiming ownership. Moreover, because of this, non-male students feel uncomfortable collaborating in research, courses, and other department-related things.
3. **Normalization/Minimization of abuse:** At all levels, males in the department tend to normalize whatever abuse non-males are experiencing, e.g., they defend the perpetrators, tell victims they are too sensitive, concerns are dismissed, etc. *Note, this was the most frequently reported form of sexual or gender-based mistreatment.*

Later, we investigate how this sexually based mistreatment affects their day-to-day and academic lives. But the department should note that this (a) has been normalized, (b) is prevalent at high frequencies, and (c) it is not just graduate students perpetuating this mistreatment, *it is at all levels.*

### B. LGBTQ+ Mistreatment

Through analyzing free response questions, we identified three main areas of mistreatment concerning LGBTQ+ students. These themes and a summary of these themes come directly from the students in the free response section:

1. **Disrespect of identity:** LGBTQ+ students feel that they are not taken seriously by their cis-gender heterosexual counterparts. Their identity is used against them to invalidate their experiences and delegitimize them as physicists.
2. **Overly questioned about identity:** LGBTQ+ students feel they are often interrogated about their identity and must defend themselves with little to no support from peers.



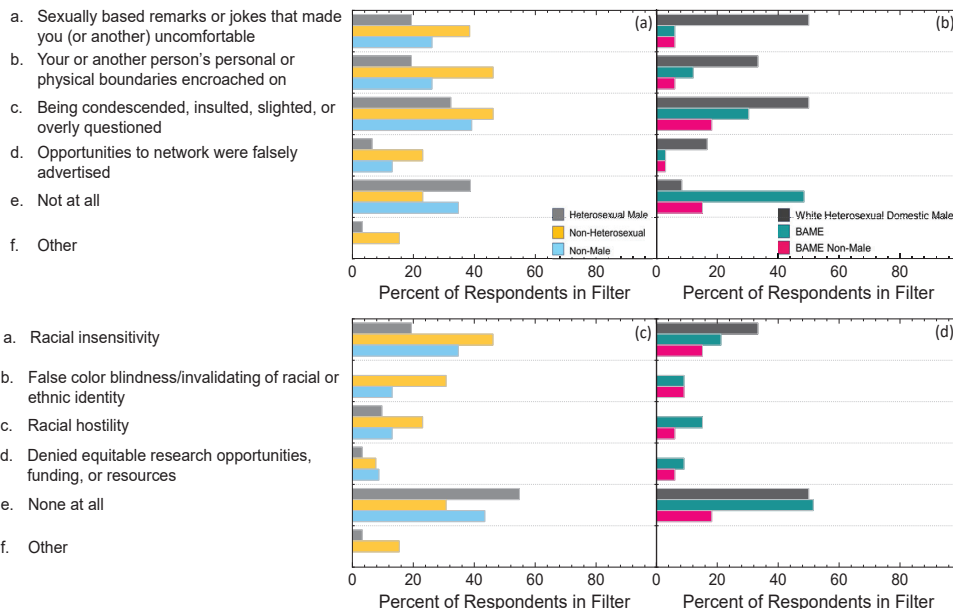


FIG. 1: During your time at Virginia Tech, have you experienced or witnessed any of the following forms of mistreatment: (1) **gender/sexuality mistreatment**: (a) Gender/Sexuality filters of het-male, non-het, non-male, (b) Race/Nationality filters of white-het domestic males, BAME, and BAME non-male; (2) **racial mistreatment**: (c) Gender/Sexuality filters, and (d) Race/Nationality filters.

3. **General homophobia**: Students report experiencing and witnessing homophobic jokes and slurs. There is a general feeling of normalization of homophobia in the department so students do not report these incidents when they occur.

Furthermore, through analysis of responses to survey questions, it was found that LGBTQ+ students often experienced or witnessed more mistreatment than other demographic groups. In particular, compared to het males, it was found to be a 6 times increase of reported/witnessed mistreatment perpetrated from faculty, 4 times increase perpetrated from department leadership, and a 2 times increase perpetrated from graduate student. This is in response to the survey question asking students to identify if they "have experienced or witnessed others experience mistreatment from..." In general, it was found that *LGBTQ+ students were noticeably more likely to experience/witness mistreatment in all categories of mistreatment, including sexual-based and racially-based mistreatment, as compared to their het male counterparts*

### C. Racial Mistreatment

We would now like to address mistreatment that stems from a racial or ethnic bias. In a "mark all that apply" question, students were asked if they had experienced or witnessed various forms of racial mistreatment, see Fig. 1(c-d).

The most prevalent form of mistreatment came in racial insensitivity, with approximately 45% of non-het students, 35% of non-males, and 40% of BAME non-males reporting that they had experienced or observed it. Furthermore, it is important to note that all three of the previous filters reported at least one instance of being denied equitable resources/treatment based on race. While the percentage is small, the fact that it is happening at all is an indictment on our department. Such instances would not just violate the Virginia Tech Principles of Community, *but also a violation of Title VI*.

The open-ended questions also provided insight into racial mistreatment. We have identified four general categories that encompass student experiences.

1. **Racial Insensitivity**: This can be inappropriate comments/jokes or an increased judgment of those of a

particular race/nationality. The sources of this mistreatment are not just other students but also include faculty.

2. **Assuming Race or Nationality**: There have been multiple reports of faculty and graduate students incorrectly assuming a student's race or nationality, sometimes in public settings.

3. **Slurs**: Students report hearing slurs and being referred to by derogatory stereotypical names based on their race; the perpetrators are not limited to graduate students.

4. **Racial hostility**: Students report negative and condescending remarks about a student's race and professors targeting certain races within their courses. *This is a Violation of the Virginia Tech Principles of Community and Title VI*.

The responses from this report indicate that many students within the department experience or witness acts of racial mistreatment, most often in the form of insensitivity. The department will need to take careful and thoughtful steps so that physicists of all backgrounds feel welcome at Virginia Tech.

## III. EFFECTS OF MISTREATMENT

### A. Academic Effects

Students were asked to indicate if experiences of mistreatment have affected them academically through "select all that apply" questions, see Appendix Fig. 5(a-b). More than 50% of het males report no effect from mistreatment on their academic performance. This is very dissimilar to the reports of non-male/non-het students; they find that instances of mistreatment in the environment they work and learn in directly affects their attendance (>20%/>30%), concentration (>30%/>50%), research (>20%/>45%), and core exams (>15%), even cause them to seriously consider leaving (~30%/50%). The excess of students who report multifaceted effects on academic performance illustrates how the current climate is directly hindering their ability to succeed.

## B. Day-to-Day Effects

Students were asked to indicate if their experiences of mistreatment had any of the following effects on their daily lives, see Appendix Fig. 5(c-d). **Eighty percent of non-het and ~60% of non-male students are uncomfortable voicing their thoughts daily.** Alarming, for both non-male and non-het students, ~30% have changed or considered changing offices, missed out on events, and altered their daily routine to avoid sources of mistreatment.

## IV. REPORTING AND STUDENT PERCEPTION

Previously, we showed that the students most likely to experience or witness mistreatment are also the ones that are most affected in their day-to-day and academic (non-het, non-male, and BAME non-male students). Now, we consider whether or not students are reporting mistreatment. Students were asked "if they had ever witnessed or experienced an instance(s) of mistreatment or invalidation of identity to indicate whether or not they reported it to the appropriate channels," Fig. 2(a). Note, here we have not used any of the gender/sexuality or race/nationality filters; Fig. (a) includes all students who answered the question. Only about ~10% of students reported all instances of mistreatment. **Over 60%** of students indicated that they "did not report" any instance of mistreatment. And roughly a quarter of students state that they "reported some instances but did not report others" implying that at least a quarter of students are witnessing or experiencing multiple acts of mistreatment.

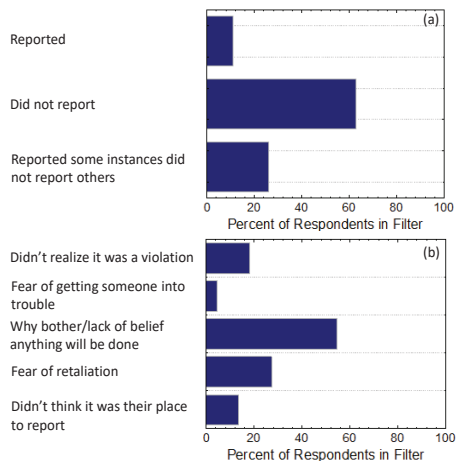


FIG. 2: (a) "If you ever witnessed/experienced an instance(s) of mistreatment or invalidation of identity, please indicate whether or not you reported it to the appropriate channels" (b) "Briefly share why you chose to report or not to report"

To understand what could be holding students back from reporting, the survey asked students to "briefly share why you chose to report or not to report." The answers were predominantly reasons they did not report. These explanations were categorized into five general themes, the frequency of each theme is shown in Fig. 2(b). The main contributor for why students do not report is a feeling of "why bother" or a "lack of belief anything meaningful will be done." We want to emphasize that **no student indicated a lack of knowledge of resources** as their decision to not report.

Using a Likert Scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," respondents were asked to share their level of agreement with the statement "If I were to experience mistreatment, I would feel comfortable reporting the situation to..." a) "any graduate student," b) "my advisor," c) "a majority of professors I was (am) enrolled in," d) "department leadership," e) "the Office of Title IX," f) "the Office of the Graduate Ombudsman." The average response for each filter is shown in 3. For reporting to advisors, **zero** het males or white het domestic males responded "Strongly Disagree"

or "Disagree," but this can not be said for the other filters. We see that for reporting to advisors, course professors, and department leadership, the average responses for non-het, non-male, and BAME non-male students are noticeably more negative than the averages for het male and white het domestic male students. On average, non-het students express disagreement about comfort reporting to course professors; and non-het, non-male, and BAME non-male students all, on average, express discomfort about reporting to department leadership. Finally, for reporting at the university level, although the averages are all above neutral, the average BAME non-male response is noticeably less than the het male and white het domestic male averages.

Similarly, respondents were asked to share their level of agreement with the following statements regarding the Physics Department's handling of mistreatment: a) "The Physics Department treats cases of mistreatment seriously." b) "The Physics Department intentionally/unintentionally perpetuates mistreatment." c) "I feel if I reported cases of mistreatment, it would be handled effectively." d) "The Physics Department takes effective measures to prevent mistreatment." (see Appendix Fig. 3). We want to point out that no non-het respondent answered "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to reported cases of mistreatment being handled effectively. Furthermore, non-het, non-male, and BAME non-male respondents all expressed disagreement on average with the statements that the Physics Department takes cases of mistreatment seriously, handles reported cases of mistreatment effectively, or takes effective measures to prevent mistreatment.

Considering this information in light of previous sections, we see that non-het, non-male, and BAME non-male students witness/experience mistreatment at higher rates, express less comfort about reporting these instances to those within the department, and have less faith that the department will handle this mistreatment effectively.

## V. CONCLUSION

There is a systemic issue of mistreatment in the physics department, with minority students experiencing/witnessing the largest portion of this mistreatment. Across the board, non-male and LGBTQ+ students experience/witness significantly more mistreatment than het males. We also observe significant increases in incidents of mistreatment from our BAME non-male students. Sexually based, racially-based, and LGBTQ+ mistreatment prevails as a large barrier for many students in completing their degree in the physics department. While the results of this survey present as dire, many universities have shown that a more equitable working environment can be achieved through careful monitoring and continued efforts to reduce mistreatment.

From the results and feedback of the students who took the survey, we **strongly recommend that a student-led working group between graduate students and faculty be formed in determining a path forward.** The ad-hoc committee firmly believes that progress toward a healthier climate in the physics department is achievable through concerted, continuous efforts, including future climate surveys. We hope the reader is inspired for change and considers aiding these efforts. For resources that helped us, see [1–5].

## REFERENCES

- [1] Frances A. Houle, Kate P. Kirby, and Michael P. Marder, "Ethics in physics: The need for culture change," *Physics Today* **76**, 28–35 (2023). [https://pubs.aip.org/physicstoday/article-pdf/76/1/28/16756480/28\\_1\\_online.pdf](https://pubs.aip.org/physicstoday/article-pdf/76/1/28/16756480/28_1_online.pdf).
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## APPENDIX

In an interest of keeping the executive summary concise, the following graphs were not included in the main text. You can also find copies of the majority of these graphs and more in the presentation that accompanies this document. In Section IV, we refer to a series of Likert Scale questions gauging the comfortability of students reporting to various department and university resources ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (-2) to "Strongly Agree" (+2). The first two rows of Fig. 3 consider department-level avenues of reporting such as: to any graduate student, their advisor, the majority of professors they are (were) enrolled in, and to department leadership. A black dashed line at zero indicates a neutral response. The shaded grey region from -0.5 to +0.5 we consider to be a fairly neutral response. The final row of Fig. 3 considers two university-level structures of reporting: the Office of Title IX, and the Office of the Graduate Ombudsperson.

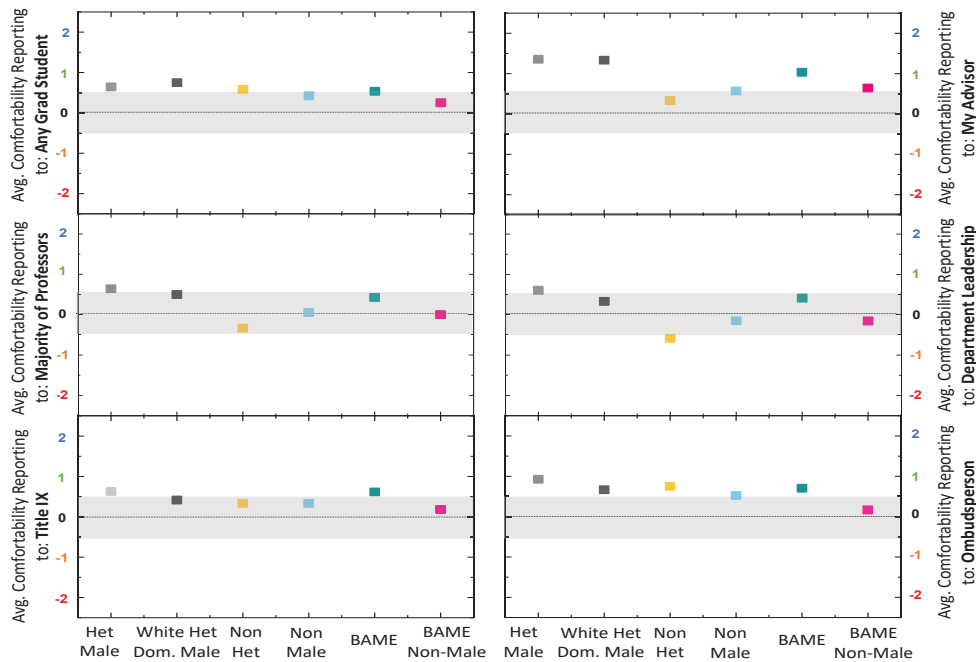


FIG. 3: Average responses to the question, "If I were to experience or witness mistreatment, I would feel comfortable reporting the situation to..." "Strongly disagree" disagree was assigned a point value of -2, "Disagree" was assigned a point value of -1, and so on. The shaded grey region indicates values between  $\pm 0.5$  in the neutral zone.

Fig. 4 considers students perception on how the department handles mistreatment, as was discussed in Section IV.

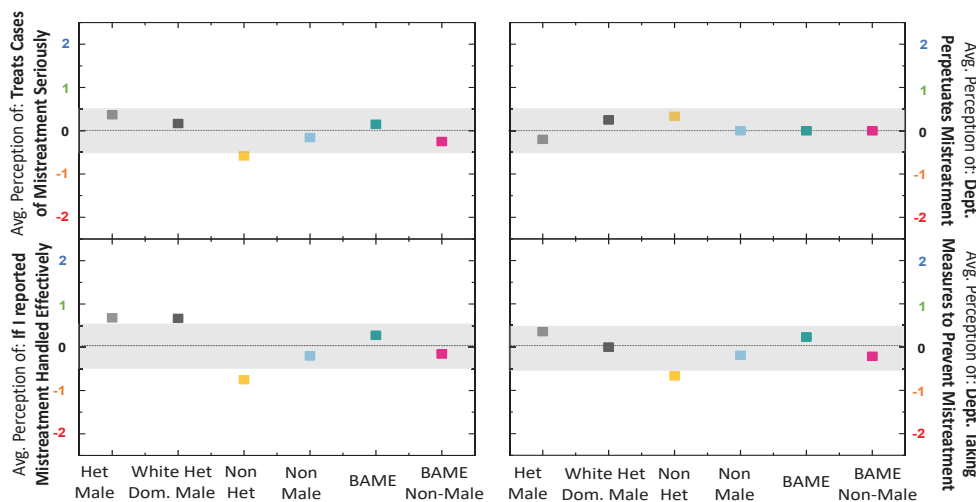


FIG. 4: Responses to the questions regarding the response of the Physics Department to mistreatment. Numeric values were assigned in the same way as in Fig. 3

As discussed in Section III, Fig. 5, shows the breakdown that the affects of experiencing mistreatment have on our student population.

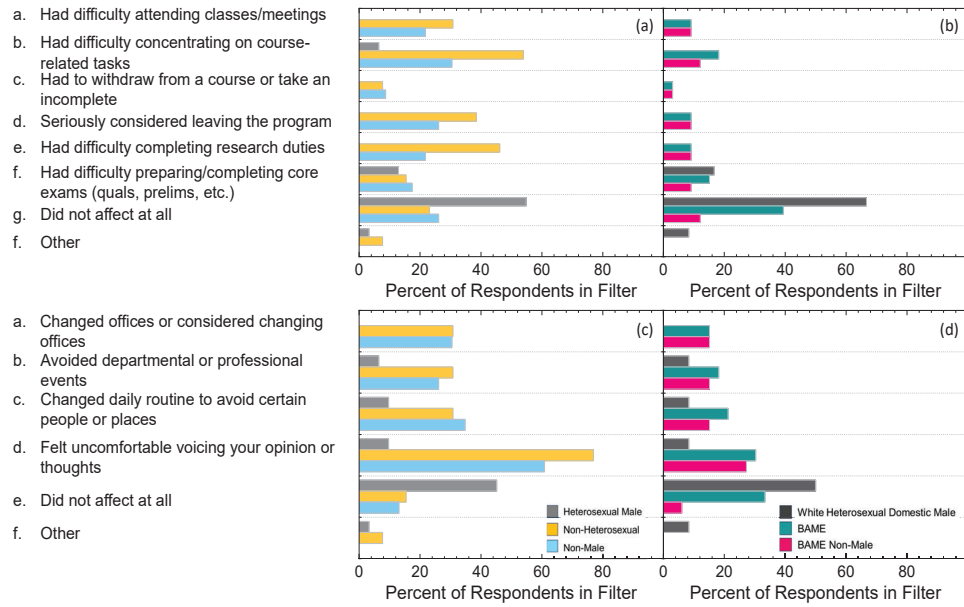


FIG. 5: **Academic affects of mistreatment:** (a) Gender/Sexuality filter (b) Race/Ethnicity filter; **Day-to-day affects of mistreatment:** (c) Gender/Sexuality filter, and (d) Race/Ethnicity filter.