



UofSC College of Social Work Student Climate Report

2021/22

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Executive Summary

In January 2022, the UofSC College of Social Work conducted a climate survey with undergraduate and graduate social work students. The survey aimed to better understand student experiences in the College and to gauge their perception of our community as a welcoming and inclusive learning environment where they are treated fairly and equitably by peers, staff, and faculty.

All current social work students were contacted via email and invited to participate. A total of 297 students completed the survey—65 undergraduates and 232 graduate students—for a response rate of 56%. This is not a representative sample, so findings presented in this report must be interpreted with caution. However, the respondent sample does reflect certain known demographic characteristics of the larger student population, particularly in terms of race/ethnicity and sex. These are two metrics the College tracks each year for all students. For example, among survey respondents, nearly one quarter (24%) self-identified as Black and 3% as Asian. This roughly mirrors the racial demographics of the total COSW student population from Fall 2021 in which 23% were Black and 1% were Asian. Other groups were underrepresented in the survey. While 8% of the COSW student body was Latinx in Fall 2021, for example, only 4% of the respondents to the survey identified as Latinx. And we do not know the population parameters for many other groups, making it impossible to know how well the survey sample compares with the larger student population. For these and other reasons, we cannot generalize to the larger COSW student population. Nonetheless, we believe these data provide a valuable window into how a range of students experience the College.

Demographics. The survey responses indicate that the College is a diverse social space. Roughly one third are students of color. Nearly 20% of respondents said they had a disability, just under 30% are first-generation college students, and 21% are LGBTQ+. Over one third (36%) of COSW students who took the survey are married/partnered, and 20% have caregiving responsibilities for a dependent household member. While 61% of student respondents identified as Christian, 17% are agnostic, 6% are atheist, and 8% do not conform to any religion at all. Just over 2% are transgender or gender non-conforming.

Climate. Overall, we find that the majority of students (63%) report that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the climate at the COSW and, on average, they report moderate levels of agreement with the idea that the COSW is a place where they feel valued. However, 12% of respondents felt discriminated against at the COSW since the school year began in 2021, and not all students express strong levels of agreement that this is a community where they belong.

Compared with White students, Black students are less likely to perceive that the COSW is committed to DEI and is a place where students can thrive and grow. LGBTQ+ students and those with a disability are also more unsatisfied at the College.

Although the student body at the COSW is quite diverse, not all students experience meaningful interactions with people who have different backgrounds than themselves. Older students, in particular, and graduate students more generally (compared to undergrads) have a more insular experience—at least in so far as they are less likely to have meaningful interactions with students from certain other social groups at the College.

Resource access. The pandemic has created more need for services among students. Health and mental health concerns, basic needs such as food access, and academic supports—these are critical for the

student community to thrive and be successful. It is concerning, therefore, that data from the survey indicate that students do not experience adequate access to these university-level supports.

Overall, the report finds that the College of Social Work is home to a diverse student body where many enjoy a positive, welcoming climate. Yet this is not experienced universally by students, and our findings suggest there are some systematic differences in students' perceptions of—and experience with—the COSW and broader university as a fair and equitable institution. The fact that more than one in ten respondents reported experiencing some form of discrimination in the first semester of the 2021/22 academic year is a clear indication that the COSW must pursue systemic changes. At the university level, significant changes must be made to ensure that students can access the supports and services they need. Ongoing efforts must address physical barriers to the building experienced by students with disabilities—including bathrooms and the front door— and address the differential treatment reported by members of the LGBTQ+ communities, such as limited access to gender-neutral bathrooms, misused pronouns, and ignored name preferences.

We trust that this report will help the COSW community make some progress towards identifying how our institution systematically impedes some students from developing a sense of belonging which hinders their ability to thrive in our programs. In addition to informing the DEI strategic planning process, we hope the report sparks reflection and dialogue among faculty, staff, and students. At the very least, it should further raise awareness among members of our community regarding the work we need to do. However, we do not believe that awareness of these problems is enough. Nor are we confident that this climate survey has exhaustively explored or identified the range of issues associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion experienced by students at the COSW. The report points to the need for structural transformation and personal change which will demand a long-term institutional and individual commitment. There is much work to be done—by all of us.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The University of South Carolina College of Social Work (COSW) is dedicated to cultivating a community of students, staff, and faculty that is welcoming and diverse. The COSW supports centers and initiatives that foster an inclusive and dynamic learning environment, but acknowledges that there is much work to be done to fully achieve this goal. To that end, the COSW conducted a student climate survey in January 2022. The objective of the survey was to gain a stronger understanding of students' perspectives and experiences related to diversity, equity and inclusion. The survey data will inform current and future planning in the area of DEI and provide a benchmark to help us gauge our progress over time.

Survey Design and Methodology

The COSW student body is relatively small. In Fall 2021, there were just over 500 undergraduate and graduate social work students. Therefore, rather than use a sampling approach for the climate survey we attempted to conduct a complete census of all students at one point in time: January 2022.

A small team of faculty and doctoral students at the College of Social Work collaborated to develop the survey instrument, with leadership provided by an advisory team composed of three COSW doctoral students: Parthenia Luke, Brandi Anderson, and Christian Gorchow. There are many student climate survey instruments that other universities have used and made publicly available, and we leaned on several of these examples to inform the development of our own. However, the primary instrument we relied on was developed by a research team at the University of Michigan for the purpose of conducting a climate survey with their own student population. We adapted many of their questions, modified others, and created some of our own. We piloted the instrument with student members of the COSW's DEI Workgroup in December 2021. In response to their feedback, we adjusted the wording of some questions and trimmed the overall length of the survey.

The survey was designed to be self-administered on-line, and to be completed in approximately 15 minutes. We emailed students at their university email addresses several times in January 2022 with information about the survey, an invitation to participate, and the survey link. We also encouraged COSW instructors to inform their classes about the survey and posted QR codes around the building so students could easily access the survey with their cell phones.

The survey had two primary sections:

1. Demographics – these questions gathered basic information such as gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, etc.
2. Campus climate – these questions explored student perceptions of the COSW and the university overall on various topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion; any discrimination they experienced personally; etc.

We have loosely organized the report around these two fields of inquiry. In addition to close-ended survey questions, we included several open-ended response options (see the appendix). The report includes data from both types of questions, but the qualitative responses that we did not incorporate into the report can be found in the appendix.

Demographics

Among the students who completed the survey, 24% identified as Black, 3% as Asian, 8% as multiracial, and 61% as non-Hispanic White. Just over 4% of all students identified as Hispanic/Latino/a/Latinx. Nearly 10% of respondents were born outside the U.S. The majority (62%) of student respondents are Christian, although more than 1 in 3 (32%) report that they are either Agnostic (17%), Atheist (6%) or do not identify with any religion at all (8%). Nearly 20% of students have a disability—the most common being a mental health condition (Table 2)—and just under 30% are first-generation college students (Table 1).

While our graduate and undergraduate social work students share much in common, there are some noteworthy differences. Relative to undergrads, the grad students who completed the survey tend to be more racially diverse, but are also more likely to be Christian and less likely to have a disability. A similar percentage of undergrads and grads are employed (63% and 70% respectively), with BSW students working an average of 23 hours a week and graduate students an average of 27 hours. The graduate student respondents are several years older, 39% are married/partnered, 8% are current or former members of the military, and 23% are caregivers to one or more dependents.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study respondents

	% /(N) or Mean(SD)		
	Undergraduate (n=65)	Graduate (n=232)	Total (n=297)
Age (n=289)	23.41 (6.73)	30.18 (9.76)	28.68 (9.59)
Sex (n=287)			
Female	90.48% (n=57)	88.84% (n=199)	89.2% (n=256)
Male	9.52% (n=6)	11.16% (n=25)	10.80% (n=31)
Gender (n=292)			
Gender conforming woman	89.15% (n=56)	87.67% (n=199)	87.33% (n=255)
Gender conforming man	9.23% (n=6)	10.57% (n=24)	10.27% (n=30)
Transgender/Gender non-conforming	4.62% (n=3)	1.76% (n=4)	2.40% (n=7)
Sexual Orientation (n=290)			
Heterosexual	66.67% (n=42)	78.85% (n=179)	76.21% (n=221)
Bisexual	23.81% (n=15)	10.58% (n=24)	13.45% (n=39)
Gay/Lesbian	6.35% (n=4)	3.52% (n=8)	4.14% (n=12)
Queer	1.59% (n=1)	4.41% (n=10)	3.79% (n=11)
Questioning	-	0.44% (n=1)	0.34% (n=1)
Asexual	-	0.44% (n=1)	0.34% (n=1)
Pansexual	1.59% (n=1)	1.76% (n=4)	1.72% (n=5)
Race/Ethnicity (n=292)			
Non-Hispanic African American/Black	13.85% (n=9)	27.31% (n=62)	24.32% (n=71)
Non-Hispanic Asian	0	3.52% (n=8)	2.74% (n=8)
Latinx (of any race)	6.15% (n=4)	3.52% (n=8)	4.11% (n=12)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0	0.44% (n=1)	0.34% (n=1)
Non-Hispanic White	70.77% (n=46)	59.15% (n=132)	60.96% (n=178)
Multiracial	9.23% (n=6)	7.05% (n=16)	7.53% (n=22)

Nativity (n=294)			
US-born	95.38% (n=62)	89.08% (n=204)	90.48% (n=266)
Foreign-born	4.62% (n=3)	10.92% (n=25)	9.52% (n=28)
Religion (n=275)			
Agnostic	26.98% (n=17)	14.62% (n=31)	17.45% (n=48)
Atheist	3.17% (n=2)	6.60% (n=14)	5.82% (n=16)
Christian	52.38% (n=33)	64.15% (n=136)	61.45% (n=169)
None	11.11% (n=7)	7.55% (n=16)	8.36% (n=23)
Spiritual	1.59% (n=1)	1.89% (n=4)	1.82% (n=5)
Other	4.76% (n=3)	5.19% (n=11)	5.09% (n=14)
Disability Status (n=279)			
With disability	32.20% (n=19)	16.36% (n=36)	19.71% (n=55)
Without disability	67.80% (n=40)	83.64% (n=184)	80.29% (n=224)
Military (n=291)			
Never served	98.44% (n=63)	92.07% (n=209)	93.47% (n=272)
Previously served/Currently serving	1.56% (n=1)	7.93% (n=18)	6.53% (n=19)
Parental Education (n=286)			
First generation college student	29.69% (n=19)	29.73% (n=66)	29.72% (n=85)
Non-first-generation college student	70.31% (n=45)	70.27% (n=156)	70.28% (n=201)
Marital Status (n=292)			
Single	78.46% (n=51)	53.74% (n=122)	59.25% (n=173)
Married/Partnered	20.00% (n=13)	38.77% (n=88)	34.59% (n=101)
Divorced/Widowed	1.54% (n=1)	7.49% (n=17)	6.16% (n=18)
Household situation (n=295)			
No dependents	84.38% (n=54)	77.92% (n=180)	79.32% (n=234)
Sole caregiver	1.56% (n=1)	4.33% (n=10)	3.73% (n=11)
Primary caregiver	6.25% (n=4)	5.19% (n=12)	5.42% (n=16)
Shared caregiving responsibilities	7.81% (n=5)	12.55% (n=29)	11.53% (n=34)
Work status (plus field placement) (n=294)			
Employed	62.50% (n=40)	70.43% (n=162)	68.71% (n=202)
Not employed	37.50% (n=24)	29.57% (n=68)	31.29% (n=92)
Number of working hours/week (n=189)	22.54 (9.82) (n=39)	26.65 (12.65) (n=150)	35.80 (12.2) (n=189)

Table 2. Types of disabilities

	Number of respondents		
	Undergraduate (n=19)	Graduate (n=36)	Total (n=55)
Type(s) of disabilities			
Acquired traumatic brain injury	1	4	5
Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder	6	19	25
Asperger's/autism spectrum	1	1	2
Blind/low vision	0	0	0
Deaf/hard of hearing	1	1	2
Cognitive or learning disability	1	3	4
Chronic illness/medical condition	6	7	13
Mental health/psychological condition	15	27	42
Physical/mobility condition that affects walking	2	5	7
Physical mobility condition that does not affect walking	0	4	4
Speech/communication condition	0	0	0

Note: students checked all types of disabilities that apply.

Climate

On the survey, we asked students “How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall climate at the COSW since the beginning of the school year (August 2021)?” The question on the survey explained to respondents that “climate” refers to “the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential at our College as expressed through the attitudes, behaviors and standards of faculty, staff, administrators and students.”

Nearly two thirds of respondents (63%) stated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the climate at the COSW. A smaller percentage of male students and students of color were satisfied or very satisfied with the climate, but cell sizes were small. (One exception was graduate students who identified as Asian, AI/AN, Latinx or multiracial – 68% reported being satisfied or very satisfied.)

Table 3. Level of satisfaction

	% (n)		
	Undergraduate (n=55)	Graduate (n=209)	Total (n=264)
Very satisfied/Satisfied	61.82% (n=34)	63.64% (n=133)	63.26% (n=167)
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	18.18% (n=10)	21.05% (n=44)	20.45% (n=54)
Dissatisfied/Very dissatisfied	20% (n=11)	15.31% (n=32)	16.29% (n=43)

Table 4. Percentage of satisfaction by sex

	% (n)			
	Undergraduate female (n=48)	Undergraduate male (n=6)	Graduate female (n=180)	Graduate male (n=21)
Very satisfied/Satisfied	62.50% (n=30)	50% (n=3)	66.11% (n=119)	57.14% (n=12)

Table 5. Percentage of satisfaction by race/ethnicity

	% (n)		
	Non-Hispanic White (n=159)	Non-Hispanic African American/Black (n=59)	Other ¹ (n=41)
Very satisfied/Satisfied	64.15% (n=102)	59.32% (n=35)	65.85% (n=27)

Note: Other¹ includes Asian, AI/AN, Latinx and multiracial.

The qualitative data provides additional insights into the overall climate. Several students noted that overall climate at the COSW is ok, but it can also vary from one class to another. This points to the importance of training teachers to be better prepared to respond to difference in the classroom:

- “I think some professors have done a great job of cultivating a classroom where people can be respectfully engaged in thoughtful disagreement but many of my professors have not. Those classes have always been the least interesting...”
- “I think that some classrooms make it difficult to share your opinion or thoughts, especially if your opinion differs from the professor. Thankfully all of my opinions have aligned with my professors, but I noted that if I had a different opinion I probably would have had my feelings hurt.”
- “I sometimes feel as if I am unable to speak my beliefs because they may be so different from others. I feel that I get judged on that when I do make the attempt.”
- “Just remind professors to be mindful of the little things, although I realize that they probably don't even realize their doing anything hurtful.”
- “[We need to] better train professors to facilitate difficult conversations within the classroom.”
- “I feel that conservative opinions (politically) do not receive the same respect or understanding in the program. Often, social work curricula is one sided which thwarts learning and provides limited spaces for students with a differing opinion to speak up or ask questions.”

COSW commitment to DEI

The survey explored the extent to which students perceived that the COSW is committed to DEI. Respondents were given the following prompt: “Considering your experiences since the school year began (since August 2021), please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements...” These statements included items such as “I feel valued as an individual at the COSW” and “The COSW has a strong commitment to diversity.” Respondents responded to each item with a 5-point

Likert scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). We constructed three index values from these items and provide means for those values below (Tables 6, 7 and 8). In each index a perfect score of “5” would mean as positive as possible (strongly agree) and a perfect score of “1” would mean as negative as possible (strongly disagree):

1. Institutional commitment to DEI – to what extent do students agree that the COSW is committed to DEI? The survey items used for this index are:
 - The COSW has a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
 - There is too much emphasis put on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion here at the COSW (reverse-coded).
 - The COSW provides sufficient programs and resources to foster the success of a diverse student body.

2. Valued/belonging – to what extent do students agree that they are valued by and experience a sense of belonging at the COSW? The survey items used for this index are:
 - I feel valued as an individual at the COSW.
 - I feel I belong at the COSW.
 - I have considered leaving the COSW because I felt isolated or unwelcomed (reverse-coded).
 - I am treated with respect at the COSW.
 - I feel others don’t value my opinions at the COSW (reverse-coded).
 - I have found one or more communities or groups where I feel I belong at the COSW.

3. Growing and thriving at the COSW – to what extent do students agree that they are growing and thriving at the COSW? The survey items used for this index are:
 - The COSW is a place where I am able to perform up to my full potential.
 - I have opportunities at the COSW for professional success that are similar to those of my colleagues.
 - I have to work harder than others to be valued equally at the COSW (reverse-coded).
 - My experience at the COSW has had a positive influence on my professional growth

Table 6. Perceived levels of COSW commitment to DEI

	Mean (SD)		
	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
Institutional commitment	3.95 (0.73) (n=55)*	3.60 (0.70) (n=206)*	3.67 (0.72) (n=261)
Valued and belonging	3.45 (0.39) (n=55)+	3.31 (0.45) (n=207)+	3.34 (0.44) (n=262)
Thriving and growth	3.98 (0.64) (n=55)^	3.66 (0.78) (n=205)^	3.73 (0.77) (n=260)

*,+^ = Differences between undergraduate students and graduate students are statistically significant

Table 7. Perceived levels of COSW commitment to DEI by sex

	Mean (SD)			
	Undergraduate female (n=48)	Undergraduate male (n=6)	Graduate female (n=178)	Graduate male (n=21)
Institutional commitment	3.87 (0.74)	4.4 (0.44)	3.62 (0.69)	3.59 (0.79)
Valued and belonging	3.43 (0.39)	3.7 (0.36)	3.31 (0.43)	3.39 (0.54)
Thriving and growth	3.96 (0.65)	4.04 (0.62)	3.68 (0.75)	3.73 (0.94)

Table 8. Perceived levels of COSW commitment to DEI by race/ethnicity

	Mean (SD)		
	Non-Hispanic White (n=159)	Non-Hispanic African American/Black (n=57)	Other ¹ (n=41)
Institutional commitment	3.74 (0.73)	3.49 (0.69)	3.67 (0.70)
Valued and belonging	3.34 (0.45)	3.35 (0.44)	3.37 (0.40)
Thriving and growth	3.84 (0.75)	3.43 (0.71)	3.74 (0.79)

Note: Other¹ includes Asian, AI/AN, Latinx and multiracial.

On average, students report modest agreement with the idea that the COSW has an institutional commitment to DEI, and graduate students are significantly less satisfied than undergrads (Table 6).

Similarly, students report moderate levels of agreement with the idea that the COSW is a place where they feel valued and where they belong, and graduates have significantly less agreement than undergrads (Table 7).

Relative to other scores in this section, students report comparatively higher levels of agreement with the idea that they are growing and thriving at the COSW (Table 8).

Across all three indices—institutional commitment, feeling valued and belonging, and thriving and growth—students of color report lower levels of agreement with these items compared to non-Hispanic White students. However, none of these differences are statistically significant.

Intergroup interactions

The survey asked students to report the extent to which they had meaningful interactions with people at the COSW who are different from them. Students reported the greatest interactions with people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds, a different social class, or different sexual orientation. Relative to graduate students, undergrads were more likely to interact with immigrant students and students with a disability (Table 9).

Table 9. Levels of frequency of intergroup interactions

Meaningful Interaction with others with ...	Mean (SD)		
	Undergraduate (n=54)	Graduate (n=204)	Total
different religious belief	3.81 (0.97)	3.73 (1.17)	3.75 (1.12)
different political opinions	3.42 (1.10)	3.41 (1.11)	3.41 (1.10)
immigrant background/immigrant family	3.58 (0.93)*	3.12 (1.12)*	3.22 (1.10)
different nationality	3.91 (0.95)	3.59 (1.07)	3.66 (1.05)
different race/ethnicity	4.59 (0.60)	4.42 (0.76)	4.46 (0.73)
different gender	3.63 (1.09)	3.78 (1.06)	3.75 (1.07)
different sexual orientation	4.22 (0.77)	3.83 (0.97)	3.91 (0.94)
different social class	4.14 (0.75)	3.95 (0.87)	4.00 (0.85)
physical or other observable disabilities	3.42 (1.02) ⁺	2.84 (1.19) ⁺	2.96 (1.18)
learning, psychological, or other invisible disabilities	3.80 (1.06) [^]	3.35 (1.23) [^]	3.47 (1.20)

*,+,[^] = Differences between undergraduate students and graduate students are statistically significant

Discrimination

Approximately 12% of students have felt discriminated against at the COSW since the 2021 school year began (Table 10). Of those students who personally felt discriminated against: 46% (n=14) felt discriminated against because of their age; 50% because of their social class; 30% felt discriminated because of their race/ethnicity or disability status; and 23% for their gender identity (Table 13).

Table 10. Perceived discrimination at the COSW

	% (n)		
	Undergraduate (n=55)	Graduate (n=193)	Total (n=264)
Ever felt discriminated against at the COSW	14.55% (n=8)	11.40% (n=22)	12.10% (n=30)

Table 11. Perceived discrimination at the COSW by sex

	% (n)			
	Undergraduate female (n=48)	Undergraduate male (n=6)	Graduate female (n=180)	Graduate male (n=21)
Ever felt discriminated against at the COSW	16.7% (n=8)	0% (n=0)	9.52% (n=16)	15% (n=3)

Table 12. Perceived discrimination at the COSW by race/ethnicity

	% (n)		
	Non-Hispanic White (n=155)	Non-Hispanic African American/Black (n=50)	Other (n=40)
Ever felt discriminated against at the COSW	10.97% (n=17)	18.00% (n=9)	10% (n=4)

Note: Other¹ includes Asian, AI/AN, Latinx and multiracial.

Table 13. Reasons of discrimination (n=30)

	%(n)
Ability or disability status	33.33% (n=10)
Racial/ethnic identity	33.33% (n=10)
Sex	36.67% (n=11)
Sexual orientation	3.33% (n=1)
Gender identity/gender expression	23.33% (n=7)
Veteran status	0
Marital status	16.67% (n=5)
National origin	3.33% (n=1)
Age	46% (n=14)
Religion	33.33% (n=10)
Height or weight	0
Political orientation	40% (n=12)
Social class	50% (n=15)
Other	16.67% (n=5)

Other responses include:

- "Parental status"
- "Based on my opinions"
- "Campus location – Charleston"
- "Professional affiliation"
- "Sexual harassment"

Inclusive and Equitable Treatment

We used an index to assess how students perceive their treatment at the COSW. The index is made up of responses to statements including “I am treated fairly and equitably in classroom settings” and “I am treated fairly and equitably in out-of-classroom University spaces.” Students responded with their level of agreement (strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree nor disagree; agree; strongly agree). A perfect score of “1” would mean as negative as possible, while a score of “5” would be the strongest level of agreement.

On average, students report agreeing with the statement that they are valued (Tables 14 – 17) and treated equitably (Tables 18 – 20). Relative to grad students, undergrads report significantly higher level of agreement with feeling valued by other students (Table 14). Differences by sex and race/ethnicity were not statistically significant (Tables 15 and 16).

Table 14. Levels of feeling valued at the COSW classrooms

Feeling valued by ...	Mean (SD)		
	Undergraduate (n=52)	Graduate (n=188)	Total (n=240)
Instructors	4 (1.03)	4.11 (0.77)	4.08 (0.83)
other students	4.25 (0.91)*	3.90 (0.78)*	3.97 (0.82)

(*) = Differences are statistically significant.

Table 15. Levels of feeling valued at the COSW classrooms by sex

Feeling valued by ...	Mean (SD)			
	Undergraduate female (n=45)	Undergraduate male (n=6)	Graduate female (n=162)	Graduate male (n=20)
Instructors	4.02 (0.97)	3.83 (1.60)	4.14 (0.74)	4 (0.97)
other students	4.27 (0.82)	4.17 (1.60)	3.93 (0.77)	3.85 (0.75)

Table 16. Levels of feeling valued at the COSW classrooms by race/ethnicity

Feeling valued by ...	Mean (SD)		
	Non-Hispanic White (n=150)	Non-Hispanic African American/Black (n=54)	Other (n=33)
Instructors	4.08 (0.86)	4.00 (0.85)	4.24 (0.66)
other students	3.94 (0.84)	4.07 (0.80)	4.03 (0.69)

We asked a similar set of questions about feeling valued *outside* of the classroom. Students reported feeling slightly less valued outside of the classroom, with grad students feeling significantly less valued than undergrads by other students, their faculty advisor/mentor, and COSW administrators. Both undergrads and grads report the lowest level of agreement when asked about feeling valued by university staff/admin outside the College (Table 17). This is also reflected in their perception of fair and

equitable treatment at the overall level of the university and the college (Table 18), though these differences are not significant.

Table 17. Levels of feeling valued outside the classrooms at the COSW

	Mean (SD)		
	Undergraduate (n=52)	Graduate (n=181)	Total (n=233)
In spaces outside the classroom, I feel valued by:			
Instructors	3.98 (0.75)	4.04 (0.79)	4.03 (0.78)
Other faculty (not instructors)	3.78 (0.77)	3.62 (0.84)	3.65 (0.83)
Other students	4.33 (0.79)*	3.89 (0.85)*	3.99 (0.85)
COSW staff members	3.86 (0.71)	3.61 (0.82)	3.67 (0.80)
GA supervisor	3.67 (0.74)	3.79 (1.03)	3.76 (0.97)
Faculty advisor/mentor	4.11 (0.79)+	3.71 (1.03)+	3.79 (0.99)
COSW administrators	3.82 (0.83)^	3.39 (1.00)^	3.49 (0.98)
University staff/admin	3.52 (0.77)	3.32 (0.95)	3.37 (0.92)

*,+,^ = Differences are statistically significant

Table 18. Levels of being treated fairly and equitably

	Mean (SD)		
	Undergraduate (n=52)	Graduate (n=188)	Total (n=240)
Overall, I am treated fairly and equitably at the...			
COSW	4.12 (0.81)	4.01 (0.84)	4.03 (0.84)
UofSC	3.96 (0.97)	3.78 (0.88)	3.82 (0.90)

Table 19. Levels of being treated fairly and equitably by sex

	Mean (SD)			
	Undergraduate Female (n=45)	Undergraduate male (n=6)	Graduate female (n=160)	Graduate male (n=21)
Overall, I am treated fairly and equitably at the...				
COSW	4.07 (0.84)	4.33 (0.52)	4.04 (0.81)	4.05 (0.86)
UofSC	3.93 (0.96)	4.00 (1.10)	3.83 (0.86)	3.62 (0.92)

Table 20. Levels of being treated fairly and equitably by race/ethnicity

	Mean (SD)		
	Non-Hispanic White (n=149)	Non-Hispanic African American/Black (n=55)	Other (n=32)
Overall, I am treated fairly and equitably at the...			
COSW	4.07 (0.86)	3.84 (0.79)	4.19 (0.78)
UofSC	3.92 (0.90)	3.51 (0.79)	3.88 (1.00)

Access to Campus Resources

We asked students to report their perceived level of access to campus resources. The question provided a list of various student support offices on campus and asked “If you have accessed these supports (or think you might try to access them if you needed to), **do you generally feel that the staff and services provided by these offices are accessible to you?** If you think you would **NEVER** need to contact or go to the office, select the “not applicable” response option.”

The response options ranged from “1” (not at all accessible) to “4” (very accessible). Average responses suggest that students do not perceive these university services to be very accessible to them (Table 21). There were no significant differences in responses by undergrad students and graduate students for any of the items.

Table 21. Access to campus resources

To what extent you feel that the staff and services provided by these offices are accessible to you?	Mean (SD)		
	Undergraduate	Graduate	Total
University Health services - Mental health counseling	2.36 (0.93)	2.15 (2.15)	2.2 (0.98)
University Health Services - Medical Services	1.53 (0.66)	1.7 (0.86)	1.65 (0.81)
UofSC Campus police	1.88 (0.86)	1.92 (0.89)	1.91 (0.88)
Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships	1.88 (0.73)	1.98 (0.79)	1.95 (0.78)
Bursar's Office	1.79 (0.74)	1.9 (0.81)	1.88 (0.79)
Writing Center	1.49 (0.77)	1.71 (0.82)	1.64 (0.80)
Gamecock Pantry	1.48 (0.65)	2.05 (1.10)	1.89 (1.02)
Student Disability Resources Center	1.69 (0.78)	1.9 (0.96)	1.83 (0.91)
International Student Services	1.75 (0.62)	2.07 (1.11)	1.97 (0.99)

Multivariate Models of Key Measures

Table 22 below summarizes the regression analyses for satisfaction with the overall climate at the COSW (first model) and perception of discrimination at the COSW (second model). Multivariate logistic regression was used to estimate the independent effect of each demographic category on the odds of having each specific experience or response type. Statistically significant effects of the odds of an experience are displayed in bold, with the levels of significance identified. The variable “Racial outgroup pre-COSW” is based on the question “How would you describe the racial/ethnic composition of the school that you graduated from prior to attending the COSW?” where possible answers ranged from “All or nearly all people of my race/ethnicity” to “All or nearly all people of other races/ethnicities.”

Table 22. Results of logistic regression for satisfaction of and perceived discrimination at COSW

	Odds Ratios (95% Confidence Interval)	
	Satisfaction "satisfied or very satisfied" (reference: "neutral, unsatisfied, or very unsatisfied")	Discrimination "Yes" (reference: "No")
Graduate (ref: undergrad)	0.89 (0.42, 1.88)	0.40 (0.13, 1.27)
Age (years)	0.98 (0.95, 1.01)	1.04 (0.99, 1.09)
Female (ref: male)	1.17 (0.46, 2.96)	0.68 (0.16, 2.84)
LGBTQ+ (ref: heterosexual)	0.43* (0.21, 0.85)	1.67 (0.54, 5.15)
<i>Race/ethnicity (ref: White students)</i>		
African American/Black	0.55 (0.25, 1.24)	1.41 (0.42, 4.77)
Other racial/ethnic minorities	0.89 (0.35, 2.24)	0.19 (0.02, 1.75)
Disability (ref: no disabilities)	0.37* (0.18, 0.79)	2.46 (0.81, 7.45)
First-generation college student	1.18 (0.62, 2.25)	2.19 (0.85, 5.65)
Racial outgroup pre-COSW	1.29 (0.95, 1.74)	1.71* (1.03, 2.83)

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The significant results from Table 22 suggest that:

- LGBTQ+ respondents reported lower odds of satisfaction at the COSW, compared to heterosexual respondents.
- Students with a disability reported lower odds of satisfaction at the COSW, compared to students with no disabilities.
- Students who, prior to coming to the COSW, previously graduated from schools with more racial outgroup members (the variable in Table 22 “Racial outgroup pre-COSW”) reported higher odds of perceived discrimination at the COSW.

In Table 23 below, ordinary least-square (OLS) regression was used to estimate the independent effect of each demographic category on the level of feelings about specific aspects of the COSW climate. The first model in Table 23 estimates the effects on the levels of agreement that the COSW has high institutional commitment to DEI goals. The second model estimates the effects on the levels of agreement that the respondents have feelings of being valued and belonging at the COSW. The third model estimates the effects on the levels of agreement that the COSW is a place where the students can thrive and grow. The fourth model estimates the effects on the levels of agreement that the respondents are fairly and equitably treated at the COSW. In all four models, higher values indicate the stronger agreement.

The results from Table 23 suggest that:

- Compared to undergraduate students, graduate students are less likely to perceive that (1) COSW is institutionally committed to DEI; (2) they are being valued and belonged at the COSW; and (3) COSW is a place where the students can thrive and grow.
- Compared to heterosexual students, LGBTQ+ students are less likely to perceive that (1) COSW is institutionally committed to DEI and (2) COSW is a place where the students can thrive and grow.
- Compared to non-Hispanics White students, non-Hispanic African American/ Black students are less likely to perceive that (1) COSW is institutionally committed to DEI and (2) COSW is a place where the students can thrive and grow.

In Table 24, ordinary least-square regression was used to estimate the independent effect of each demographic category on the level individuals' interactions in a meaningful way with others of various characteristics. Each model estimates the effects on the levels of interaction with others of different race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious belief, and political orientation, respectively. Higher values indicate more frequent interactions with others.

The results from Table 24 suggest that:

- Compared to undergraduate students, graduate students are less likely to have meaningful interaction with others with different sexual orientation at the COSW.
- Older students are less likely to have meaningful interaction with others with different (1) race/ethnicity, (2) religious belief, and (3) political orientation at the COSW.
- Compared to heterosexual students, LGBTQ+ students have more meaningful interaction with students with different sexual orientations at the COSW. In contrast, heterosexual students, LGBTQ+ students tend to have less meaningful conversations with others with different political orientation at the COSW.
- Students from schools with more racial outgroup members tend to have more meaningful conversations with others with different political perspectives at the COSW.

Table 23. Results of OLS Regression for feelings of institutional commitment, value and belonging, thriving and growth, and fairness and equitability

	Coefficients (95% Confidence Interval)			
	Institutional Commitment	Value/ Belonging	Thrive/ Growth	Fairness/ Equitability
Graduate (ref: undergrad students)	-0.36** (-0.60, -0.12)	-0.24** (-0.39, -0.08)	-0.30* (-0.55, -0.05)	0.01 (-0.28, 0.30)
Age (years)	-0.02 (-0.02, 0.01)	0.01 (-0.001, 0.01)	-0.002 (-0.01, 0.01)	-0.01 (-0.02, 0.01)
Female (relative to male)	-0.14 (-0.45, 0.17)	-0.15 (-0.35, 0.05)	-0.10 (-0.43, 0.22)	-0.05 (-0.42, 0.31)
LGBTQ+ (relative to heterosexual)	-0.34** (-0.57, -0.11)	-0.07 (-0.22, 0.07)	-0.28* (-0.51, -0.04)	-0.25 (-0.53, 0.04)
<i>Race/ethnicity (ref: White students)</i>				
African American/Black	-0.28* (-0.55, -0.02)	-0.02 (-0.18, 0.15)	-0.43** (-0.70, -0.16)	-0.14 (-0.46, 0.18)
Other racial/ethnic minorities	-0.01 (-0.30, 0.29)	0.05 (-0.13, 0.24)	-0.01 (-0.30, 0.29)	0.31 (-0.08, 0.69)
Disability (ref: no disabilities)	-0.21 (-0.46, 0.03)	-0.08 (-0.24, 0.08)	-0.22 (-0.48, 0.03)	-0.55 (-0.35, 0.24)
First-generation college student	-0.08 (-0.29, 0.12)	-0.02 (-0.24, 0.08)	-0.03 (-0.24, 0.18)	0.004 (-0.25, 0.26)
Racial outgroup pre-COSW	-0.003 (-0.10, 0.10)	-0.02 (-0.08, 0.04)	-0.03 (-0.13, 0.07)	-0.06 (-0.19, 0.06)

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 24. Results of OLS Regression for interactions in a meaningful way with others of different social identities

	Coefficients (95% Confidence Interval)			
	Interaction: race/ethnicity	Interaction: sexual orientation	Interaction: religious belief	Interaction: political orientation
Graduate (ref: undergrad students)	-0.17 (-0.43, 0.08)	-0.37* (-0.69, -0.06)	-0.01 (-0.39, 0.37)	0.02 (-0.35, 0.39)
Age (years)	-0.01* (-0.03, -0.003)	-0.003 (-0.02, 0.01)	-0.03** (-0.05, -0.01)	-0.02** (-0.04, -0.01)
Female (relative to male)	0.003 (-0.32, 0.33)	-0.04 (-0.46, 0.37)	-0.02 (-0.52, 0.48)	-0.17 (-0.66, 0.31)
LGBTQ+ (relative to heterosexual)	-0.18 (-0.42, 0.06)	0.44** (0.13, 0.74)	0.02 (-0.35, 0.49)	-0.40* (-0.76, -0.04)
<i>Race/ethnicity (ref: White students)</i>				
African American/Black	0.11 (-0.16, 0.39)	0.15 (-0.20, 0.50)	0.05 (-0.39, 0.49)	0.05 (-0.38, 0.47)
Other racial/ethnic minorities	0.06 (-0.24, 0.37)	-0.11 (-0.50, 0.28)	-0.10 (-0.56, 0.36)	-0.44 (-0.90, 0.03)
Disability (ref: no disabilities)	0.02 (-0.24, 0.78)	0.27 (-0.05, 0.59)	0.30 (-0.09, 0.69)	-0.22 (-0.60, 0.15)
First-generation	0.15 (-0.06, 0.37)	0.10 (-0.17, 0.37)	-0.32 (-0.65, 0.01)	0.17 (-0.15, 0.48)
Racial outgroup pre- COSW	0.04 (-0.06, 0.15)	0.05 (-0.08, 0.19)	0.02 (-0.14, 0.18)	0.19* (0.03, 0.34)

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Conclusion

Overall, the report finds that the College of Social Work is home to a diverse student body where many enjoy a positive, welcoming climate. Yet this is not experienced universally by students, and our findings suggest there are some systematic differences in students' perceptions of and treatment by the COSW and broader university. The fact that more than one in ten respondents experienced some form of discrimination in the first semester of the 2021/22 academic year is a clear indication that the COSW must pursue systemic changes. At the university level, significant changes must be made to ensure that students can access the supports and services they need.

Some of the open-ended responses provide additional insight into these findings, specifically as it concerns race and ethnicity:

- "I am almost always treated in a way that is different than my [white] counterparts"
- "Since, August 2021 there have been many in class incidents that were not addressed by professors. Multiple times, offensive comments were made by a White male and nothing was said to him. I have experienced this in several of my classes and it is frustrating. As a Black female I have felt like I cannot say much in class without being criticized by certain students and it has negatively impacted my classroom experience."
- "The COSW is very white and does not prepare future social workers for a very racist South Carolina that they will face. It feels like the COSW glosses over the very real racism that happens outside of our classrooms and has not prepared us for what we are actually going to face."
- "Not enough classes that discuss diversity...The books that are chosen all have African Americans at the bottom of everything negative...It would be nice to see other professors of different backgrounds."

Ongoing efforts must lower barriers to access for students with disabilities. Students addressed these concerns in comment boxes throughout the survey:

- "I continue to be disappointed and upset by the lack of an initiative to address disability diversity equity and inclusion, especially when it regards invisible disabilities, such as chronic illnesses and illnesses of the brain. The attendance policy is a very good example of this, but in addition, the fact that accessibility of Multiple Modes of Engagement with the class isn't stressed, like doing hybrid classes, recording lectures, putting notes online, and allowing longer test-taking time. Some professors believe these things are luxuries and not critical pieces of accommodation that make or break whether or not people with chronic illnesses and mental disabilities are able to successfully engage with the class. I've witnessed people asking for these accommodations and the professor responding as if the student is being lazy. This is not even to mention the system with field education, as there is only one model for completing field hours and it is not one that [accommodates] people with disabilities, women who are pregnant/raising children, and just people who are not of the social class to be able to dedicate all of their time to school. I would like to see several options that allow a person to complete their recommended hours."
- "I had professors that struggled, forgot, or did not implement my accommodations in the classroom despite multiple notices, reminders, and having the proper paperwork. Even my peers took notice and attempted to help, but I still had to fight very hard for my accommodations and they were only almost fully implemented by the end of the year and some

were still lacking. It worries me about future interactions that I will continue to have this struggle and I will not have the help I need to be at the same level of my peers.”

- “I feel that my instructors value me, my opinions, and classroom actions, but do not...[make an] effort to fully grant me my accommodations. So while I feel valued as a student, I do not feel valued as a disabled student. My cohort is amazing and I have never felt such strong support from a group who truly values all of me including my disability and does not attempt to ignore or forget about it.”
- “I had to take a break during my time with the school due to trauma and my mental illness. I have found being open about my mental health has not served me well when going through the program. I have had professors compliment my growth, but others who have made me feel awkward.”
- “I have reached out to a couple professors about issues with anxiety...since starting my MSW journey, and those two specific professors were overwhelmingly kind and attentive, whereas I don't have the desire to open up to students in the program because I somewhat feel out of place, even though I know I am supposed to be here.”
- “Please...ensure people with invisible disabilities can still get an education, especially when it comes to field and the attendance policy. The attendance policy this past semester is directly prohibitive to people with invisible disabilities. Please look into the concepts of universal design and universal instructional design...I realize this comes off very negative—I've just seen so many people hurt and unaccommodated for disability since I've been here. I really do think some of the professors here are the kindest and smartest people I've had the pleasure to learn from. But at the same time, some of staff and faculty just are not educated on the ways disabilities affect your everyday life. The student disability center can't fight everybody's battles—some of those battles just shouldn't be there in the first place.”
- “Implement accommodations such as subtitles or have an option for braille textbooks or have a quiet room consistently throughout classes despite whether a student needs it, because then somewhat who does need it doesn't have to ask, and those that do not see it normalized.”

Other comments by respondents point to differential treatment experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ communities such as limited access to gender-neutral bathrooms, misused pronouns, and ignored name preferences:

- “I am very frequently misgendered [by students in class]. I have corrected them before on my gender identity but it doesn't stop and none of my professors have stated anything about it.”
- “I definitely feel valued by my instructors. All the instructors that I have told about [my gender identity] have been very understanding and supportive, and never treated me differently afterwards. Some of the students were a little awkward about it in the beginning, maybe because they did not know and were just finding out. I feel that they have since moved on towards accepting it.”
- “Misgendering students in the classroom has to stop. Asking pronouns only to misuse them makes my peers anxious to even come to class. Then - we are severely punished for not attending class. There is no room for mental health.”
- “I'm glad to see the gender neutral bathrooms! I feel like the fact that it took until 2022 to get the first one in the building going is kind of sad. I would love to see more safe space stickers throughout the whole building and have instructors discuss their commitment to diversity and inclusion, especially for queer students like me.”

In conclusion, we trust this report will help the COSW community make some progress towards identifying how our institution systematically impedes some students and student groups from a sense of belonging and the ability to thrive in our programs. It should increase awareness among members of our community regarding the work we need to do in order to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. This work includes structural transformation and personal changes, both of which will require much more than is possible from a report like this one. The work we need to do will demand a long-term institutional and individual commitment, as well as the resources to get it done. In short, this report points to many things that need to be changed—perhaps radically—in order for us to become a leading institution on campus and in our state on diversity, equity and inclusion. For this reason, we see this report as a beginning point rather than any kind of finish line. Yes, it will inform the DEI strategic planning process, and we hope it sparks reflection and dialogue among faculty, staff, and students. But recognizing the need for these changes is merely acknowledging that we are at the beginning of a long journey.

Appendix: Data from open-ended survey questions

There were many comments that students made in open-ended. These comments are important so we include them here, loosely organized according to themes.

Religion and politics

“I believe the COSW is very inclusive and accepting except when it comes to religious or political beliefs that are not the "norm." There have been a few instances of classmates sharing about how Christianity is exclusive, how it could be mistaken as schizophrenia from a client if they were talking about him coming back, etc. The professor went along with it and said "crazy Christians back at it again." This is not the only instance where I have felt like I could not be open about my religious beliefs. If this were any other religion being talked about, I feel that overall, it would be respected.”

“Classmates will make comments about how terrible people are who have different political views and religious views than them. I never say anything because I have never felt comfortable sharing my views because of how tense the room can get. This constantly stresses me out and makes me feel not accepted or valued.”

Other campuses

“When we were at the previous campus, we had computer and printing access, ample close parking (to include more handicap parking), comfortable classrooms, multiple restrooms, as well as areas to sit outside of the classroom. At the current campus we have NO computer/printing access, the classrooms are freezing (to the point where we brought blankets, hats, scarves and jackets), one bathroom with multiple stalls and have to sit on the steps outside or in the grass. Everything is offered is at Columbia campus, and no arrangements or consideration has been made to include our campus. We were visited by school staff who took down our concerns, had no answers to many questions, and acted if we were the ones that were misguided. Since that time, no one has took a look back to even see if we are okay or make us feel more welcome. None of our concerns have been addressed, or resolved, unless you count the three heaters that were brought in which were only felt by those seated closely to them. We pay the same money as Columbia students yet have none of the amenities of that campus. I feel discarded, unimportant, and at this point am just looking forward to graduating. My saving grace is my AWESOME instructors and cohort. I wish for future classes that the program/school does better by Charleston campus...”

“I think as part time students at a satellite location we sometimes feel less valuable to the overall college and school compared to full time students in the program. Dr. Morgan and others at the Greenville location make me feel very valued and are a part of my community/invite me to be part of their community in social work/academia.”

“Important to note that I have very limited exposure to COSW this year as I am only completing my field practicum and am not in any true classes. I only interact with COSW related to my field placement and my answers would be different otherwise. I do wish the field office treated us more like the knowledgeable professionals with expertise in our own experiences and careers. At times I have been made to feel less than an expert in my own life when engaging with the field office and it is frustrating.”

“The Lowcountry Graduate Center would be better if we were in a place where we had access to a library and a place to study and if we had technology that actually worked since we are paying for those things. Better communication would also be nice in order for the students that are there to have a better understanding of what is expected and needed from the college (more specifically the College of Social Work).”

PhD-specific

“In my experience, professors speak to me and other students in a demeaning manner. The COSW lacks the support and mentorship necessary to graduate PhD students who are competitive in the job market.”

But this contrasts with some other comments (from non-PhD students): “The instructors COSW are just as interested in learning for their students as they are in teaching them. They take the time to get to know us. The students are also eager to learn from each other.”

Many others point to inconsistencies: “I do believe that most of my classmates and professors are open-minded and do listen to what I have to say and see me as an individual. There are some professors that are “their way or the highway” but I feel like every program will have those.”

Pandemic

“The cohort that I am a part of gets along very well, and I always feel supported by my classmates. Professors have not always been understanding or gracious to us, especially considering that we have been in the middle of a pandemic. One prime issue has been attendance policies, and the lack of understanding coming from professors. Seeing and experiencing understanding from other professors really highlights that professors who are not willing to be flexible are choosing to do so. Therefore, they are CHOOSING to make things more difficult for us. Very disappointing from the college of social work.”

“I had a hard time last semester. I know a lot of other students felt as if our effort being put into the course was being degraded by absences we couldn’t control, and a few teachers did not seem to care if we succeeded or failed. This semester (SPRING 2022), all of my teachers seem to respect and understand that we all have lives and are adults, as long as we keep them posted on our situations and try our best to work with them, they will work with us as much as they can. A huge difference from being treated as less by a select few of professors in fall of 2021.”

“I think amongst the current situation with the pandemic there needs to be better considerations for students that have to miss class due to COVID related issues. There should be virtual opportunities or recordings of class. I had to fight tooth and nail last semester to make sure I didn’t fail a class because of COVID related absences which is something that was not brought to our attention until the last few weeks of class. I understand that absences need to be enforced, but being a student at the college of social work I was assuming that there would be more understanding towards students during this public health crisis.”

Financial barriers

“They make it seem as if a part time program is accessible and flexible but it really isn't. Many students find themselves struggling financially when faced with working and committing to an internship. I feel that the demands of the internship create an exclusionary environment through which students with

lesser means are vetted out of the program and those who are more fortunate can continue on without having to choose between having a home or completing the required hours.”

“I can't really spend much time on campus because parking is so expensive and I can't afford it - so I can't come to campus except through carpooling or the bus. Because of that, I can't really spend much time in the building with my peers or have the same access as everyone else. I would like for professors to understand these limitations and address them in class.”

“Please don't make students do 200 field hours anymore! a lot of us are poor and are balancing a job (if not multiple) to support ourselves. you are literally driving us to the brink of financial instability!”

“The field program to operate appropriately for part time students must maintain the option to complete field hours within workplace hours as they have considered this year. Otherwise I would not (and others in the program) have been able to complete field without significantly setting myself and family back financially EVEN WITH financial aid.”

“Being a Greenville student makes it more difficult to take part in larger campus events. Having more events on the weekends or live streamed would help. Also, we don't have access to the different societies or organizations that I would like to be a part of.”

“The difference in part-time and full time programs seems to be more than just how long it takes to complete. It feels as if the part-time program students are provided with less choice in elective courses. It is understood going in that the course of study should be followed in order to complete the program in the allotted time, but it seems that the few elective choices offered are lacking in diversity from one summer session to the next. I wasn't able to answer a lot of the survey questions because I haven't had interactions (outside of one time meetings) with members of the college outside of my instructors and fellow students.”