

GSE Climate Survey Report, 2023

Helsinki GSE's equality committee was established in 2019, with a broad mission of promoting equality in the community in all its forms. It is dedicated to ensuring that opportunities and resources are distributed fairly in the community, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or any other status of a member. The committee works diligently to foster an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

The lack of diversity and inclusivity has been a pervasive issue in the field of economics, a challenge that also surfaced in 2018 when the American Economic Association conducted an extensive professional climate survey. There is a global endeavor in the field of economics to enhance equality and improve the overall atmosphere. A pivotal strategy in this global mission involves the collection of local data, which informs the development of tailored solutions to enhance conditions. In alignment with this approach, the equality committee decided to conduct a survey to assess and map the studying and working environment within the GSE community.

This GSE Climate Survey Report offers a comprehensive overview of the findings from our survey on the studying and working environment, conducted last spring. Within this report, we present the results and insights derived from the survey, as well as the discussions they have sparked, illuminating the perspectives and experiences of our community members with regard to our unique studying and working environment. This first report signifies a pivotal milestone in our joint commitment to drive positive change and elevate the overall experience of the GSE community.

Participants

The survey was distributed to faculty members within the Helsinki GSE community across several institutions: the University of Helsinki, encompassing both the disciplines of Economics and Agricultural, Environmental, and Resource Economics; Aalto University; and Hanken School of Economics. It also included researchers from the VATT Institute for Economic Research. Additionally, the survey was sent to all postgraduate, master's, and bachelor's students involved in the programs.

The survey received a total of 167 responses, with approximately 74% of the respondents being students (Appendix, Figures A1). Among the student respondents, 57% were affiliated with the University of Helsinki, 32% with Aalto University, and 11% with Hanken School of Economics. Regarding the faculty respondents, 46% were from the University of Helsinki, 30% from Aalto University, 7% from Hanken School of Economics, and 6% from the VATT Institute for Economic Research. In terms of gender identification, 66% of the respondents identified as male, 27% as female, and 7% preferred not to disclose their gender.

Notably, graduate students demonstrated a commendably high level of participation in the survey, accounting for 45 of the total responses. On the other hand, bachelor's and master's students were somewhat less responsive. Therefore, to present the results, the responses from bachelor's students and master's students in both the general and research tracks have been combined.

In general, we received a pleasing number of responses to the survey, but it was still insufficient to meaningfully segment the results based on factors such as the respondent's gender or affiliation. The intention is to conduct the survey approximately every two years, and moving forward, efforts should be made to ensure a larger response rate.

Overall satisfaction

The initial questions focused on the overall satisfaction with the respondent's study or work environment. Among graduate students, around 28% expressed a moderate or slight dissatisfaction with their department as a welcoming and respectful environment for work/study, while approximately 16% indicated a similar level of dissatisfaction with their job/studies (Appendix, Figures A2). Among the faculty members, the level of dissatisfaction was slightly lower: about 12% reported ranging from extremely to slightly dissatisfied with their department as a welcoming and respectful environment for work, and roughly 7% expressed a similar level of dissatisfaction with their job.

Studying and working environment

The following 12 questions in the survey explored various aspects of the studying and working environment (Appendix, Figures A3). A conducive work and study environment fosters a strong sense of belonging, mutual respect, inclusivity, and open dialogue, while also implementing effective mechanisms to address and resolve instances of discourteous or offensive behavior. The findings

reveal a clear lack of a strong sense of belonging within the GSE units and in studying economics. Approximately 38% of the students expressed varying degrees of disagreement with the statement regarding feeling connected with others while studying economics. Additionally, a significant proportion of graduate students (43%) disagreed with the idea that there is a strong sense of community in their respective department/unit. A similar sentiment was shared by approximately 18% of the faculty respondents.

The findings also indicate that a considerable number of respondents are unsure about the appropriate means and channels for reporting problematic behavior. Approximately 40% of both undergraduate and graduate students disagreed with the availability of a clear process for reporting and resolving conflicts associated with discourteous or offensive conduct. Similarly, among faculty members, almost 30% of the respondents shared this sentiment.

Inappropriate conduct

Furthermore, the survey sought to determine whether respondents had personally experienced discrimination or unfair treatment, or observed or witnessed such behaviors. The results indicate that troubling behaviors, such as bullying and ignoring or excluding individuals, are present within the GSE units and during the study of economics. (Appendix, Figures A4).

The survey concluded with a direct inquiry about incidents of sexual harassment. Among all groups, students, graduate students and faculty, there were respondents who had either personally experienced or witnessed instances of sexual harassment (Appendix, Figures A5). Furthermore, we asked those who had experienced or witnessed sexual harassment whether they had reported it. Only 8% of the respondents indicated that they had officially reported the harassment.

Summary of the results

In Table 1, we have compiled a summary of the survey results for all respondents. The questions in the table are categorized into different topics, and the responses have been analyzed to determine the percentage of respondents who are “slightly to extremely satisfied” or “somewhat to strongly agree” with a given statement. The table provides a clear overview of the areas where improvement is most needed.

Table 1: Summary of the results

Overall	How satisfied are you with your job/studies?	85 %
	How satisfied are you with your department or unit as a welcoming and respectful environment to work/study?	78 %
Inclusion and belonging	When studying economics, I feel valued and accepted by others. / I feel valued and accepted by others in the community.	81 %
	When studying economics, I feel connected to others. / I feel connected to others in the community.	70 %
	There is a strong sense of community in the department / unit.	68 %
Interpersonal justice	Faculty and staff treat me with dignity and respect.	84 %
	Students treat me with dignity and respect.	88 %
Diversity	In the community, there is a demonstrated commitment to diversity and inclusion.	62 %
	I am treated differently by others (faculty / staff / students) in the community or in my department / unit because of my identity (race / ethnicity, socioeconomic background, religion, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, etc.).	*75 %
Communication and civil discourse	Individuals' differing points-of-view and opinions are respectfully heard and considered.	74 %
	I feel comfortable/safe sharing my ideas and points of view openly in the classroom.	87 %
	I feel comfortable/safe sharing my ideas and points of view openly with my supervisor.	76 %
	I feel comfortable/safe sharing my ideas and points of view openly in seminars.	74 %
	I feel comfortable/safe sharing my ideas and points of view openly in the meetings of my unit.	71 %
	I feel comfortable/safe sharing my ideas and points of view openly in the GSE meetings.	59 %
Accountability for wrongdoing	In the community, there is a willingness to correct discourteous or offensive behavior.	57 %
	There is a clear process for reporting and resolving conflicts surrounding discourteous or offensive behavior.	39 %
	I would feel comfortable (not fear retaliation) coming forward with the complaints/grievances about discourteous or offensive behavior.	60 %
Incivility	I have personally been addressed in unprofessional terms either publicly or privately or I have observed or witnessed somebody else been addressed in unprofessional terms.	**28 %
	I have personally been ignored or excluded or I have observed or witnessed somebody else been ignored or excluded.	**23 %
	I have personally been bullied or harassed or I have observed or witnessed somebody else been bullied or harassed.	**20 %
	In the classroom or in other encounters with the faculty, have you been sexually harassed, or have you witnessed sexual harassment? / At your workplace or in work related events, have you been sexually harassed, or have you witnessed sexual harassment?	**10 %

Notes: The percentage indicates the proportion of respondents who are “slightly to extremely satisfied” or “somewhat to strongly agree” with a given statement. *Reverse ordered. ** Respondents were allowed to choose several options.

Based on the survey results, our community could benefit from a greater sense of togetherness, and there's room for improvement in our efforts towards promoting diversity and inclusion. Also, the environment could be more welcoming for open and inclusive participation in discussions, and there's been a need for a more consistent approach to addressing misconduct. Additionally, many respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the available channels for reporting misconduct.

Various forms of harassment are reported across all respondent groups. When interpreting the percentages in the table, it's essential to bear in mind that, in questions related to incivility, respondents could choose multiple response options. Thus, the percentage does not directly indicate the proportion of respondents who have experienced or witnessed harassment. The ultimate goal, of course, is to eliminate harassment and inappropriate behavior. So, despite the interpretation, the results are not favorable.

Discussion and proposed actions

During the past spring and early autumn, the survey results have been presented and discussed in various events and meetings, including the GSE Equality Committee, the "GSE Coffee" gathering, the GSE Board, and a session organized for representatives of student organizations. During the Board meeting, it was prominently noted that the results, when compared to the overall atmosphere at Aalto University, for example, were not good. There was also a clear consensus among the attendees of the discussions regarding the pressing need for improvement. Furthermore, in all discussions, harassment was deemed an exceptionally grave concern, and the importance of maintaining a zero-tolerance stance was strongly emphasized.

Below, we have compiled some of the improvement suggestions that emerged during these discussions. For some of these suggestions, improvements have already been implemented, or are currently in progress.

- (1) Provide comprehensive information on reporting channels and ensure that all individuals receive an email containing the information, including a link to the climate survey report.
- (2) Maintain consistent communication emphasizing a zero-tolerance policy towards disruptive behavior. There was advocacy for implementing an anonymous whistleblowing system, already proven efficient in the business world.

- (3) Explore various strategies to enhance community-building. For example,
- Evaluate the availability of additional spaces for students at Economicum.
 - Evaluate the possibility of re-furnishing the lobby spaces in the Economicum building to enhance community and student engagement.
 - Focus on better integrating new students, especially non-Finnish students, into the community during the early stages of their studies.
 - In our studies, we could encourage more collaboration, particularly by emphasizing activities like group work.
 - When new graduate students join, we could introduce them with photos and names, etc. This introduction could be included, for example, at the end of the weekly newsletter.
 - During discipline/GSE orientation events, emphasize the importance of building a strong sense of community. Consider highlighting activities beyond academics and involving student organizations more actively.
 - Arrange coffee or other gatherings more frequently – such as a monthly coffee event for everyone on the last Friday of each month.
 - Investigate measures implemented in other units to improve community cohesion.
- (4) Implement anonymous grading for exams and assignments to ensure fair and unbiased assessment.
- (5) Conduct the survey periodically, every two years, to monitor the progress and development of the situation and identify any emerging trends or areas of concern.

GSE Equality Committee

Marja-Liisa Halko (chair)

Cecilia Blomster

Annika Nivala

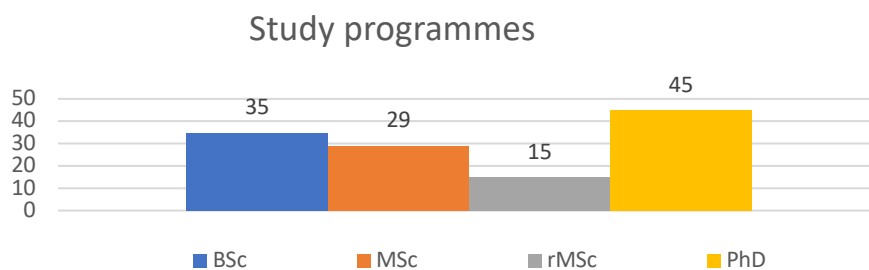
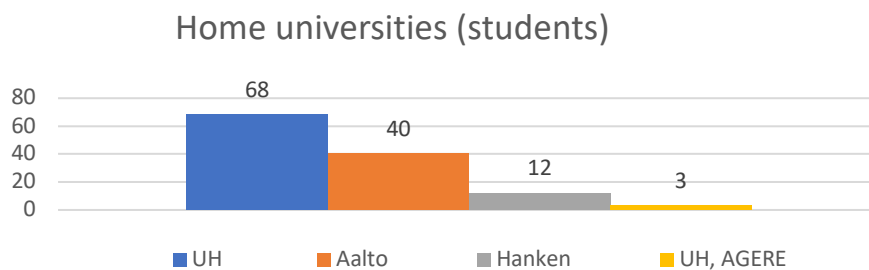
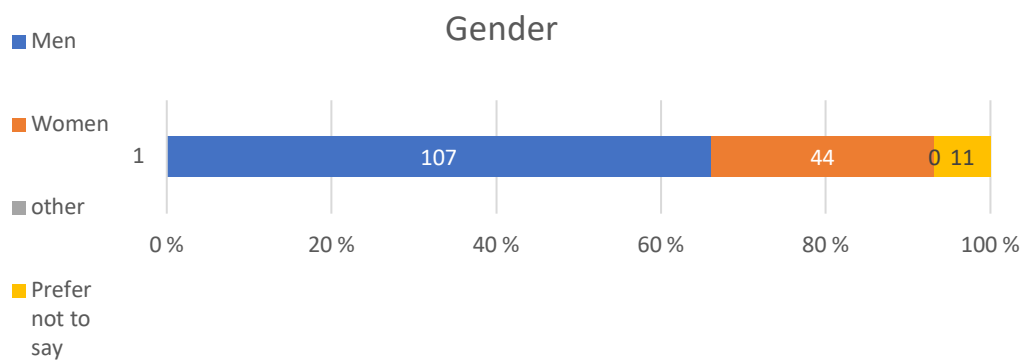
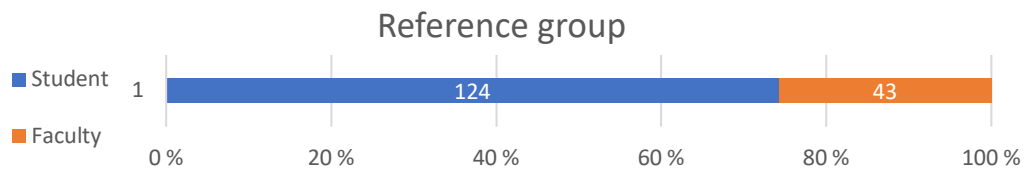
Jukka Pirttilä

Helena Rautakaulio

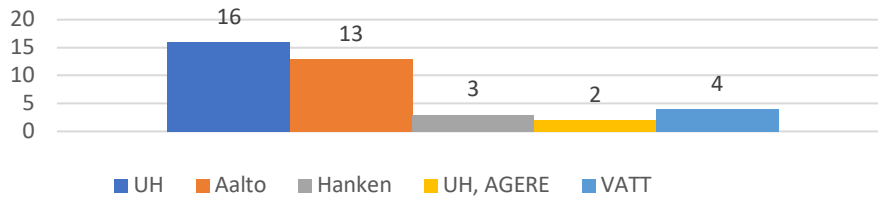
Tuukka Saarimaa

Appendix

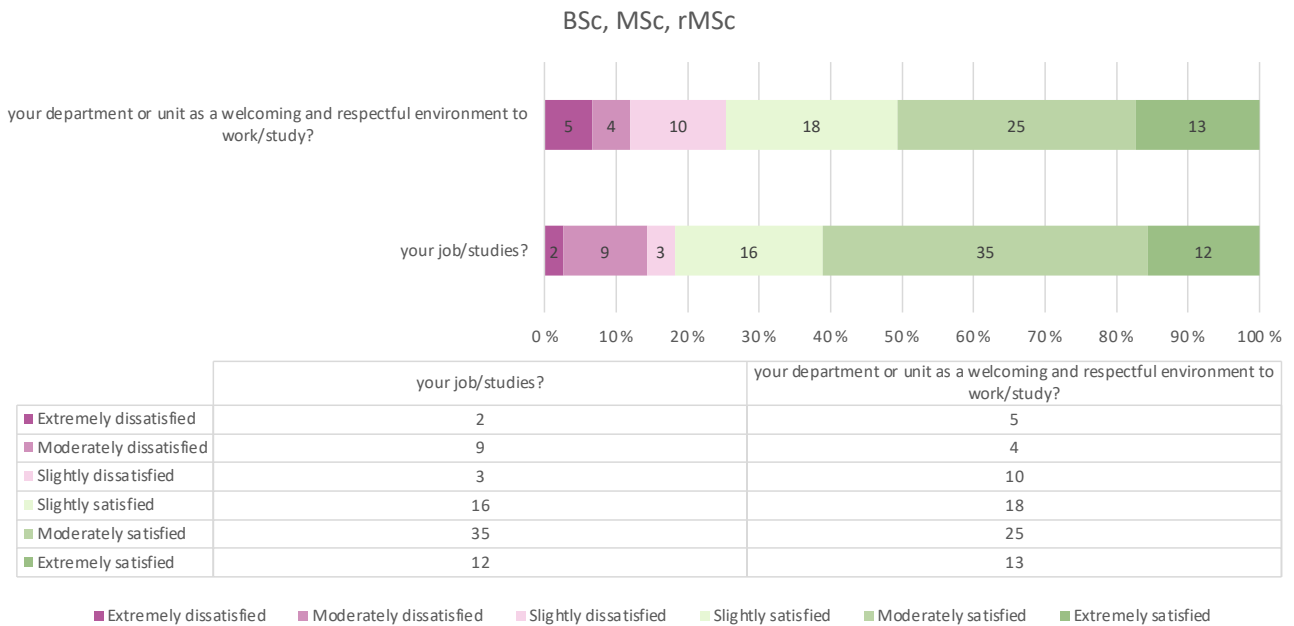
Figures A1: Demographics of the survey



Home departments (Faculty)



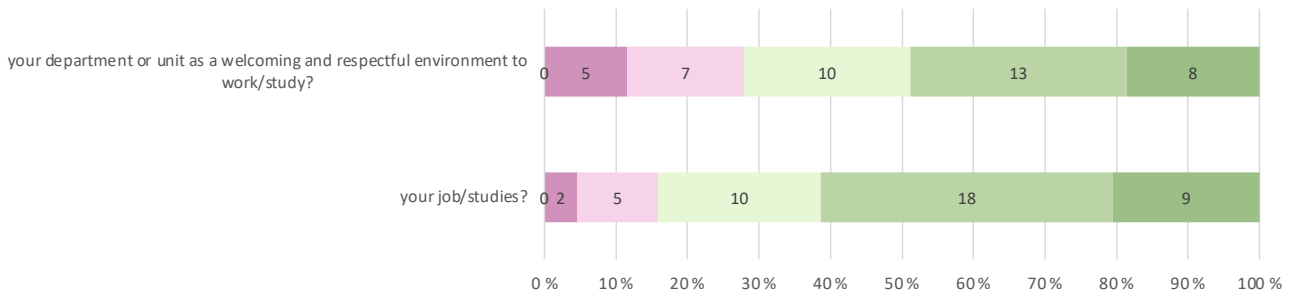
Figures A2: In the following questions, by community we mean the GSE units as a whole, and by department or unit your immediate working / studying environment. Please indicate first how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with your job / studies and your working / studying environment.



	your job/studies?	your department or unit as a welcoming and respectful environment to work/study?
Extremely dissatisfied	2	5
Moderately dissatisfied	9	4
Slightly dissatisfied	3	10
Slightly satisfied	16	18
Moderately satisfied	35	25
Extremely satisfied	12	13

Extremely dissatisfied Moderately dissatisfied Slightly dissatisfied Slightly satisfied Moderately satisfied Extremely satisfied

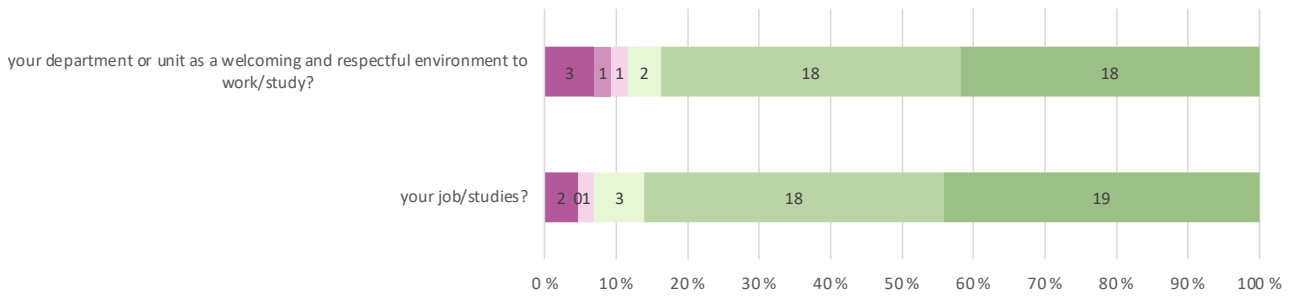
PhD



	your job/studies?	your department or unit as a welcoming and respectful environment to work/study?
Extremely dissatisfied	0	0
Moderately dissatisfied	2	5
Slightly dissatisfied	5	7
Slightly satisfied	10	10
Moderately satisfied	18	13
Extremely satisfied	9	8

Extremely dissatisfied Moderately dissatisfied Slightly dissatisfied Slightly satisfied Moderately satisfied Extremely satisfied

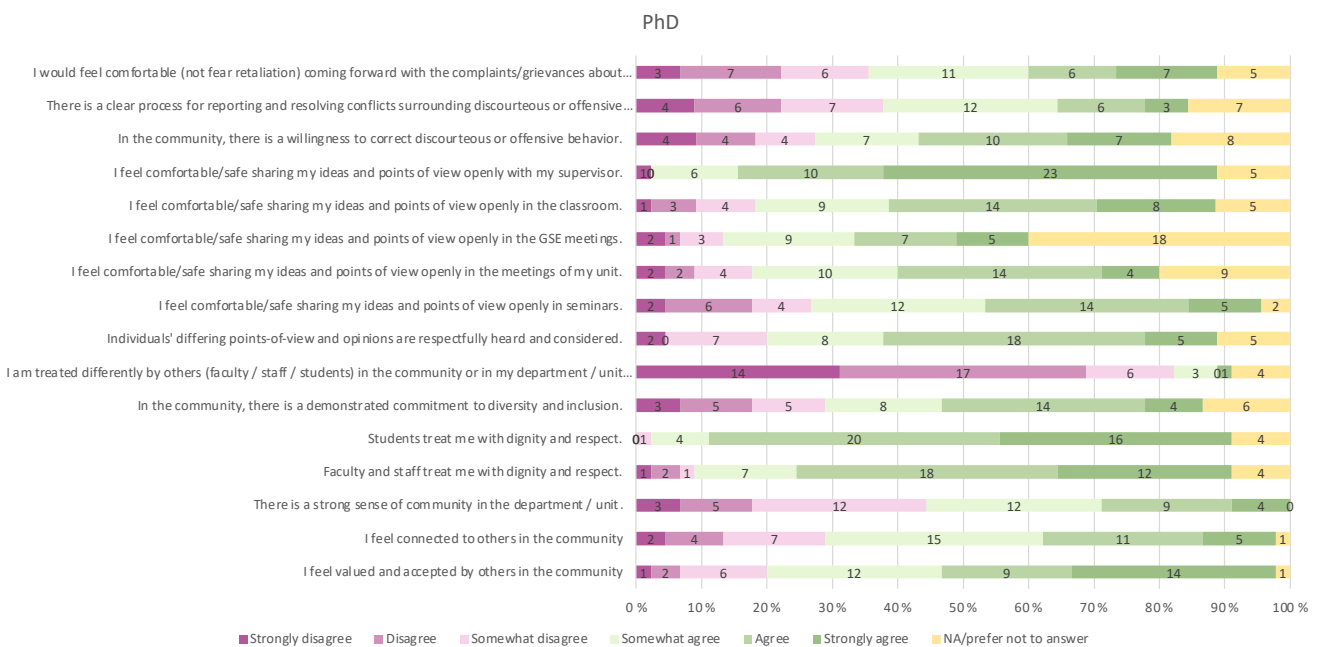
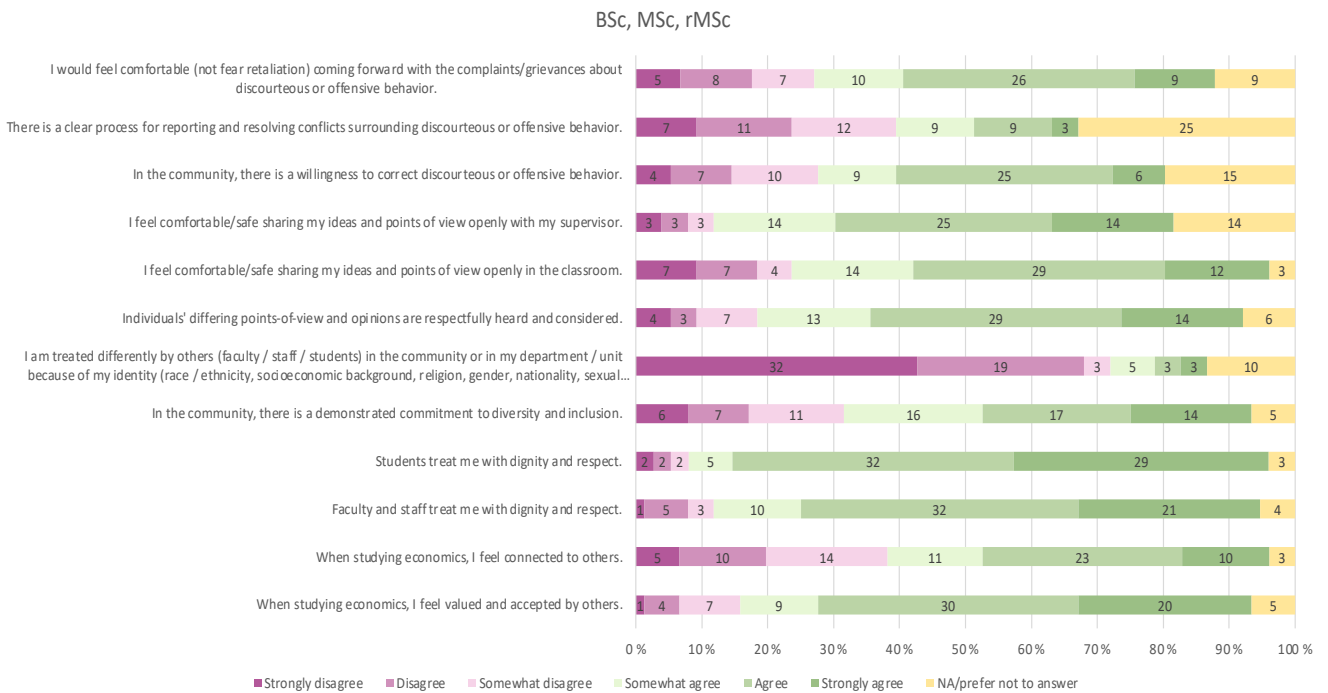
GSE Faculty



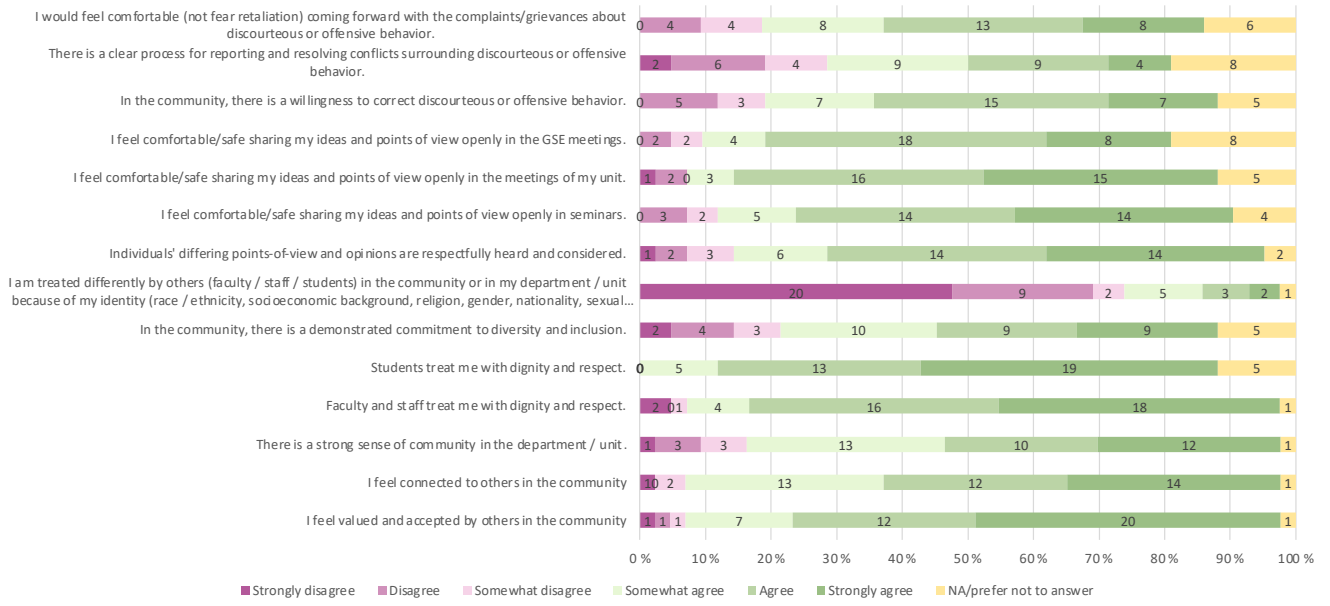
	your job/studies?	your department or unit as a welcoming and respectful environment to work/study?
Extremely dissatisfied	2	3
Moderately dissatisfied	0	1
Slightly dissatisfied	1	1
Slightly satisfied	3	2
Moderately satisfied	18	18
Extremely satisfied	19	18

Extremely dissatisfied Moderately dissatisfied Slightly dissatisfied Slightly satisfied Moderately satisfied Extremely satisfied

Figures A3: Please indicate next how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.



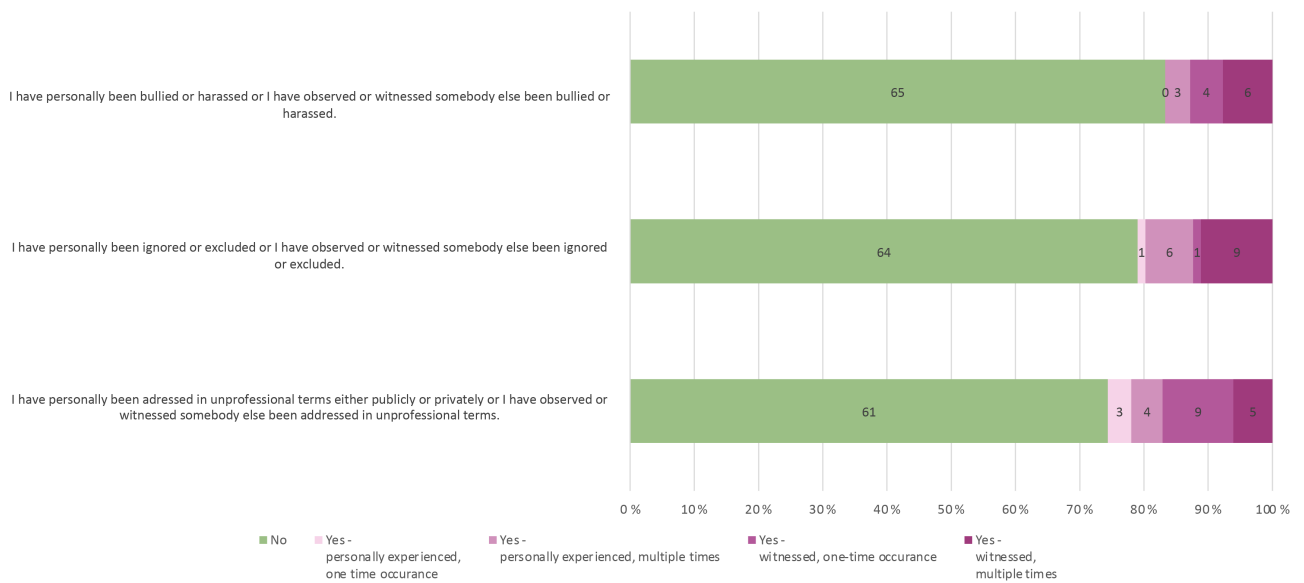
GSE Faculty



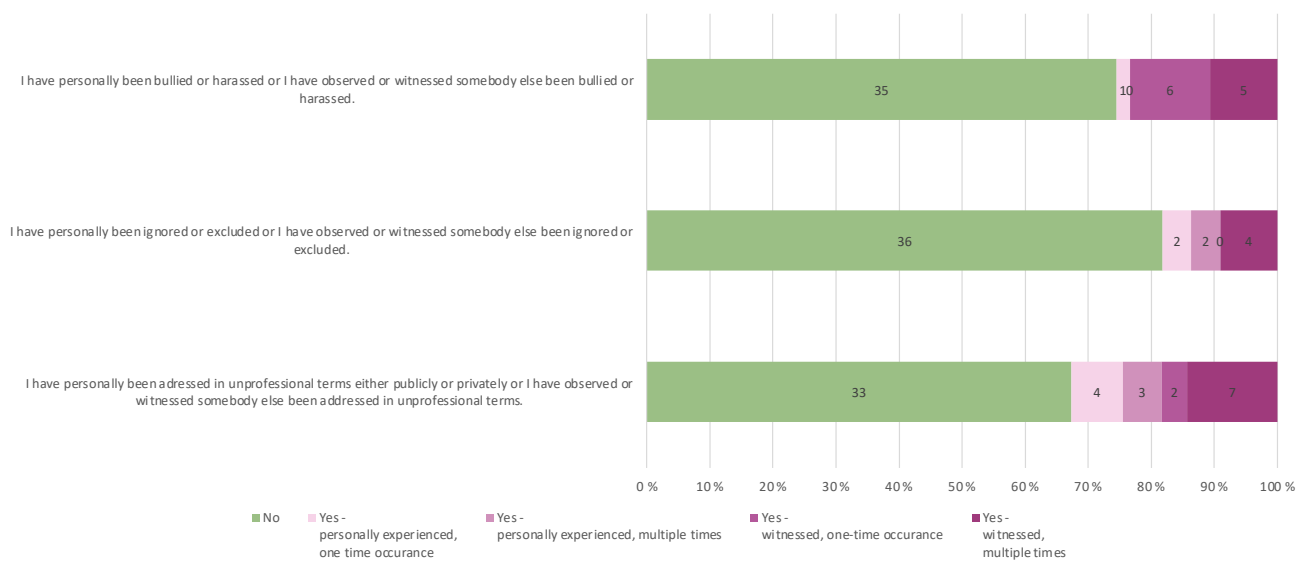
Figures A4: (Students) During your studies at a GSE unit, do you feel that you have personally experienced discrimination or unfair treatment or have you observed or witnessed discrimination / unfair treatment by anyone?

(PhD students & faculty) Within your last five years at a GSE unit (if you have worked less than five years, then during your employment in a GSE unit), do you feel that you have personally experienced discrimination or unfair treatment or have you observed or witnessed discrimination / unfair treatment by anyone?

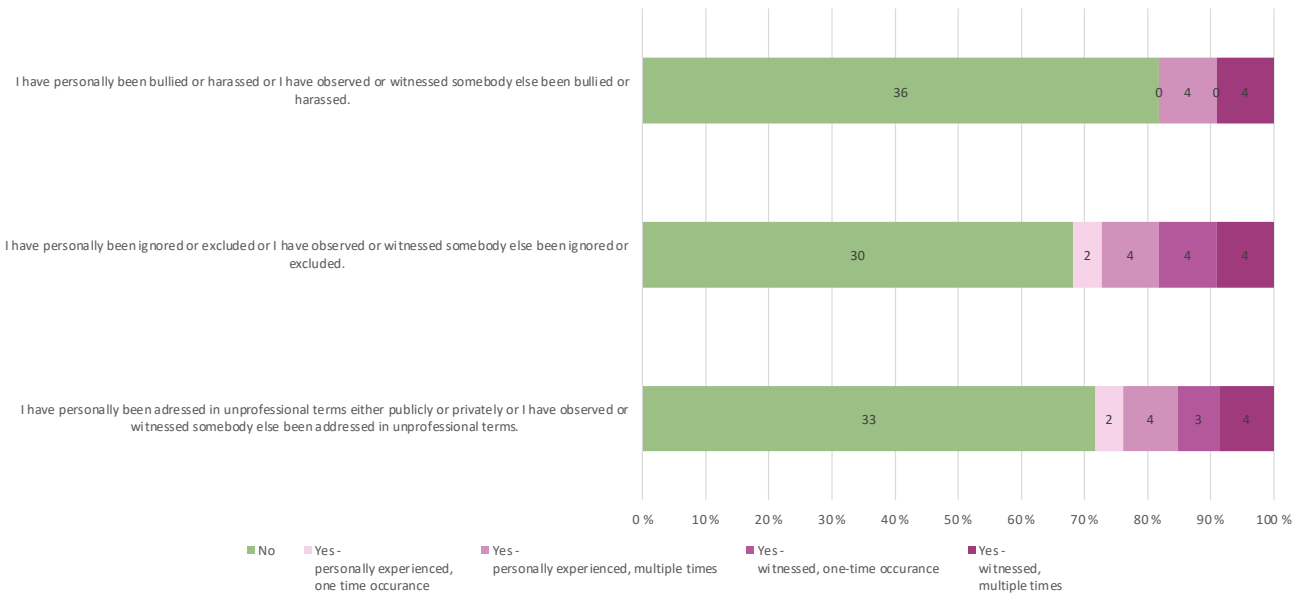
BSc, MSc, rMSc



PhD

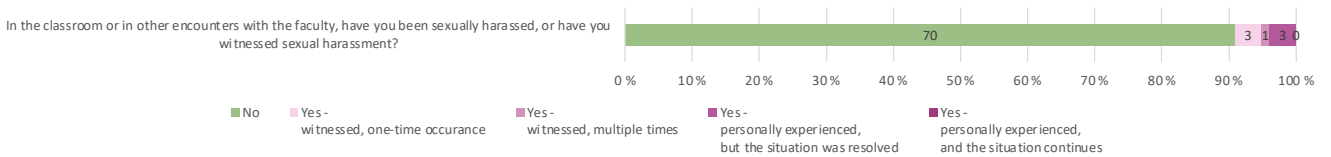


GSE Faculty

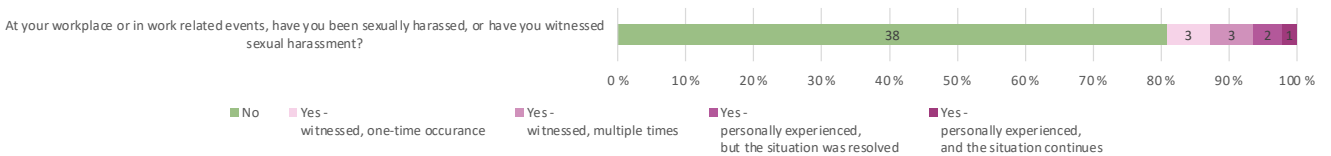


Figures A5: (Students) In the classroom or in other encounters with the faculty, have you been sexually harassed, or have you witnessed sexual harassment?
 (PhD students & Faculty) At your workplace or in work related events, have you been sexually harassed, or have you witnessed sexual harassment?
 Sexual harassment is, for example, displaying or distributing inappropriate sexual material, making offensive sexual remarks, making inappropriate remarks about your appearance or body, inappropriate touching, making unwanted attempts to establish a dating, romantic, or sexual relationship with you despite your efforts to discourage it.

BSc, MSc, rMSc



PhD



GSE Faculty

