Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why me and what is this about?

We are asking all students at Caltech to answer a climate survey on sexual assault and sexual misconduct. The results will be used to guide policies to encourage a healthy, safe, and nondiscriminatory environment on campus. Our goal is to make Caltech as safe as possible by developing programs and services that prevent sexual assault and misconduct, as well as respond to these events when they do occur. This survey is an important tool for us to assess current programs and to shape future policies.

Who is administering the survey?

The survey is sponsored by Caltech in collaboration with the Association of American Universities (AAU). Westat, a private research organization, is administering the survey and will be assisting in the analysis of the data.

What will Caltech do with the results?

The results will be used to better understand the climate at Caltech, the extent of sexual assault and misconduct among students, and the use of programs and services currently being offered. This information will be used to make recommendations for changes to the policies and procedures related to preventing and handling sexual assault and misconduct at Caltech.

Why are you asking about these sensitive topics?

Our goal is to foster a safe and supportive environment where students can flourish, both academically and personally. To understand the climate at Caltech, we need to ask direct questions about topics that some may find sensitive. It is only by directly collecting this information from you that we will be able to prevent negative experiences and effectively respond when they do happen.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to participate in a web survey. This survey includes sections that ask about your knowledge and beliefs about social situations, perceptions related to sexual misconduct at your college, and your knowledge of resources available at your college. This survey also asks about your personal experience with sexual misconduct, such as harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of violence.
Why is the language on the survey so explicit?

Some of the language used in this survey is explicit and some people may find it uncomfortable, but it is important that we ask the questions in this way so that you are clear what we mean. Information on how to get help, if you need it, appears on the bottom of each page and at the end of the survey.

Isn’t this survey only for women?

No, this survey is for everyone, regardless of gender identity or experiences. The survey will be used to shape policies that affect everyone on campus, so it is very important that you provide your experiences and viewpoint.

I’ve never experienced sexual assault or sexual misconduct, so why should I take part?

If only victims of sexual assault and sexual misconduct participate in the survey, we will have a very lopsided view of your campus. To get a complete picture of your college, we need to hear from as many students as possible. Please tell a friend!

How long will the survey take?

This survey should take most people approximately 20 minutes to complete. It may take up to 30 minutes for some individuals.

Am I required to participate?

You do NOT have to participate in this survey, and if you do participate, you may skip any question you are not comfortable answering and may exit the survey at any time. Most people will find the questions interesting.

Will my answers be confidential?

When you complete the survey, the link with your name, email, and IP address will be broken so that no one will be able to connect these with your survey answers. The results will be presented in summary form so no individual can be identified. However, if we learn about child abuse or about a threat of harm to yourself or others, we are obligated to report it to the authorities.

We have obtained a Certificate of Confidentiality (CoC) issued by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The CoC is issued to protect the investigators on this study from being forced to tell anyone about your participation in this study, even under a subpoena.

Even when a CoC is in place, you and your family members must still continue to actively protect your own privacy. If you voluntarily give your written consent for an insurer, employer, or lawyer to receive information about your participation in the research, then we may not use the CoC to withhold this information.
What should I do if I become upset answering these questions?

On each page of the online survey, there is a link to on- and off-campus resources that you can contact if you become upset. In addition to local resources, there is information for several national services that provide information and counselors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We have included a variety of resources so you can choose to contact the one(s) you think would be most helpful to you.

I still have questions.

If you have any questions about this study, you can call the study Help Desk at 1-855-497-4787.

If you have questions about your rights and welfare as a research participant, please call the Westat Human Subjects Protections office at 1-888-920-7631. Please leave a message with your full name, the name of the research study that you are calling about the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct, and a phone number beginning with the area code. Someone will return your call as soon as possible.