

Summary

Mentors can make many positive contributions to a graduate student's professional development and career choices. This report explores the types of mentoring relationships UMass Amherst doctoral students experience and, for those who do not have a mentor, their reasons for not having one.

- Three quarters of graduate students report having a mentor; no significant differences were observed by race/ethnicity, gender, international/U.S. citizenship, or school/college.

- The majority of students rate their mentor as being "very" or "somewhat" helpful.

- Lack of faculty interest and availability is the most cited reason for not having a mentor.

- Significantly more international students indicate that they do not have a mentor because they do not feel they need one.

- Students with mentors are significantly more satisfied with their program and the University, report more professional development experiences, and have better relationships with faculty and peers.

Graduate Student Mentoring: A Survey of Doctoral Students

Having a mentor during graduate study can be a rewarding experience and can help graduate students develop their professional interests and career path. Emerging literature on the graduate student experience highlights the important contribution advising and mentoring makes to graduate students' socialization, their satisfaction with their graduate school experience, and their persistence to the graduate degree (see, for example, Nettles & Millett, 2006). This report focuses on a recent UMass Amherst survey of graduate students that, in part, asked doctoral students about their experiences related to mentoring.¹ Table 1 provides demographic information about survey respondents.

Access to a Mentor

The majority of doctoral students (74%) report having a mentor, as defined by "a person they can rely on for advice and/or guidance about program requirements, academics or career matters." This percentage was consistent across schools/colleges. Of the students reporting a mentor, 55% report having two or more mentors. Most mentors are found within the student's program or department (86%), with mentoring relationships being formed less often with other graduate students (7%), faculty outside of the program or department

(4%), individuals at other universities or non-faculty at the University (1%).

Student Satisfaction with Mentor Relationship

Across schools and colleges within the University, the majority of graduate students report being "very" (62%) or "somewhat" (33%) satisfied with their mentor. No differences in satisfaction were observed across schools and colleges. Figure 1 reports on the percentage of students that rate their mentor as "very" or "somewhat" helpful in different aspects of the mentor role. The vast majority of students rate their mentor as "somewhat" or "very" helpful. International students' ratings of mentor helpfulness are somewhat higher than U.S. students' ratings. Students rate mentors as particularly helpful when it comes to dissertation progress and development of a research focus.

Table 1: Survey Respondent Demographics*

	% of Total	N
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/Cape Verdean	6%	76
Asian	24%	289
Latino/a	6%	68
White	56%	664
Other	4%	49
Multiple	4%	48
Gender		
Male	51%	628
Female	49%	601
Citizenship		
U.S.	61%	753
International	39%	482
*Only doctoral students included		

¹In spring 2007, an online graduate student experience survey was administered to all graduate students at UMass Amherst. In total, 2,411 students took the survey, out of the 4,852 graduate students enrolled at UMass Amherst in spring 2007 (a 50% response rate). The survey was developed by the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA) in collaboration with the Student Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Office (SAREO) who also administered the survey for OAPA.



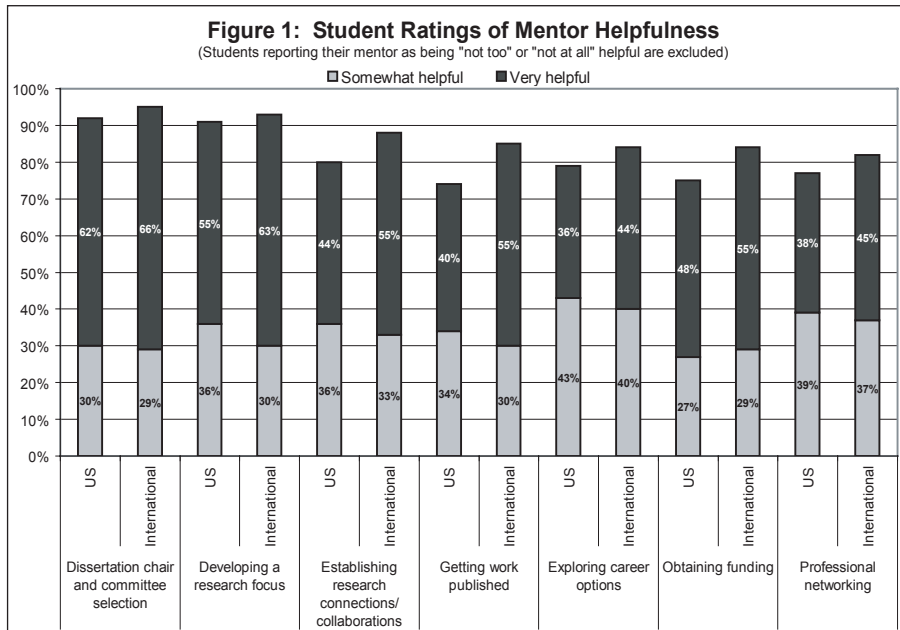


Table 2: University Re-enrollment By Mentor

		Do you have a mentor?	
		Yes	No
If you were to start over, would you select this same university?	Definitely	26.5%	10.2%
	Probably	50.4%	40.2%
	Probably not	19.6%	32.3%
	Definitely not	3.5%	17.3%
	Total	100%	100%

(10%) or “probably” (40%) enroll at UMass Amherst again.

Summary

The majority of doctoral students at UMass Amherst have a faculty member in their department that they can rely on for advice on program requirements, academics, or career matters. These students are generally satisfied with their mentor and report that this person is helpful to them across a number of important aspects of graduate and professional preparation and development (from developing a dissertation and research focus to creating professional contacts). For the quarter of students who do not have a mentor, the most often mentioned reason was that faculty in their program show a lack of interest and/or availability for serving that role. Finally, the survey results provide further evidence of the importance of the presence of mentoring relationships. Students with mentors report higher levels of satisfaction with the graduate experience and more professional development opportunities than their peers without mentors.

To access the full Graduate Student Experience report, please go to: www.umass.edu/oapa/oapa/reports/grad_experience.pdf

References

Nettles, M.T. & Millett, C. M. (2006). *Three magic letters: Getting to Ph.D.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

No Mentor: Why?

We turn now to the quarter (26%) of doctoral students who report that they do not have a mentor. The Graduate Student Experience Survey provided an open-ended response box for students to indicate the reasons why they did not have a mentor. Seventy-six percent of those who do not have a mentor provided at least one reason for not having one. Of that group, the most frequently mentioned reason (U.S., 54%; international, 41%) was a lack of faculty interest and availability for serving as a mentor. One student indicated that s/he received any needed guidance from other graduate students and stated, “In general, the only useful resources are other graduate students - the faculty do not seem to be concentrating on helping their graduate students gain employment.” Variability in reasons given did exist between U.S. and international students, with international students (26%) more likely to say that the reason for not having a mentor was that they “did not need one,” 13 percent of U.S. students gave this response.

Mentoring: Does it Matter?

The literature on the graduate student experience consistently highlights the important and positive role a mentor can play in graduate students’ persistence to degree and career opportunities. The results of this survey further support this assertion. The responses of doctoral students with and without a mentor were compared on a host of factors related to student satisfaction, professional preparation, and persistence. These include students’ ratings of program quality and climate, quality of relationships with faculty and peers, professional development and training, and satisfaction with the program and the University as a whole. In all of these areas, doctoral students with a mentor gave consistently higher ratings than their peers without mentoring relationships. As one example see Table 2, which shows students’ reports of whether or not they would choose UMass Amherst again if they were to start their graduate career over. Three-quarters of Doctoral students with a mentor said they would “definitely” (27%) or “probably” (50%) enroll at UMass again, which is substantially higher than the doctoral student without mentors who said they would “definitely