

The UMass Amherst Graduate Student Experience Survey

Summary of Findings

The Graduate Student Experience Survey is a web-based survey developed by the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment (OAPA) and the Student Assessment, Research, and Evaluation Office (SAREO) in consultation with representatives from the Graduate School, the Office of Institutional Research, the Department of Educational Policy, Research, and Administration (EPRA) in the School of Education, and the Northeast Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (NEAGEP). It was administered by SAREO to all UMass Amherst graduate students in spring 2007; approximately 2,000 (55%) of these students completed the survey. This research was supported by the Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and NEAGEP.

- The majority of both master's and doctoral students (57% and 64%, respectively) rate the overall quality of their academic experience at this university as either "very good" or "excellent".
- The majority of both master's and doctoral students (68% and 70%, respectively), when asked "If you were to start your graduate career over again, would you select this same university?" answered either "probably" or "definitely".
- Out of an array of potential obstacles to academic progress, the one most frequently identified by both master's and doctoral students (over two-thirds of the population) was financial constraints. Related to this, having to work too many hours for pay was the second-most frequently identified obstacle. Part-time students, women, and students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups report facing more challenges than their counterparts.
- Many students encounter difficulties in the area of affordable housing: 63% of master's students and 66% of doctoral students report that they are either "somewhat dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with the availability of affordable housing.
- Approximately three-quarters of doctoral students and two-thirds of master's students report having a mentor at this university. Of those without a mentor, the most commonly cited reason was the lack of availability or lack of interest on the part of the faculty. The vast majority of these mentors were identified as faculty members within students' programs.
- Doctoral students' experiences with their mentors varies to some extent by gender. Both U.S. and international female doctoral students' ratings of the helpfulness of their mentors in getting their work published were below those of males.

- The majority of all doctoral students agree that their dissertation chair/advisor performs the advising role to their expectations. While there is no significant difference between U.S. and international doctoral students in this overall rating, international students do rate their dissertation chair/advisor more highly than do U.S. students in the help they provide in networking with other professionals in their field and with faculty at the University.
- U.S. doctoral students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups rate student-faculty relations in the program as a whole more negatively than do white or Asian students. They indicate a greater degree of competition between students for faculty time and attention, and report a greater degree of difficulty finding a faculty member with whom they could work.
- International doctoral students (when compared with U.S. students) and U.S. students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (when compared with other U.S. students) give less positive appraisals of peer relations within their programs. Both groups are less likely to think that students freely share information with one another on how to get through the program; in addition to this, international students are less satisfied with the intellectual quality of their fellow students than are U.S. students.
- Students reported to participate in a great range of professional scholarly activities. Seventy-seven percent of doctoral students have attended at least one scholarly meeting or conference, and 61% have presented at least one paper or poster session at such conferences. In addition, 45% of students have received funding from their departments to attend such meetings.
- While the majority of doctoral students have held teaching appointments, of this group, 27% of U.S. and 13% of international students reported that they have received no training to do so.
- While in many ways all graduate students report similar experiences, some differences emerge particularly by comparing responses by student demographics:
 - Women encounter obstacles to program completion to a greater degree, perceive their program climate more negatively, and receive less support from their mentors in publishing than do men.
 - U.S. students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups also have greater obstacles to program completion, and give lower ratings to their programs in the areas of student interrelations and student-faculty relations, than do white students.

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