



Graduate Department Student Services Survey 2004 Research Report

Support services for graduate students the University of Maryland are typically provided at three different levels: campus-wide, school/college, and department/program. In 2002, a study of graduate student campus-wide needs was conducted to help guide the efforts of the new Graduate Student Involvement area of the Division of Student Affairs. To complement the 2002 study, this survey sought to understand which services are and are not already provided at the school/college and department/program levels.

In November of 2003 the Coordinator of Graduate Student Involvement and the Stamp Student Union Research Advisory group distributed a web-based survey to 2,000 randomly selected graduate students. There were 431 completed surveys returned for a 22% response rate. Due to the fact that some departments had relatively few respondents, the data was analyzed not at the department/program level but instead the report identified trends by school/college. A copy of the survey can be found at: <http://cgi.umd.edu/survey/display?grad/GDSSS>.

General Findings

Schools/Colleges that provide the most services for their graduate students tend to be professional programs that have a majority of masters students.

- When asked what they would change about the services offered, graduate students' comments followed several themes:
 1. Improve transition/orientation to graduate school
 2. Provide better information about graduate services and deadlines
 3. Improve and expand available graduate study and lounge space
 4. Expand evening hours of basic campus services including food service
 5. Improve meaningful contact with advisors
 6. Provide more social programs and campus-wide social programs
 7. Increase awareness of the needs of part-time and distance learning students
 8. Help with finding a job after graduation
- When asked at what level their services were provided, 53% of students responded that services came from the department or program level, 13% at the school/college level, 9% by the Graduate School and 2% at the campus level.
- According to responses, the two services offered most by department are orientation (with 81% of all students and 77% of non-business students) and social events (74% for all students and 67% for non-business students).
- About a 1/3 of all graduate students reported that their departments provide: exit interviews (35%), peer mentoring (34%), and assistance in finding housing (25%).
- Approximately one half of all graduate students reported that their departments provide: information about their dissertation or thesis (51%) or information about fellowships or grant money (53%). However, when examining non-business students, the percentages are 69% and 64%, respectively.
- Sixty-one percent of students reported that they have access to a student lounge space, but a number of students complained that those spaces suffered from poor upkeep and were not sufficient to meet students' needs.
- Only 23% of students reported that family events were offered in their department. The percentage fell to 16% when Smith School of Business students were screened out.

Demographics

There was a slightly higher ratio of masters students to doctoral students (73% masters, 26% doctorate) among the respondents than the graduate population (58% masters, 29% doctorate, 13% “other”). It is believed that this was partially due to the large number of responses from Smith School of Business students (n=135, 31% of all respondents of which 98% were masters degree candidates). The ratio of masters to doctoral students for non-Smith School of Business students was 61% masters to 37% doctoral). Past surveys of graduate students have typically had a higher ratio of doctoral to masters students (54% to 36% in the 2002 Graduate Student Needs Assessment Survey and 47% to 44% in the 2000 Graduate Student Survey)

	All	Full-time	Part-time
Masters	72.5%	50%	50%
Doctorate	25.8%	78%	22%
Other	1.6%	0%	86%

Fifty six percent of respondents reported being full-time students compared with 65% of the total graduate population. (Who’s On Campus, OIRP, Fall 2003)

	All	Masters	Doctorate
Full-time	55.9%	64%	36%
Part-time	43.2%	84%	13%
Other	0.9%	75%	0%

As shown in the table below, the percentage of respondents from each school/college was similar to the percentage of those students from the graduate population as a whole. As previously mentioned, students from the Smith School of Business were overrepresented as were students from Informational Studies and Public Affairs. Another factor influencing the results was the small size, and consequently, small sample size of some schools/colleges like Journalism and Health and Human Performance. Also shown in the table below is the percentage of surveyed students in each department pursuing masters or doctorate degrees or were part-time or full-time.

School/College	sample size	% of total responses	% of Grad Population*	Masters	Ph.D.	Full-time	Part-time
Agriculture & Nat.Resources	n=9	2.0%	3.6%	22%	78%	66%	34%
Architecture	n=12	2.8%	1.8%	100%	0%	67%	33%
Art and Humanities	n=40	9.3%	12.8%	55%	43%	68%	32%
Behavioral & Social Sciences	n=38	8.8%	8.5%	58%	37%	70%	30%
Business	n=135	31.3%	15.0%	98%	2%	39%	59%
Computer, Math and Physical	n=14	3.2%	8.5%	14%	86%	86%	14%
Education	n=44	10.2%	11.4%	45%	52%	57%	41%
Engineering	n=56	13.0%	15.8%	68%	30%	55%	45%
Health & Human Performance	n=6	1.4%	2.0%	17%	83%	50%	50%
Informational Studies	n=28	6.5%	2.5%	100%	0%	36%	64%
Journalism	n=5	1.2%	0.8%	100%	0%	100%	0%
Life Sciences	n=14	3.2%	5.9%	36%	64%	93%	7%
Public Affairs	n=20	4.6%	2.2%	95%	5%	75%	25%
Other	n=11	2.6%	N/A	64%	18%	73%	27%

*According to University OIRP Statistics for 2003

Survey Results

In addition to showing the data for all students, the responses on graduate services were further broken down by degree type (masters or doctorate), enrollment status (full-time or part-time) and non-business school students. Due to the fact that 135 (31%) of all respondents were Smith School of Business students, and of that group 98% were masters students, there was concern that their responses might skew the mean. Therefore, the category of “Non-Business” includes none of the Smith School of Business student responses. However, the percentages listed for degree type and enrollment status include all responses.

- A large number of graduate students indicated that their departments offered orientation programs (81%), social events (74%), and 69% of non-business graduate students received information about working on a dissertation or thesis.
- Only about half of all graduate students indicated that their department offered: assistance in finding housing, events for the families of graduate students, peer mentoring programs, exit interviews, information about fellowships/grant money, or programs for presenting graduate research.

To the best of your knowledge, which of the following are provided for graduate students in your department?

Services	All (n=431)	Non- Business (n=296)	Masters (n=309)	Ph.D. (n=110)	Full-time (n=238)	Part-time (n=184)
Dissertation/Thesis information	51%	69%	40%	84%	63%	38%
Student lounge space	61%	61%	63%	58%	69%	52%
Support in finding a job after graduation	62%	49%	71%	41%	62%	62%
Orientation program for new graduate students	81%	77%	82%	85%	86%	77%
Assistance in finding housing for the school year	25%	26%	27%	23%	28%	22%
Food/Vending options	53%	49%	56%	45%	55%	49%
Information on available assistantships	61%	70%	57%	75%	78%	40%
Information on fellowships/grant money	53%	64%	49%	68%	66%	36%
On-campus program for students seeking assistantships	17%	18%	17%	17%	17%	15%
Social events for graduate students	74%	67%	79%	65%	75%	74%
Events for families of graduate students	23%	16%	25%	16%	22%	24%
Airport pick-ups for new graduate students	9%	11%	6%	18%	14%	3%
Programs for presenting graduate student research	38%	51%	30%	62%	47%	27%
Peer mentoring program for graduate students	34%	27%	33%	39%	36%	32%
Electronic/Web-based portfolio for showcasing writing or research	10%	10%	9%	11%	13%	5%
Opportunity to give feedback on your experience with department (e.g., exit interviews)	35%	28%	39%	25%	37%	33%

Based on student responses of available services, schools/colleges offer a variety of services to their graduate students. The services offered differ by school/college and it's important to recognize that students were asked to indicate what their department provided while this table, in many cases, shows the aggregate of responses of graduate students in a number of departments within a given school or college. The table below lists the schools/colleges for each service category that offered services at an above average rate.

Schools/Colleges with High Levels of Student-Identified Services:

Numbers in brackets indicate the overall mean for each area

Dissertation/Thesis Info [51%]	%
Education (n=44)	86%
Arts & Humanities (n=40)	85%
HHP (n=6)	83%
AGNS (n=9)	78%
BSOS (n=38)	74%
CMPS (n=14)	71%

Student Lounge Space [61%]	%
Public Affairs (n=20)	95%
CMPS (n=14)	93%
Information Studies (n=28)	89%
Architecture (n=12)	83%
Arts & Humanities (n=40)	73%

Support Finding a Job [62%]	%
Journalism (n=5)	100%
Public Affairs (n=20)	95%
Business (n=135)	87%
Information Studies (n=28)	68%
Engineering (n=56)	50%

Orientation Program [81%]	%
CMPS (n=14)	100%
Public Affairs (n=20)	90%
Information Studies (n=28)	89%
Business (n=135)	89%
BSOS (n=38)	87%
Architecture (n=12)	83%

Help Finding Housing [25%]	%
Architecture (n=12)	42%
Arts & Humanities (n=40)	40%
Journalism (n=5)	40%
CMPS (n=14)	35%
BSOS (n=38)	32%
Life Sciences (n=14)	29%

Food/Vending Options [53%]	%
Public Affairs (n=20)	75%
BSOS (n=38)	66%
Business (n=135)	61%
Arts & Humanities (n=40)	55%
Information Studies (n=28)	54%

Info on Assistantships [61%]	%
Arts & Humanities (n=40)	85%
Architecture (n=12)	83%
HHP (n=6)	83%
Journalism (n=5)	80%
Public Affairs (n=20)	80%
CMPS (n=14)	79%
Information Studies (n=28)	79%
Life Sciences (n=14)	79%

Info on Fellowships/Grants [53%]	%
Life Sciences (n=14)	86%
Information Studies (n=28)	82%
Journalism (n=5)	80%
Architecture (n=12)	75%
Arts & Humanities (n=40)	75%
HHP (n=6)	67%
BSOS (n=38)	66%
CMPS (n=14)	64%

Preview Days [17%]	%
Journalism (n=5)	40%
Information Studies (n=28)	32%
Architecture (n=12)	25%
Engineering (n=56)	21%
Education (n=44)	20%

Social Events [74%]	%
Architecture (n=12)	92%
Business (n=135)	89%
Information Studies (n=28)	89%
Public Affairs (n=20)	85%
Life Sciences (n=14)	71%
Arts & Humanities (n=40)	70%

Family Events [23%]	%
Business (n=135)	37%
Public Affairs (n=20)	25%
AGNS (n=9)	22%
CMPS (n=14)	21%
Information Studies (n=28)	21%
Life Sciences (n=14)	21%

Airport Pick-ups [9%]	%
CMPS (n=14)	29%
HHP (n=6)	17%
Arts & Humanities (n=40)	15%
Education (n=44)	14%
Life Sciences (n=14)	14%
Engineering (n=56)	13%

Research Presentations [38%]	%
Life Sciences (n=14)	79%
CMPS (n=14)	71%
Arts & Humanities (n=40)	63%
Education (n=44)	55%
BSOS (n=38)	50%
HHP (n=6)	50%

Peer Mentoring Program [34%]	%
Business (n=135)	47%
CMPS (n=14)	43%
BSOS (n=38)	37%
Life Sciences (n=14)	36%
Public Affairs (n=20)	35%
HHP (n=6)	33%

Web-based Portfolios [10%]	%
Journalism (n=5)	20%
HHP (n=6)	17%
Engineering (n=56)	16%
Public Affairs (n=20)	15%
Life Sciences (n=14)	14%
BSOS (n=38)	11%

Exit Interviews/Surveys [35%]	%
Business (n=135)	50%
Public Affairs (n=20)	45%
AGNS (n=9)	33%
Architecture (n=12)	33%
HHP (n=6)	33%

Recommendations

1. Improve departmental orientation for graduate students.

Graduate students' portal to the University is typically through their department. In fact many graduate students have little reason to interact with other people or units outside their department. For this reason, it's an important pipeline for conveying campus information. Departments help socialize grads to the department, their academic requirements, and their field of study. From this survey there are indications that there is, in some areas, some room for improvement.

While 81% of all students and 77% of non-Smith School of Business students reported that their department offered a new student orientation program, for something as important as orientation, the percentage should be higher. As some of the respondents shared in the comment section:

“I like the idea of having an orientation for new grad students. I would have LOVED to have had one so that I knew more about my program before I started.”

“A departmental or program welcome or tool kit for new students. This would make it much easier to know where to go for guidance, or even to point you in the right direction before you need assistance.”

“[I would have liked a] survival guide for a new student. (recommended course application, lab information, faculty information and so on – more precise description)”

Even among student who did have access to an orientation (and attended it) several students reported that the program did not meet needs or expectations.

“[I would like] a better orientation when we first get here. I know several of us are from over 1500 miles away, and to get here and not know what was going on, or to not be greeted was really disappointing.”

One way for departments to receive more feedback on their efforts to transition students would be to conduct exit interviews with graduating students. Currently only 35% of respondents indicated that their department provided exit interviews.

2. Improve campus-wide orientation programs for all graduate students.

It is difficult for departments to keep up with changes in graduate school and general campus deadlines, programs, policy, and services. The best source for such information is the area sponsoring the service. However, that information doesn't always seem to make it to students. For example, half or fewer respondents reported that their department provided: dissertation/thesis information (51%), assistance in finding housing (25%), information on fellowships/grant money (53%), campus programs for finding assistantships (17%). As some of the respondents shared in the comments section:

“An efficient way to obtain accurate information from the graduate school about deadlines, paperwork, etc, would also be very helpful!”

“[I would like a] better introduction to resources on campus (non-departmental). We are a bit of an island and rely almost exclusively on hear-say to find out what support we need and what requirements we need to fulfill (including things like immunizations, etc). The department has no idea how to deal with the fellowship office and to what benefits fellowship students are entitled (i.e. how to get health insurance).”

To improve this flow, it is recommended that an updated packet of basic campus information be compiled and made available to departments and their students each year.

3. Create web-based repositories of information about graduate student services.

There are at least three limitations to traditional orientation programs. One problem is that orientation programs are typically held only once or twice a year. The problem is that new graduate students often can't anticipate what information they will need. Another second problem is that information about policies and services are constantly changing. Departments and administrative offices can easily be unaware of new changes and perpetuate outdated information. A third problem is that it's extremely difficult to bring together a group of busy graduate students in one place for any period of time.

Despite these problems, orientation programs are still a vital way to convey information; however, there is a need for supplemental sources of information. In an attempt to address this need, several other universities, including Boston College, MIT and UMUC, have moved some or all of their orientation information onto centralized websites. Such sites allow graduate students to find updated and relevant information 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. Several respondents alluded to such a service in the comments section:

“This is my first semester at UMD working on my graduate program. I find myself confused and lost at times. When I ask questions to get information from Student Services they tell me contact Registration Office for Grad students. When I go to the Registration for Grad students they tell me ask your advisor. When I ask my advisor she tells go ask at Student Services and so on and so on. This is very frustrating and makes me feel discouraged in my efforts to finish this program at UMD. The Graduate program should have a centralized place where you can get a straight informed answer.”

“Perhaps the grad student services are very good, but I am not really aware of where they are or what they offer to me as a grad student.”

While the University of Maryland currently offers a limited online handbook for graduate students, it is recommended that this service be expanded in cooperation with the Graduate School, Student Affairs and other relevant administrative offices.

4. Create a database of departmental best practices that can be shared across campus.

Based on some survey responses, it is evident that a number of departments offer wonderful programs for their students. These respondents not only indicated that their needs are met, but recommended individuals in their department for commendation. The University should work to learn from those successful programs and services by maintaining a database of best practices that departments could tap. While there can be big differences between departments across campus, it is likely that many of the programs are translatable.

5. Make all primary services for graduate students available on line and have offices remain open until 7 p.m. one day each week for at least the first month of each semester.

Many campus services (such as ID card services, food service, buying a parking pass, searching housing options, and others) tend to operate on a 9-5 schedule. These hours make it difficult for graduate students because virtually all graduate students live off-campus and tend to only come on campus as dictated by their academic schedule. Additionally, those students who work, teach or take classes at night have very limited access to basic services.

“Many graduate students are evening students, but the offices are closed at 4:30. This hinders your ability to drop off work, get a picture id, get whatever special card you need to check-out books from the McKeldin Library, etc. “

Some administrative areas such as Off-Campus Housing and Transportation Services have recently made great strides to improve access, but overall, more needs to be done.

6. Create a master plan for renovating existing lounge/study spaces and creating new spaces.

One of the unexpected themes for this survey was that while 61% of graduate students reported access to lounge and study space in their department, many respondents were dissatisfied with the spaces available to them. As some of the respondents shared in the comments section:

“We need a dedicated, quiet space for graduate students who are not teaching assistants to study and read. The graduate student study room in the art library was removed at the beginning of the semester and no additional alternative study spaces have been presented.”

“[Need a] better Graduate student lounge--current lounge is small and unkempt”

“MORE WORK SPACE!! Up-dated computers & computer equipment, at least in the lab... We don't have a lounge/meeting area and [my department's] part-time office hours are insufficient.”

It's unclear from many comments whether the students are referring to overall campus space or areas within their department.

7. Improve services and outreach for part-time, distance and satellite campus graduate students.

Perhaps the most unexpected finding of the survey was the volume of concerns voiced by part-time, distance and satellite campus graduate students regarding university services. While these students comprise about 40% of the graduate population at Maryland, there is a common perception that they are only concerned with earning their degrees and could care less about services such as orientation or social events. However, it is clear from their comments that many of these students feel underserved and ignored:

“I'd also like to see more classes start at 6pm rather than 5pm, as that would allow employees to attend classes without taking time off work. Any classes offered during the day should also have an evening session, again for employee-students. Lectures, discussions, and other student-benefit events should be held in the evenings, rather than the afternoon, so employee-students have a chance to attend, and there should be more classes for people aiming to enter Children's Services.”

“[I would like] recognition of self-supporting graduate students as genuine participants in department life, e.g., graduate student, not just graduate teaching or research assistants, should get offices and mailboxes.”

“As a part-time graduate student, I feel very isolated and alienated and am not very involved in the department. I have a lot of need for support for my studies, but wouldn't know how to begin seeking this support from the department. I generally seek such support from other grad students with whom I am friends or from faculty. This may be endemic to a large metropolitan campus with many commuter and part-time students. I currently have a very demanding full-time job. However when I first came to UMCP, I worked only part-time and was in a different department and still felt pretty much the same way. My experience has been very different from my MA experience which was at a major state university but located in a small college town. I was a full-time student with an assistantship.”

Many of the specific issues raised by part-time students could be resolved by implementing some of the general recommendations in this report. However, a more directed effort at serving such students would go a long way to prevent the feeling of being ignored by the University.

“I am an internet-only student taking one distance-learning class while in my home state of Maine. I get daily e-mail from the campus police concerning campus safety issues, campus social issues/opportunities for grad students, and a few other things (present e-mail, for example) that clutter up my tube and I don't really care about, sorry. It seems that your computer department folks could put filters on these mass e-mailings and not bother me, or give me a choice to receive them or not. I also received a form through the mail requiring me to prove immunizations, and

this is silly if I'm only contacting others thru the internet. I'm guessing the internet program is new, but you need to reconsider how all this stuff looks from here. I take an internet course because I DON'T want to have to go to the campus.”

In reference to the above comment, one way to avoid “spamming” student with irrelevant information and emails is for the University to create meaningful graduate student sub-categories such as “distance learning,” “part-time,” and “branch campus”. Not only would this help students only receive the information they need, but aid administrators in tailoring programs to specific sub-populations.

8. Improved help in finding assistantships as well as jobs after graduation

Students are understandably concerned about finding graduate assistantships to support their education as well as jobs after they graduate. However, many feel that they don't receive adequate help.

“I really would like to see more support from the department in regards to job searching.”

“It would be great if there was a more centralized place for assistantship listings within the department.”

Of those surveyed, 61% indicated that their department provides support in finding a job after graduation. This number drops to 49% when Smith School of Business students are excluded. Another 61% of students reported that their department helped them find assistantships. However, this number did increase to 70% for non-business school students.

9. Improve campus-wide social programs for graduate students.

While a large number of students (74%) indicated that their department offered social events, several respondents indicated a need for more campus-wide social events. These cross-discipline events help fight a sense of departmental isolation that is common with graduate students. Some of these comments were:

“[Provide] social/organizational events/structures so that the grad students aren't so isolated.”

“We should encourage more inter-cultural activities, because we have more than 30 percent international students in our MBA program.”

“[Provide] alternate grad pub night (I'm never on campus on Fridays)”

A smaller number of students (23%) indicated that programs for families were provided in their department. This may be due, in part, to a relatively small number of children per department. Providing family events may be better suited to campus-wide events for all graduate students.