

# Data Sources: Results for the CGS Pressing Issues Survey

What are the top issues currently facing graduate school deans and their staffs? Have these issues changed over time? To help answer these questions, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) annually asks graduate deans at member institutions to identify the most important issues they are currently addressing. The results of this “Pressing Issues” survey allows CGS to remain current with our deans’ most significant concerns, and to offer programs at Summer Workshops, Annual Meetings, and other forums that address these needs. A look at the results of the most recent Pressing Issues surveys allows us to measure how the issues deans are facing have changed over the past five years.

Before looking at the recent history of the Pressing Issues survey, it would be helpful to know more about the process CGS uses to gather this information. Every year since 2004, the Pressing Issues survey data was collected as part of the annual International Graduate Admissions Phase I: Applications surveys. The first part of the Phase I survey asks graduate school deans to identify the three most important issues they are currently facing. Prior to 2004, the data were collected as part of the CGS membership survey or other surveys. The survey question remained the same before and after 2004.

The 2007 survey was sent to 468 American colleges and universities that were members of CGS as of February 2007. Roughly 31% (148) of the survey population provided usable responses as of April 6 (Redd, Neubig, & Mahler, 2007). These institutions collectively mentioned 378 issues. Master’s institutions (14 respondents) reported 29 “pressing issues,” while the 134 doctoral-granting universities reported 349 issues.

Table 1 displays the most frequently mentioned responses from all institutions collectively, and from master’s and doctoral colleges and universities separately. Among all respondents, the most frequently mentioned pressing issue was graduate student financial support (fellowships, stipends, loans, etc.) The high ranking of this issue likely is based on several factors. One of the most important is that the average annual cost of attending a master’s degree program is now more than \$15,000, while the yearly cost for a doctoral program is higher than \$21,000, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2005 and 2006). Costs at these levels suggest that more graduate students are

seeking financial support, and graduate deans may be devoting more of their time in dealing with students’ concerns about financing issues. Differences in costs may explain why student financial support was the most mentioned issue among doctoral deans (21.4%) but ranked second among master’s institutions (20.7%).

The top issue for master’s institutions was enrollment management and student recruitment, which was mentioned by 31% of master’s institutions compared with just 16.6% of doctoral-granting universities. Master’s-focused institutions tend to have smaller student enrollments than doctoral-granting universities; they thus may be likely to devote more resources and time to student recruitment and related issues.

There were other differences between master’s and doctoral universities. Student services, student diversity, and other related issues was mentioned as a current pressing concern by nearly 14% of respondents at doctoral universities, compared with about 10% of those at master’s-only colleges. At the same time, graduate school management was cited as a pressing issue at almost 14% of doctoral institutions, compared with just under 7% of master’s institutions. In spite of these differences, the top five issues among deans at doctoral institutions (student financial support, enrollment management, student services, graduate school management, and dealing with budget cuts) were nearly identical to those at master’s-focused institutions (graduate school management is not in the top five of master’s institutions).

The changes in the top five most pressing issues among all respondents show that graduate school deans have faced a number of new challenges over the past six years. As Table 2 shows, graduate school management increased from just the tenth most frequently mentioned issue in 2001 to the third most in 2007, while enrollment management and student recruitment has increased from the sixth most frequently mentioned pressing issue in 2004 to the second most in

2007. Both of these trends strongly suggest that graduate deans have had to devote much more time and effort to both program management and student recruitment. The enrollment of international students also has become a much more important issue for graduate deans since 2001, when Congress made significant changes in student visa requirements.<sup>1</sup> As a result, international students as a “pressing issue” rose from just the 13th most mentioned pressing issue in 2002 to the sixth in 2007. One other important issue that has risen in the survey is dealing with budget cuts. This issue

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Pressing Issues	Percentage of All Respondents	Percentage of Master’s-Focused Institutions	Percentage of Doctoral Institutions
Graduate Student Financial Support (including Fellowships, Assistantships, and Student Loans, etc.)	21.4%	20.7%	21.4%
Enrollment Management/Student Recruitment	17.7%	31.0%	16.6%
Student Services/Diversity (Includes: student counseling, health care, and health insurance)	13.8%	10.3%	14.4%
Graduate School Management	13.2%	6.9%	13.7%
Dealing with Budget Cuts/Graduate Program Financing	11.6%	10.3%	11.7%
Program Review	9.3%	6.9%	9.4%
International Students	5.3%	6.9%	4.8%
Other	7.7%	6.9%	8.0%
Source: Redd, Neubig, & Mahler, 2007.			

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ranked ninth in 2005, but rose to fourth in 2007. This may suggest that the number of graduate schools and programs that have faced budget pressures from their universities has grown rapidly in recent years.

However, student financial support has remained at the forefront of graduate deans' concerns in every Pressing Issues survey. Concerns about student financial aid have been ranked either the top or second most frequently mentioned pressing issue in every survey since 2001. This result may have occurred due to the continually rising costs of graduate education and the relative scarcity of fellowship support from sources outside of the universities (Redd, 2006).

The recent trends in the Pressing Issues survey provide a great platform from which CGS can adequately address member deans' most important concerns. These results allow us to keep current with the issues that graduate deans face, and allow us to track which issues remain top concerns over time. Your continuing willingness to tell which issues are most on your minds each year is our chief vehicle for designing Annual Meeting programs and other meetings that will address the issues that most affect your students and institutions. We hope you will continue to respond to the Pressing Issues survey and other data requests that we use to best address your needs.

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<sup>1</sup>In 2001, Congress imposed two significant changes to the way foreign student visas were to be processed. One was a requirement to interview nearly 100 percent of visa

applicants. The second was to use finger print scans and other "biometric checks" for applicants. For more information, see "Breaking the Visa Backlog," *Business Week*, April 24, 2006. On-Line. Available: [http://www.businessweek.com/print/technology/content/apr2006/tc20060424\\_377280.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/print/technology/content/apr2006/tc20060424_377280.htm).

Table 2. Rank Order of the Most Pressing Issues Among CGS Graduate School Deans, 2001 to 2007

Pressing Issues	2001 rank	2002 rank	2003 rank	2004 rank	2005 rank	2006 rank	2007 rank
Graduate Student Financial Support (Fellowships, Assistantships, Student Loans, etc.)	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
Enrollment Management/Student Recruitment	3	5	3	6	3	2	2
Student Services/Diversity (Includes: student counseling, health care, and health insurance)	2	3	4	3	4	2	3
Graduate School Management	10	9	5	4	2	3	4
Dealing with Budget Cuts/Graduate Program Financing	4	4	8	8	9	4	5
Program Review	6	7	7	7	5	5	6
International Students	11	13	13	11	10	6	7

Sources: Redd, Neubig, and Mahler, 2007; CGS Membership Surveys, various years.

### References

- "Breaking the Visa Backlog," *Business Week*, April 24, 2006. On-Line. Available: [http://www.businessweek.com/print/technology/content/apr2006/tc20060424\\_377280.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/print/technology/content/apr2006/tc20060424_377280.htm).
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- Redd, K.E, Neubig, E.H, and Mahler, J.D. *Findings from the 2007 CGS International Graduate Admissions Survey—Phase I: Applications*. Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools.

**New Institutional Member**  
Assumption College

**New International Member**  
University of Nottingham

**New Corresponding Associate Members**  
AY Recruiting Solutions  
Gates Millenium Scholars