

Data Sources: Results from the CGS Pressing Issues Survey

Graduate student financial support is the top issue facing graduate deans for the fourth year in a row, according to the Council of Graduate Schools' (CGS) 2008 Pressing Issues survey. However, many graduate deans, particularly at master's-focused institutions, also identify enrollment management/student recruitment and graduate school management as important issues. This article discusses the results of the 2008 Pressing Issues survey for both the current year, and trends in pressing issues since 2001.

Background

Every year, CGS asks graduate deans at member institutions to identify the three most important or "pressing" issues or challenges they are currently addressing. The results of this survey allow 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 topics. Pressing Issues data have been collected as part of the International Graduate Admissions Phase I: Applications and Pressing Issues surveys conducted annually since 2004, and through the CGS membership survey and other surveys in prior years.

The 2008 Phase I survey was sent to 481 American colleges and universities that were members of CGS as of January 2008. Roughly 35% (167) of the survey population provided usable responses (Redd, Neubig, & Mahler, 2008). Approximately 90% (150) of the 167 respondents provided information about their pressing issues. The respondents included 106 doctoral-granting universities and 44 master's-focused institutions.

Results

Table 1 displays the most frequently mentioned responses from all institutions collectively, and by Carnegie Classification¹ and institutional control (public colleges and universities compared with private institutions²). Graduate student financial support was the top pressing issue (mentioned by 58% of respondents) among all respondents and Doctoral/Research Extensive universities (65%). However, at Doctoral/Research Intensive universities and Master's & Specialized institutions, the top concern was enrollment management/student recruitment (57% and 60% respectively). This result is not surprising since graduate enrollments at master's and research-intensive institutions tend to be smaller than those at research-extensive universities.

Respondents at public institutions were more likely to identify dealing with budget cuts/graduate program financing as a pressing issue, while private institution respondents were more likely to identify student services/diversity. In fact, twice as many respondents at public institutions identified budget cuts as a pressing issue (38% versus 19%). Graduate student

support was the most common pressing issue at both public and private institutions, but 69% of respondents from private institutions said it was an issue compared with 54% of respondents from public institutions.

Responsible conduct of research/research ethics is a new emerging issue identified by graduate deans. CGS has promoted education in the responsible conduct of research (RCR) through grants from the Office of Research Integrity and the National Science Foundation. While currently only a small share (4%) of total respondents identified RCR as a pressing issue on their campuses, it is possible that more deans will deal with research ethics issues in the near future, and the percentage of respondents identifying this issue will increase.

The top five pressing issues among graduate dean respondents have remained consistent over the past two years, and graduate student financial support has been the top issue every year since 2001, except for 2003 and 2004. However, there have been significant changes since the first Pressing Issues survey in 2001. For example, graduate student management was the tenth most pressing issue initially, but it quickly rose to the top five; this year, it was the third most pressing issue. Dealing with budget cuts/graduate program financing has been ranked as high as fourth in the early and more recent surveys, but it dropped as low as ninth in 2005. The ranking of this issue is probably an

Table 1. Results from the 2008 CGS Pressing Issues Survey

Pressing Issue	All Respondents	Percentage of Respondents:				
		Doctoral/Research Extensive	Doctoral/Research Intensive	Master's & Specialized	Public	Private
1 Graduate Student Financial Support (including Fellowships, Assistantships, and Student Loans, etc.)	58%	65%	54%	49%	54%	69%
2 Enrollment Management/Student Recruitment	48%	38%	57%	60%	47%	50%
3 Graduate School Management	41%	40%	43%	42%	44%	33%
4 Dealing with Budget Cuts/Graduate Program Financing	32%	31%	18%	44%	38%	19%
5 Student Services/Diversity (Includes: student counseling, health care, and health insurance)	24%	35%	14%	9%	21%	31%
6 Program Review	17%	20%	18%	14%	15%	24%
7 International Students	14%	13%	14%	16%	15%	12%
8 Responsible Conduct of Research/Research Ethics	4%	3%	7%	5%	6%	0%
9 Other	25%	26%	18%	26%	24%	27%

Source: Redd, Neubig, & Mahler, 2008.

indication of the direction of national economic conditions; if the economy worsens, this issue will probably be ranked even higher. Lastly, international student issues rose from the eleventh most pressing issue in 2001 to seventh this year.

Conclusion

The Pressing Issues survey enables CGS to keep current with the topics that graduate deans face and allow us to track which issues remain top concerns over time. Based on this

Table 2. Rank Order of the Most Pressing Issues Among CGS Graduate School Deans, 2001 to 2008

Pressing Issues	2001 rank	2002 rank	2003 rank	2004 rank	2005 rank	2006 rank	2007 rank	2008 rank
Graduate Student Financial Support (Fellowships, Assistantships, Student Loans, etc.)	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1
Enrollment Management/Student Recruitment	3	5	3	6	3	2	2	2
Graduate School Management	10	9	5	4	2	3	4	3
Dealing with Budget Cuts/Graduate Program Financing	4	4	8	8	9	4	5	4
Student Services/Diversity (Includes: student counseling, health care, and health insurance)	2	3	4	3	4	2	3	5
Program Review	6	7	7	7	5	5	6	6
International Students	11	13	13	11	10	6	7	7

Sources: Redd, Neubig, and Mahler, 2008; CGS Membership Surveys, various years

information, we can structure our activities to help address the issues that most affect your students and institutions. We hope you will continue to respond to the Pressing Issues survey and other CGS data requests. The other results from the 2008 Phase I survey will be discussed in future issues of the *Communicator*.

By Kenneth E. Redd, Director, Research and Policy Analysis, and Emily H. Neubig, Program Associate, Best Practices and Research

¹Based on the 2000 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. Research/Doctoral Extensive universities typically award 50 or more doctorates across at least 15 fields of study each year. Research/Doctoral Intensive universities typically award at least 10 doctoral degrees across three or more disciplines each year. Master's & Specialized colleges and universities typically offer master's degrees exclusively, although some may award doctoral degrees in one or more disciplines.

²Includes both non-for-profit and for-profit (proprietary) colleges and universities.

References

Redd, K.E, Neubig, E.H, and Mahler, J.D. Forthcoming. *Findings from the 2008 CGS International Graduate Admissions Survey—Phase I: Applications*. Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools.

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Enhancing Graduate Education: A Fresh Look at Library Engagement

understanding user needs and perceptions and determining effective strategies for delivering meaningful services in the ever-changing and evolving environment of graduate studies.

By Diane Goldenberg-Hart, Communications Coordinator, Coalition for Networked Information⁷

¹PowerPoint presentations from the forum “Enhancing Graduate Education” are available online at <http://www.arl.org/events/fallforum/forum07/>.

²*Graduate Education: The Backbone of American Competitiveness and Innovation* (Washington DC: Council of Graduate Schools, 2007), <http://www.cgsnet.org/Default.aspx?tabid=240&newsid440=47&mid=440>.

³*Graduate Education*, p. 5.

⁴Cecily Marcus, Lucinda Covert-Vail, and Carol A. Mandel, “NYU 21st Century Library Project: Designing a Research Library of the Future for New York University: Report of a Study of Faculty and Graduate Student Needs for Research and Teaching,” January 2007,

<http://www.library.nyu.edu/about/KPLReport.pdf>.

⁵More information about both studies is available online at <http://www.lib.umn.edu/about/mellon/> and at <http://www.lib.umn.edu/about/scieval/>.

⁶Details about these projects are available online: 2006 UW Libraries Biosciences Review,

http://www.arl.org/arldocs/resources/pubs/mmproceedings/150/wilson_files/wilson.ppt; 2007 UW Libraries Triennial Survey, <http://www.lib.washington.edu/assessment/surveys/survey2007/>; 2005 UW Biomedical Research Data Management Study, <http://www.jamia.org/cgi/content/abstract/14/4/478>.

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