

# Data Sources: Results from the 2009 CGS Pressing Issues Survey

Dealing with budget cuts is the top issue facing graduate deans in 2009, according to the Council of Graduate Schools' (CGS) annual *Pressing Issues Survey*. Graduate student financial support and graduate school management issues ranked a close second and third, respectively.

## Background

Each year, CGS asks graduate deans at member institutions to identify the three most important or "pressing" issues or challenges they currently face. The findings from this *Pressing Issues Survey* inform CGS about the concerns of graduate deans and help to shape sessions at Summer Workshops, Annual Meetings, and other forums, as well as future best practices projects. The survey has been conducted annually as part of the *CGS International Graduate Admissions Survey, Phase I: Applications since 2004* and through the CGS membership survey and other surveys in prior years.

The 2009 *Phase I* survey was sent to 495 U.S. colleges and universities that were members of CGS as of January 2009. A total of 245 institutions responded to the survey, for a response rate of 49.5% (Bell, 2008). About 94% (230) of the *Phase I* survey respondents wrote in one or more pressing issues in response to this open-ended question. These 230 respondents to the *Pressing Issues Survey* included 152 doctoral institutions, 64 master's institutions, and 14 institutions classified as baccalaureate or specialized in the 2005 basic Carnegie Classifications. Seventy-one private institutions responded to the *Pressing Issues Survey*, along with 159 public institutions. Responses to the *Pressing Issues Survey* were coded into nine broad categories. Since respondents were able to write in up to three pressing issues, the percentages sum to more than 100%.

## Pressing Issues in 2009

The top pressing issue identified by graduate deans was dealing with budget cuts and graduate program financing, mentioned by half (50%) of all respondents (see Table 1). Respondents from doctoral institutions were more likely to mention this issue than graduate deans from master's & specialized institutions (53% vs. 46%), and respondents from public institutions were more likely to indicate that this was a pressing issue than those at private institutions (53% vs. 44%).

Graduate student financial support was ranked a close second, with 49% of all respondents saying this was a concern. Once again, graduate deans from doctoral and public institutions were more likely to mention this issue than those from master's & specialized and private institutions, respectively. Graduate school management issues ranked third (48%), but respondents from master's & specialized and public institutions were more likely to mention this as a pressing issue than respondents from doctoral and private institutions.

Enrollment management and student recruitment was ranked as the fourth most pressing issue this year (43%) followed distantly by student services (17%), program development and review (17%), international student issues (6%), and research ethics (3%). Many respondents (33%) wrote in a range of issues that did not fit into the eight broad categories listed in Table 1. Some of the issues included in the 'other' category include job placement for doctoral degree recipients, Ph.D. completion rates, time-to-degree issues, and graduate student housing, among many other issues. If specific issues in this 'other' category are mentioned more frequently in future years, CGS will begin to report those issues separately.

The top issues of respondents from doctoral institutions and public institutions were the same as the most pressing issues for all respondents, but the top issues varied for graduate deans in master's & specialized institutions and private institutions. Among graduate deans at master's & specialized institutions, the top concern was enrollment management and student recruitment, mentioned by 58% of these respondents, followed by graduate school management (56%), and budget cuts and graduate program financing (46%). Respondents from master's & specialized institutions were more likely to mention enrollment management and student recruitment than respondents in other categories, and the same was true for graduate school management. Graduate deans at private institutions ranked graduate school management as their top concern (45%), followed by budget cuts and graduate program financing (44%), and enrollment management and student recruitment (44%).

**Table 1.** Results from the 2009 CGS Pressing Issues Survey

Pressing Issue	Total	Percentage of Respondents			
		Doctoral	Master's & Specialized	Public	Private
Budget Cuts and Graduate Program Financing	50%	53%	46%	53%	44%
Graduate Student Financial Support (incl. fellowships, assistantships, loans, etc.)	49%	53%	41%	53%	39%
Graduate School Management	48%	44%	56%	50%	45%
Enrollment Management, Student Recruitment (incl. diversity issues)	43%	36%	58%	43%	44%
Student Services (incl. diversity services, counseling, health care, health insurance)	17%	22%	6%	15%	21%
Program Development and Review	17%	16%	18%	16%	20%
International Student Issues	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%
Responsible Conduct of Research and Research Ethics	3%	4%	0%	3%	3%
Other	33%	34%	32%	29%	42%

Note: "Master's & Specialized" includes 64 master's institutions and 14 institutions classified as baccalaureate or specialized in the 2005 basic Carnegie Classifications.  
Source: 2009 CGS Pressing Issues Survey

## Historical Comparison of Pressing Issues

This year, a significant shift occurred in the rankings of the pressing issues faced by graduate deans. This year's top issue, budget cuts and graduate program financing, has never been

**Table 2.** Rank Order of Pressing Issues Among Graduate Deans, 2001 to 2009

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Budget Cuts and Graduate Program Financing	4	4	8	8	9	4	5	4	1
Graduate Student Financial Support (incl. fellowships, assistantships, loans, etc.)	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2
Graduate School Management	10	9	5	4	2	3	4	3	3
Enrollment Management, Student Recruitment (incl. diversity issues)	3	5	3	6	3	2	2	2	4
Student Services (incl. diversity services, counseling, health care, health insurance)	2	3	4	3	4	2	3	5	5
Program Development and Review	6	7	7	7	5	5	6	6	6
International Student Issues	11	13	13	11	10	6	7	7	7

Sources: CGS Pressing Issues Survey, 2001 to 2009

ranked higher than fourth in the *Pressing Issues Survey*, and as recently as 2005 was ranked as the ninth most pressing issue (see Table 2).

From 2005 to 2008, graduate student financial support was ranked as the top issue, but it slipped to the number two position this year. This issue is the only one to have been consistently ranked number one or two in every survey from 2001 to present. Graduate school management was ranked

third this year, as in two of the previous three years. Enrollment management and student recruitment, the second most pressing issue in each of the last three years, slipped to fourth in 2009.

## Conclusion

Given the current state of the U.S. economy, it is not at all surprising that dealing with budget cuts and graduate program financing emerged as the top concern in 2009. What is interesting is how this issue also shaped many of the responses in other categories. For example, some of the responses included in the graduate student financial support category focused on how graduate deans could continue to provide adequate levels of financial support despite a declining budget. And, the graduate school management category includes several responses about managing the graduate school despite cuts in staffing levels and other budgetary constraints. Given the depth of the current recession and the budget cuts at many U.S. graduate schools, it is likely that this issue will remain one of the top concerns of graduate deans in the 2010 *Pressing Issues Survey* as well.

By Nathan E. Bell, Director, Research and Policy Analysis

## References:

Bell, N. 2009. *Findings from the 2009 CGS International Graduate Admissions Survey, Phase I: Applications*. Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools.

## New Deans and Titles

Helen G. Drinan is President of Simmons College. She replaces Susan Scrimshaw.

Damien Ejigiri is Dean of the Graduate School at Southern University A&M College. He replaces James Llorens.

John F. Hall is Dean of Graduate Studies at California Institute of Technology. He replaces Michael Hoffmann.

Joseph Hellige is the Vice President, Research and Dean, Graduate Studies at Loyola Marymount University.

Beverly Karplus Hartline is Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of the District of Columbia.

Steven R. Lerman is Vice Chancellor and Dean for Graduate Education at MIT.

Gregory H. Maddox is Interim Dean, Graduate School and Research at Texas Southern University. He replaces Richard Pitre.

Mrinal Mugdh is Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Houston-Clear Lake. She replaces Yvette Bendeck.

Patrick J. Pellicane is Vice Provost for Research and Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He replaces Robert Sikes.

Brian W. Pogue is Dean of Graduate Studies at Dartmouth College. He replaces Charles Barlowe.

Larry A. Robinson is Vice Provost at Seton Hall University. He replaces Jonathan Engel.

Gary Roth is Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Graduate School at Rutgers University, Newark Campus.

Cheryl R. Scheid is Interim Dean and Vice Chancellor at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. She replaces Edward Schneider.

Mark J.T. Smith is Dean of the Graduate School at Purdue University. He replaces John Story.

James D. Sterling is Interim Vice President, Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty at Keck Graduate Institute of Applied Life Science. He replaces T. Gregory Dewey.

Patricia Stokowski is Interim Dean at the University of Vermont. She replaces Frances Carr.

Robert White is Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He replaces Douglas Causey.

Paul Zelhart is Director, Center for Graduate Studies at Grand Canyon University.