

Impact of COVID 19 on Graduate Education From Council of Graduate Schools

Surveys conducted by the Council of Graduate Schools evaluated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on graduate education. An early [survey](#) of U.S. and Canadian graduate school deans in May 2020 revealed that the majority of the respondents did not believe that major policy changes to accommodate students' progress toward degree would be needed. At that time, automatic extensions were granted by only 14% of those surveyed with a larger proportion (47%) dealing with requested extensions to a student's defense on a case-by-case basis. There were sweeping changes to plans for summer schedules with 78% of graduate school deans reporting revisions to dissertation-writing camps and other similar workshops and 66% of the respondents planning remote delivery of the fall 2020 orientation. A consensus was providing support for graduate students with a majority of graduate school deans who responded to the survey strongly committed to honoring the financial commitments made to current and incoming graduate students.

Table 1 ranks the priorities of the May, 2020 survey respondents with an overwhelming majority ranking financial support as the #1 priority. Interestingly, Figure 1 ranks the confidence that these graduate school leaders had as face-to-face experiences began diminishing in May 2020. Several of the "allocating adequate resources" survey questions were toward the lower end of the confidence scale. There was collective pessimism when asked about the impact that the pandemic (as well as the political climate at the time) was anticipated to have on international graduate student recruitment and enrollment.

A more recent and expansive [survey](#) was sent to active members of the National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals (NAGAP) in December of 2020 and. This survey asked a series of questions covering U.S. graduate enrollment trends in the fall 2020, the impact of COVID-19 on program suspensions, and newly admitted graduate students' perceptions. Figure 2 shows that there was a relatively modest number of programs suspended for the fall 2021 semester with the arts and humanities fields most impacted. Graduate student concerns were also a focus of the December 2020 survey with the restrictions on face-to-face training exacerbating the financial concerns of newly admitted and current graduate students. Overwhelmingly, 82.2% of NAGAP respondents agreed that more prospective domestic students had expressed concerns about the affordability of graduate and professional education since the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, a majority (61.1%) of the admissions professionals had experienced an increased number of prospective domestic students choosing to defer their graduate or professional education due to financial concerns related to the pandemic. Respondents indicated that prospective students are not losing their interest in a graduate education. However, there was a consensus that more prospective domestic students are questioning the value of a graduate education. When asked about their personal perceptions, students considering a graduate degree were most concerned with the impact of the shutdown on campus culture as well as work-life balance (Figure 3). These concerns were somewhat elevated amongst students of color and women students. A survey addressing the impact of COVID-19 on higher education conducted by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company focused on college freshman provided insight into the future of graduate programs in the wake of the pandemic. This topic along with interviews of BMI graduate officers and students will be featured in the June newsletter.

Table 1. Top Three Resources/Needs that Graduate Deans Will Seek to Protect in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic & Its Fiscal Impact to Their Institutions

Area	#1 Priority	#2 Priority	#3 Priority	Total
Grant aid, assistantship, fellowship, and other financial support for graduate students.	75	28	21	124
Supporting graduate students meeting basic needs during this crisis.	37	35	19	91
Offering graduate students support for coping with psychological challenges associated with this crisis.	10	21	41	72
Maintaining the staff FTE of my unit.	14	25	18	57
Engaging in domestic outreach and recruitment activities for graduate students to ensure the diversity of the incoming cohort.	14	19	20	53
Supporting graduate faculty to teach and mentor graduate students virtually.	17	15	14	46
Funds for direct student financial support for graduate student travels (e.g., conferences, field works, and professional development, etc.) and other professional development activities.	5	12	15	32
Engaging in the international outreach and recruitment activities for graduate students to meet the enrollment target.	8	8	9	25
Providing preparation and support for graduate assistants to transition to online teaching.	5	10	9	24
Programming for graduate career development activities.	0	7	14	21
Maintaining the student employment opportunities (both undergraduate and graduate) in my unit.	3	8	7	18
Other areas (Please specify).	2	1	1	4

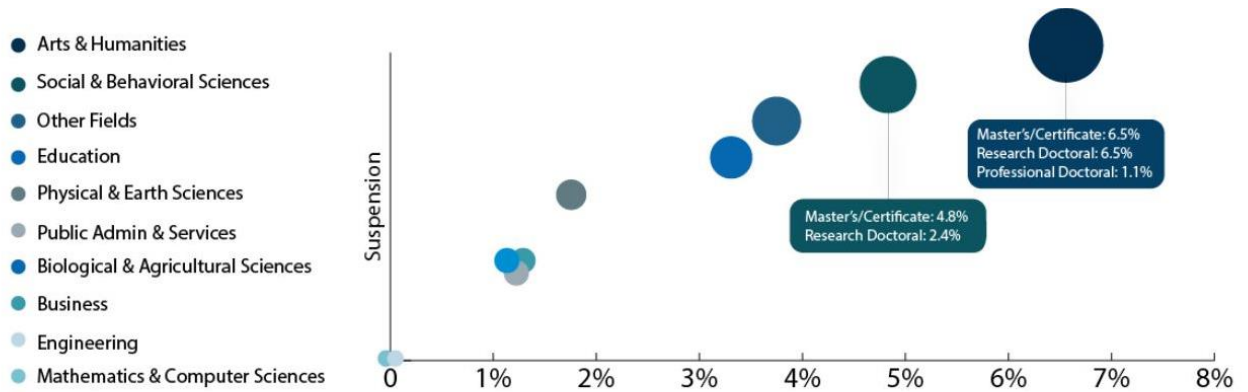
Data Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Survey on the Impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic on Graduate Education, May 2020

Figure 1. Graduate Deans Confidence in Their Institutions' Ability to Do Select Actions During Academic Year 2020/21.



Data Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Survey on the Impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic on Graduate Education, May 2020.

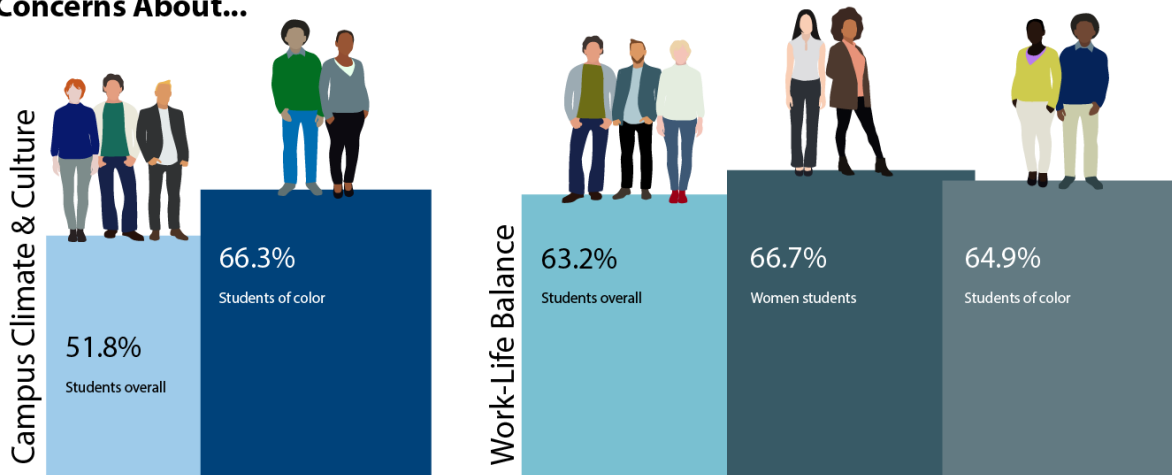
Figure 2. Program suspension, Fall 2020



Data Source: NAGAP, The Association for Graduate Enrollment Management & Council of Graduate Schools, Survey of Graduate Enrollment Management Professionals, Fall 2020, Data Table 5.

Figure 3. Since the COVID-19 Pandemic, More Prospective Students Express Concerns About...

Concerns About...



Data Source: NAGAP, The Association for Graduate Enrollment Management & Council of Graduate Schools, Survey of Graduate Enrollment Management Professionals, Fall 2020