

# Graduate and Professional Student Government

## Graduate Community Report



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Graduate and Professional Student Government  
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## Executive Summary

The Graduate and Professional Student Community Report (GPSCR) includes an analysis of the graduate and professional community climate, in addition to suggested initiatives for the Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) and University of Pittsburgh. GPSG represents the 10,000 graduate and professional student population and works to support students in academic, professional, and social endeavors. This document serves as a mean to identify and address critical issues in graduate and professional student life at Pitt. Through internal surveys and benchmarking data, GPSCR will suggest resolutions to current issues facing graduate students; GPSCR will be a living document to provide guidance for the actions of GPSG, the University of Pittsburgh, and the greater Pittsburgh community.

Overall, it has been found that the graduate and professional student population is extremely diverse and decentralized. Graduate and professional students take classes, teach courses, conduct research, and provide outreach to the greater community. The graduate and professional student community is one of the most diverse populations on campus, of which 20% are considered international students. This plan also seeks to integrate and connect common issues among the entire community. The GPSCR contains data collected from polling and personal inquiries of graduate students from across the university. Graduate students will have access to the proposed document for insight and input to further shape the community initiative.

## The Role of GPSG in the Graduate Community

### Mission Statement

To improve the lives of the University of Pittsburgh Graduate and Professional Students and foster a vibrant, inclusive community.

### Functionality

The Assembly Board (AB) of GPSG is comprised of students representing the 14 Graduate and Professional Colleges hosting graduate students, in addition to representatives from special interest groups. The AB works in conjunction with the GPSG Executive Board (EB) which is comprised of five elected officers and is supported by one Administrative Assistant. All representatives are Graduate and Professional Students.

This proposal outlines initiatives that supplement the duties EB members and the AB representatives to increase efficiency and effectiveness of the GPSG.

## Major Initiative Topic Areas

The following initiatives have been developed through surveying Pitt graduate students, internal and external research of resources available, and benchmarking other institution's graduate and professional programs. These initiatives have been voted by the AB to be focal points of GPSG in the oncoming years. In addition, these initiatives align with the University of Pittsburgh's Strategic Plan.

### *Increase Sense of Community*

- Formalized orientation offered to all graduate and professional students
- Increase visibility of community based services (orientation, Trailblazers, grad-specific workshops)
- Development of meaningful relationships through social programming
- Instill Pitt pride throughout the entire student body
- Increase communication efficiency

### *Resources for Non-Academic Career Track Students*

- Development of Office of Academic Career Development (OACD), Versatile PhD, Center for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Career Development (DPCD)
- Increase support for graduate students seeking non-academic track careers

### *Centralization of Graduate and Professional Student Resources*

- Centralization of information and/or services for graduate students
- Centralized space for graduate student resources
- Staff support

## Increase Sense of Community

Graduate and professional students expectations are steadily changing. Many undergraduate programs around the country are providing a strong resources and sense of community for their students to grow and develop. Pitt has been working to provide its own undergraduate students “the best experience in the world”. Students with this experience may seek a similar environment in their graduate institution. There are over 10,000 graduate and professional students in Pitt’s Oakland Campus with approximately 2,000 of them international students.

It has been shown that, interdisciplinary collaboration is an extremely strong indicator of a healthy academic and intellectual environment at a university. By integrating our diverse and intellectually engaged community of graduate and professional students the culture on the Oakland campus would shift to match the goals of the Strategic Plan (Goals 1, 3, 4, and 5). Overall, the graduate and professional programs are decentralized and the sense of community lies within the programs, not the University. As such, GPSG is working to provide a greater sense of community and university pride despite the numerous challenges. Proposed resolutions to some challenges are discussed below.

### Current Challenges and Proposed Resolutions

#### *Communication*

Currently, GPSG is responsible for developing its own communication access with graduate students. Over the past few years, a distribution list (d-list) has been fostered to reach graduate students with bi-monthly newsletters, and special announcements. The d-list is populated primarily by AB representatives informing their respective schools about connecting with GPSG, as well as incoming students attending the GPSG orientation. Some AB representatives, however, do not have the ability to contact all students in their school, nor do all incoming students attend the GPSG orientation. Additionally, GPSG updates its website, Facebook page and group to provide current information to students. Based on the climate and orientation survey results (discussed below) there is a significant disconnect in communication throughout the overall graduate community. Some testimonials include “I didn’t know about GPSG until this survey”, and “I don’t know what GPSG is or what it does for students”.

One means to provide all graduate students with important and relevant information is to e-mail a bi-semester newsletter to ALL graduate and professional students. With the ability for GPSG to email all graduate students, graduate students would become aware of GPSG, as well as all of the services and resources available to them from the University. This newsletter could be vetted through the Provost’s office to ensure quality material to the graduate students, as well as include input and information from multiple University divisions (student health, athletics, etc.).

#### *Market outreach programs and services*

There are many students who want to increase campus engagement, but lose interest due to difficulty in finding ways to connect or identifying other opportunities outside the University. The University hosts over 500 student organizations, and numerous university affiliates who provide service and volunteer

opportunities within the greater Pittsburgh community. These services such as Pitt Student Volunteer Outreach, Trailblazers, etc. provide valuable support to the University that promote and further a strengthened community internally and externally; they align extremely well with Goal 4 and 5 of the Strategic Plan.

These programs, while extremely beneficial, are difficult to learn about and are sometimes poorly supported. As a result, GPSG would like to bolster their exposure (at a minimum) through a formalized and supported Orientation for all graduate students. This orientation would expand upon the traditional “resource fair” provided by GPSG, to include structured breakout sessions for attending students. One such breakout session could include details about Pitt specific resources including outreach opportunities. These organizations will be invited to the resource fair portion of the orientation.

GPSG would greatly benefit from University support in planning this orientation through financial and staff contributions. GPSG has planned and hosted this event completely internally since its creation in 2013, but the event requires additional financial and staff support to grow. This would include help coordinating with each graduate school, as well as space and speaker confirmation.

## Non-Academic Career Track Students

The number of doctoral students has been steadily increasing, however, the number of tenure-track/academic appointments has remained constant. Students are therefore looking at non-academic job opportunities after graduation. The success of initiatives such as Versatile PhD shows there is demand for support for students working toward or transitioning to non-traditional and/or non-academic vocations as they conclude traditionally academic degree programs. Unfortunately, most students spend a majority of their time focusing on their academic abilities and not much on non-academic or transferable skills. This puts these students at a severe disadvantage (such students typically decide very near the end of their academic path to engage in a non-academic career).

Pitt has realized this trend and has already taken measures towards supporting non-academic career seeking graduate students. The expansion of the Office of Academic Career Development towards assisting students seeking non-academic paths and continued growth of Versatile PhD have provided graduate students a support venue for non-academic career paths. The newly formed Center for Doctoral and Postdoctoral Career Development here at the University provides PhD students by centralizing career/professional development opportunities on campus, but once again these services are limited to PhDs. Pitt has an opportunity to become a leading institution in this new reality due to buy-in by graduate students and administration.

### Current Challenges and Proposed Resolutions

#### *Development of OACD, Versatile PhD, DPCD*

There are numerous programs that the university subscribes to and provides students, however, they are not marketed or known throughout the graduate community. A shift in mindset to promote these programs is necessary from the administrative level to staff and faculty, such that students are able to utilize the resources available.

GPSG hopes the administration can provide the Directors of individual graduate schools and programs the appropriate information about OACD, Versatile PhD, and DPCD. Promoting this information will hopefully encourage greater programming initiatives from individual schools to provide additional program specific opportunities to students.

#### *Increase support for graduate students seeking non-academic careers*

Similar to undergraduate students, graduate students are in need of institutional support to locate appropriate job opportunities after graduation. While the Career Development and Placement Assistance Office has services that can help graduate students, they are in general not graduate student specific. At the graduate level, services must be tailored and focused at even the levels of resume or curriculum vitae critique.

GPSG has been working to promote the services available, as well as to provide programming outlets for students. Opportunities such as resume review, interview preparation, and network events are critical for student success but are sometimes unavailable for graduate students. It is thus, that GPSG hopes to find partners within the University and administration to create more opportunities for graduate students. Some of these opportunities could include network opportunities with non-academic career alumni, or seminars to develop public speaking and interpersonal relationship skills.

## Centralization of Graduate and Professional Student Resources

One of the greatest deficits within the Pitt graduate student community is the lack of a centralized space that all graduate students can call their own. Some schools, departments, and/or programs offer such a space to their students, but this is by no means universal. There are many students who find themselves in programs that cannot offer them a community space to relax with fellow students, work on assignments, meet other fellow students, and most importantly locate information universal to all graduate and professional students.

### Current Challenges and Proposed Resolutions

The dissertation space in Hillman Library is a prime example of success in bringing together different graduate students. This space is limited, however, and not all graduate students are writing dissertations. The purpose of a centralized space is to enrich the graduate student experience at Pitt. This centralized graduate space would foster both academic and social interactions amongst graduate and professional students. It would provide a central location where students could inquire about available resources on campus. This space could house GPSG, in addition to other graduate student organizations such that a greater sense of community would emerge from the guaranteed increase in programming collaboration.

The closest space to a graduate and professional student center on campus is the Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) office located at 825 William Pitt Union. This space consists of two small rooms, a front office for GPSG's administrative assistant and a rear office for GPSG officer and graduate students to utilize. At most, there can only be three to four students in the room at one time. A small shared conference room is available next to these offices, however, again size and access are limited.

Numerous other universities have dedicated graduate space and have stated "it is key to the success of graduate student groups", and "it provides a necessary resource for students to come to when they aren't sure where to find information". While some individual schools may provide a space for students, having a centralized space supported from the University level would help develop the sense of community within the graduate and professional students, and most importantly help students get the resources that are available to them.

## GPSG Orientation and Climate Survey Results

At the 2015 GPSG Orientation, a survey was conducted with incoming students. These students were asked about their expectations of graduate school, what they thought the University should provide for them, and more. With undergraduate educational experiences increasing their support and resources for students, there is a growing request for additional resources as a graduate student. Overall, the University provides similar, or the same, resources to graduate students as it does the undergraduates. These resources, however, are all tailored to the undergraduates and are unequipped to support graduate and professional student needs and concerns.

The Graduate and Professional Student Government also conducted a climate survey that was made available to all registered graduate and professional students. The survey included 7 questions that revolved around the importance and availability of services to graduate students, in addition to the overall feeling of support felt by graduate students from their departments, schools, and the University. It is through the data collected in these surveys that helped set the foundation for the initiatives discussed above.

### Orientation Survey Results and Analysis

In August, 2015 approximately 500 students attended orientation and 200 of which responded to an entrance survey. These incoming graduate students were asked about their expectations of graduate school, what they thought the University should provide for them, and more. In an open ended question asking what services you would like provided for you as a graduate student and duplicate answers were summed with these results:

<b>Service Requested</b>	<b>Percent Mentioned:</b>
Financial Services	51.5%
Private Graduate Lounge	26.5%
Career Development	20.5%
Legal Services	18.5%
Health Services	13.0%
Academic Services/Resources	6.5%

These results show that graduate students are still looking for various services similarly to undergraduate students. While “Financial Services” was not explicitly defined, it was prompted to be finding funding opportunities for graduate programs, as well as financial planning for after graduation. This year, GPSG hosted a financial planning event for graduate students that was positively received, and hopes to provide similar programming in the future. In addition, the Provost’s office has been working to organize funding opportunities for graduate students, and that information has been pushed through GPSG and the individual schools.

A Private Graduate Lounge and Career Development were the second highest requested services. While many individual schools and programs have a graduate lounge, there is no central graduate student space which has caused the suggestion described above. It is interesting to note that the services the schools are best at providing (academic services) and university (health services) are the lowest mentioned services. It was also found that students are very much interested in career development and placement, which has also been addressed above.

Another survey question asked by which means of communication students preferred. The results showed that 95% of students answered Email, with Facebook at 38.5%. Students were allowed to select more than one answer. These results show that students would most appreciate information directed to them through email.

The raw survey results are provided in Appendix A.

## GPSG Climate Survey Results and Analysis

The exact questions and results gathered from the GPSG climate survey, are provided in Appendix A. A total of 665 students responded to the survey of the 894 that opened the survey. The survey was advertised through GPSG, my.pitt, the Provost's Office, and the Associate Deans of Graduate Studies for each school.

Based off of the responses from Question 1, it was found that Graduate School of Public Health had the highest percentage of responders from their respected school. Nursing, Education and GSPIA also had approximately 10% of their students respond to the survey. Overall, the percentages can be seen in the first graph of Appendix A.

The survey also includes follow up, open-ended questions that allow the responder to elaborate their responses and verbalize additional "desires" for help and support.

The most notable trend in open ended responses relates to off-campus housing assistance, financial support, and support with mentor relationships. In particular with mentor relationship support, a handful of students have noted that their academic mentor is creating a hostile work environment and the students did not know what opportunities they have to express this concern. Generalized, the theme of the responses in the open-ended section made it clear that students did not know who to approach with their questions.

## Currently available resources

Available resources to graduate students vary based on which graduate school they are in. The resources available to all graduate professional students can currently be found on the Graduate Studies website: <http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/services.html>. This list, however, is not inclusive of all services available. More importantly, graduate students are generally unaware of the services available to them and where to find information about them based on the climate survey results.

## Summary

The results of the orientation survey and graduate student climate survey validate the foundation for the proposed initiatives. Not surprisingly, the most important resource to students is career-orientated. While there are many opportunities for career/professional development for graduate students, many of those opportunities are hosted by one graduate school and not advertised well to others outside the program. This is a detriment to the graduate students because most of these events relate to transferable skills; not every graduate school has an office which coordinates/plans such events.

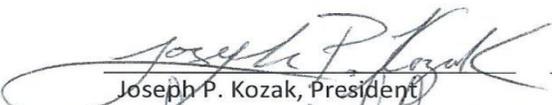
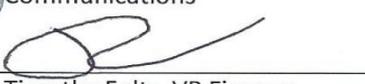
Many respondents to the climate surveys are unaware of University-wide available services such as mental health services and legal services. Developing a stronger communication infrastructure or community will help increase the efficacy of information dissemination.

From the climate survey, we also found that students generally feel more supported and represented by their department or program. This feeling of support and representation decreases the broader the scope (school to University level). One concern with this trend is that students may not affiliate themselves as Pitt students, but rather a school specific student. This was made evident during one of the strategic planning town hall sessions hosted by the University. Supporting the open-ended section, students are neutral on whether GPSG supports or represents them. Once again, this highlights the challenge GPSG faces with communication.

Overall, GPSG will be pursuing the major initiative themes of *Increasing Sense of Community*, *Non-Academic Track Students*, and the *Centralization of Graduate and Professional Student Resources*. It is the hopes that the University will support and partner with GPSG to specifically:

- Communicate with all Graduate and Professional students through an email listserv
- Aid in the dissemination of information and resources for non-academic track jobs
- Provide a centralized, multi-purpose location where all graduate and professional students can call their own, and easily access available resources

This report and these initiatives have been draft and submitted by the 2015-2016 GPSG Executive Board, under the advisement and approval of the 2015-2016 Assembly Board. The vote of support was unanimous by all Assembly Board members, and it is the hopes that the Provost's Office of the University of Pittsburgh will work with GPSG to provide the best experience for graduate and professional students.

 Joseph P. Kozak, President	 Greg Logan, VP Communications	 Andrew Topp, VP Programming
 LaTrece Holland, VP Committees	 Timothy Folts, VP Finance	 Christina Mazur, Administrative Assistant

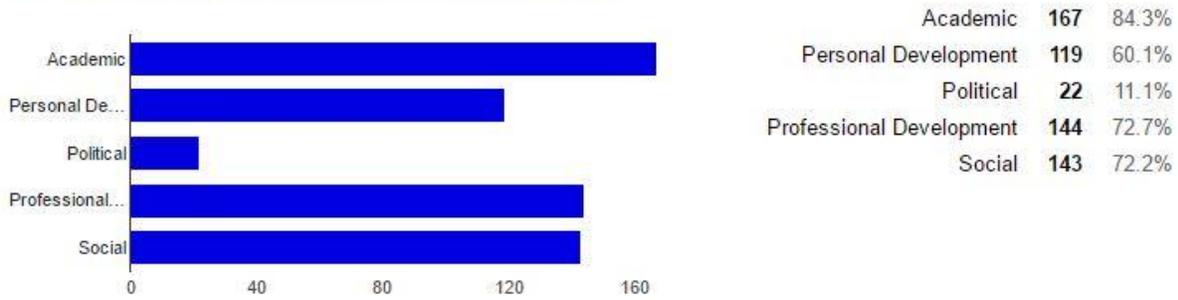
## APPENDIX A: Orientation Survey Results

School Affiliation\*\*:

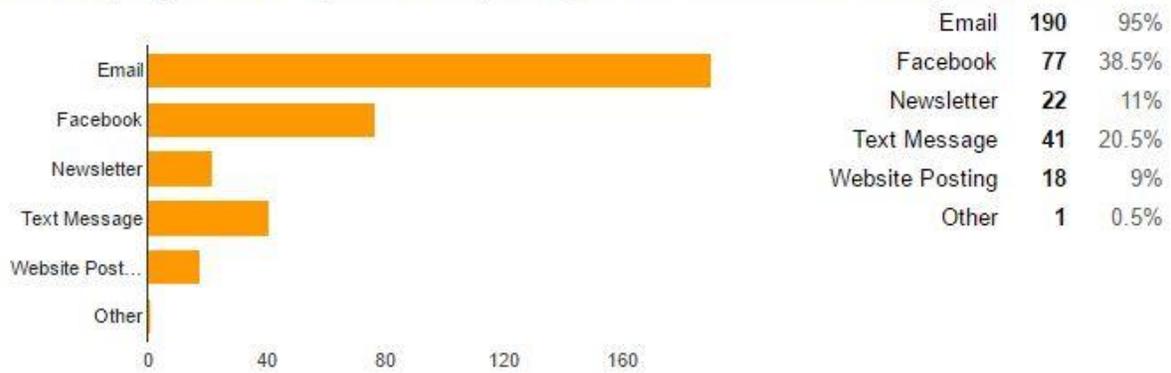
<b>School</b>	<b>Number Attended</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>
Dietrich School of Arts and Science	31	15.5%
Katz Graduate School of Business	3	1.5%
Dental Medicine	5	2.5%
Swanson School of Engineering	39	19.5%
Health and Rehabilitation Sciences	32	16%
Information Sciences	47	23.5%
Law	0	0%
Medicine	5	2.5%
Nursing	1	0.5%
Pharmacy	1	0.5%
Public and International Affairs	10	5%
Public Health	11	5.5%
Social Work	15	7.5%
Education	0	0%

\*\*These numbers are reflective of the students who participated in the survey. In total there were approximately 480 students in attendance at the orientation event.

**What types of programs are you most likely to attend?**



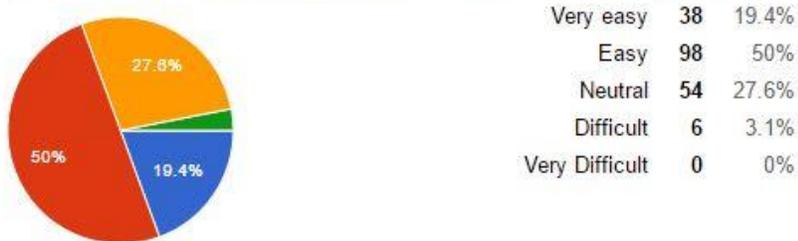
**How do you prefer to be updated on upcoming events and news related to graduate students?**



**How easy was it for you to gather information and available resources BEFORE you arrived on campus?**

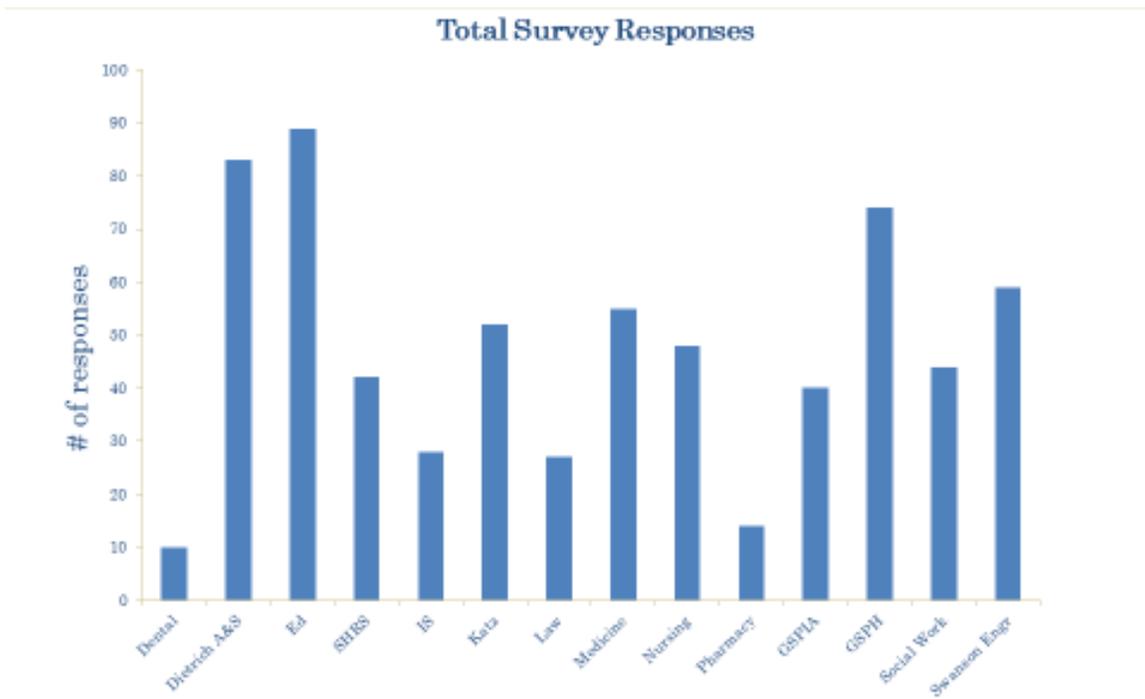


**How easy was it for you to gather information and available resources AFTER you arrived on campus?**

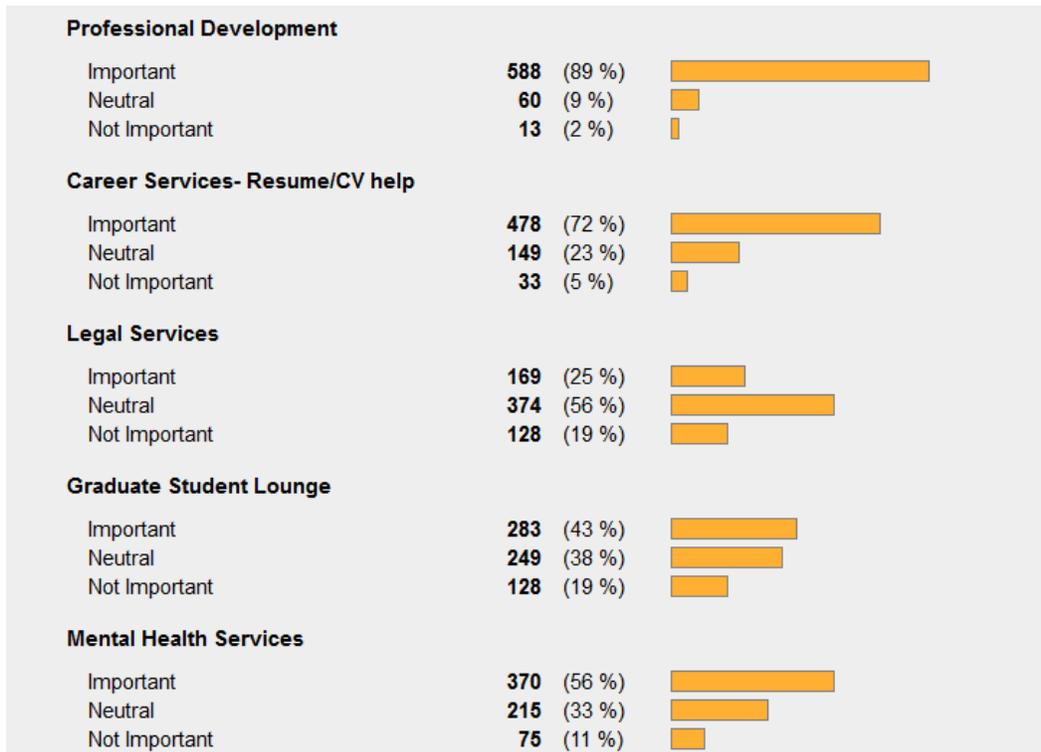


## APPENDIX B: Climate Survey Results

Question 1) School affiliation:



Question 2) How do you value these services as a graduate student?

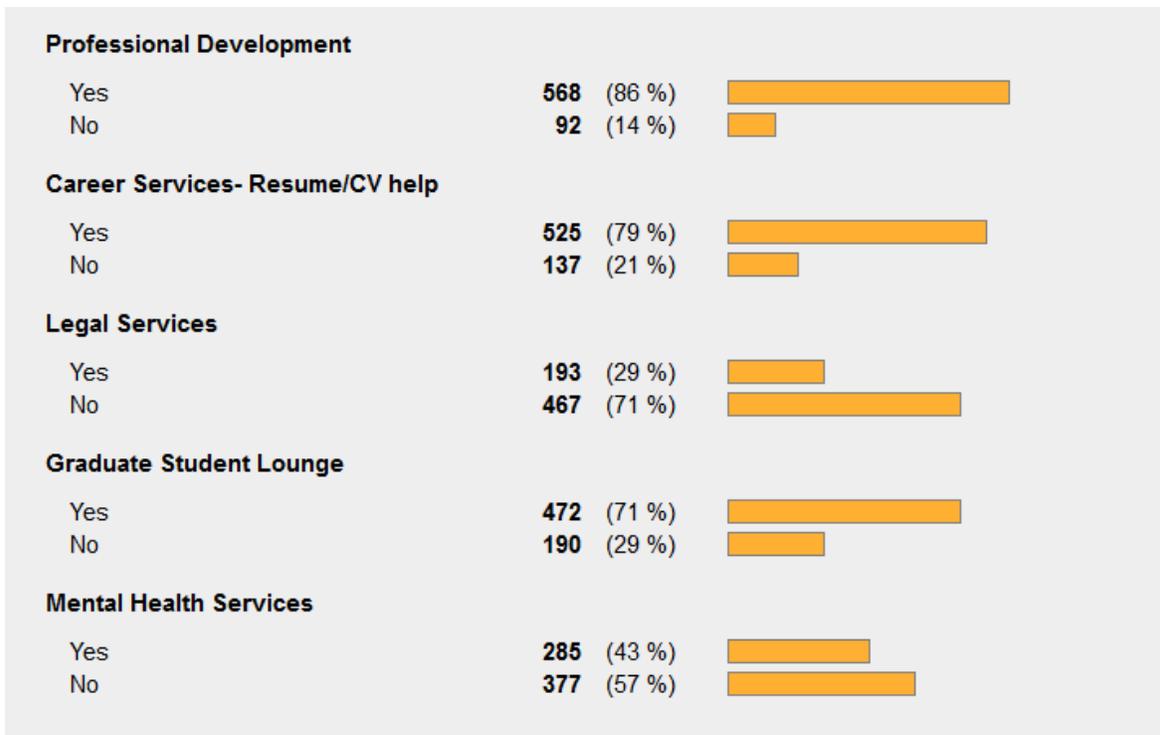


Question 3) What other services do you value (option)?

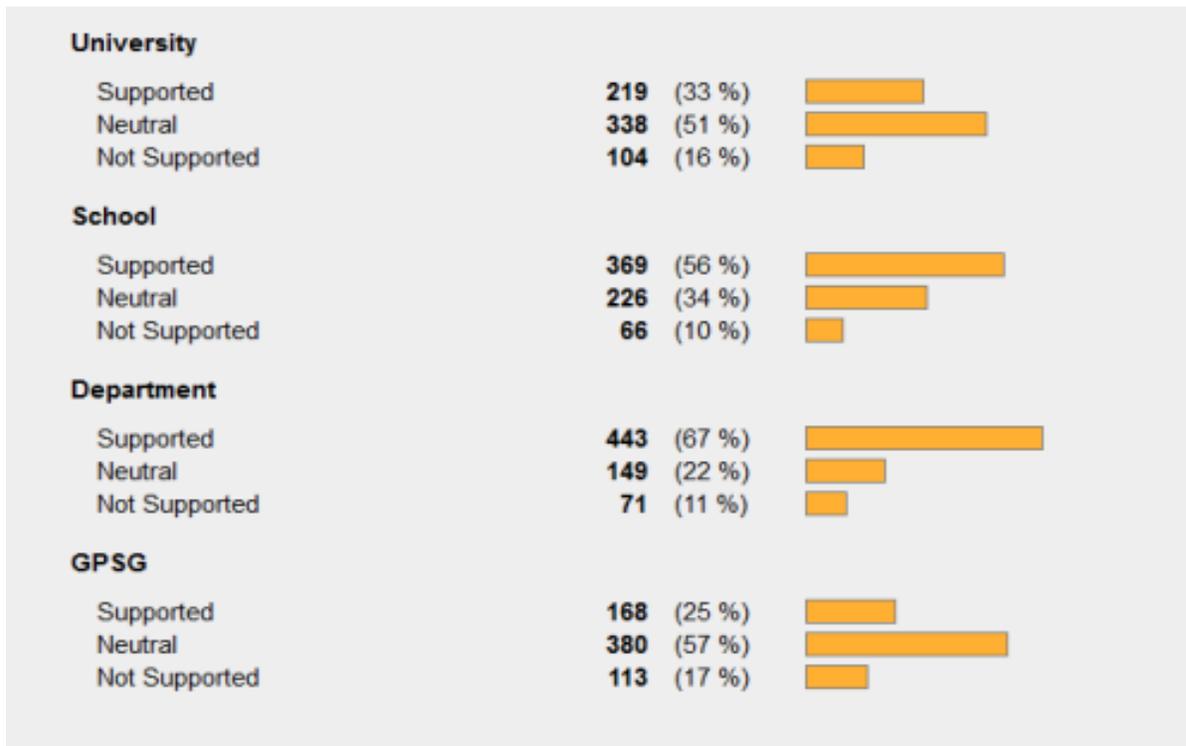
This was an open-ended question and the most common answers included:

- Tutoring
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Networking Opportunities
- Transportation
- Personal Health
- Housing
- Financial Support
- Diversity support
- Quiet Study Space
- Mentorship/advising
- Alumni Relations

Question 4) Does your school have any of these services?



Question 5) How supported do you feel from the following?



Question 7) Do you think your opinion is represented in?

