

Recommendations for improving campus climate for graduate students
Advisory Council on Campus Climate, Culture, and Inclusion (ACCCCI)
September 2012

The ACCCCI Graduate Student Subcommittee reviewed the findings from the 2011 Graduate Student Survey related to climate for diversity, equity, and inclusion, and identified three areas for attention: TA Training, Professional Development, and Student Voice. The findings in each area, recommendations and next steps have been endorsed by ACCCCI and are summarized below.

TA Training

Survey results: Graduate students employed as Teaching Assistants at least once during their graduate studies at UCSC were asked to evaluate TA training provided by their program, both in terms of its overall quality, and training specifically for teaching diverse student population and maintaining respectful classroom environment. 80 percent of respondents reported receiving formal instruction in teaching prior to their first TA assignment. Of those TAs who received formal instruction, about 60 percent were satisfied with its overall quality in three divisions (Humanities, Social Sciences and PBSci) and 84 percent – in the School of Engineering. (The Arts Division had too few respondents with TA experience and was not included in this analysis).

About 50 percent of respondents across divisions said that their programs provided insufficient training and resources for maintaining a respectful classroom environment (see the attached *Report on TA training* for details), and 44 percent said that their programs did not provide sufficient resources or “best practices” for teaching diverse students. There were significant gender differences in student satisfaction with TA training for teaching diverse student populations, with nearly twice as many women reporting insufficient preparation compared to men.

The Survey showed that the extent to which the TA training satisfied graduate students’ needs varied across programs within every division. There were no significant differences among students with different racial/ethnic backgrounds in their TA training, needs and experiences.

Based on the Survey results, ACCCCI recommends that

1. deans review the Survey findings on TA training (attached) whether formal training is being provided for new TAs either before or concurrent with teaching assignments, as required by campus policy;
2. departments
 - a) review the Survey findings on TA training for their specific graduate program (attached) with the person responsible for TA training and a head TA,
 - b) engage faculty members and invite on-campus specialists to provide training sessions for all TAs (new and experienced) on issues of diversity, student resources, supportive learning environment, and conflict resolution. Such specialists include Donnae Smith, Diversity & Inclusion Program Coordinator (donnaes@ucsc.edu) and Nancy Heischman, Director of Campus Conflict Resolution Services (nheischm@ucsc.edu).
 - c) share information/workshops on TA training on issues of diversity and supportive learning environment with other graduate programs;
3. the campus
 - a) create a training program in college teaching (for which a certificate of completion would be issued). It is envisioned that the program will provide a cohort of 14-15 select graduate

- students with faculty mentorship and in-depth training in teaching a diverse student population. Upon completion of the program and as compatible with degree progress and academic employment, these students should become mentors to other graduate students and bring teaching resources and expertise to their respective programs.
- b) re-establish the Center for Teaching Excellence to provide programming (workshops, invited speakers, etc.) and teaching resources on topics of diversity and inclusion for both graduate students and faculty (building a “community of practice”);
4. the Graduate Student Association (GSA) consider institutionalizing the “TA Question and Answer” panel as part of the yearly GSA New Student Orientation.

Professional Development

Survey results: The majority of respondents across programs indicated that they needed professional development opportunities in the following areas:

- writing and publishing scholarly articles,
- conducting dissertation research, and
- conducting academic and non-academic job search and interviews.

Students consistently reported irregular availability or lack of professional development classes/workshops in these areas (see the attached *Report on Professional Development*).

The survey also found that even among students who have already completed coursework many felt underprepared in these areas. For example, from about a third (PSci) to two thirds (Social Sciences) of respondents did not feel that they had good preparation to write scholarly articles for publication. At the same time, about 70-80 percent of doctoral respondents in all divisions except SOE expected to find an academic position, including a faculty and postdoctoral or other researcher position in academia.

Level of preparation varied by division as well as by respondents’ gender and race/ethnicity. For example, in the Social Sciences Division and the School of Engineering female graduate students felt significantly less prepared to produce scholarly publications than their male colleagues. Almost 40% of underrepresented ethnic minority respondents (including Hispanic/Latino, African-American/Black, American-Indian students and students with multi-racial/ethnic backgrounds) reported having poor preparation to write and publish scholarly articles. Poor preparation for producing scholarly publications was reported by 12% of white, non-Hispanic, 15% of Asian-American, and 21% of international students.

Feeling well prepared to engage in various professional activities (such as independent research, writing scholarly articles, and making presentations) was associated with student perceptions of a supportive climate in the department. For example, students who felt well prepared to conduct independent research and engage in scholarly writing also reported a significantly higher sense of support in the department for students with different backgrounds, identities, and physical, and other not readily apparent disabilities.

Based on the Survey results, ACCCCI recommends that

1. departments

- a) review and evaluate professional development opportunities, identifying the gaps between student needs and opportunities offered,

- b) organize workshops and professional development opportunities and, if possible, invite students from other programs to attend, and/or cooperate in programming with relevant related departments,
- c) inform students and faculty about new online resources available at UCSC's Career Center website for graduate students such as "Versatile PhD for Humanities and Social Sciences",
- d) invite alumna to share their experiences on the academic and non-academic job markets and early career experiences;

2. the campus

- 1. support and increase the number and capacity of campus-wide professional development events,
- 2. raise students' awareness of campus-wide and departmental professional development events (for example, through maintaining an online quarterly calendar of events).

Student Voice

Survey results: Graduate programs across the academic divisions varied in the following practices supportive of student voice:

- consulting with students about program issues/changes that concern them,
- allowing graduate student representatives to attend faculty meetings, and
- informing graduate students about means for conflict resolution between faculty or staff and students.

Programs that had these practices received significantly higher ratings of the overall quality of the program. In addition, these programs were found to have higher levels of student satisfaction with both transparency and equitability of funding decisions and had more students who were satisfied with retention of graduate students in their program.

Students were more likely to report feeling respected by faculty in the programs where faculty consulted with students and informed them about conflict resolution process. Please see the attached *Report on Student Voice Practices* for details.

Based on the Survey results, ACCCCI recommends that

1. departments

- a) review their existing information dissemination practices in light of the survey results for their program,
- b) consider instituting practices which improve information sharing with graduate students about departmental issues such as student representatives to Faculty meetings, Doctoral Program Committees, etc.,
- c) review their existing processes for graduate students to resolve a conflict with a faculty member,
- d) make necessary changes to the ways in which graduate students are informed about department- and campus-wide services and processes for resolving a conflict with a faculty member;

2. the campus build a comprehensive on-line resource devoted to managing relationships between graduate students and faculty (e.g., perhaps modeled after UC Davis or Michigan State U).

Recommended next steps

ACCCCI recommends that responsibility for follow-through on these recommendations be formally designated – specifically,

- recommendations suggesting campus wide action be assigned to and coordinated by the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies,
- recommendations suggesting actions by deans or departments be assigned to and coordinated by academic deans, and
- the recommendation to the Graduate Student Association be forwarded to the GSA president for consideration.

Expected actions by the principal officer assigned responsibility may include

- a) receiving recommendations,
- b) endorsing or modifying them, as appropriate,
- c) consulting with the Senate (i.e., the Graduate Council), as appropriate,
- d) creating an action plan, and
- e) assessing outcomes.

In addition, ACCCCI recommends that these three areas of concern (TA Training, Professional Development, and Student Voice) be again evaluated in late Spring 2013 (via the graduate student survey to be conducted by IRPS/Grad Division).