

# **Student Voice Practices and Departmental Climate**

**Findings of the 2011 Graduate Student Survey, UCSC**

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## **Background**

The Division of Graduate Studies and Institutional Research & Policy Studies have conducted a biennial survey of graduate students since 2004. The survey collects comprehensive data on student satisfaction with various aspects of their graduate studies including curriculum, faculty teaching and mentorship, availability and quality of resources, TA training, and climate in the department. Program-specific results of this survey are provided to departments for self-study and external program review.

In 2011 the Graduate Student Survey was part of the UCSC Diversity and Community Building Study and included a number of questions to assess the climate in the program. Specifically, there were questions about equity and transparency of funding decisions, inclusion of students in decision-making and providing students with information and resources about conflict resolution between faculty and graduate students.

The survey questions and the present report on the findings were prepared at the request of the Graduate Student Subcommittee of the Advisory Council on Campus Climate, Culture, and Inclusion (ACCCCI) that met during the 2010/11 and 2011/12 academic years.

Conducted online in May 5<sup>th</sup> - June 30, 2011, the Graduate Student Survey yielded a 51 percent response rate.

## **Executive Summary**

Most graduate programs at UCSC have established ways to communicate with their students about decisions and processes in the department. However, some graduate programs have been more successful or have made more efforts than others to meet their students' needs for information about and involvement in the departmental decisions and processes concerning graduate students.

In half of the graduate programs at least a third of respondents were dissatisfied with the faculty's efforts to keep graduate students informed about and to include/engage them in decision-making processes in the department. In the majority of the graduate programs (22 out of 30 programs), at least a third of respondents said that their program did not inform students about resources and formal processes of conflict resolution between faculty and graduate students.

In some programs such as Politics and Sociology, most graduate students said that the faculty did not consult with them on issues and program changes that concerned them and there was no adequate student representation at faculty meetings. There were other programs, most notably Astronomy & Astrophysics, Mathematics, and Linguistics, where all or most respondents said that their faculty consulted with them and ensured adequate student representation at faculty meetings.

Departments with practices in place that were inclusive and supportive of student voice also paid more attention to informing their students about resources and formal processes of conflict resolution between faculty and graduate students.

Based on student evaluation of these and other departmental practices, we found that the graduate programs that had these student voice practices in place

- received significantly higher ratings of the overall quality of the program<sup>1</sup> than those programs without such practices,
- had significantly higher levels of student satisfaction with both transparency and equitability of decisions regarding funding of students,
- had significantly more students who were satisfied with retention of graduate students in their program.

Furthermore, 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.

We found no statistically significant differences in perceptions of student voice practices by students of different backgrounds and identities (including ethnicity, social class, and gender).

Overall, these findings suggest that improving departmental practices supportive of student voice could increase student satisfaction with the overall quality of the program, could improve their relationships with faculty and other students, and could be beneficial to all students, regardless of the differences in their social background and identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Students evaluated the overall quality of their program following a series of questions primarily about the academic aspects of their program. The survey questions are included in Appendix.

## *Detailed Results*

### **Description of student voice practices**

The 2011 Graduate Student Survey included three questions designed to assess the extent to which faculty included graduate students in the departmental decision-making and informed them about how to seek help in case of a conflict with a faculty member. Students were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: “Based on what you know, graduate students in your program are

1. consulted about program issues/changes that concern them
2. adequately represented at faculty meetings
3. informed about resources and formal processes related to conflict resolution between faculty and students.”

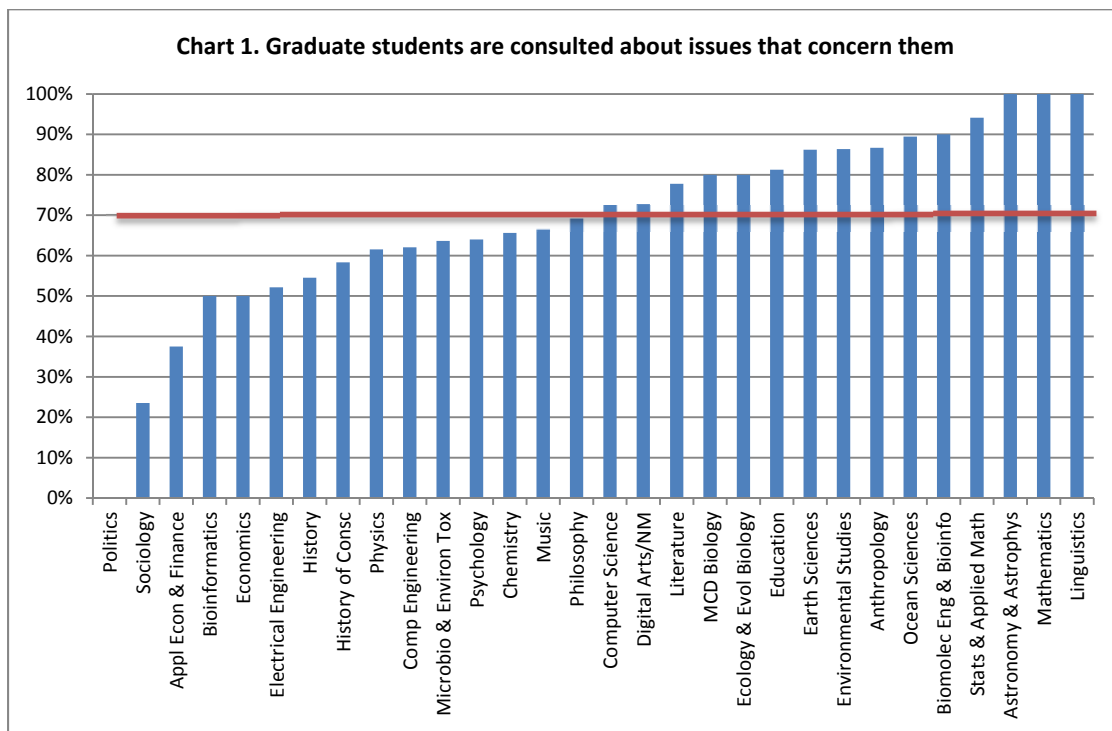
In this report we refer to these three items as the practices or opportunities supportive of student voice. The analysis below describes the differences among the programs in the extent to which they were supportive of student voice and show how these differences in student participation were related to student satisfaction with funding decisions’ equity and transparency, departmental climate, and overall quality of the program.

### **Program-specific differences in the student voice practices**

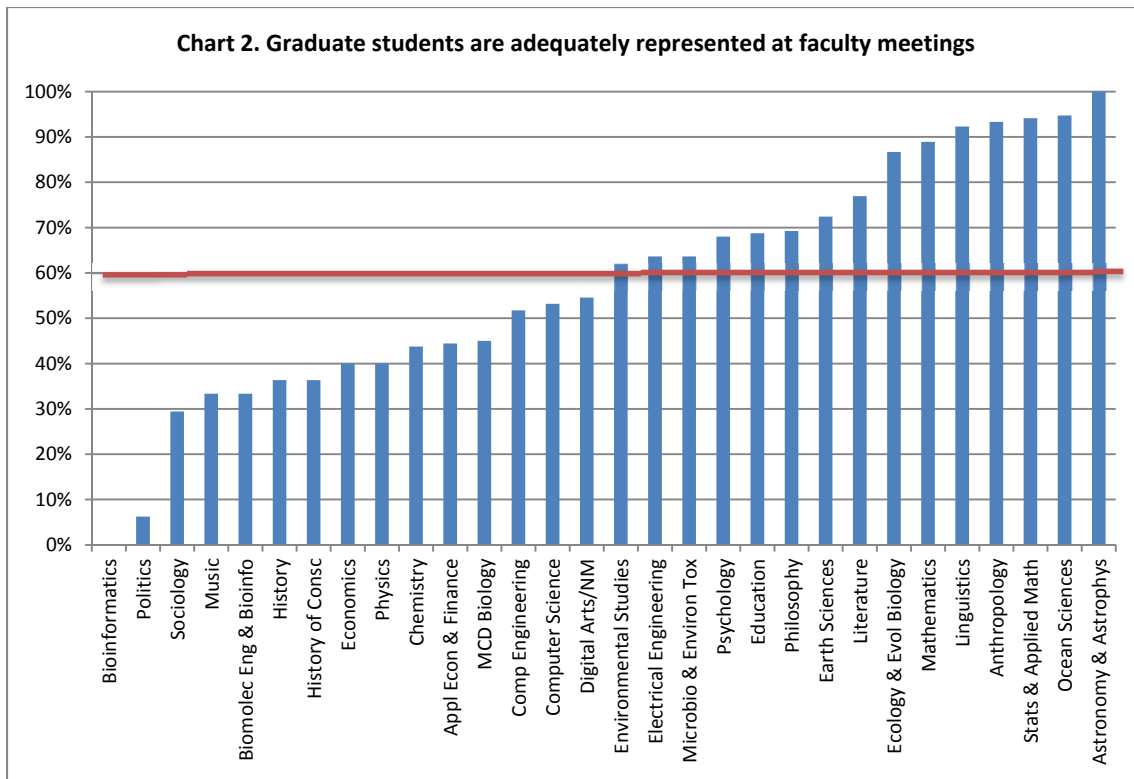
According to the 2011 survey results, some graduate programs have been more successful than others in meeting their student needs for information about and involvement in the departmental decisions and processes concerning graduate students. Graduate programs varied in the extent to which they had in place each of the three student voice practices the survey asked about. Charts 1-3 show a percent of respondents in each program who agreed or strongly agreed with each respective statement. On the left side of the charts are those programs that had the lowest proportion of respondents who felt that faculty consulted them (Chart 1), that they were represented at faculty meetings (Chart 2), and were informed about conflict resolution (Chart 3).

For example, Chart 1 shows that there were some programs where no or only a minority of respondents agreed that faculty consulted with graduate students (0% in Politics Department) to every respondent agreeing that graduate students were being consulted (100% in Astronomy & Astrophysics, Mathematics, and Linguistics Departments). In about half of the graduate programs at least a third of their students said that were not being included in faculty’s decision-making concerning the graduate program (Chart 1).

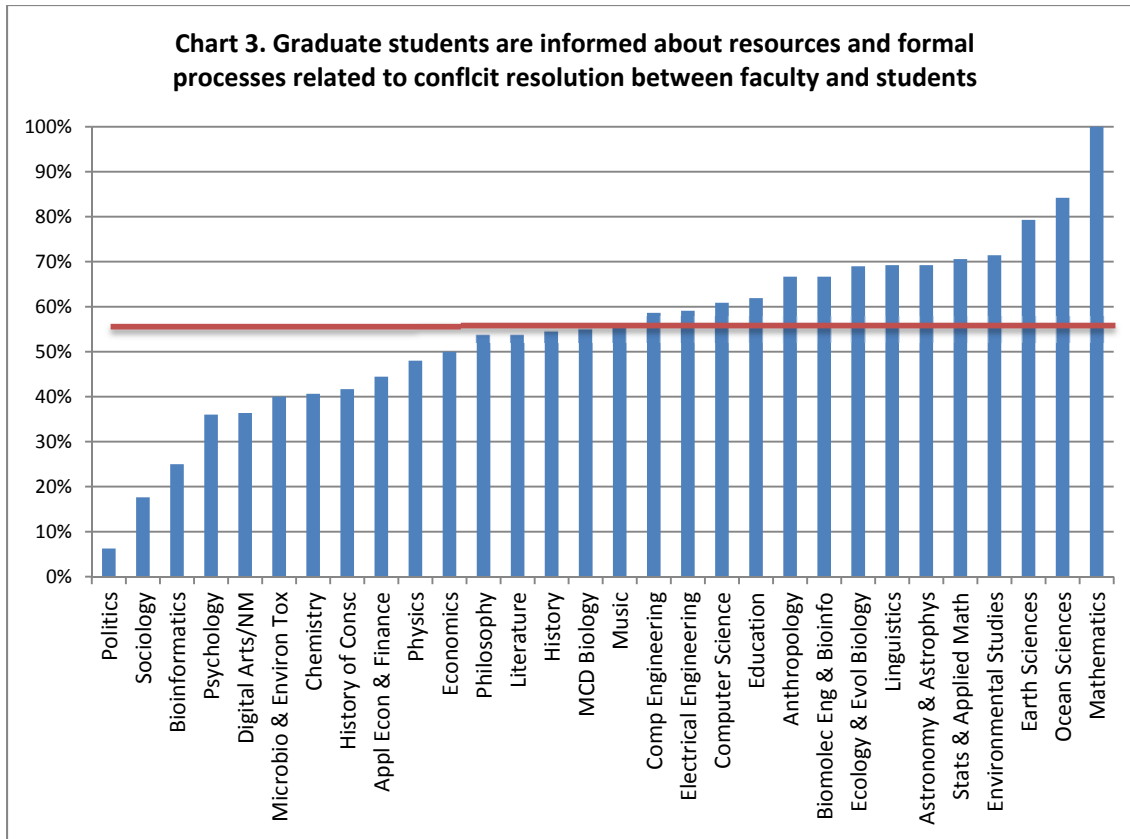
A campus-wide percentage of students who agreed with a statement is indicated by a red line on each respective chart. Specifically, 70% of graduate students campus-wide felt that they were being consulted (Chart 1), 60% said that they were adequately represented at faculty meetings (Chart 2), and 56% said that students knew about the process of conflict resolution between faculty and students (Chart 3).



As Chart 2 shows, in the majority of the graduate programs (18 out of 30 programs evaluated based on the 2011 survey) at least a third of respondents said that there was no adequate student representation at the faculty meetings.



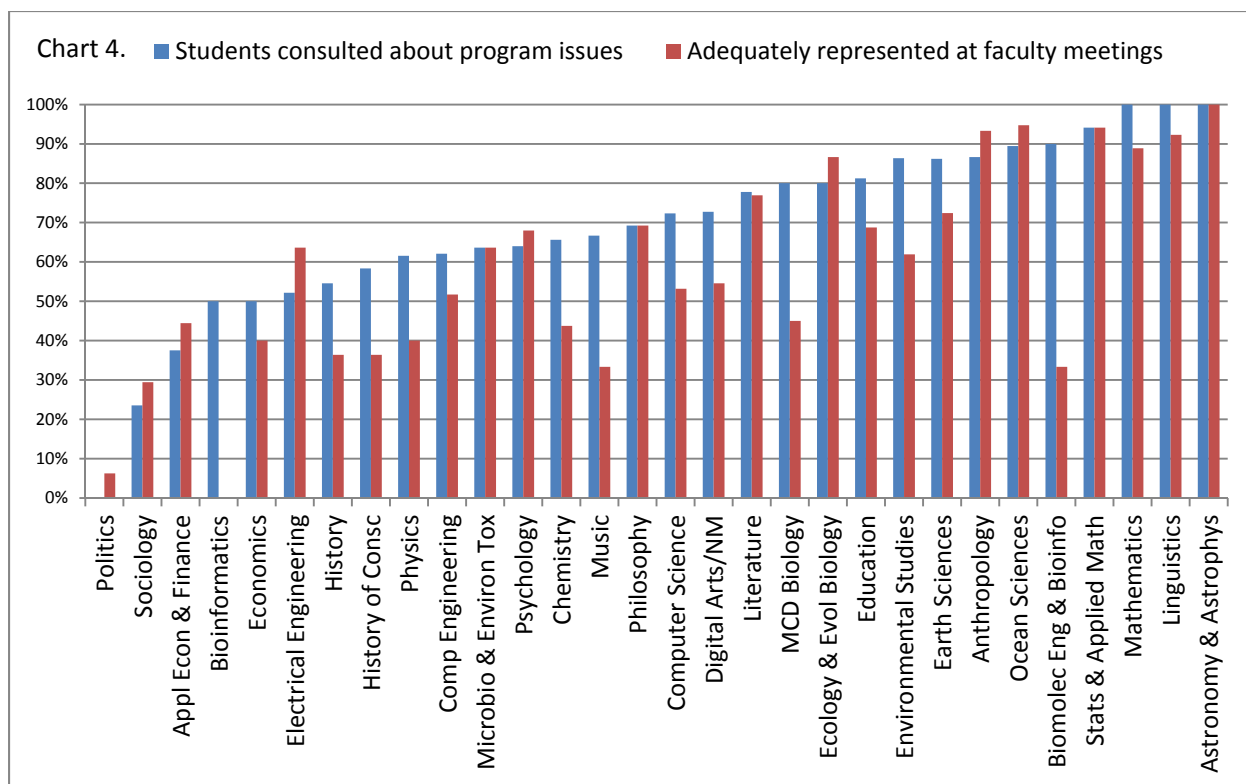
Rather similarly, in the majority of the graduate programs (22 out of 30 programs) at least a third of respondents said that their programs did not inform students about resources and formal processes of conflict resolution between faculty and graduate students (Chart 3). Campus-wide, about half of graduate students thought that their programs did not inform students about conflict resolution resources.



Most importantly, we found that the programs with a higher degree of consultation between faculty and graduate students were also more likely to have adequate representation of graduate students at faculty meetings *and* to have more students who were informed about the process of faculty/student conflict resolution.<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Chart 4 that shows the respective proportions of respondents from each program who said that students were being consulted and were adequately represented.

<sup>2</sup> All three measures of student voice were very strongly correlated when measured on a program level ( $p < .001$ ). The correlation analysis included 30 programs shown in Charts 1-3. Highly statistically significant bivariate correlations ranged from 0.7 (represented *and* informed) to 0.8 (consulted *and* represented or informed).





### Transparency of funding decisions and the student voice practices

The Survey also asked students about their satisfaction with (a) transparency of decisions regarding funding of students and (b) equitability of the funding decisions in their department/program. We found that programs with the student voice practices were significantly more likely to have a higher level of student satisfaction with both transparency and equitability of funding decisions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Statistically significant bivariate correlations ( $p < .001$ ) between the three student voice measures and transparency and equitability of funding decisions ranged from 0.4 to 0.6.

## **Satisfaction with the program's overall quality, retention of graduate students, and respect**

Students evaluated the quality of various academic aspects of their program and its overall quality. We found that those programs that provided the aforementioned opportunities for student voice also received higher average ratings of the programs' overall quality.<sup>4</sup>

We asked respondents about their satisfaction with retention of graduate students in their program. We found that in the programs supportive of the student voice practices students were more satisfied with retention compared to the programs that did not provide graduate students with opportunities to express their view and be informed about issues that concerned them.<sup>5</sup>

In the programs where faculty consulted with students and informed them about conflict resolution process students were significantly more likely to report feeling respected by faculty.<sup>6</sup>

## **Social background differences and perceptions of student voice practices**

We analyzed individual perceptions of student voice practices by respondents' race/ethnicity, gender, and social class background. We found no statistically significant differences in perceptions of student voice practices by students from different ethnic backgrounds, comparing four groups of respondents in each division (except the Arts): underrepresented ethnic minority students, Asian-American (non-Hispanic), white (non-Hispanic), and international students. Underrepresented ethnic minority students included Hispanic/Latino, African-American/Black, and American-Indian students and students with multi-racial/ethnic backgrounds.

There were also no statistically significant differences by gender and social class background.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the findings in this report suggest that improving departmental practices supportive of student voice could increase student satisfaction with the overall quality of the program, could improve their relationships with faculty and other students, and could be beneficial to all students, regardless of the differences in their social background and identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Statistically significant bivariate correlations ( $p < .001$ ) between the average rating of the program's overall quality and each of the three student voice measures ranged from 0.5 (represented), 0.6 (informed), to 0.7 (consulted).

<sup>5</sup> Statistically significant bivariate correlations ( $p < .001$ ) between the three student voice measures *and* satisfaction with retention of graduate students ranged from 0.5 (represented) to 0.7 (informed or consulted).

<sup>6</sup> Both measures were correlated with an average level of respect by faculty (0.4), significant at  $p < .05$ .

## APPENDIX

### 2011 Graduate Student Survey questions (used for this Report)

#### Quality of Program & Faculty Ratings

5. Please rate the following aspects of your department/program and the faculty

1. Very poor
  2. Poor
  3. Fair
  4. Good
  5. Excellent
  6. Not applicable/ Don't know
- 
- a. Quality of teaching by faculty in your program
  - b. Quality of teaching in your area of specialization
  - c. Diversity of faculty's research interests
  - d. Opportunities to work collaboratively with faculty
  - e. Opportunities to form mentorship relationships with faculty members
  - f. Opportunities to work with faculty whose research interests match your own
  - g. Amount of faculty involvement in program/department activities and events
  - h. Faculty assistance in helping you find and secure funding
  - i. Faculty assistance in helping you find professional employment
  - j. Quality of faculty advice regarding an academic career
  - k. Quality of faculty advice regarding other types of careers
  - l. Frequency of your academic progress assessment (e.g., annual or more frequent review by your program)
  - m. **Overall quality of your graduate program**

[...]

#### Funding Decisions and Retention

10. How satisfied are you with

1. Very dissatisfied
  2. Dissatisfied
  3. Satisfied
  4. Very satisfied
- 
- a. transparency of decisions regarding funding of students in your program/department?
  - b. equitability of the funding decisions?
  - c. retention of graduate students in your program/department?