

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS AT UNC



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UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO

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“Overall, I am pleased with UNC as a university in terms of the professionalism and competence of the administration, support staff and the faculty. I feel like it is a place that is genuinely concerned with ensuring students’ needs are met and that they receive high quality education.” (UNC Graduate Student, 2012)

Improving the Quality of Life for Graduate Students at UNC

LINDA BLACK, ED.D., SONJA RIZZOLO, PH.D. AND SARA KNIPPENBERG, M.A.

In Fall 2012, the Graduate School and International Admissions Office conducted a survey to evaluate how well UNC meets the needs of current graduate students and how the Graduate School can further improve their quality of life. The survey was developed to assess students' opinions about their experiences at UNC. The survey was sent to 2,230 degree seeking UNC graduate students enrolled during the fall 2012 semester. A total of 788 completed surveys were collected for an overall response rate of 35%. Of the 788 graduate students responding, the majority of the students were female (74%), White (75%), Colorado residents (74%), working towards a Master's degree (61%), and enrolled full-time (53%). Sixty-one percent of the respondents indicated that they took the majority of their classes on the Greeley campus. Further examination revealed that 27% of the students took classes online and 12% took classes at one of the off-campus centers. The average age of the respondent was 34 years old and the average cumulative GPA was 3.8. Forty-six percent of the graduate students indicated that they had completed more than half of their degree program at the time of the survey. A short summary of the findings are presented as well as a detailed action plan to improve the graduate student experience.

Respondents were asked to rate their importance and satisfaction with statements related to advising, equitable treatment, social community, academics, program flexibility, financial resources and opportunities to collaborate with faculty. The importance and satisfaction items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Figure 1 represents the five items students endorsed as most important, these were also rated within the top 10 most satisfying.

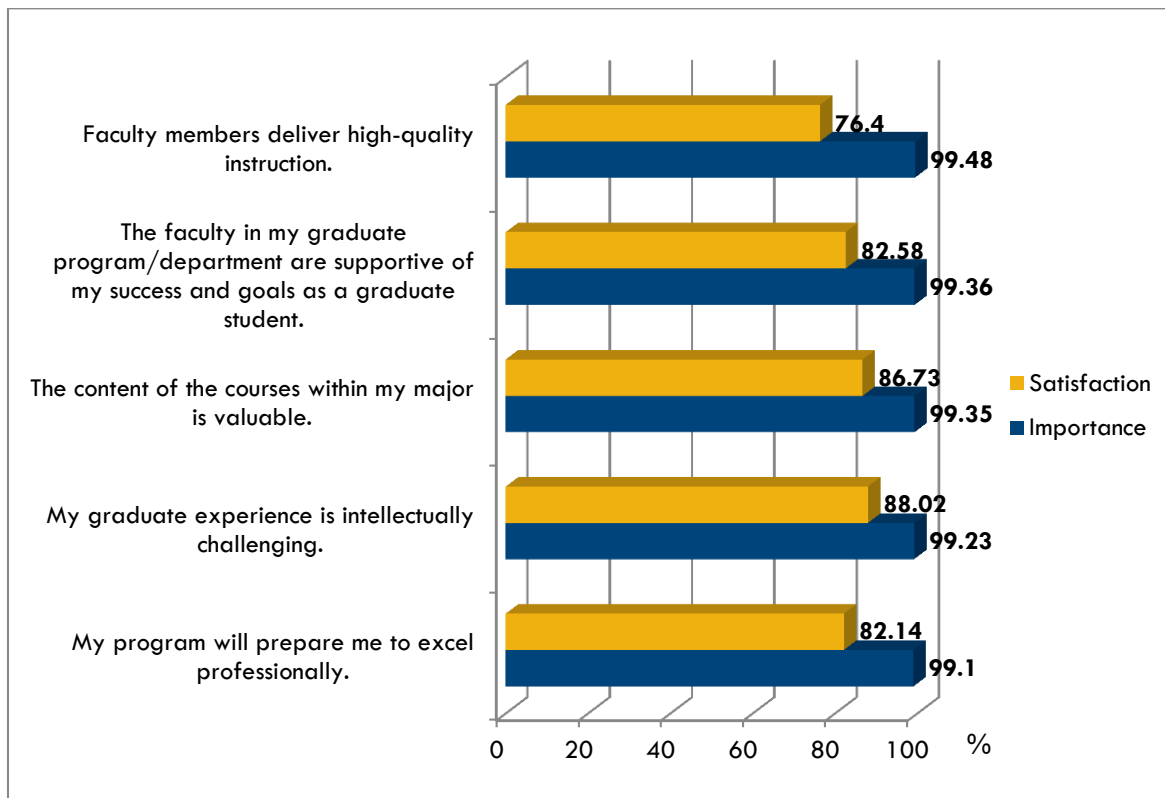


Figure 1. The Five Most Important Items for Graduate Students and Degree of Satisfaction.

Satisfaction: Percent responded "Agree" and "Strongly Agree"
 Importance: Percent responded "Important" and "Very Important"

UNC and the Graduate School have been working to provide all graduate students with a quality education and experience. While we excel in many areas, several areas were identified as needing improvement based on the responses to the importance and satisfaction questions (>.8 mean difference between importance and satisfaction mean scores): advising, program flexibility, financial resources, fair and unbiased treatment from faculty and coping strategies to help with the multiple pressures from home, work and school.

Students suggested numerous professional development and social activities that would improve their graduate student experience at UNC. The following were the most commonly suggested: workshops to expand knowledge in the students' fields of study and research, career workshops and professional networking events. These events provided additional opportunities to enhance skills for the various career paths. Social events to build graduate student community or events that initiate opportunities for students to interact with other students outside of their program of study were of lesser importance. The social events suggested were: sporting events, cultural events, volunteer opportunities and fundraising.

Despite the desire to want to attend these events students often face barriers that prevented them from attending. The most commonly noted barrier was the event's location; many graduate students live far from the Greeley community, are off-campus or online students. Other barriers included time constraints and financial costs.

Graduate students experienced various stressors that negatively influenced their graduate student experience at UNC. The four areas of stress were: time management, insufficient financial support, lack of program flexibility and inadequate advising. See figure 2 below for a graphical representation.

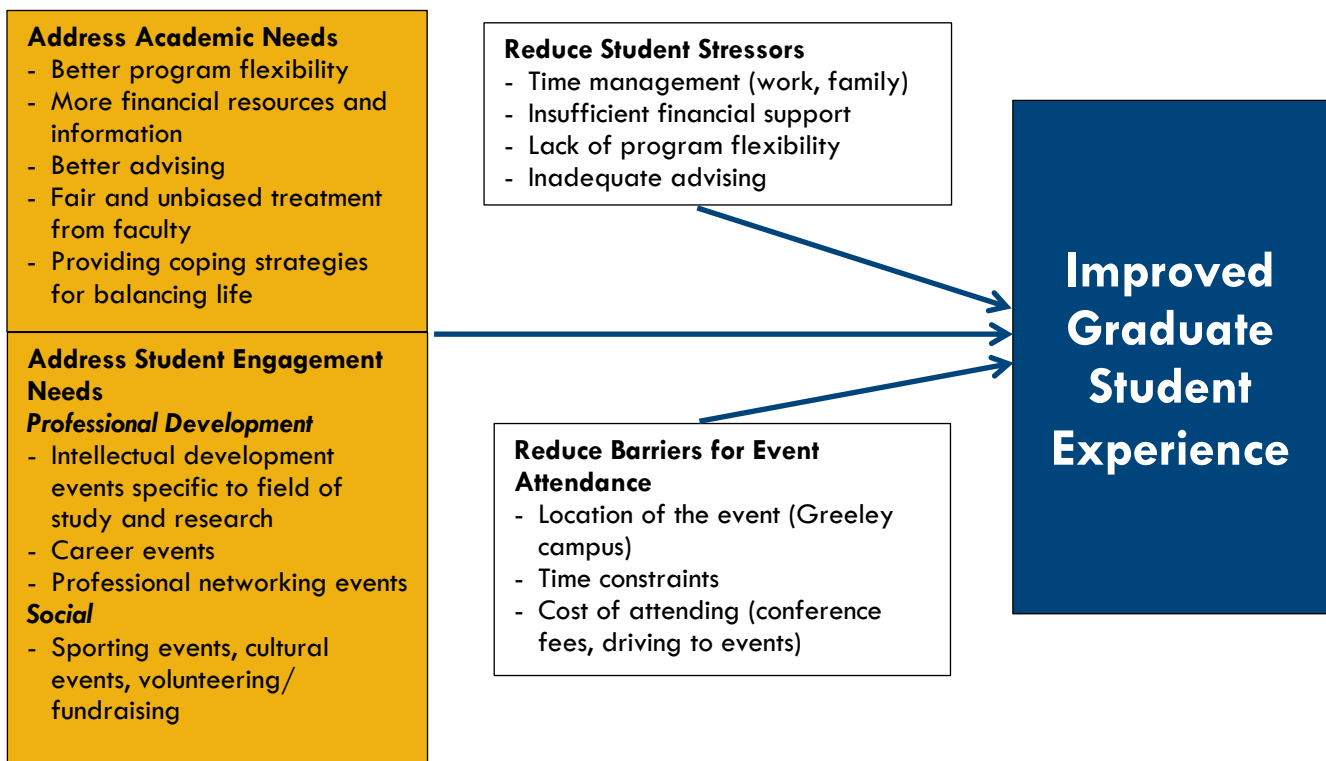


Figure 2. Actions to Improve the Graduate Student Experience.

The aforementioned results set the platform for the actions that follow. The following action steps have been developed by the Graduate School Student Engagement Team and are informed by these data. Addressing the academic and student engagement needs will contribute towards a better quality of life for current and future graduate students. In order to reach out to all students including online and distance learners, the Graduate School has a goal to make many presentations and workshops more accessible. The Graduate School will create materials related to the events being offered. These may include podcasts, webinar recordings, and handouts and can be found on the [Graduate Student Professional Development \(GSPD\)](#) website. Several events are planned for spring 2013; others are in development for the 2013/2014 academic year.

Skill Building

The Graduate School will collaborate with faculty and other departments on campus such as the Writing Center to implement a number of professional development opportunities to enable graduate students to be successful.

- Pedagogy Workshop Series – **Scheduled for spring 2013 (February 5, February 11, February 18, March 5, March 12, March 26, April 2, April 15, April 22)**. For more details check the schedule of upcoming events at the end of this document. These events will be offered on campus and through live webinars.
- Grant Writing Workshop Series – **Scheduled for spring 2013 (February 21, March 14, April 18)**. For more details check the schedule of upcoming events at the end of this document.
- Writing Skills Workshop – **Scheduled for spring 2013 (February 25, April 3)**. For more details check the schedule of upcoming events at the end of this document.
- Dissertation Workshop – **Scheduled for spring 2013 (March 2)**. For more details check the schedule of upcoming events at the end of this document.
- Research Day – **Scheduled for spring 2013 (April 11)**. For more details check the schedule of upcoming events at the end of this document and the [Center for Honors, Scholarships and Leadership website](#).
- Publishing workshop.
- Workshops to increase research skills and locating research opportunities.
- Professional speakers to enrich program specific skills.
- More financial support for Graduate Student Association (GSA) so more students can attend professional conferences.

Finances

The Graduate School will collaborate with the Office of Financial Aid to create workshops for students to inform students about financial aid options.

- Financial Aid workshops for
 - incoming students during the Graduate Student Orientation;
 - current students to address financial aid questions;
 - students who are getting close to graduation to address strategies to pay off students loans and managing debt.
- Workshops to help find financial assistance from a variety of sources.

Career Workshops

The Graduate school will collaborate with Career Services, faculty and alumni to create several workshops to prepare students for various career paths.

- Resume, Cover Letter and Vita Writing Workshop - **Scheduled for spring 2013 (February 28)**. For more details check the schedule of upcoming events at the end of this document.
- Interviewing, Job Search and Networking Workshop - **Scheduled for spring 2013 (March 28)**. For more details check the schedule of upcoming events at the end of this document.

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- Newer faculty or recent graduates share their interview experiences and career paths with current students.

Support Services

The Graduate School will collaborate with the various support services on campus, such as the Writing Center, Research Consulting Lab to create visibility of these services among graduate students. Targeted e-mail campaigns will be developed highlighting certain services such as Dissertation Series and Research Consulting Lab for segments of the graduate student population. Furthermore, to strengthen the sense of inclusion among off-campus and online students, services will be developed to reach out to off-campus and online learners.

Advising

- Plan of Study workshop.
- Panel of faculty members discussing the role of advisor.

Wellness/Counseling

- Collaborate with the Counseling Center and the Psychological Services Clinic to promote their resources to graduate students.
- Time management tips.
- Resource list by location.

Social

- Town Hall Meetings - **Scheduled for spring 2013 (February 23 in Colorado Springs and March 5 on Greeley campus)**. For more details check the schedule of upcoming events found at the end of this document.
- Graduate School fundraiser to build community among graduate students and to raise awareness within the community.
- Reduced tickets to professional sporting events/cultural events.
- Collaborate with outdoor pursuits for activities geared to graduate students.

“Thanks for the Quality of Life Survey! It shows how much the Graduate School cares about students at UNC and improving our quality of life.” (UNC Graduate Student, 2012)



Schedule of upcoming events

Please check the [Graduate Student Professional Development \(GSPD\)](#) website for specifics about each of the events and **sign up**.

Date	Day	Time	Type	Name of presenter	Name of presentation	Location & Room
February 5, 2013	Tuesday	12:30-1:45pm	Pedagogy	Dr. Jeri Kraver	Rubrics: The Key to Authentic Assessment	Michener Library Computer Lab Room 335 or LIVE WEBINAR
February 11, 2013	Monday	11:00-12:15pm	Pedagogy	Dr. Angela Vaughan	Evaluating Teaching and Learning	UC Council Room or LIVE WEBINAR
February 18, 2013	Monday	11:00-12:15pm	Pedagogy	Dr. Angela Vaughan	Incorporating "How to Learn" into the Curriculum	Kepner 1040 or LIVE WEBINAR
February 21, 2013	Thursday	5:00-7:30pm	Grant Writing	Panel: Dr. Lisa Rue, Dr. Elizabeth Franklin, & Dr. Connie Stewart	Grant Writing Workshop Series I	Candelaria 1375
February 23, 2013	Saturday	12:00-1:00pm	Social Event	Dr. Linda Black	Town Hall Meeting	Colorado Springs campus
February 25, 2013	Monday	5:00-6:30pm	Writing	Writing Center	Common Errors in Grammar, Punctuation and Syntax	Kepner 1040
February 28, 2013	Thursday	9:00-10:30am	Career Services	Elizabeth Mahoney	Resume, Cover letter and Vita Writing Workshop	UC Council Room
February 28, 2013	Thursday	5:30-7:00pm	Career Services	Elizabeth Mahoney	Resume, Cover letter and Vita Writing Workshop	UC Council Room
March 2, 2013	Saturday	8:00am-4:00pm	Dissertation Series	Dr. Susan Hutchinson	Dissertation Series	Residential West Side-South Hall Main Lounge 175
March 5, 2013	Tuesday	9:30-10:45am	Pedagogy	Dr. Deborah Kauffman	Student Writing as a Learning Tool	UC Spruce C or LIVE WEBINAR
March 5, 2013	Tuesday	12:00-2:00pm	Social Event	Dr. Linda Black	Town Hall Meeting	UC Spruce A & B
March 12, 2013	Tuesday	12:30-1:45pm	Pedagogy	Dr. Jeri Kraver	Cool Activities for the Classroom	UC Council Room or LIVE WEBINAR
March 14, 2013	Thursday	2:00-3:45pm	Grant Writing	Graduate Student Working Group	Grant Writing Workshop Series II	Michener Library Room 335
March 26, 2013	Tuesday	3:30-4:45pm	Pedagogy	Dr. Kevin Pugh	Workshop on Teaching for Transfer and Transformation	UC Council Room or LIVE WEBINAR
March 28, 2013	Thursday	9:00-10:30am	Career Services	Elizabeth Mahoney	Interviewing, Job Search and Networking Workshop	UC Aspen B
March 28, 2013	Thursday	5:30-7:00pm	Career Services	Elizabeth Mahoney	Interviewing, Job Search and Networking Workshop	UC Aspen B
April 2, 2013	Tuesday	2:00-3:15pm	Pedagogy	Dr. Lahcen Ezzaher	Promoting Rhetorical Awareness in your Classroom	UC Spruce A or LIVE WEBINAR
April 3, 2013	Wednesday	3:30-5:00pm	Writing	Writing Center	Writing Center Presents: "Eyes on Your Own Paper" Workshop	Kepner 1040
April 11, 2013	Thursday	9:00am-5:30pm	Research	N/A	Research Day & Reception	Mnt Evans – UC middle Ballroom
April 15, 2013	Monday	3:30-4:45pm	Pedagogy	Dr. Harvey Rude	Working with Diverse Learners in the Post-Secondary Context	UC Council Room or LIVE WEBINAR
April 18, 2013	Thursday	2:00-3:45pm	Grant Writing	Graduate Student Working Group	Grant Writing Workshop Series III	Michener Library Room 335
April 22, 2013	Monday	11:00-12:15pm	Pedagogy	Dr. Angela Henderson	Getting Students Past Ideologies: Using Heterosexist Guided Imagery	UC Council Room or LIVE WEBINAR
May 6, 2013	Monday	5:00-7:00pm	Research	N/A	Research Night	Columbine A/B, Spruce and Aspen A/B/C

Thank you to all graduate students who took the time to complete the Quality of Life Survey. We appreciate your feedback and will continue to improve the quality of life of graduate students at UNC.