

Graduate Students: Assessing the Out of Class Experience

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Darby Roberts, PhD

Stefanie Stefancic

Texas A&M University





Review of the Literature

- Drop Out Rates (Baird, 1996)
 - 50% overall attrition rate at doctoral level
 - 60% social sciences
 - 40% sciences
 - 20% professional fields (including education)

Review of the Literature (cont.)

- Significant barriers and needs for graduate students within departments (Anderson & Swazey, 1998; Baxter Magolda, 1998; Cook, Sims & Peyrefitte, 1995)
 - Faculty/student relationships
 - Understanding of research in field
 - Connection and support of peers
- Very little has been studied about the role institutional culture of campus resources play in success (Elkins Nesheim & Guentzel, 2006)



Overview of the Project

- Committee
- Sample
- Survey creation
- Timeline
- Data Analysis

Results

	TAMU Graduate and Professional Population (n=9185)	Project Sample (n=2000)	Project Respondents (n=440)
Male	58%	61%	56%
Female	42%	39%	44%
White	49%	49%	43%
Black	3%	4%	3%
Hispanic	7%	7%	6%
Asian	3%	3%	2%
American Indian	<1%	<1%	--
International	36%	37%	46%
Unknown/Other	1%	1%	1%



Results (cont.)

- Demographic Survey (n=440)
 - 60% are single, 26% married/partnered
 - 12% have a child/children
 - 75% would recommend Texas A&M to their friends
 - 75% are very or somewhat satisfied with their graduate school experience

Results (cont.)

□ Demographic Survey Comments

- What do you hope to gain from grad school?
 - “A variety of experiences that will eventually turn me into a better person to face challenges of professional and personal life.”
- Why did you take a break between you last degree and your current degree?
 - “I worked full-time during my Master’s degree and am currently working full-time during my Ph.D. I wanted a break from constantly running from work to class.”

Results (cont.)

- Services Survey (n=224)
 - 40% unaware of the Ombudsman for Graduate Education
 - 20% unaware of AGOSS social events outside of their academic department
 - How students find out about things:
 - 31% messages sent to campus e-mail account
 - 23% e-mail from academic department
 - 21% conversations with friends/colleagues
 - 18% flyers around campus



Results (cont.)

□ Services Survey Comments

■ General Comments about Career Services

- “Not enough opportunities specific to my major/career plans. I had more luck going through my department because the job opportunities, and internship opportunities, they found were more specialized to what I was looking for.”
- “I used the Career Center for help with my resume last year and I got a lot of useful advice.”



Results (cont.)

- Balance and Adjustment (n=214)
 - 95% thought balance was somewhat or very important, but 60% thought they were maintaining balance.
 - 40% rated their stress level as somewhat or very high during an average week.

Results (cont.)

□ Balance and Adjustment Comments

■ What is your personal definition of balance between academic, work and personal life?

- “Having sufficient time on my own, outside of the demands of academics and work to maintain sanity and enjoy life; having enough time in work to earn money for academics, etc.”
- “Keeping up with all three, feeling as though you are succeeding at all three and haven’t let major deadlines slip by.”



Results (cont.)

- Employment Survey (n=161)
 - 63% held an assistantship (of those 82% worked 20+ hours/week)
 - 11% are employed outside of Texas A&M.
 - 37% do not expect to have educational debt when they graduate (from both graduate and undergraduate education).



Results (cont.)

- Involvement Survey (n=102)
 - 60% were involved as undergraduates
 - 61% academic/professional
 - 45% social
 - 32% service to community
 - 55% were involved as graduate students
 - 57% academic/professional
 - 33% social
 - 18% cultural



Results (cont.)

- Affinity Survey (n=170)
 - 78% had strong or moderate affinity (connection/relationship) with their undergraduate institution
 - 81% had a strong or moderate affinity (connection/relationship) with Texas A&M

Results (cont.)

□ Affinity Survey Comments

■ Describe an experience that made you feel welcomed.

- “I was a single parent and needing an education, AG Ed opened there doors and hearts to me and made me feel welcome and gave me self assurance.”
- “Graduate Student Orientation was a really good experience, especially when the Yell Leaders and Reveille taught us yells and when some Former Student told us that as soon as we were accepted to A&M we were a part of the Aggie family and about the Aggie Ring.”



Implications for Practice

- ❑ Revamp, create, or cancel programs
- ❑ Develop collaborative relationships based on graduate student needs
- ❑ Develop effective marketing strategies
- ❑ Increase socialization to have a positive impact on completion of the degree



Words of Wisdom

- ❑ Know literature and resources (don't reinvent the wheel)
- ❑ Allow more time than you think will be needed to design and implement surveys
- ❑ Keep assessments short (put longer or sensitive topics toward the end)
- ❑ Recruit heavily to keep a large sample because people will drop out
- ❑ Know environment on your campus
- ❑ Have a plan to sustain momentum

References

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- Baird, L. L. (1996). Documenting student outcomes in graduate and professional programs. *New Directions for Institutional Research* 92, 77-87.
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Contact Information

□ Stefanie Stefancic

- Coordinator of Adult, Graduate, and Off Campus Student Services, Offices of the Dean of Student Life
- (979) 845-1741
- stefanies@studentlife.tamu.edu

□ Darby Roberts, PhD

- Associate Director, Department of Student Life Studies
- (979) 862-5624
- darby@tamu.edu