PREFACE

Background for the analysis and interpretation of data collected as part of the Open Forums Project with Oregon State University Graduate Students

Attached is the summary of data collected during the open forums project (online and in-person forum responses included) of graduate students in winter 2012. Many thanks to the 171 students who participated and who offered thoughts on how to improve graduate education at OSU. Special thanks to students who hosted and facilitated the sessions, the project committee, and especially to Courtney Everson for carrying this project through from its inception to this final report.

These data were collected to help inform the Graduate School's Strategic Planning team of issues that should be considered during development of a 5-year strategic plan that is designed to increase the quality and impact of graduate education on the OSU campus. The report contains many excellent suggestions that the committee will seriously consider. The Graduate School leadership is committed to developing a 5-year plan that will lead to a higher level of educational attainment, a more civil and respectful campus climate, and alumni who are indeed making an impact in each of our signature areas. Many of the suggestions made in this report will be addressed in our 5-year plan. In addition, there are items addressed in this report which may not find their way directly into the plan, but which will be addressed by the Graduate School leadership. We strongly recommend that readers of this report also review the 5-year plan when it is released later this academic year (anticipated release: Spring 2012) so that you can see how we intend to move forward toward our goals.

The report also contains some perceptions that are clearly incorrect, which is a clear indication that we need more effective communication between the Graduate School and the graduate students to ensure that these inaccurate perceptions do not continue or proliferate. We recognize that if the perceptions documented in this report exist among the 171 respondents, then they certainly exist among the 3770 graduate students enrolled at OSU in Corvallis, Bend, E-campus and other off-site locations. Finally, it is important to recognize that the Graduate School is aware of many of the issues raised in this report and we are already working on solutions to some of these problems, in many cases collaboratively with CGE, ASOSU, and the Graduate Council of the Faculty Senate as well as with the Strategic Planning Committee.

As we implement the 5-year plan, we expect students and faculty to see positive impacts of our work. Consequently, we intend to host similar forums in the future in an effort to monitor the effectiveness of the strategic plan in meeting our goals and the needs of the graduate students and graduate faculty. As opportunities arise to participate in these forums and surveys, we urge you to participate. In addition, you are always welcome to and encouraged to contact the Graduate School when you have concerns or need assistance.

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Open Forums on Graduate Education: Findings Report
Oregon State University (OSU)

A Collaboration of the OSU Graduate School, Associated Students of Oregon State University (ASOSU), the OSU Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE), OSU Chapter of Mediators Beyond Borders (MBB), and OSU Team Liberation

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<center>**Executive Summary**</center>

Introduction: The Open Forums on Graduate Education project was a collaborative endeavor between the OSU Graduate School, Associated Students of Oregon State University, the OSU Coalition of Graduate Employees, the OSU Chapter of Mediators Beyond Borders, and OSU Team Liberation. The primary objective of the project was to qualitatively elicit feedback, concerns and ideas from graduate students in the Oregon State University system about graduate education and the graduate student experience at OSU.

Methods & Sample: Four, in-person open forums were held on the OSU main campus (n = 79) in additional to an online forum feedback site (n = 92). The total sample size for this project was n = 171. Both forum types (in-person and online) were structured around three broad categorical sections (see below). Each was analyzed independently using a modified thematic analysis technique. Four primary themes were identified for each section; results are summarized below. The prevalence of themes in multiple categories may be indicative of their priority status for graduate students in improving their educational experience.

Thematic Results:

Categorical Section 1: Academic Programs & Quality of Education
- Theme #1: Graduate curriculums must be improved in terms of course offerings, instructional quality, and presence of stand-alone graduate courses
- Theme #2: Advisor and mentor relationships should be improved through lower faculty/student ratio, educational workshops, faculty accountability, and safety systems for when things go awry
- Theme #3: Increased professional development opportunities, and support thereof, that account for both industry and academic goals should be enacted
- Theme #4: Infrastructural support, especially office space, is inadequate for graduate students

Categorical Section 2: Graduate Student Experiences – Quality of Life & Support Systems
- Theme #1: Graduate students seek more formalized peer mentoring, more department-level support, and more variety of advising types and persons
- Theme #2: There is a lack of professional development support, especially for graduate students and those not looking to pursue an academic career
- Theme #3: Resources for graduate students are often hard to identify/access, and are often lacking for specific communities such as student-parents and international students
- Theme #4: Graduate students perceive a lack of good communication between students and the Graduate School, and a large variance in support levels across departments and programs

Categorical Section 3: Graduate School Costs, Funding & Employment
- Theme #1: Graduate education full costs and costs of living are a huge burden, and students are often unprepared for additional costs, and lack adequate funding options to cover educational costs incurred
- Theme #2: Funding packages must be improved: significant pay disparities exist, salaries are often below a livable wage, and funding structures cause for financial and employment insecurity
- Theme #3: Graduate employment positions should be more transparently and equitably distributed, significant excessive workload issues exist, and GTA work should be rewarded/incentivized
- Theme #4: Graduate students need assistance in navigating human resources/financial aid office/payroll department, and students need assistance in finding/applying for external funding

Conclusion: Currently, graduate education at OSU—as indicated by participant narratives—has an immense amount of positive and innovative offerings, and we applaud these strong efforts. Conversely, this project has also highlighted a great need for improvement in a multitude of content areas that intersect to shape the graduate student experience and quality of graduate education at OSU. We recommend continued student-centered frameworks and collaborative efforts be implemented as Oregon State University strives for continued excellence in graduate education and in common commitment to the university's mission.

Introduction

The Open Forums on Graduate Education project was a collaborative endeavor between the OSU Graduate School, Associated Students of Oregon State University (ASOSU), the OSU Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE), the OSU Chapter of Mediators Beyond Borders (MBB), and OSU Team Liberation. The primary objective of the project was to qualitatively elicit feedback, concerns and ideas from graduate students in the Oregon State University system about graduate education and the graduate student experience at OSU. Findings from this project will be presented for consideration in the Graduate School's 5-year Strategic Plan, and as a reference document for individuals and entities to use in advancing graduate education at OSU. The project was entirely graduate-student led, and the project committee conducted the entirety of project planning, project facilitation, data collection and analysis, and writing of this report.

Study Background & Methods

Participant Population & Recruitment: all graduate students of OSU were invited to partake in the Open Forums project. Multimedia publicity outlets were used to publicize the event on the OSU main campus, including: list-serves, fliers, save-the-date cards, social networking sites, radio stations, OSU news publications, and websites. In addition, graduate students in the Extended Campus, Cascades Campus, and international graduate students were additionally targeted through campus-specific and program-specific list-serves and announcements. The total sample size for this project was n = 171. Study sample demographics are detailed on pages 5 – 6.

Study Sites: Because graduate students have highly variable schedules and reside in multiple locales, two types of Open Forums were offered: 1) four, in-person open forums (each lasting approximately one-and-one-half hours) were held between January and February 2012 at the OSU main campus (n = 79); and 2) an online forum feedback site was offered for students unable to make the in-person open forums, and for those participants wishing to provide additional feedback (n = 92). The fourth in-person forum was open to international graduate students only, as the project committee recognized that international graduate students face additional, unique needs and issues separate from those of domestic students.

Data Collection: Both forum types (in-person and online) were structured around three broad categories (categorical sections): 1) Academic programs and quality of education; 2) Graduate school costs, funding and employment; and 3) Graduate student experiences: quality of life and support systems. These three categories allowed for qualitative, structured, consistent data to emerge across all four in-person open forums and the online forum site. The in-person open forums were guided by a modified World Café style facilitation method, led by trained, graduate-student facilitators from across the OSU campus. The three broad categories outlined above were used to structure both the in-person forum conversations, as well as the online forum site data collection tool. The facilitation method chosen for the in-person forums allowed for dynamic, transdisciplinary, and interactive discussions between graduate students. Detailed notes were taken by the trained facilitators during each categorical section discussion and in-person open forum date. Participants were also invited to write anonymous notes on each categorical section during the in-person open forums. All notes from both the in-person forums and online forum site were compiled for aggregate data analysis. Basic demographic information (optional) was

collected from both in-person and online forum participants to insure contextualization of the sample. Demographic information was not linked to participant narratives; participant comments were aggregated to insure anonymity and confidentiality throughout this project. Participants of both forum types were also surveyed (optional) on their preferred methods for ongoing communication with the OSU Graduate School, and the importance of being able to provide feedback on their graduate education (results of this survey are detailed on page 14).

Data Analysis: Facilitator and participant notes from the in-person open forums were transcribed into Word documents and combined with participant data from the online forum feedback site for qualitative analysis. Each categorical section was analyzed independently using a modified thematic analysis technique, whereby aggregated data was coded for primary and secondary themes cross-cutting and prevalent to all forums. Themes identified for each categorical section comprise the primary findings of this project. In addition, all sections were analyzed for participant-provided solutions to address identified needs and concerns. These solutions are summarized herein for each categorical section. International graduate student data was secondarily analyzed to identify issues, needs and ideas specific to the international graduate student population. This data is summarized in Appendix B (pages 16 – 17) of this report.

Results Outline: Results of the thematic analyses are reported herein for each categorical section: 1. academic programs and quality of education; 2) graduate school costs, funding and employment; and 3) graduate student experiences: quality of life and support systems. Results for each categorical section include: a section introduction, primary/secondary themes and details, participant-generated solutions, and a section discussion. In addition, we report study sample demographics, and findings from the survey on preferred methods for ongoing communication with the OSU Graduate School.
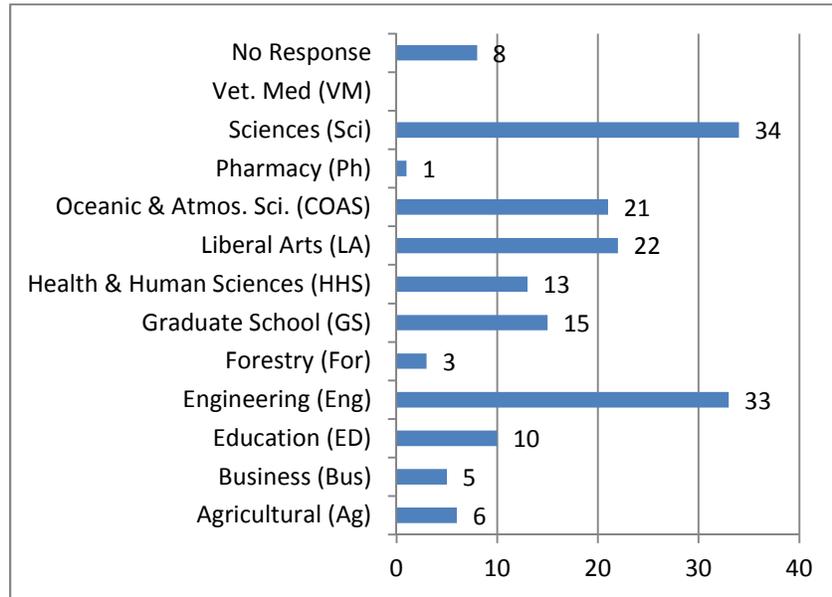
Study Limitations: We identify two primary limitations of this project and associated findings. First, we recognize that findings may not be inclusive of all needs, concerns and ideas of all graduate students at OSU. Despite a strong sample size (n = 171) and intense efforts to recruit participants from diverse programs and educational pathways, the participant sample remains a self-selected sample with all limitations thereof. Second, we noticed "data gaps" in the findings where a lack of data may indicate the need for more targeted recruitment efforts in the future. Specifically, we note a lack of data on the Graduate Research Assistant experiences, and limited detailed data on the experiences of non-traditional students. In addition, findings from this project demonstrate that non-traditional and part-time students often have different academic and program needs than full-time, traditional students. For non-traditional students, the cohort model does not always serve them well and can be an impediment to their educational experience. Similarly, support services, educational costs, and funding avenues should be sensitive to the unique needs of non-traditional students, and should adjust offerings appropriately. The data collected from this project on the non-traditional student experience is limited, and we recommend targeted efforts to address their unique needs in future projects.

Study Sample Demographics

Demographics were collected for both online and in-person forum participants. However, demographic questions were optional; "no response" indicates the student declined to answer.
Total Sample Size: n = 171

College

Program
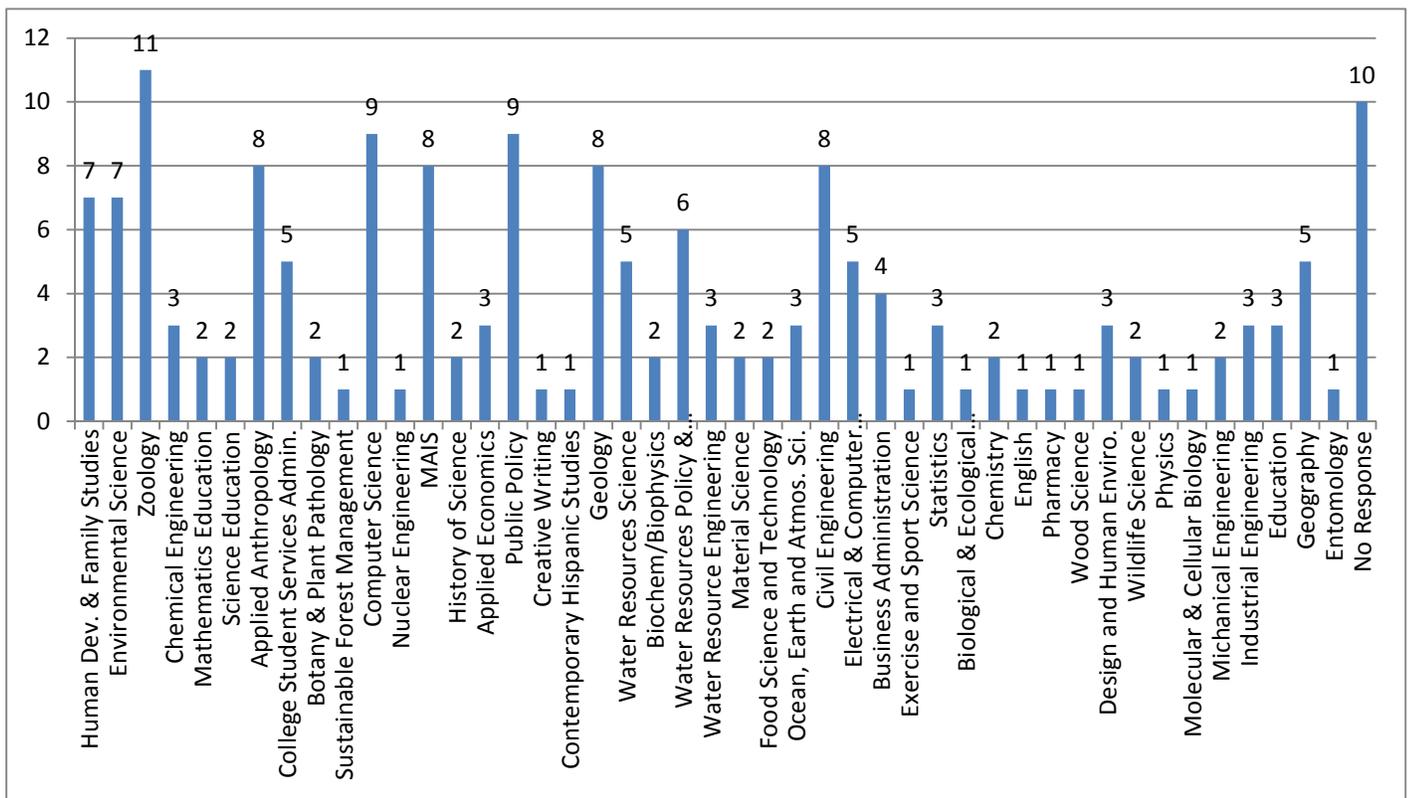
Degree Pursuing
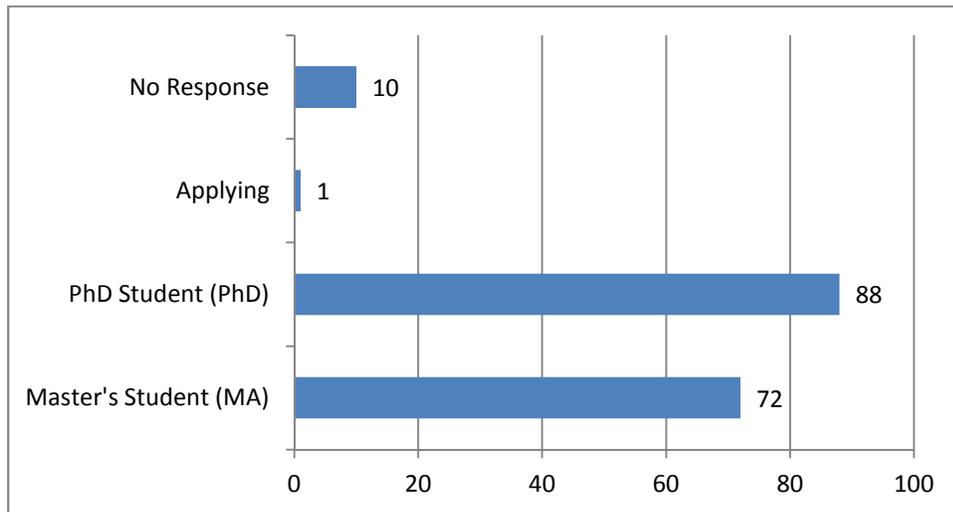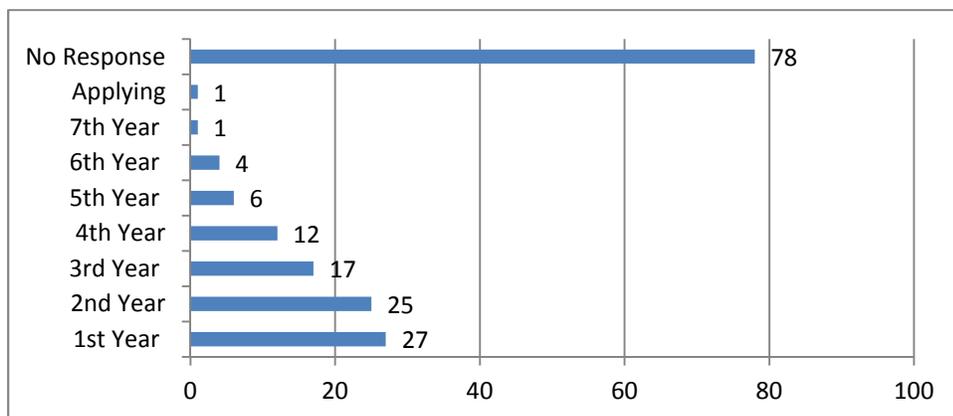
Degree Pursuing bar chart:
- No Response: 10
- Applying: 1
- PhD Student (PhD): 88
- Master's Student (MA): 72

Year in School

Year in School bar chart:
- No Response: 78
- Applying: 1
- 7th Year: 1
- 6th Year: 4
- 5th Year: 6
- 4th Year: 12
- 3rd Year: 17
- 2nd Year: 25
- 1st Year: 27

Domestic or International Student

Domestic or International Student bar chart:
- No Response: 9
- Dual/Both: 1
- International: 52
- Domestic: 109
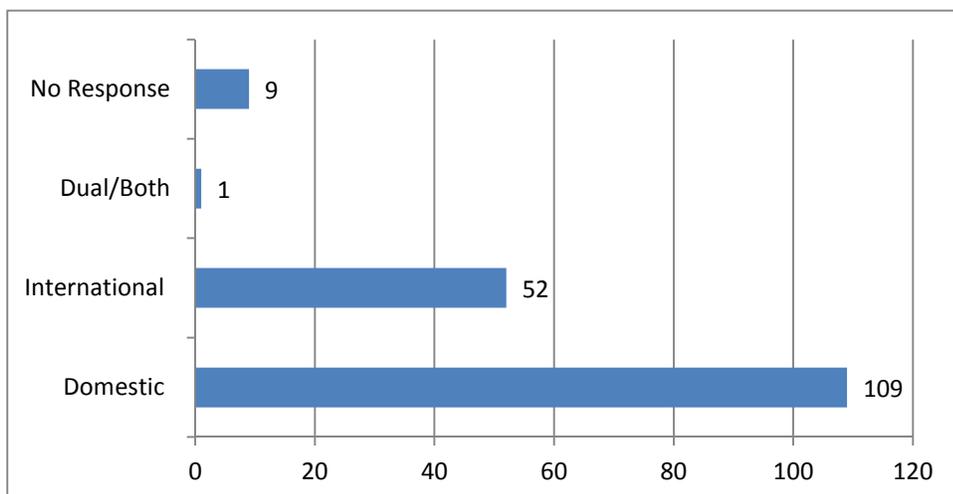
Categorical Section 1: Academic Programs & Quality of Education

Introduction: Four primary themes emerged in the open forums section on academic programs and quality of education: 1) Graduate curriculums, course offerings, and teaching quality; 2) Advisor and mentor relationships; 3) Post-graduation life; and 4) Infrastructural support for graduate students. These four themes are highly intertwined, and were identified by participants as the major impediments and routes for success in offering high-quality, graduate education at OSU. Ultimately, graduate education must become more student-centered to achieve meaningful educational experiences and to produce successful graduates.

Theme #1: Graduate Curriculums, Course Offerings, and Teaching Quality
1. Slash courses are highly problematic: need more quality, stand-alone graduate courses
    a. Slash courses lower the quality of graduate education drastically because the class is primarily undergraduate-focused
    b. 50/50 rule in Program of Study is difficult to meet when slash courses dominate
    c. Graduate courses need better student/faculty ratios to be effective
2. Course availability and curriculum offerings at the graduate-level must be improved
    a. Required classes must be offered regularly
    b. Faculty buy-outs decrease course offerings, and faculty who buy-out tend to be the best teachers
    c. Curriculums often outdated: program requirements do not match courses available
    d. PhD programs are not robust enough: PhD students need more quality classes at the 600 level that are offered regularly
    e. Specializations are not supported by offered curriculums
3. Quality of teaching is often poor
    a. Perception that there are many poor teachers across programs and colleges
    b. Need diversity of faculty teaching courses: no faculty monopolies on classes
    c. Need diverse pedagogical methods in graduate education
    d. Current teaching evaluation system does not provide true anonymity
4. Current credit load requirements are problematic and inconsistent
    a. 12 credit requirement for GTA/GRA/Fellows is out of the norm with national credit load recommendations
    b. Discrepancy between full-time status when employed/fellowship-supported (12 credits) versus when non-employed/non-funded (9 credits) must be addressed
    c. Lack of clarity around what courses (graduate-only or all courses) count toward 12 credit minimum
    d. E-campus classes not counting toward 12 credit minimum is highly problematic

Theme #2: Advisor and Mentor Relationships
1. Need lower faculty to graduate student ratio
    a. Trade-off between quantity of students versus quality of advising
2. Academic advisors and mentors are not/should not be the same thing
    a. Academic advisors and mentors from multiple disciplines are needed to insure students receive transdisciplinary advising and mentoring
    b. Quality, individualized academic advisor and mentor relationships are needed
3. When advisor-advisee relationships go awry, students need:

a. Someone to talk to and safe avenues for discussing their situation
b. Safe, formal avenues for filing grievances and finding solutions
4. Faculty training, oversight and accountability are necessary
a. New faculty need training and oversight in advising their students
b. All faculty should be held accountable in student advising by the Graduate School
c. Need avenues and mechanisms to help students when advisors go on sabbatical

Theme #3: Post-Graduation Life
1. Professional development opportunities needed, including:
a. Graduate-student focused career services, networking opportunities, publication opportunities, preparing for getting a job or going on in academia
2. Need a more meaningful exit interview process, such as in-person exit interviews
3. Two very different post-graduation objectives of the graduate student body that are directly intertwined with curriculum develop and program foci:
a. Industry-specific objectives
b. Academia-specific objectives

Theme #4: Infrastructural Support for Graduate Students
1. Adequate office space is extremely important to graduate students
a. Currently, no place to keep valuables
b. Crammed office spaces mean productivity of graduate students decreases or that graduate students will simply decline to use the space with their name on it
c. Need privacy for advising and meeting with undergraduate students
2. Need basic supplies and amenities to fulfill graduate student/ graduate teaching demands
a. Need free printing and copying

Solutions
1. Offer more stand-alone and transdisciplinary/cross-listed graduate courses; when slash courses are offered, mandate a grad-only separate meeting time to insure graduate quality
2. Restructure P&T and incentives: provide more faculty incentives for teaching/advising
3. Require faculty to document a certain number of Continuing Education Credits (CEUs) in advising, mentoring, and evidence-based graduate-focused pedagogical methods
4. Improve course evaluation system to be meaningful, anonymous, and accessible to students *before* they enroll in a course
5. Institute a peer review process for teaching that is meaningful and includes faculty outside of home departments

Discussion: Participants recognized that strengths and weaknesses in academic programs and quality of education vary by college, program, faculty and cohort. Despite the variation, the themes reported herein emerged as highly prevalent and important for participants. Participants also discussed the importance of recognizing the inherent trade-off made in quantity versus quality metrics and associated goals. When you increase the quantity of students accepted, you inherently decrease the quality of educational experience received when the infrastructure to support said students is not in place. While success is often defined in terms of quantity metrics, quality metrics may be a more valuable way to define and achieve success from the graduate-student perspective.

Categorical Section 2: Graduate Student Experiences – Quality of Life & Support Systems

Introduction: Four primary themes emerged in the open forums section on graduate student experiences – quality of life and support systems: 1) Mentoring/advising relationships; 2) Professional development/career services; 3) Resource needs; and 4) Inconsistency in support of and communication with graduate students. While details are different between sections, some of the primary themes described below are also reflected in the other two categorical sections; their prevalence in multiple categories may be indicative of their priority status for graduate students in improving their educational experience.

Theme # 1: Mentoring and Advising Relationships
1. Students want more formalized peer mentoring opportunities
    a. There is a need for departmental peer mentoring
2. Advisors/mentors need more guidance, and students need more variety in advising type and personnel
    a. Advisors/mentors need formalized training to ensure advising quality
    b. Advisors/mentors need to advise on non-academic paths
    c. Good mentoring should be incentivized, and all advising should be assessed
3. Students want more departmental support
    a. Departments vary greatly in support
    b. Students want more social opportunities and thorough orientations

Theme # 2: Professional Development & Career Services
1. There is a lack of overall professional development support. Students want:
    a. More professional developmental opportunities and support thereof
    b. More trainings for GTAs regarding teaching and class management
        i. International students need this in particular (see Appendix B)
2. There are primarily academic professional development options. Students want:
    a. Non-academic path development opportunities
    b. Connections to recent graduates for advice/mentoring for non-academic careers
3. Career fairs and services seem to be oriented towards undergraduates and engineers. Graduate students need:
    a. Graduate student-focused career fairs and services
    b. Non-engineering career fairs

Theme # 3: Resource Needs
1. Resources must be targeted and specific to sub-communities within the grad population
    a. International students need targeted, meaningful resources (see Appendix B)
    b. Non-traditional and part-time students may need different resources than traditional and full-time students
2. Resources/support are lacking for students with families
    a. Insurance costs for family members (spouses and dependents) are too high
    b. There is a strong need for parental leave policies and support
3. Students need easily identifiable and accessible resources and support services
    a. There is not a centralized location to identify resources
    b. Many students do not know about available resources

      c.   There is a lack of resources for non-traditional graduate students
      d.   Available resources are difficult to navigate or use
4.   Students have issues with commuting and lack of transportation options
      a.   Parking on-campus is difficult and expensive
      b.   Corvallis public transportation options are limited

Theme #4: Inconsistency in Support of and Communication with Graduate Students
1.   Communication between students and Graduate School is lacking
      a.   Frustration with bureaucracy at Graduate School – not knowing how to access resources or follow various processes/procedures/policies
      b.   Graduate School website is not very helpful or user friendly
2.   Quality of life and feelings of support varies widely across departments and programs
      a.   Some students feel supported by their department and others feel very isolated and unsupported
      b.   Departments/programs could/should learn from one another

Solutions
1.   Implement formalized peer-to-peer mentoring program
2.   Improve advisor/mentor relationships by providing trainings, incentives and formalized assessment
3.   Provide graduate specific career opportunities (e.g., graduate career counselor, specific graduate career fairs, alumni network)
4.   Provide more professional development opportunities and support thereof
5.   Graduate School should serve as a clearinghouse/facilitator for graduate student support practices, and provide centralized resources (e.g., strong orientation programs, counseling/advising practices, user friendly website, targeted support programs)

Discussion: Across graduate programs, there is high variability in how supported students feel in regards to advising/mentoring, access to resources, professional/career development and feelings of overall support. The Graduate School could provide institutional support to departments/colleges to help share what works and implement best practices. In addition, the Graduate School should aim to capitalize on peer mentoring already occurring on campus and help spread this by establishing a formalized peer-to-peer mentoring program, and address mentor/advisor relationships by better incentivizing high-quality advising/mentoring and helping to equip faculty for their duties through continuing education training opportunities. A common comment from students was that they felt their advisor lacked the skills and know-how about university processes, resources available, and how to prepare students for the workforce – all of which are necessary for mentoring a graduate student. In addition, students often discussed the need for more professional development and non-academic track opportunities, which will assist them in being more marketable upon completing their degree. Further, creating a centralized location for all resources offered to graduate students would be helpful to not only students, but advisors as well when attempting to access information regarding resources. International students have unique support issues that need to be addressed separately from those experienced by other graduate students, as they are under both international and domestic laws/policies/practices (see Appendix B).

Categorical Section 3: Graduate School Costs, Funding & Employment

Introduction: Four primary themes emerged in the open forums section on graduate school costs, funding and education: 1) Graduate school costs and cost of living; 2) Funding graduate education; 3) Access to and issues of graduate employment; and 4) knowledge and awareness of the financial system. Participants identified these themes as central to their success as graduate students, teachers, and researchers.

Theme #1: Graduate School Costs and Cost of Living
1. Fees are not covered by the tuition waiver and are a significant financial burden
    a. Lack of transparency about what the fees actually pay for
    b. Fees are mostly geared towards undergraduate resource services; graduate students are not involved in fee structure and spending
    c. Student health services fee seems duplicative for those on health insurance
    d. $300 fee relief is very helpful, but it is taxed and comes after fees are charged
    e. Many understand the importance of fees/appreciate the services provided by fees
2. Graduate students are very grateful for their health insurance (and the inclusion of dental and vision), though access to health insurance continues to be an issue for some students
    a. Spousal and dependent coverage is cost prohibitive
    b. $200 insurance deductible can be hard for students to cover
    c. Hourly workers, scholarships/fellowships recipients and distance education students do not have access to quality healthcare at a reasonable cost
    d. Summer health insurance is deducted in one lump sum, which is a challenge
    e. Lack of timely information from and difficulty working with insurance office
3. Full costs of graduate school are not clearly communicated to graduate students
    a. Fees, books, printing, parking and misc. expenses are a huge financial burden
    b. Cost of living in Corvallis is very high
4. Concerns over tuition expenses and in-state versus out-of-state tuition, including:
    a. Slash classes: graduate students pay more than undergraduates for the same class
    b. Very large discrepancy in in-state versus out-of-state tuition costs
    c. Establishing residency is very difficult, and the process is not clear

Theme #2: Funding Graduate Education
1. Many graduate employees work below a livable wage
    a. Appreciation for funding offers, but inadequate compensation for time and efforts
    b. Even with funding, many are unable to meet basic needs on the salaries provided
    c. Financial stresses detract from the focus graduate students are able to afford their work and studies, especially for those who take on second and third jobs
    d. Graduate students with families have an exceptionally difficult time
    e. Low salaries are a barrier to recruitment/retention of graduate students at OSU
2. Significant pay disparities exist for graduate employees across and within departments
    a. Pay disparity is a common concern even for those satisfied with their salaries
    b. Need to examine pay disparity among different races, genders, and nationalities
3. Funding is uncertain and of short duration
    a. Students given little advance notice of funding status and appointment details
    b. Low financial security/employment stability when appointments are term-to-term

4. Funding for conference attendance is not readily available
    a. Unable to present work in their profession due to lack of conference funding
    b. Need for conference travel subsidies as conference are professional development

Theme #3: Access to and Issues of Graduate Employment
1. GTA appointments need to be assigned more openly and transparently
    a. Need to match student skills/expertise with GTA appointment
    b. Perception that nepotism drives the allocation of GTA positions
2. FTE is not always divided evenly among TA assignments, varies widely across campus
    a. Grad employees are often routinely expected to work beyond contract hour limits
    b. GTAs find excessive hours interfere with their ability to perform quality work
    c. Excessive workload demands interfere with progress toward degree completion
3. Fear of confronting issues due to potential retribution: need safe avenues
4. Graduate teaching should be supported and incentivized
    a. TAs desire more comprehensive and subject-specific training and support
    b. Perception that RA work is valued above TA work
    c. Quality teaching should be more broadly recognized and rewarded

Theme #4: Knowledge and Awareness of the Financial System
1. Need for assistance in navigating financial aid, payroll and human resource systems
    a. Difficulty experienced with human resources/financial aid office/ payroll dept.
    b. Financial aid is processed slowly which significantly impacts student resources
2. Need for assistance in finding and applying for external funding/internship opportunities
    a. Graduate School website is difficult to navigate; need updated information
    b. Desire for transparency about differences in funding between departments
    b. Departments should notify students of funding opportunities

Solutions
1. Institute fee remission as part of the tuition waiver or cap graduate student fees
2. Increase the minimum salary to a living wage, include cost of living increases, and explore options for extending insurance coverage to dependents and other grad students
3. GTA positions should be listed publicly and should match student's skills and goals
4. GTAs/GRAs should be given pedagogical support; quality work should be rewarded
5. Provide greater transparency about full costs, and increase visibility of funding options

Discussion: Participants identified the full costs of graduate school as a major financial burden, and one for which they felt unprepared. Many expressed gratitude for the funding received, but difficulties in securing adequate and ongoing funding were also prevalent. Issues with funding/employment vary greatly by college/program. Assistantships, FTE, and salary distribution should be more equitable and transparent. GTA concerns about workload and adequate support have significant implications for undergraduate education. Participants are also concerned that admitting more graduate students without adequate funding sources will further dilute FTE for existing students, and diminish overall quality of education and research. The Graduate School can play a significant role as a centralized hub for funding information, and for encouraging colleges/departments to create systems that are more responsive to the multiplicity of needs that arise from being at once a graduate student, employee, teacher, and researcher.

Discussion & Conclusion

Taken together, aggregated thematic, demographic and survey results from the Open Forums project allow for a holistic picture of graduate education and the graduate student experience at OSU to emerge. The project experience and associated findings reveal that graduate education includes a high-level of multivocality and a range of experiences. Despite variability across colleges, programs, and students, we feel confident that the themes reported herein accurately reflect the collective picture of graduate education and student experiences at OSU. We urge administrators, faculty and students alike to join efforts in addressing the issues and implementing solutions generated from this project. Based on results from the survey on ongoing communication with the Graduate School, participants feel it is important for graduate students to have opportunities to provide ongoing feedback about graduate education (see Appendix A, page 14). We recommend the Graduate School implement an ongoing communication avenue informed by these survey results.

We conclude this project with the sense that graduate education at OSU is in a pivotal and transformative time. Currently, graduate education at OSU—as indicated by participant narratives—has an immense amount of positive and innovative offerings, and we applaud these strong efforts. Conversely, this project has also highlighted a great need for improvement in a multitude of content areas that intersect to shape the graduate student experience and quality of graduate education at OSU. Resolving the issues addressed in this report will insure that graduate students receive the support they need as they carry out the teaching and research mission of the university, while also increasing access to graduate education and aiding in the recruitment and retention of quality graduate students. Further, because of the fluid links between undergraduate and graduate students and curriculums, improving graduate education will have direct impacts on the quality of undergraduate education. We recommend continued student-centered frameworks and collaborative efforts be implemented as Oregon State University strives for continued excellence in graduate education. We encourage any individuals or entities interested in the methodology or findings of this project to contact us for additional discussion with our project committee: the corresponding author for this report is Courtney Everson, reachable at eversonc@onid.orst.edu.

Appendices

Appendix A: Ongoing Communication with the Graduate School (results)
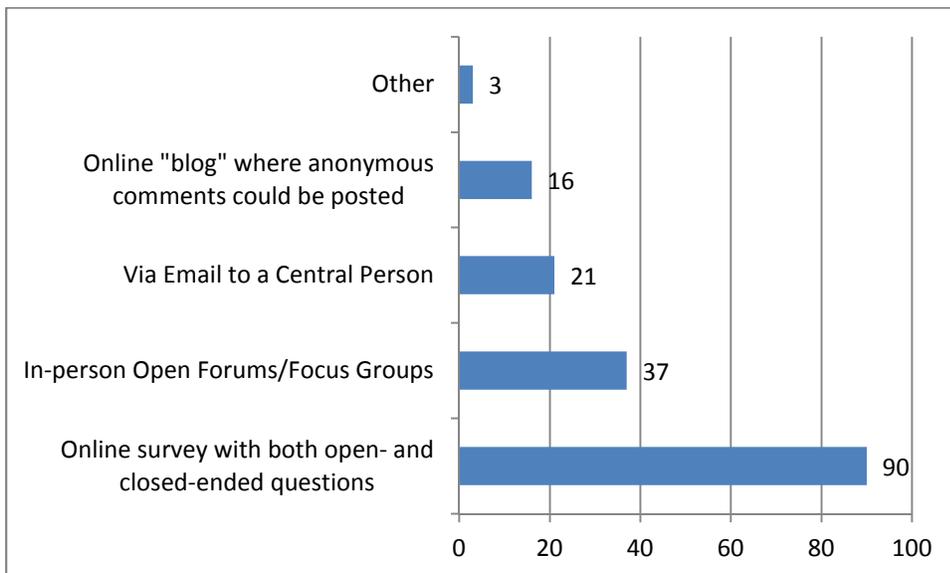Appendix B: International Graduate Student Issues List (results)

Appendix A: Ongoing Communication with the Graduate School

Responses Received: n = 81

Q1: How important is it for you to have the opportunity to provide regular and ongoing feedback to the Graduate School about your graduate experience and the education you are receiving?
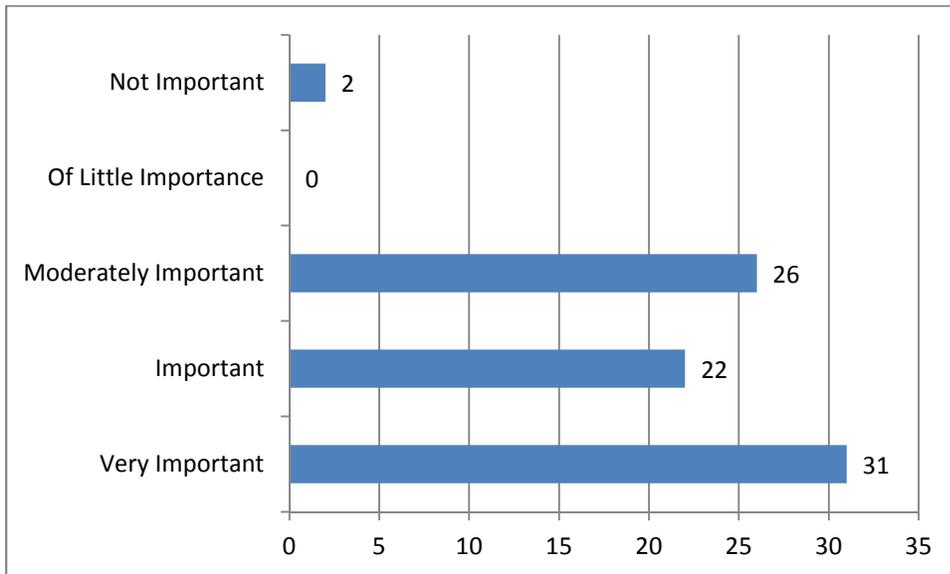
Q2: What is your preferred method for providing ongoing and future feedback to the Graduate School about graduate education/graduate student experiences? (Please check all that apply)

Appendix B: Issues Specific to International Graduate Students

International graduate students face additional, unique issues that impact their educational programs and graduate student experience. These unique issues are not experienced by domestic students, as international students must ascribe to international laws, policies and procedures that domestic students are not subject to. International graduate students must have their unique needs thoughtfully addressed separately; to this end, we summarize the unique needs of international graduate students here (organized by categorical section), and offer participant-generated solutions. We also note that collecting feedback from international graduate students is problematic due to fears of deportation or other retribution for speaking out. International students participated at high numbers in the anonymous online forum feedback site (n = 47) versus the in-person open forums (n = 5). Angela Baxter, Director of Graduate Affairs for ASOSU, has discussed these issues at length with INTO/international students. We encourage any entities interested in the unique needs of international students to contact Angela at graduate.affairs@oregonstate.edu

Academic Programs & Quality of Education
- GTA/GRA international students are not prepared to teach in US academic settings
  - Many international students are not prepared to teach in their fields due to language/cultural barriers. They need training for instructing and classroom management
- INTO Graduate Pathway Program has limited options for graduate programs,
  - Students need more varied programs (e.g. - international students are given one engineering path regardless of the specific type of engineering program they are enrolled in, leaving international students behind when going into their specific engineering field of study)
- Students need help navigating the rules and regulations of the OSU system
- Students need advising on how to stay legal in the U.S. post-graduation
- Many unknowns and "surprises" (not covered in the acceptance information) encountered
- Departments, the Graduate School and International Programs should be consistent in the information they provide and policies they implement
- International students often feel left without a cohort, a home department and a primary advisor and mentor
- Faculty are often not understanding or sensitive to the fact that English is a second language (verbal and writing) for international students in coursework and research

Graduate School Costs, Funding & Employment
- Costs for INTO/international Students is excessive
  - INTO students are expected to pay up to two years tuition prior to admittance compared to domestic students who pay term by term
  - INTO students are expected to pay late registration fee of $500 compared to $50-100 for domestic students
  - INTO/international students pay OSU fees, but are limited in their ability to access the services funded by these fees (e.g. - international students are limited to

one month reservations of books compared to three month reservations for domestic students yet pay the same fees)
- o Cost of living is too expensive
- o Students who enter INTO, but are not accepted to OSU graduate programs, do not receive refunds or transfer funds if they are accepted into a different university
- INTO/international student experience inequities in employment and funding
  - o International students are limited in employment opportunities
  - o Termination of GRA/GTA position without warning hinders students ability to be successful and find additional funding/employment
- Students need help with employment options and funding sources
  - o Cannot work off-campus as international students
  - o Limitations to employment options based on Visa type
- Students need help with additional fees and costs not covered by funding
  - o International students cannot get loans in the U.S.
- OSU must be upfront with international students about additional fees and costs

Graduate Student Experience: Quality of Life & Support Systems
- There is a lack of support for INTO/international students
  - o Lack of support from OSU departments when international students report issues with INTO
  - o Increase in number of international students has caused strain on already inadequate resources and support systems; access is increasingly difficult
  - o There is a lack of legal personnel to deal with international laws, policies and procedures, especially in terms of taxes and Visas
  - o International students' spouses and dependents do not have the same access to OSU resources as domestic students' spouses and dependents
    - ▪ OSU's insurance policies do not cover international student spouses
  - o Limited access to resources, meals, housing and support during academic breaks
  - o No policy/procedure in place for dealing with emergencies if INTO is closed
  - o Many graduate programs, support services and resource entities lack the ability/willingness/infrastructure to deal with international student issues
- Language barriers experienced by newly arrived INTO/international students needs to be addressed; administration/faculty must be sensitive to English as a second language
- Students have experienced retaliation for voicing their concerns regarding INTO policies, procedures and lack of support to anyone outside of INTO
- There are significant issues with INTO OSU, including:
  - o Misrepresentation and ambiguities in contracts and policies
  - o Relationship between OSU and INTO OSU is ambiguous and confusing to international students
  - o INTO recruiters are misleading international students, and providing inaccurate information

- o Contract wording is ambiguous and confusing; it implies that international students are INTO OSU students, but also stand-alone OSU students who have access to resources available to all OSU students
- o Graduate Pathways Program has different TOEFL/GMAT tests for INTO students versus direct admittance which causes confusion
- o International students are told they will be enrolled into academic English, but are placed in general English once arriving at INTO OSU
- o INTO students have no clear understanding of their rights as students, international students and/or INTO students
- Myths, miscommunication and inconsistent information received by international students at orientation(s) and by international advisors
  - o Orientations must be better structured for the international population

Solutions
1. Acceptance information should be revised to accurately reflect all costs incurred, especially those not covered by funding offer
2. Warm-up classes and/or an introductory orientation courses to OSU and the U.S. educational system should be offered
3. Support services for international students should be enhanced, and include free support in the areas of: academics (especially writing), funding, Visas, taxes
4. Quality professionals trained in working with international students in the various support programs at OSU should be offered (e.g. - ISS, Writing Center, Academic Success Services, Legal Advocacy, International Accountant, UHDS/off campus housing, Office of Equity and Inclusion)
5. Develop formalized reporting system for INTO/international students where anonymity can be maintained, and include procedures for transparency in handling grievances
6. Provide institutional structures for international students to give feedback regarding issues that directly affect them
7. Create meaningful oversight of the INTO OSU Program
8. Provide clear, consistent and accurate information to international students
9. Enhance funding and employment options for international students
10. Nurture greater inclusion of the international student body with the entire population of graduate students at OSU (enhance cohort support)