

Chancellor's Graduate and Professional Student Advisory Board 2021-2022

Graduate Group Resources Subcommittee Report

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1. Background and Accomplishments

The Graduate Group Resources Review subcommittee was created in 2019 when students recognized that there were inequities between the graduate group structure and departmentally based programs. **In order to bridge the gap of inequities between the two program structures, the subcommittee's overarching goal has been to examine the differences between the graduate school experience of students in graduate groups compared to students in departmentally-based programs.** In its inaugural year (2019-2020), the subcommittee focused on information gathering to identify areas in which program coordinators and students in graduate groups needed support.

In 2020-2021, the subcommittee worked with Graduate Studies to streamline forms across departments and graduate groups. The subcommittee also worked with Kyle Clayton, Graduate Center Manager, to discuss graduate group usage of Walker Hall. **Lastly, in its second year, the subcommittee conducted a survey that gathered information from graduate students about these key areas: funding, access to physical meeting space, faculty engagement, and resources available to students in graduate groups. The survey collected over 400 responses, and yielded a wealth of both qualitative and quantitative data about the graduate school experience of students in graduate groups.**

This was the Graduate Group Resources Review subcommittee's third year. During the 2021-2022 academic year, the subcommittee focused on the following objectives:

- I. Communication with Kyle Clayton about Walker Hall usage
- II. Analysis of survey data, which was collected during academic year 2020-2021

Below, findings and accomplishments of each objective are described.

2. Communication with Kyle Clayton about Walker Hall usage

Due to the extension of remote instruction during Winter Quarter of this year, Walker Hall was not in use for approximately half of the quarter. With the decreased usage due to COVID-19 preventative measures, the subcommittee pivoted from its plan to meet with Kyle Clayton, Graduate Center Manager, to analyze usage of Walker Hall in Fall Quarter. Instead, the

subcommittee planned to continue with analysis of survey results and reach out to Kyle Clayton at the end of Spring Quarter to present the results and see if he can confirm findings with Walker Hall usage statistics. Through email correspondence, Kyle Clayton agreed to this new plan.

3. Analysis of survey results

When the survey closed at the end of Spring Quarter 2021, there were 402 responses recorded. After meticulous data cleaning, final responses excluded the following participants: 1. those where respondents were from departmentally based programs, 2. those that had a completion percentage of 33% or less (which were primarily responses that completed only the demographics portion of the survey), and 3. those where respondents were prospective students or already graduated from their program. The final data set included 389 responses from graduate group students.

Below, the results of the survey are presented.

3.1 Results: Survey Respondent Demographics

The 389 survey respondents represented 39 graduate groups on campus. The majority of individuals were in the Ecology Graduate Group (8.74%), followed by the Epidemiology Graduate Group (6.17%). When aggregated to program foci, 85.64% of individuals were in a STEM field, while 12.53% were in the Social Sciences, and 1.57% were in Humanities. Year in program ranged from first through eighth year, with the majority being in their second year (28.28%), followed by third year students (16.97%). With regards to degree objective, 81.22% of respondents were obtaining a Ph.D., while 17.99% were obtaining a Masters and 0.79% were pursuing a combined Masters and Ph.D.. The majority of respondents were not international students (79.48%). Respondents primarily identified as white (48.15%) or Asian (27.25%). Lantinx or Hispanic individuals made up 9.79% of responses and Black or African American represented 2.12% of responses. The remaining 12.96% of respondents identified as Mixed Race or Other. **This racial and ethnic representation represents a similar make-up of the entire UC Davis campus.**¹ More detailed information on frequencies of demographics can be found in Table 1 in the Appendix.

3.2 Results: Faculty Engagement and Student Mentorship

The survey asked a series of questions about the level of engagement of faculty within a student's graduate group, as well as student's self-assessments of the adequacy of faculty

¹ [UC Davis racial and ethnic data.](#)

mentorship. Below, we discuss these results. Additional tables and figures of the results are reported in the Appendix.

In general, students felt that faculty were 'very' or 'somewhat' involved with their graduate group (Figure 1), but expressed a desire for increased mentorship/advising, more core and non-core class offerings by faculty, faculty attendance at social events, and more faculty presentations at graduate group seminars and colloquia (Figure 2). In their free response reflections about faculty engagement, a number of students also expressed that they wanted to see increased faculty engagement with diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. A few respondents also noted that engagement is not even across faculty in their graduate group. For example, one student shared: "There is a core group of faculty who handle nearly all the responsibilities of the graduate group. It would be nice to see more faculty participate collectively in different areas."

Although the majority of students knew what faculty members were part of their graduate group, nearly 21% of students didn't know what faculty were affiliated with their graduate groups, or knew only some of the affiliated faculty, but didn't know where to find information on other affiliated faculty (Figure 3). **This points to the need for more transparent, centralized, and accessible information about faculty membership in graduate groups. This could be alleviated, in part, by more robust and up-to-date faculty and graduate group pages on UC Davis website.**

Students were also asked if faculty members that are not actively engaged with their graduate group should retain their graduate group membership. Responses to this question were mixed (Figure 4). **Within their free response answers students generally expressed a desire for more transparency with regards to the level of engagement of various faculty members. Several students suggested more policies to encourage engagement, and limits on how long faculty can be minimally involved with a grad group while also retaining membership.** One student suggested:

"I think faculty should be able to designate (or at least make that designation clear) their involvement. Some join a grad group to allow a specific student to join their lab only to leave once the student graduates. Faculty who frequently take more than one student in [a] 5 year period should be designated as core faculty and have more involvement in the grad group. That way it also helps clarify to future students who is a key member and likely to take students compared to a faculty member who joined as one off for a specific student."

This student's suggestion provides a possible path forward that would increase the transparency of faculty involvement with graduate groups, thus benefiting both current and prospective graduate students.

Students were also asked to assess how easy or difficult it was for them to find a major professor within their graduate group. Responses are reported in Figure 5.

Finally, in an open ended question, students were asked if there was anything else they would like to comment on about faculty engagement and student mentorship within their graduate group. There were 96 responses to this prompt. Many respondents expressed a desire for increased faculty engagement with their graduate group, and students generally indicated a need for increased one-on-one mentorship and support. As one student wrote:

“Many faculty just seem too busy to assist and mentor students. I have sent emails that go unanswered for months, if they are answered at all. It takes weeks to get a meeting, even with my own major professor. They all are nice and mean well, but are stretched to the limit and I feel that I am not being trained or learning what I had hoped to in this program. I am doing everything essentially on my own.”

Another student noted the ways that a lack of mentorship and advising impacts graduation rates and skill-building. They expressed:

“In my experience faculty are very involved with funded projects but provide much less advising or mentoring on dissertation/thesis research or student-directed work. This leads to much slower skill development in key academic areas like research question development and conducting literature reviews, and avoidable outcomes like PhD students that do all their dissertation writing in 6 months at the end of their 6-year program, for example.”

Additionally, some students felt that a lack of faculty buy-in was likely a result of faculty’s commitments to their home departments, which are prioritized over their graduate group commitments. As one respondent noted:

“As it stands most of the progressive policies our grad group has are due to student initiatives and pressure on faculty, but I don't feel like the faculty feel they have the same "skin in the game" to make our grad group a place where the students feel welcome and supported.”

Several students also expressed frustration that a lack of faculty engagement often creates more work for students. For example, one student noted: “Faculty should be required to run recruitment - this task is currently 100% on student responsibility without fair compensation.” Another student noted that their graduate group has a “profound network of peer-mentoring,” but that mentorship network “has, in part, emerged due to lack of top-down

information flow from the graduate group.” **In both cases, tasks that should be handled at the graduate group level are being placed on the graduate students themselves.**

Finally, many students commented on the uneven engagement of faculty within their graduate groups: some faculty are highly engaged, while others are not engaged at all. Some students felt that this can give a false impression to incoming students. For example, one student shared:

“Some 'outside' professors are well engaged, but many are not at all i.e. I have never seen them at any dept events/talks, don't think they are advising any students, and they aren't teaching any classes tailored to our students. Our list of affiliated faculty looks very big and has people from all over, but many of those faculty are not functionally available to advise or teach and I think it's disingenuous for us to recruit students with that faculty when they aren't really there.”

The above perception was common amongst a subset of survey respondents. Students also provided suggestions of possible solutions to the perceived issue. For example, one respondent provided an interesting suggestion regarding increasing faculty engagement:

“There is a small core group of highly engaged faculty with my graduate group, they do great work and are attempting to make the graduate group more inclusive. On the other hand, [My graduate group] is one of the largest grad groups at UCD. There are many faculty who benefit from being associated with the group without providing any service to the [my graduate group], much of the labor falls on students (such as planning, recruitment, admissions, orientation, etc) this free labor provided by students and supported by core faculty members and the amazing grad coordinator is what keeps the group running. I would love to see some requirements of associated faculty to opt in or pay to be a member of the group either with a certain number of hours dedicated to the group or with a small fee to help keep the grad group programming, mentorship, and leadership in student admissions running for generations of grad students to come.”

3.3 Results: Access to Physical Space, Funding, and Assessment of the Graduate Group Structure

The final section of the survey asked students to assess their access to campus resources (including funding and physical space), and their general impressions of the graduate group structure. Student assessment of the benefits of the graduate group structure are reported in Figure 6.

Access to physical meeting space was commonly raised as a concern amongst graduate group students. **About 48% of respondents indicated that they lack access to shared physical**

meeting and/or socializing space on campus through their graduate groups, and approximately 24% reported that they were unsure if such meeting space was offered via their graduate groups. Furthermore, about 20% of respondents either did not have access to a private or semi-private physical lab or work space on campus, or did not know if they had access to such work space. Among those graduate group students who reported having access to physical work space on campus, about 30% reported that the resource through which they had access to private or semi-private physical lab or work space on campus was their GSR position. Among the respondents that indicated that their graduate does not provide access to shared physical meeting space to students, 9.2% indicated that they did not have any access to private or semi-private physical lab or work space on campus. About 89.7% of respondents without access to shared physical meeting space via their graduate group had access to private or semi-private work space through other means (e.g., one's advisor, TA position, or GSR position). Results are presented in Table 2.

The survey also assessed interest in utilizing meeting space in the Graduate Student Center among graduate group students. Roughly 55% of survey respondents indicated that they would be interested in reserving meeting space if the Graduate Student Center had meeting rooms exclusively for use by students in graduate groups. Another almost 35% of respondents reported that they may be interested.

Access to funding resources may also pose a unique challenge for graduate group students. Approximately 36% of respondents described their experience finding funding as either difficult or somewhat difficult, while about 29.5% found it easy or somewhat easy to find funding. Given the differential availability of funding resources by discipline, further investigations should be performed to identify those disciplines in which students may lack access to sufficient funding. Students who indicated that it was difficult for them to find funding were asked to elaborate on why that was the case. **The majority of free responses mentioned that having to find TA positions outside of their department makes the process more difficult and stressful, and adds a higher degree of uncertainty about the stability of the funding.** Several students mentioned the stress of having TA positions allocated at the last minute, or having no guarantees of funding from quarter to quarter (or year to year). As one student noted:

“Quarterly I am reliant on a TA position that is never secure the following quarter as courses[,] and professors teaching the course[s,] change. Having a TA position is unstable income because it is guaranteed only for 3 months.”

Similarly, another student shared:

“Having to find funding on a quarter by quarter basis adds stress to my living situation and ability to focus on my work.”

Finally, students were asked to reflect on aspects of the graduate group structure that they have struggled with, or found especially challenging. The 194 free response answers to this question ranged widely, from feeling satisfied with the current structure of their graduate group to raising concerns about mentorship, funding, access to space, and the clarity of qualifying exam expectations. The dominant themes, however, were related to funding and space/community. **Over 50 students shared open ended comments related to their struggles to find funding or TA positions. Most students mentioned that it can be hard to find TA positions, and that the process of applying is stressful and difficult to navigate.** As one student observed:

“I don't feel well supported with regards to applying for, and finding, outside funding to support my research and dissertation writing. I also feel that the grad group structure places an unfair burden on students in terms of applying for TA positions in a multitude of departments. These applications are generally HIGHLY redundant with regards to basic application information (streamlining this alone would be a huge help!!!), and can take significant amounts of time.”

The general sentiment amongst students is that the TA application process is stressful, time consuming, and employment is rarely resolved far enough in advance. Based on student responses and suggestions, there is an opportunity to streamline this process to reduce the burden on students applying for these positions.

Additionally, several students mentioned the need for physical spaces to gather and work, since not all graduate group students have access to offices and community spaces. Others mentioned the need for a greater sense of community within the graduate group. Capturing these sentiments, one student shared:

“The lack of a communal space to be together is frustrating. This would be especially great for beginning students to help build a sense of community, and would be a great space for us to host meetings. We've often struggled to reserve meeting space, and with our graduate group spread across so many different departments it can be a bit isolating.”

Overall, based on student responses, there is a need for more physical gathering and work spaces, and more intentional community-building events for graduate group students.

Respondents were also asked about which resources they used to find TA/GSR funding. More than half of respondents indicated that their advisor served as a resource for finding funding. Nearly 44% cited program coordinators as a resource for finding funding, and 47% reported that they have used personal relationships and connections to find TA/GSR funding. About a quarter of respondents reported finding funding through faculty in their program. Only about 11% of respondents reported finding funding through the Handshake platform. **Moreover, nearly 23% of respondents reported that they were unable to acquire funding at the desired level for at least one quarter.** Results are presented in Table 3.

4. Recommendations

Based on findings and accomplishments from this year, we recommend the following:

- A. Meet with Kyle Clayton to present the results from the survey to see if he can confirm the findings with Walker Hall program usage statistics.
- B. Analyze the survey results more closely. As subcommittee members were limited this year, we were not able to analyze results with as much detail as we desired. To make results more informative, we recommend further analyzing from various lenses, such as stratifying by program foci, race, and year in program. The original dataset that was used for the above analyses are housed with the Graduate Student Advisor to the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Chancellor (GSADC).
- C. Present current findings to Dr. JP Delplanque, Dean of Graduate Studies, to inform him of our findings and discuss action steps.

We do not foresee a need for the subcommittee to continue next year if CGPSA does not have the capacity to do so. However, the recommendations provided above are in direct response to student-identified issues through our graduate group survey created by students and for students. Thus, we strongly encourage a UC Davis staff member, existing GSR position, or a couple CGPSA members to continue delving into the survey results to provide additional practical solutions to the issues identified.

5. Appendix

Table 1. Demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Graduate Group Program		
Agricultural and Environmental Chemistry	9	2.3

Animal Behavior	15	3.86
Animal Biology	20	5.14
Applied Mathematics	7	1.8
Atmospheric Science	1	0.26
Biochemistry, Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology	10	2.57
Biomedical Engineering	21	5.4
Biophysics	4	1.03
Biostatistics	4	1.03
Child Development	1	0.26
Community Development	7	1.8
Computer Science	10	2.57
Cultural Studies	2	0.51
Ecology	34	8.74
Education (Ph.D.)	14	3.6
Energy Systems	10	2.57
Epidemiology	24	6.17
Food Science	8	2.06
Geography	15	3.86
Health Informatics	2	0.51
Horticulture and Agronomy	22	5.66
Human Development	6	1.54
Hydrologic Sciences	9	2.31
Immunology	9	2.31
Integrative Genetics and Genomics	11	2.83
Integrative Pathobiology	11	2.83

International Agricultural Development	6	1.54
Microbiology	7	1.8
Molecular, Cellular and Integrative Physiology	8	2.06
Neuroscience	13	3.34
Nutritional Biology	11	2.83
Performance Studies	3	0.77
Pharmacology and Toxicology	10	2.57
Plant Biology	15	3.86
Population Biology	5	1.29
Preventive Veterinary Medicine	2	0.51
Public Health (MPH)	3	0.77
Public Health Sciences (PhD)	1	0.26
Soils and Biogeochemistry	9	2.31
Transportation Technology and Policy	9	2.31
Viticulture and Enology	1	0.26
Year in Program (n=391)		
1	95	24.42
2	110	28.28
3	66	16.97
4	55	14.14
5	38	9.77
6	14	3.6
7	9	2.31
8	2	0.51
Degree Objective (n=380)		

Masters	68	17.99
Ph.D.	309	81.22
Combined Masters & Ph.D.	3	0.79
International Student Status (n=387)		
No	306	79.48
Yes	79	20.52
Program Focus (n=385)		
Humanities	6	1.57
Social Sciences	48	12.53
STEM	328	85.64
Multiple Foci	1	0.26
Race/Ethnicity (n=380)		
White	182	48.15
Asian	103	27.25
Black or African American	8	2.12
Latinx or Hispanic	37	9.79
Mixed Race or Other	48	12.96

Table 1. Demographics of the 389 graduate student respondents are shown. Total numbers and percentages are presented for each category.

Table 2. Physical work space and meeting space

<i>Survey responses pertaining to access to physical meeting space and private or semi-private work space</i>	
Respondents indicated whether their graduate group has dedicated shared physical meeting and/or socializing space for students on campus	
Yes	27.76%
Unsure	23.91%

No	47.56%
NR	0.77%
Respondents indicated whether they have access to a private or semi-private physical lab or work space on campus	
Yes	78.92%
Unsure	7.71%
No	12.60%
NR	0.77%
Resource through which respondent has access to a private or semi-private physical lab or work space on campus	
Graduate group	77.85%
Major professor	11.07%
TA position	5.54%
GSR position	29.64%
Respondents interested in reserving meeting space if the Graduate Student Center had meeting rooms exclusively for use by students in graduate groups	
Interested	55.01%
May be interested	34.45%
Not interested	9.51%
NR	1.03%
Respondents with access to private or semi-private physical work space on campus among those without access to shared meeting space through their graduate group	
Access via other means	89.73%
No access	9.19%
Unsure	1.08%

Table 3. Funding

<i>Survey responses pertaining to funding and GSR/TA Positions</i>
How grad group students described their experience finding funding

Difficult	16.8%
Somewhat difficult	19.4%
Neither easy/difficult	17.4%
Somewhat easy	17.1%
Easy	12.4%
NA	16.8%
NR	0.1%
Resources used to find TA/GSR/Readership funding	
The Handshake platform	11.20%
Advisor	50.40%
Faculty in respondent's program	25.07%
Program coordinator	43.73%
Personal relationships and Connections	46.93%
Other	9.60%
Respondents indicated whether they were unable to acquire funding at the desired level for at least one quarter	
Yes	22.62%
Other	4.11%
No	57.84%
NR	15.42%

Figure 1

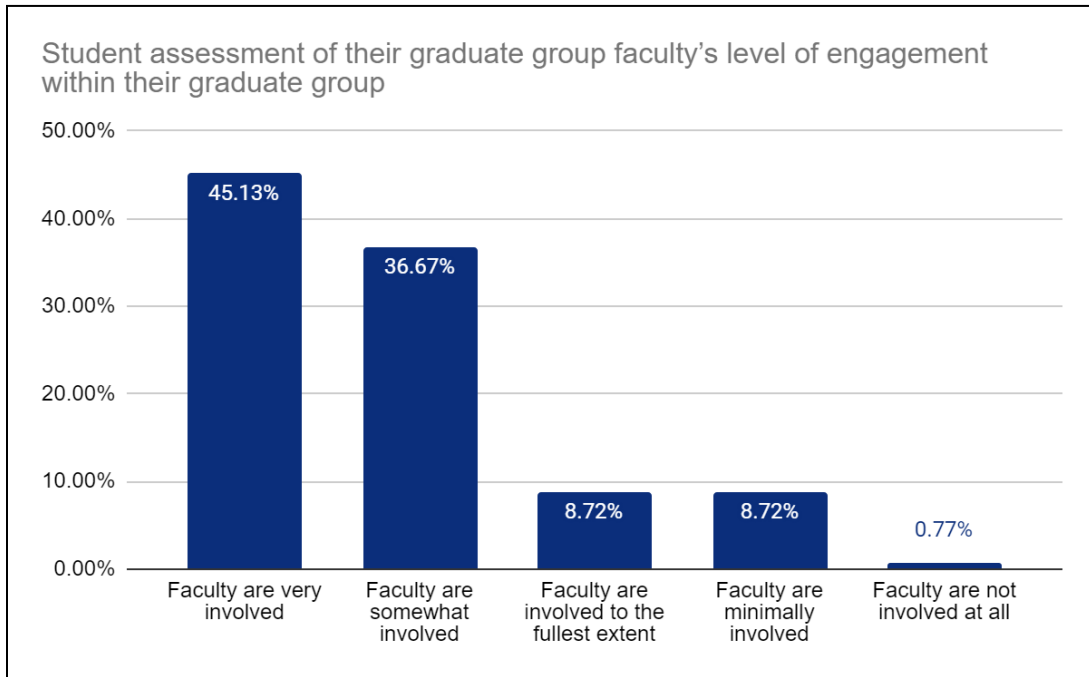
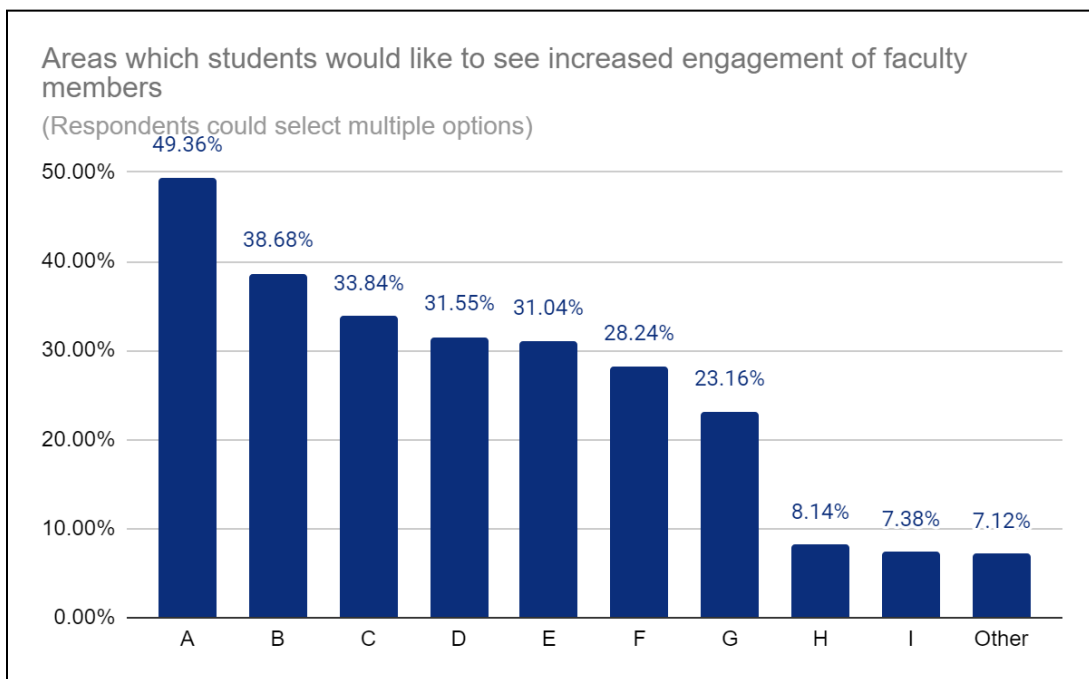


Figure 2



A = Mentoring or advising

B = Teaching non-core graduate classes relevant to students in your graduate group

C = Attending social events

D = Teaching core classes within the graduate group

E = Presenting at seminars or colloquia

F = I am satisfied with the current level of faculty engagement

G = Attending seminars or colloquia

H = Participating in qualifying exam committees

I = Participating in dissertation committee

Figure 3

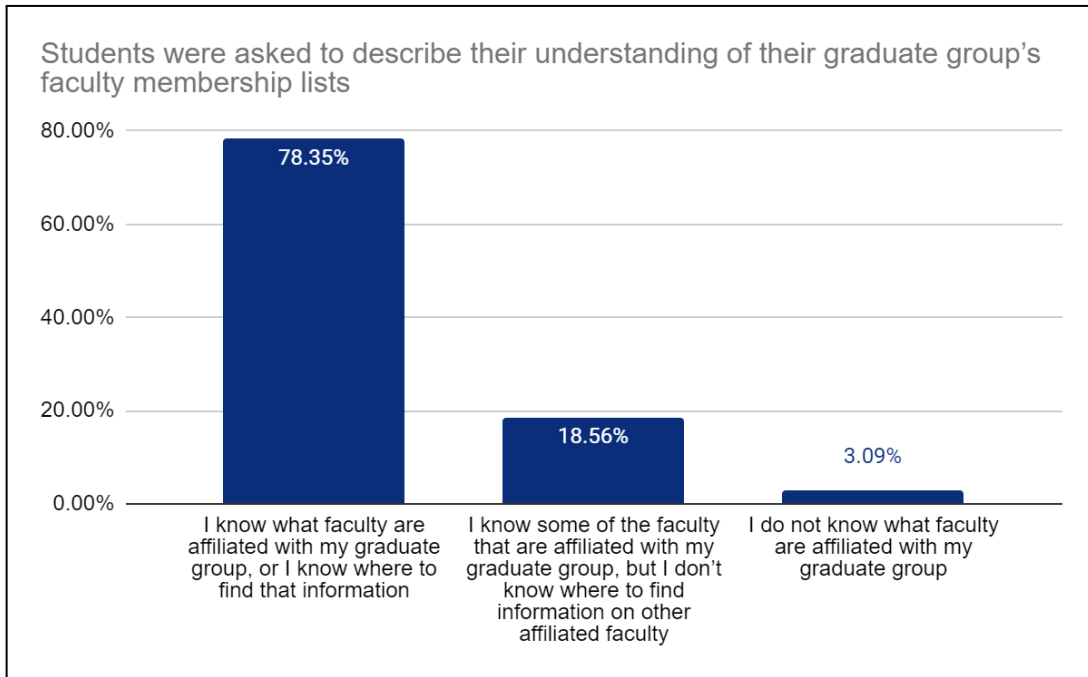


Figure 4

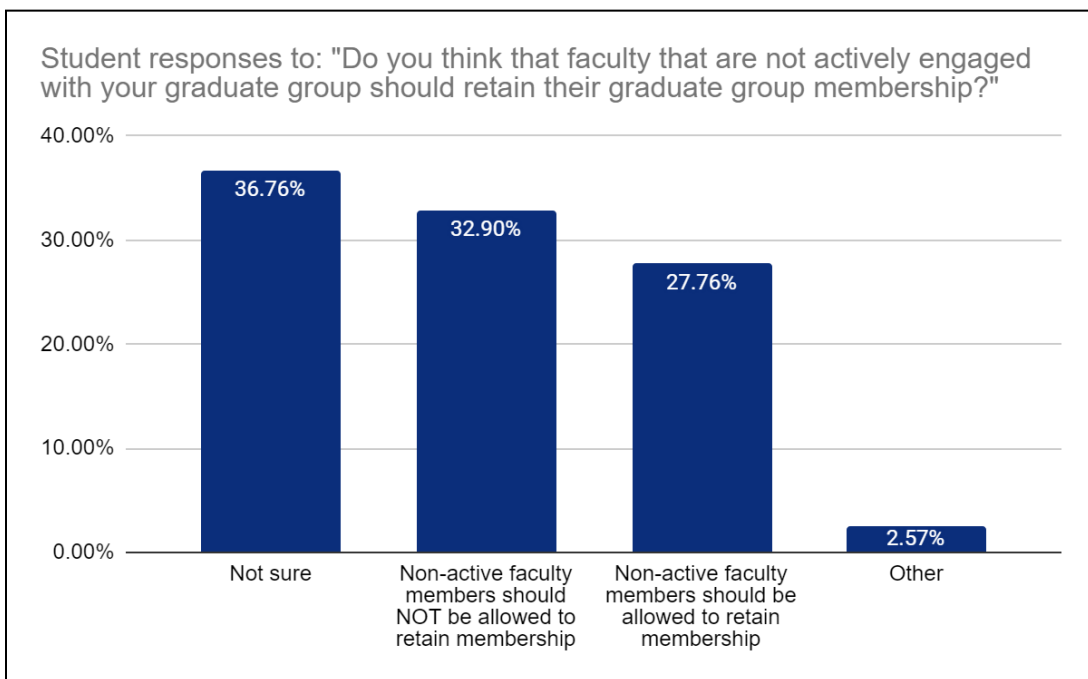


Figure 5

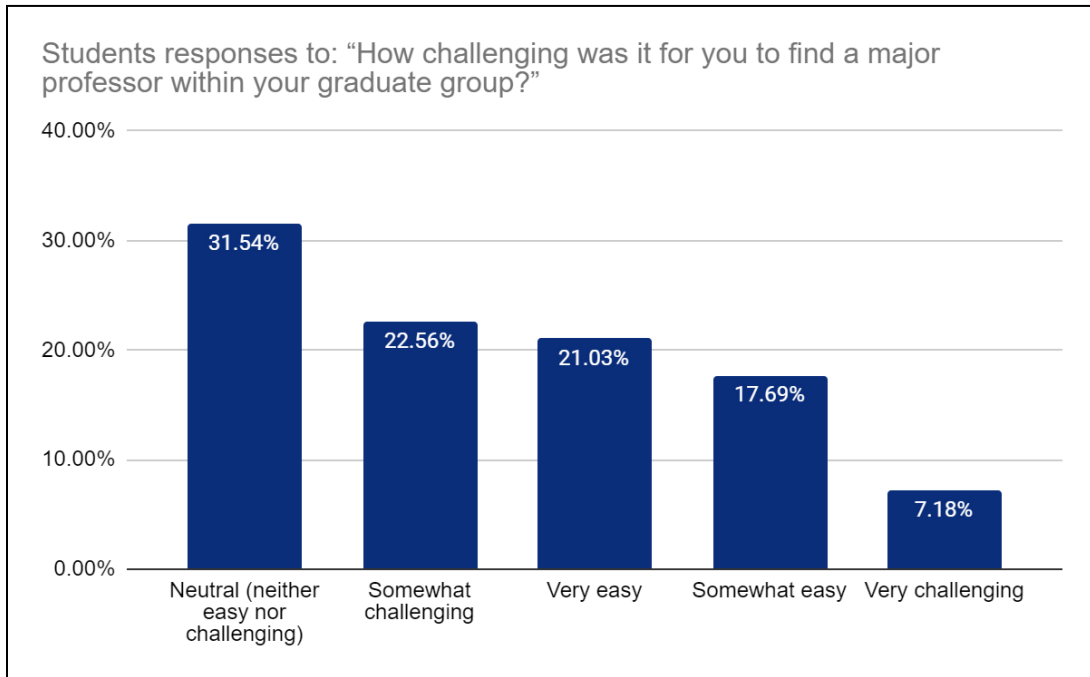


Figure 6

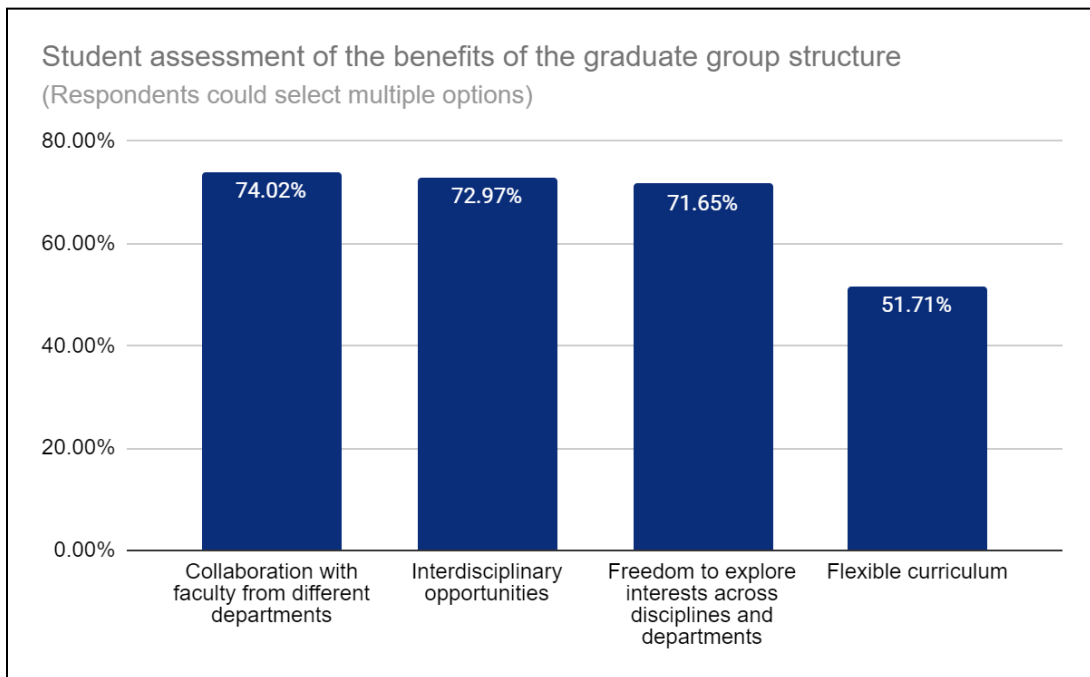


Figure 7

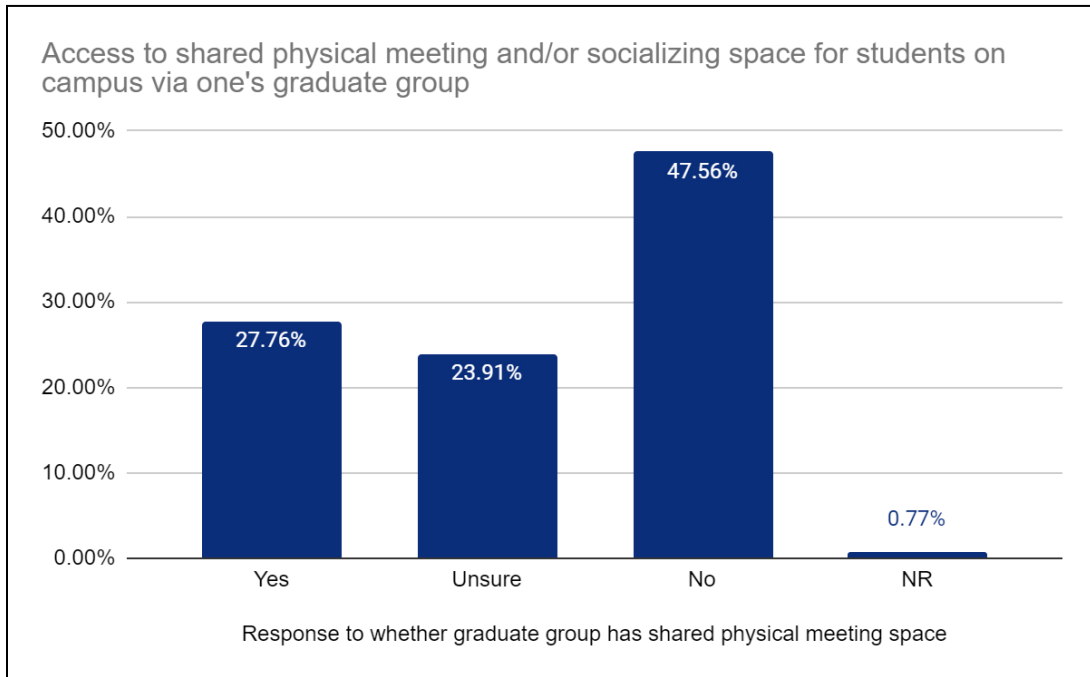


Figure 8

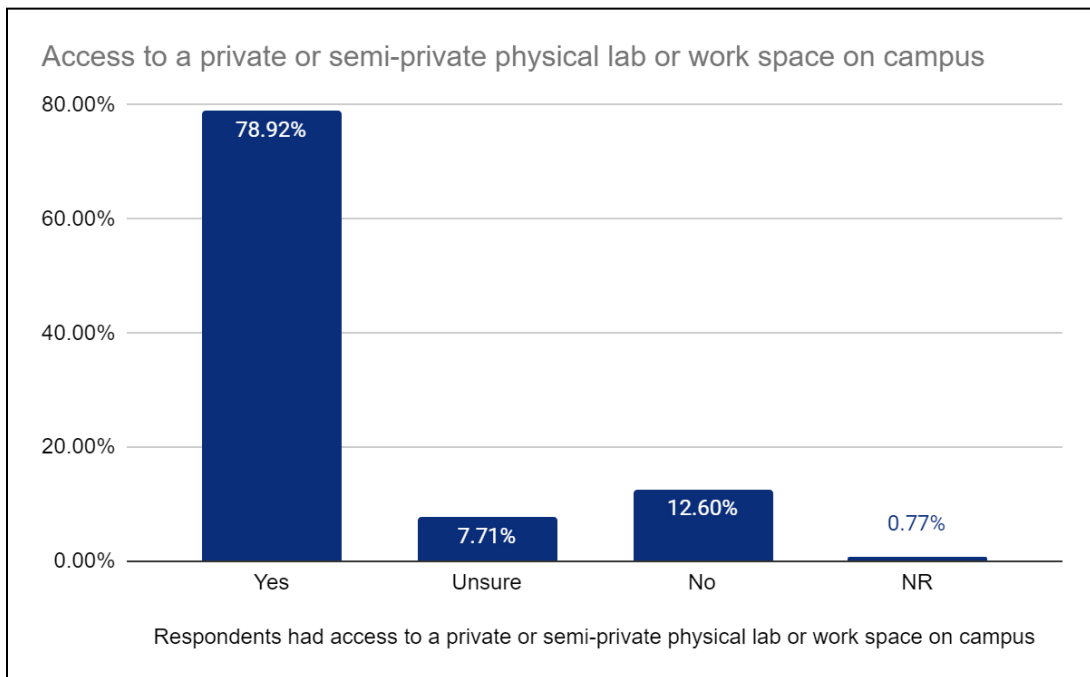


Figure 9

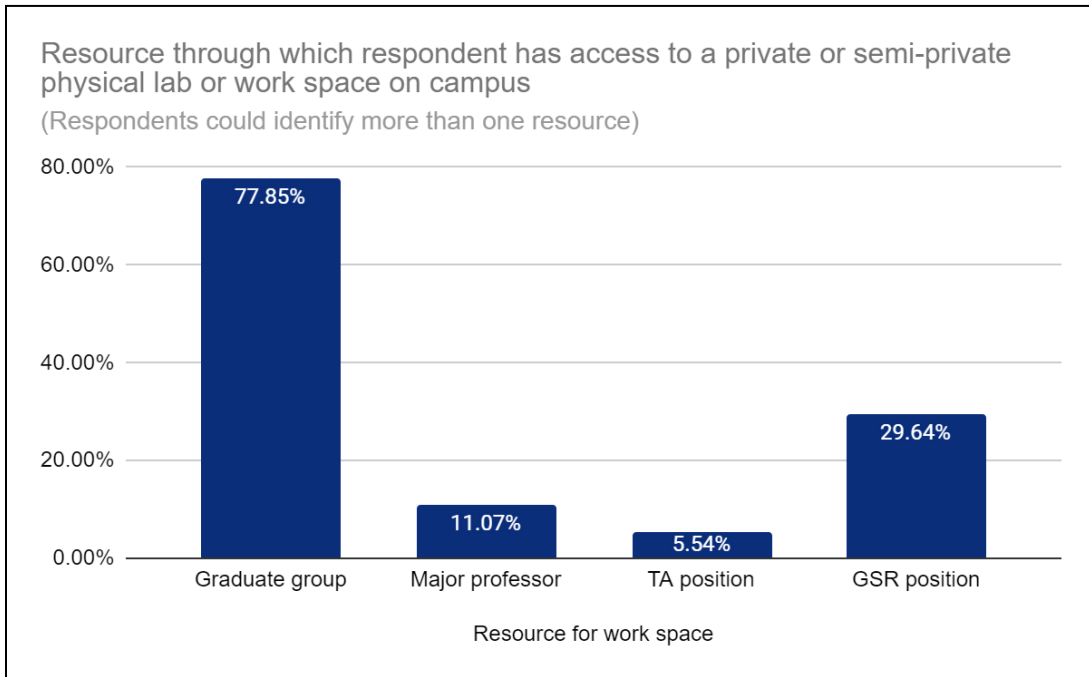


Figure 10

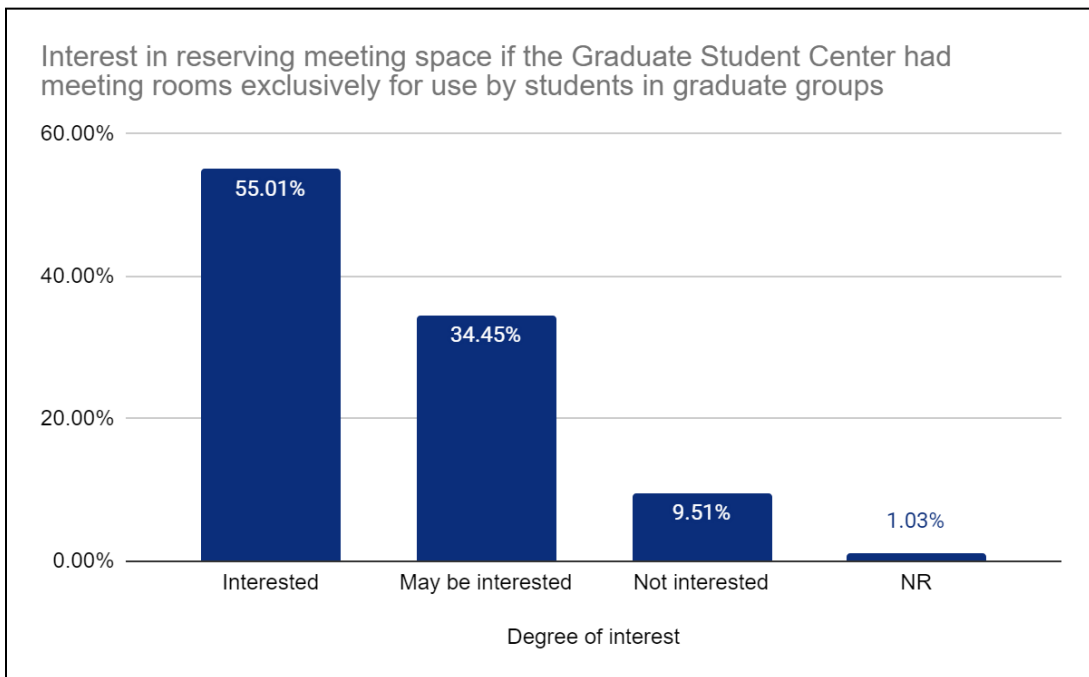


Figure 11

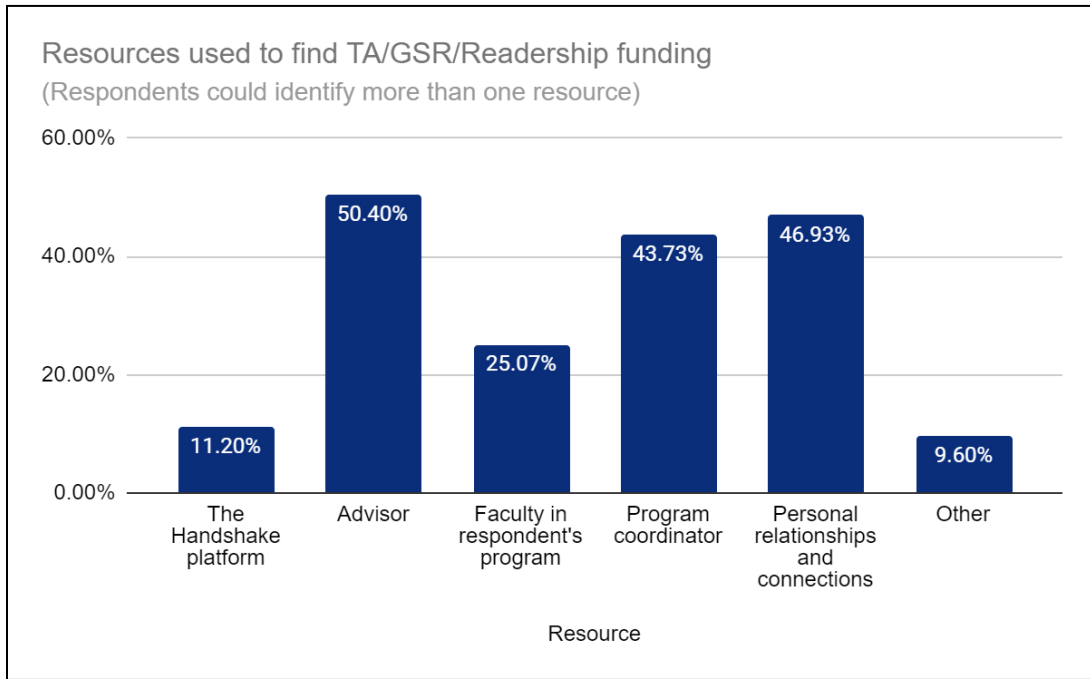


Figure 12

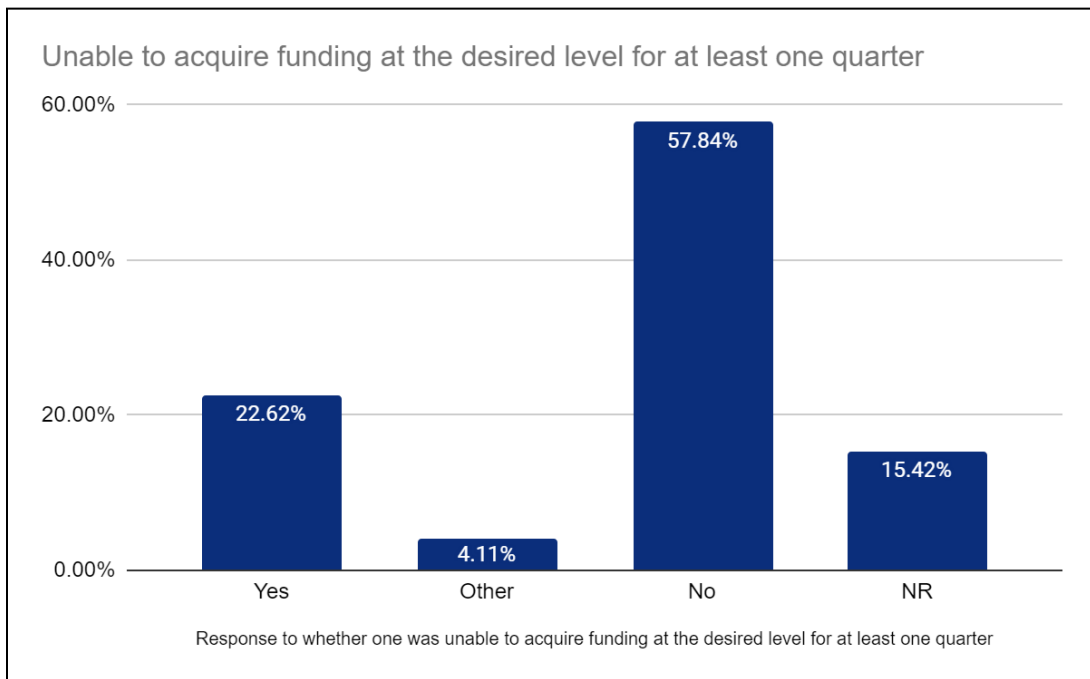


Figure 13

