

Chancellor's Graduate and Professional Student Advisory Board 2020-2021 Graduate Group Resources Subcommittee Report

Members: Dorothy Hoang (chair), Hawa Kaba, R. Kay, Gwyneth Manser

Background and Accomplishments

The Graduate Group Resources Review subcommittee was created in 2019 to examine differences between the graduate school experience of students in graduate groups, and students in departmentally-based programs. The goal of this subcommittee is to identify and bridge the gap of inequities between these two program structures. In its inaugural year, the subcommittee focused on information gathering, which informed the goals for this current year's initiatives. Based on the [information we collected during the 2019-2020 year](#), the subcommittee focused on the following objectives for the 2020-2021 academic year:

1. Administrative forms for graduate groups
2. Physical space for graduate group students
3. TA appointments as a source of funding for graduate group students
4. Faculty membership in graduate groups
5. Implementation of a survey for graduate group students

Below, we describe our findings and accomplishments within each of these objectives.

Administrative forms for graduate groups

Through the work of the subcommittee last year, one area of concern identified by graduate group program coordinators was the lack of coordinated or systematic communication. Program coordinators expressed the extensive effort required when applying for funding or submitting various university forms. These administrative forms are primarily tailored to department programs, which makes it difficult for program coordinators to complete in a way that fits into the box of departmental requirements. For example, a form may require a signature from a department staff member, but that position does not exist within a graduate group. This creates a burdensome task for the program coordinator and may delay the process of obtaining funding or other opportunities.

The subcommittee understood the need to modify forms to include graduate group language. We met with Duncan Temple Lang (Associate Dean of Graduate Studies) and Jasmine Durias (Project Policy Analyst III) to discuss this need. Jasmine Durias informed us that University staff is working on a parallel project of converting all paper forms into e-forms. Thus, it was an opportune time to weave in modifications to address our concerns. Duncan Temple Lang, Jasmine Durias, and our subcommittee agreed that the University staff would take on this project

of modifying language on forms. The staff will contact our subcommittee should they need feedback or clarification.

Physical space for graduate group students

Past research by the subcommittee found that some graduate groups do not have access to physical work and community spaces on campus. To resolve the issue of the lack of space for graduate students, the subcommittee met with Kyle Clayton (Graduate Center Manager), as suggested by Dean Jean-Pierre Delplanque, to obtain more insight about the issue. Kyle Clayton explained that the goal of new Walker Hall is to provide more space for graduate students at UC Davis. Walker Hall will be composed of 3 lecture halls for undergrad and graduate classes, exam/conference rooms, study spaces reserved for informal drop-in space for students, general-use space in lobbies, student parent meeting room. The subcommittee suggested that Kyle Clayton consider prioritizing graduate group student's access to the space, given that departmentally-based programs typically have access to more physical spaces on campus.

Kyle informed the subcommittee that reservations for the rooms will primarily be made online by graduate group coordinators. The Graduate Studies website will include a reservation page and scheduling priorities will be based on administrative/student status, where graduate coordinators will have to reserve large spaces on grad students' behalf due to liability concerns. Though it will be an additional responsibility for coordinators, Kyle Clayton felt this reservation structure would create a better system for Graduate Studies to evaluate the effective use of the rooms. After the coordinators have sent the request to reserve a room, students will get notified with the confirmation or decline of the reservation. Moreover, students will also be able to easily identify which rooms are available and which rooms are not; and can use those rooms on a drop-in basis. The rooms' reservations will not be an extra fee that students have to pay.

To ensure that graduate group students' are aware of the services offered by Walker Hall, graduate groups coordinators will need to be trained during summer about how to reserve rooms and how to make sure that graduate groups' students will take advantage of the building. The subcommittee suggested that additional marketing efforts, such as quarterly emails, should be conducted in order to help ensure that students know they have access to these meeting spaces.

Walker Hall will be open from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM starting Fall 2021. Because the hall is not yet open to the public, the subcommittee plans to contact Kyle Clayton at the end of Fall Quarter to obtain insight into room usage and reservation requests. Kyle Clayton informed us that he is invested in creating an equitable system for room usage and that the online reservation system will allow for data extraction and analysis. With approval from senior administration, he is happy to share the data with us so we can further analyze usage by graduate groups.

TA appointments as a source of funding for graduate group students

The goal of the Teaching Assistant (TA) appointment objective was to explore the possibility of creating agreements between departmentally-based programs and graduate group programs, where a fixed number TA positions in departments would be reserved for graduate group students. The reasoning behind this was to help alleviate financial insecurity in graduate group students since their programs do not have positions dedicated to them like departmentally-based programs do. To discuss the objective, the graduate group resources met with Jean-Pierre Delplanque (Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies), Duncan Temple Lang (Associate Dean of Graduate Studies), and Tracey Pereida (Academic Human Resources Analyst). At this meeting, all were in agreement that an agreement between departments and graduate group programs were a good idea in order to assist with funding for graduate group students. Tracey Pereida informed us that it was not against existing bylaws to create a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU). Duncan Temple Lang and Tracey Pereida attempted to obtain existing MOUs in order to provide some examples of graduate groups that are already implementing this process. However, both Duncan Temple Lang and Tracey Pereida were unsuccessful, leading the meeting group to believe that no official MOUs exist.

In addition to the MOUs, the subcommittee found that Handshake was not the best way to acquire TA positions, as they are often not posted there. A 'common application' for TA applications was also discussed, to reduce the workload burden of graduate group students who apply for TA positions in a multitude of departments.

Faculty membership in graduate groups

This year's subcommittee projects also entailed addressing concerns about faculty membership in graduate groups and the review process for faculty membership. We reviewed bylaws from several graduate groups to understand what standards exist for faculty membership within graduate groups. We also met with the Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies and the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs to discuss issues pertaining to graduate group membership. We concluded that one of the advantages of *not* excluding temporarily unengaged faculty from membership lists includes allowing prospective students to identify potential major professors/advisors. Disadvantages include inactive faculty being included on membership rosters and their participation being required for a quorum when voting to amend graduate group policies/by-laws. In order to gain information about students' perspectives on whether standards for graduate group membership should be changed, a question was included in the Graduate Group Resources Student Survey. A majority of survey respondents answered that they were "not sure" if faculty should be excluded from graduate groups if they are deemed inactive.

Implementation of a survey for graduate group students

Subcommittee members gathered data about gaps in resources available to graduate group students by conducting focus group interviews with departmentally-based graduate program students and graduate group students during the 2019-2020 term. This year, we aimed to expand on last year's data collection efforts. To do so, we constructed an online survey to assess funding, access to physical meeting space, faculty engagement, and resources available to students in graduate groups. Our efforts were different from existing data collection efforts. First, our survey is intended *for grad students*, and was constructed *by grad students*. Second, we assessed issues affecting graduate group students specifically, rather than graduate students in general. We collected data during the duration of Spring Quarter 2021, and we received 402 responses in total. We worked closely with graduate group coordinators and the Graduate Student Association to publicize the survey, and almost weekly reminders were sent to all graduate group students throughout the second half of Spring Quarter.

We performed a preliminary analysis of the data. Almost 40% of respondents reported that it was either somewhat difficult or very difficult to find funding (*i.e.*, TA, GSR work). 1 in 4 respondents said that they experienced challenges in finding funding at the level that they wanted (*e.g.*, 25% vs. 50% FTE position). Almost 50% of respondents also said that their graduate group does not have dedicated physical meeting space on campus, and over 50% of respondents reported that they would use meeting rooms at the new Graduate Student Center if rooms were exclusively reserved for graduate groups. About 40% of respondents reported that faculty are only somewhat involved, minimally involved, or not involved at all in their graduate groups.

These findings only scratch the surface of the survey responses, which also includes a number of open-ended response sections. Moving forward, we hope to perform further analysis of the data and to use the survey results to inform specific recommendations and projects. We also hope to work closely with Graduate Studies to address some of the highlighted concerns.

Recommendations

Based on our accomplishments this year, we propose that this subcommittee continues next year in order to continue with action items as follows:

The subcommittee recommends following up with Duncan Temple Lang (Associate Dean of Graduate Studies) and Tracey Pereida (Academic Human Resources Analyst) in Fall of 2021 to develop a draft/model MOU for reserved TA position agreements between graduate groups and departments that can then be shared with graduate groups. We also encourage Graduate Studies to consider establishing reserved TA positions within departments for graduate group students in order to increase equity of employment opportunities for graduate students.

We recommend meeting with Kyle Clayton (Graduate Center Manager), to request data on reservations and usage of Walker Hall. We recommend analyzing these data to understand usage amongst graduate group students to inform future steps on finding designated physical space for graduate group students.

Lastly, we recommend that the subcommittee analyze the graduate group survey data to better understand graduate group students' perspectives on faculty engagement, physical space, and funding. Findings from these data will inform the future direction of the subcommittee.