Executive Summary

2009 Autumn Graduate Student Survey

Survey Profile

Five hundred and forty-four UW Tacoma graduate students were invited by email to participate in the 2009 Web-based Graduate Student Survey. One hundred and six students (19.5%) responded. The survey contained 40 questions presented in three sections that sought to obtain opinion data on various academic, student life, and personal aspects of their student experience. Most questions were multiple-choice and some allowed “skip logic” to provide opportunities for follow-up questions based on responses. Thus in some instances, questions were only answered by a subset of respondents. Some questions allowed open-text responses so that respondents could freely express their thoughts and suggestions.

Graduate Student Profile

The majority (58%) of 2009 UW Tacoma graduate student respondents are returning from a previous academic year, and 42% are new to UW Tacoma. The majority of new students told us they did not consider other colleges or universities for their graduate work as 80% only sought admission to UW Tacoma. Of those who did consider another institution, 55% held UW Tacoma as their first choice.

New students are attending graduate school as a means to help achieve “Career development” (51%). Interestingly, their second highest reason for attending, “To specialize in an area of expertise” (17.8%) seems to support their most stated reason for post baccalaureate studies.

New student respondents also told us that “UW Tacoma’s academic reputation” at 36.4% was “Very Important” in their decision to attend. But the most influential factor selected was “UW Tacoma offered the major/program I wanted” with 79.6% saying this was “Very important.” When asked to comment on their selection of UW Tacoma, new graduate students said:

“I especially was impressed by UW Tacoma’s small campus feel and its excellent, supportive faculty members. That coupled with UW’s academic reputation, made it a very appealing school to apply to.”

“Most importantly, it provided a nights/weekend program for obtaining my teacher certification (my lifestyle was minimally changed by going back to school) AND it offered a Secondary Science certification program which was exactly what I was looking for (that was a bonus).”

Graduate student survey takers said that “Becoming a better person” is “Extremely” (50.5%) important to them personally, as is “Thinking in new ways” (46.5%). As a group, respondents consider “Becoming an authority in my field” as “Extremely” (35.9%) or “Very” (39.8%) important to them personally.

Of note is the degree to which social awareness and responsibility is reflected in student responses. For example, among items rated as being personally important, across response options “Slightly” to “Extremely”, “Becoming successful in a business of my own” tallied 67% while “Becoming involved in programs to improve the environment” scored 92%, the difference in valuation being in the 33% who said that business success was “Not at all important” as compared to only 8% who judged improving the environment as “Not at all important.” Graduate students also participated in community volunteer
activities with 43.9% providing tutoring and mentoring, and others being involved in church activities (32%), as well as youth services and conservation activities at 22% each.

Fifty-six percent of UW Tacoma graduate student respondents are homeowners while 36% rent. University provided housing is of little interest to these students as 81.7% say they are not interested in living on campus.

While 94% of respondents say they are registered voters, a little over 90% voted in the last election. Most students told us they politically identify as “Liberal” or “Strongly liberal” (49.5%) followed by “Moderate” (34%) with only 14.4% saying they were “Conservative” or “Strongly conservative.” The liberal to moderate stance of the graduate student population is reflected in their responses rating agreement with various statements. For example, 60% “Agree strongly” that “A national health care plan is needed to cover everybody’s medical costs”, and 64% “Agree strongly” that “Same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status.” However, even though 66% “disagree strongly” that “Racial discrimination is no longer a major problem in America”, 57.6% say they agree strongly or somewhat that Affirmative action in college admissions should be abolished.”

The social networking website “Facebook” (46.5%) is the most popular with graduate students and 80.2% say they do not use “Twitter.” Fifty-one percent have used Wikipedia “Sometime” but 33% responded they use it “Frequently.”

**Graduate Academic Pursuits**

Survey takers said they are pursuing coursework in Social Work and Education with 29.5% and 27.6% respectively, which is similar to findings in the greater graduate population where 37.4% are Education majors and 23.2% seek Social Work degrees. In responding to our question asking how satisfied respondents were with “Your program of study”, 77% said they were “Extremely” or “Very” satisfied. When asked to consider new proposed graduate programs, nearly eight percent indicated they would consider “M.S. Environmental Engineering & Sciences” and 4.8% selected “M.A. Urban Studies” as a possible program of study. Sixty-six percent of graduate students expect to complete their masters programs in one to two years. The remaining 34% estimate it will require three to five years, but most of these plan for no longer than three. About 28% do not expect to earn a doctorate degree.

The most popular “first choice” learning style preferred by graduate students is the traditional lecture (30.1%) with “Group discussion” following in preference with 24.3%. “Study groups”, “Student presentations”, and “Laboratory experiments” were in disfavor, scoring less that 2% for either a first or second choice option as a preferred learning activity.

Students feel the “Quality of instruction” at UW Tacoma meets their expectation with 49% saying they are “Very” satisfied and another 25% are “Extremely” satisfied. Likewise “Approachability of faculty” scores well with 42% “Very” and 35% “Extremely” satisfied.

About 18% of current graduate students do not anticipate working while attending UW Tacoma, compared to the majority (59.4%) who say they will be employed 30 or more hours per week. Students anticipate spending considerable time studying with a little over thirty percent saying they plan on 16 or more hours per week studying.

**Graduate Student Concerns**

UW Tacoma graduate students identified several issues of concern that impact achieving their academic goals. Some of these centered on costs, the level of personal commitment required, course availability, and the lack of services and facilities available to them.

Many graduate students (41.4%) say they are “Extremely” concerned about “Financing my education.” Respondents commented that the rising cost of tuition and the availability of financial aid were causes for concern. When asked to identify sources for paying for their education, 23.9% say they will pay all costs. However most (27.3%) say they do not expect to pay any of the expense, while a little over 50% of respondents say that eighty percent or more of the cost will be covered via student loans.
Most graduate students (51.5%) say they are “Not at All” concerned that “Classes might not be academically challenging enough”, nor do they believe classes will be too challenging as only 15.7% of respondents say they are “Very” or “Extremely” concerned about the academic challenge. But the majority of respondents (62.1%) say they are either “Extremely” or “Very” concerned about the workload requirements of graduate studies, and that “Balancing studies with work and/or family responsibilities” is an issue with nearly 80% identifying this as a significant concern. “Being able to juggle full time work, class workload, practicum hours and family, including commuting” was one student’s comment about their number-one concern. This sentiment was echoed by other respondents as well (particularly those attending evening classes) as in the following comments:

“…being able to balance my family, my full-time job and my career as a graduate student. Most things close before I can get there from work, so I am usually unable to utilize the services and bookstore most days.”

And

“Students do not have access to campus facilities and the library over the weekends. We have had serious issues locating “open” facilities for group work during the weekends.”

Understandably, “Getting good grades” is a goal of survey takers. Most (34.6%) identify this as an “Extremely” high concern with another 29.8% judging it to be “Very” concerning.

Though many felt they were “Very” satisfied (29.8%) with the availability of courses for their chosen program of study, nearly as many (28%) said they were “Slightly” or “Not at all” satisfied with course selection. The following comment suggests the dilemma this poses for students:

“My focus in the M.B.A. program was going to be finance, but with the limited availability of elective courses it looks like the focus will end up being more in management. While this makes sense in the general context of the M.B.A. and greatly simplifies the class scheduling it is more than a little disappointing as a student.”

Graduate Comments

Survey takers were offered opportunities to comment on topics covered in the survey. Additional program and topic specific comments are available online. Below are some general comments:

- It would be nice if there were some support programs in place for Graduate Students who are single parents
- I especially was impressed by UW Tacoma's small campus feel and its excellent, supportive faculty members. That coupled with UW's academic reputation, made it a very appealing school to apply to.
- UW Tacoma is great however, to get into the big leagues, we do need housing, more opportunities in the community to create a more convenient campus and better parking.
- I am having a fabulous time learning. I love the challenge, the deadlines that always come too soon for me (i am a procrastinator!). and Finally i love being in the presence of such brilliant minds and ideas that the professors have. the professors enthusiasm on the subjects they teach is inspiring.
- Some of the classrooms make me feel very claustrophobic and difficult to focus. With no windows, over crowded rooms, cold temperatures, no plants or art, the classrooms feel very cold and uninviting to learning.
- I am an MSW student with 20 years of experience in social work. It is very difficult for me that none of my experience has been counted and that I must complete 2 practicums. I understand it is not a UW Tacoma issue and more a Dept of Social Work issue but very difficult indeed.
The expanding campus: more classrooms are being built, but there is no additional parking being planned. In the evening the graduate students have to search for decent, safe parking and are competing with the restaurants, bars, and other classes. This isn't about "paid" parking. I'm talking about free roadside or parking lot parking. We pay enough for graduate classes that we shouldn't have to pay additional for parking.

Survey Statistics

Detailed results of the survey are available by request to:

UW Tacoma
Office of Academic Affairs
Survey Administration