

National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS)

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32,000 GRADUATE STUDENTS GRADE THEIR DOCTORAL PROGRAMS : POOR REPORT CARDS IN CAREER GUIDANCE, PREPARATION FOR TEACHING

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) Tables were turned this week as 32,000 graduate students and recent Ph.D.'s graded doctoral programs in a groundbreaking online survey conducted by the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS). Students graded their doctoral programs' implementation of educational practices recommended by the National Academy of Sciences, the Association of American Universities, and other educational leaders. Report cards for more than 1300 doctoral programs, generated from the survey results, are available online at <http://survey.nagps.org/>.

"Graduate students often report feeling overwhelmed by the process of higher education and helpless to change things," said NAGPS President Kimberly Suedkamp Wells, one of the survey authors and a doctoral student at the University of Missouri – Columbia. "Our survey is important because it provides students with the opportunity to feel like they can actually make a difference in their educational experience."

Students are most satisfied in doctoral programs where they have the freedom to pursue a broad range of career options, to make informed choices about their own education, and to have those choices respected. While 81% of students reported satisfaction with their programs overall, only 45% are satisfied with their preparation for teaching and 38% with career services. According to Adam Fagen, survey author and a doctoral student at Harvard University, "even programs that excel at research may get an incomplete when it comes to preparing students for non-research aspects of their careers."

"It's a real problem when Ph.D.'s can't function outside the university," said survey author Geoff Davis, a Dartmouth math professor turned software developer. "Getting science and engineering Ph.D.'s into industry is the best way to get new research and ideas out of the lab and into the world." While 89% of survey respondents believed their doctoral programs are doing a good job of preparing them for academic careers, only 52% felt prepared for nonacademic careers.

A particular area of concern is the lack of information about the career outcomes of former students. Only 30% of respondents reported receiving information on graduation rates for their programs during the application process, and only 35% received information on job placements for recent program graduates.

Women and underrepresented minority students were less satisfied with their experiences than their counterparts. Twenty-eight percent of women and 40% of minority students said that their programs did not provide supportive environments for members of underrepresented groups. "If the climate of doctoral programs is not supportive, all the recruiting in the world is not going to make a difference," said Kimberly Suedkamp Wells.

The survey results highlight model doctoral programs, and they suggest strategies that faculty and administrators can use to improve students' educational experiences. Involving graduate students in decisions that affect their education, providing them with more information about program outcomes, and providing greater curricular breadth in graduate training were all found to increase student satisfaction. Most of these strategies are relatively easy and inexpensive to implement.

NAGPS is an advocacy organization representing 900,000 graduate and professional students across 200 campuses in the U.S. More information on NAGPS can be found at www.nagps.org. The online survey was funded by a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

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