

Fall 2012

Early Engagement Survey of 1st year graduate students at ISU: Fall 2012


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Abstract

The Early Engagement Survey was emailed to first year graduate students on October 16, during the 9th week of the semester. The purpose of the survey was to identify key behaviors of new graduate students that might provide an early indication of difficulties transitioning to graduate school. Students were asked about their academic integration, social integration, and possible causes of financial stress—three factors identified as possible explanations as to why students leave graduate school without a degree. We also know that the largest attrition rates occur during the first year of graduate studies, but we do not know whether early student behaviors during the first few months of graduate school correlate with a decision to leave by the end of the first year.

Disciplines

Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Higher Education

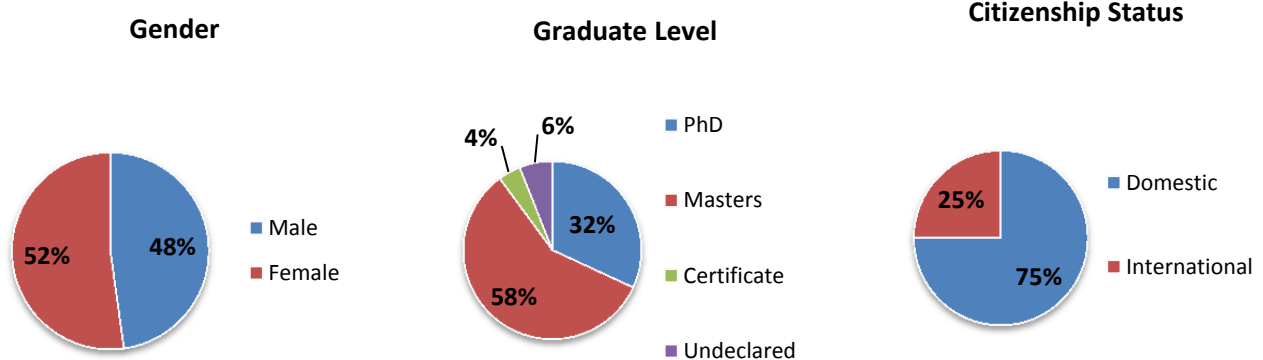
Early Engagement Survey of 1st year graduate students at ISU: Fall 2012

Ignacio Hernandez, Craig Ogilvie

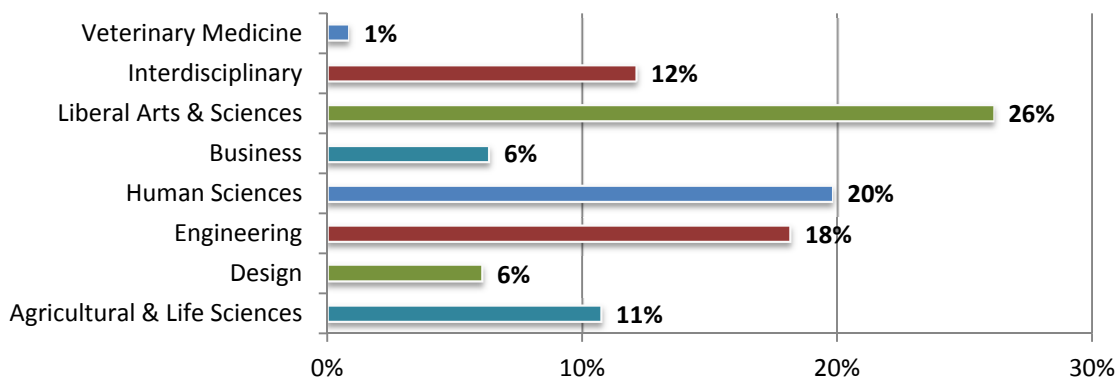
The Early Engagement Survey was emailed to first year graduate students on October 16, during the 9th week of the semester. The purpose of the survey was to identify key behaviors of new graduate students that might provide an early indication of difficulties transitioning to graduate school. Students were asked about their academic integration, social integration, and possible causes of financial stress—three factors identified as possible explanations as to why students leave graduate school without a degree. We also know that the largest attrition rates occur during the first year of graduate studies, but we do not know whether early student behaviors during the first few months of graduate school correlate with a decision to leave by the end of the first year.

The sampling frame for the survey was the population of all first-year graduate students pursuing master’s degrees, doctorates, certificates, as well as undeclared students. The survey was emailed to those whose first semester as an ISU graduate student was either summer or fall 2012. This provided 1,257 potential respondents. Survey responses were submitted by 364 students in the sample frame yielding a 29% response rate. As is the case with most surveys, item nonresponse yielded a varying number of respondents so we make parenthetical notation of the number of respondents for each item.

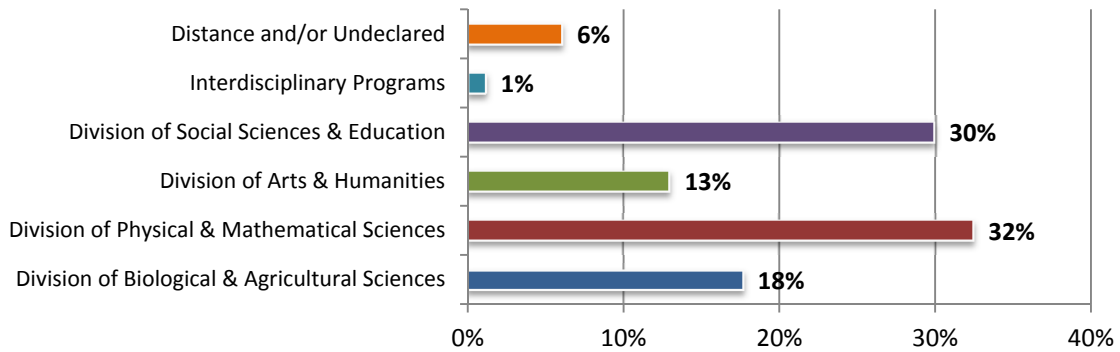
Characteristics of the final sample



Distribution of respondents by college, n=364



**Percentage of Respondents,
by Graduate Division**



Academic Integration

Attendance at department/program sponsored events

Students were asked about the frequency with which they attend department/program sponsored seminars, talks, and/or research presentations per week (n=354)

- 202 students, 57%, attended at least one department/program sponsored seminar, talk, and/or research presentation.

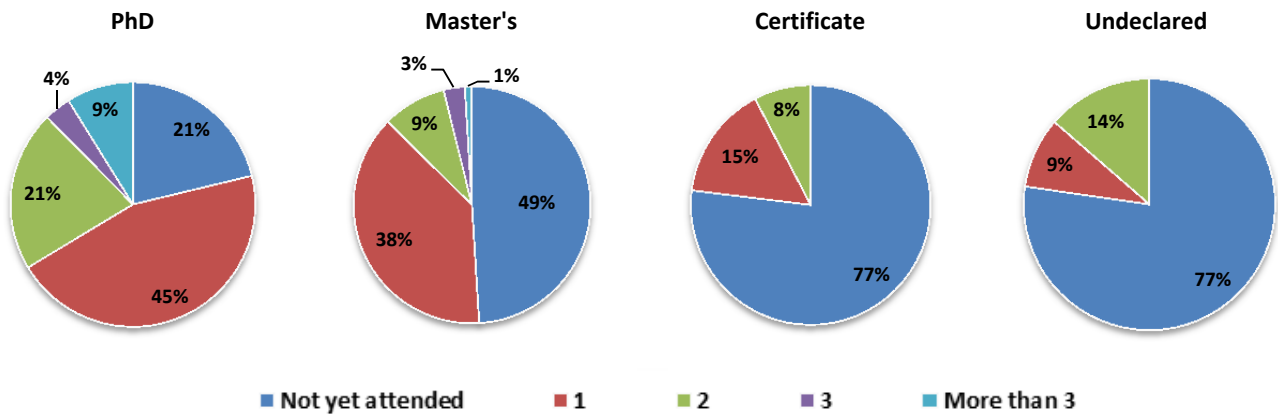
Gender and College

- 81% of students in the College of Design reported attending at least one department/program sponsored seminar, talk, and/or research presentation.
- 27% of students in the College of Human Sciences and 19% of students in the College of Business reported attending at least one department/program sponsored seminar, talk, and/or research presentation.
- There is an even split by gender, 57%, attended at least one department/program sponsored seminar, talk, and/or research presentation.
- Percent distributions of respondents by gender and college are provided in the table below

Seminars, Talks, or Presentations Attended	Gender		College								Total (n)	% of Total
	M	F	Agricultural & Life Sciences	Design	Engineering	Human Sciences	Business	Liberal Arts & Sciences	Interdisc.	VetMed		
None yet attended	43%	43%	41%	19%	28%	63%	82%	32%	52%	33%	152	43%
1	38%	37%	36%	62%	55%	36%	9%	38%	20%	33%	134	38%
2	12%	14%	21%	14%	9%	1%	5%	19%	20%	0%	46	13%
3	4%	2%	3%	5%	5%	0%	0%	3%	2%	33%	10	3%
More than 3	3%	4%	0%	0%	3%	0%	5%	7%	5%	0%	12	3%
Total (n)	167	187	39	21	64	67	22	94	44	3	354	100%

Graduate Level

- When distributed by graduate level, we see some figures which show PhD students displaying higher attendance patterns, compared to Master’s, certificate, and undeclared students, in their department sponsored research seminars or talks. Here are more highlights with pie charts:
 - 49 % of Master’s students have not yet attended a department/program sponsored seminar, talk, and/or research presentation.
 - 79 % of PhD students have attended at least one department/program sponsored seminar, talk, and/or research presentation.
 - Approximately three quarters of Certificate and Undeclared students have not yet attended any seminars, talks, and/or research presentations.
- The following pie charts show the percent distribution of student attendance of attending department sponsored research seminars or talks by graduate level:

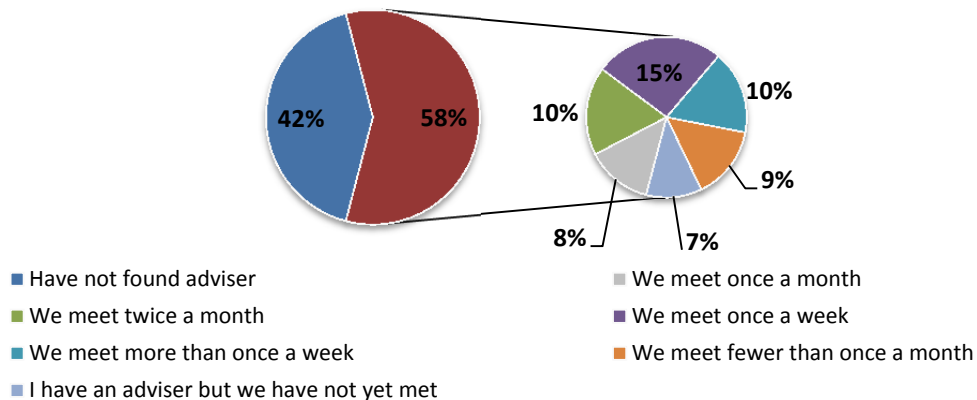


Finding an Academic/Research Adviser

Students were asked if they had *found an academic/research adviser (n=338)*

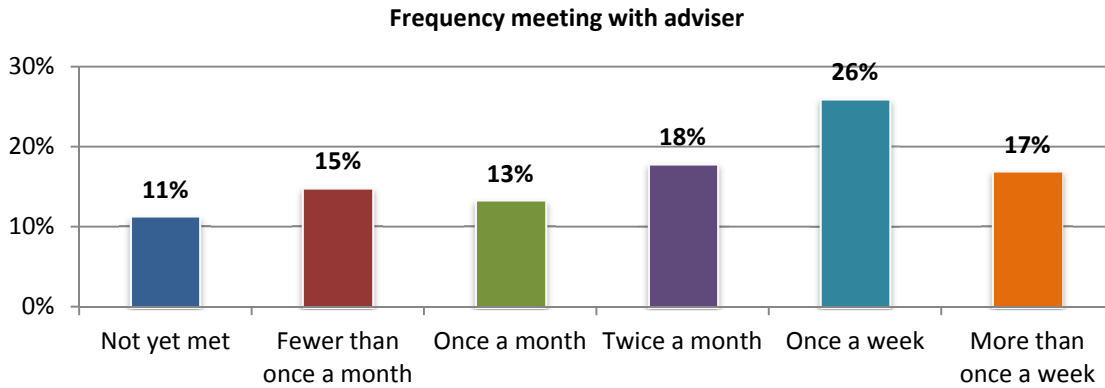
- 141 students, 42 % of respondents, indicated they had not found an academic/research adviser. The following pie chart shows students who have not found and adviser along with the distribution of the frequency of meetings for the 58% of students who have found an adviser, as a proportion of all n=338

Finding an adviser and frequency of meetings



We asked the 58% of students who indicated they had found an academic/research adviser about the frequency with which they meet ($n=196$). This chart shows the distribution only within the group of students who had found an academic/research/adviser.

- Of the students who indicated having found an adviser, 43 % of them reported meeting with their adviser once a week or more. The following chart provides a frequency distribution of their meetings.



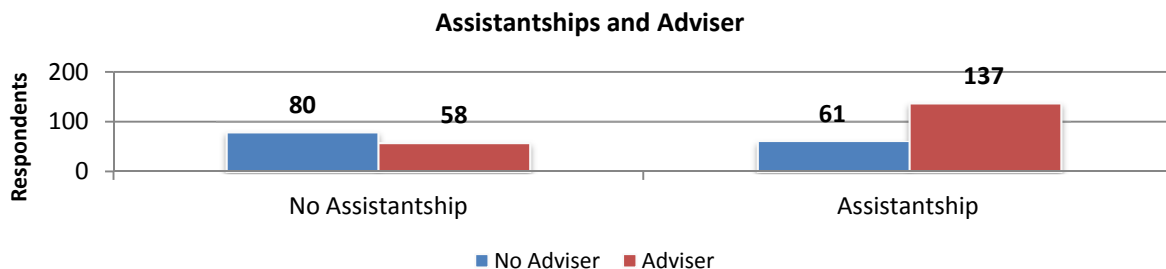
Gender

- We were also interested if there were any differences in finding an academic/research adviser between genders. 61 % of females and 55 % of males had found an academic/research adviser.

Have you found an academic/research adviser? ($n=338$)	Gender		Total (n)	% of Total
	Male	Female		
Yes	55% ($n=87$)	61% ($n=110$)	197	58%
No	45% ($n=72$)	39% ($n=69$)	141	42%
Total	159	179	338	100%

Assistantships

- As may likely be anticipated, there is a statistically significant positive association between having found an academic/research adviser and having an assistantship: $X^2_{(1)}=24.6, p=.001, \psi=0.271$



College

- All respondents in the College of Veterinary Sciences reported having an academic/research adviser, but a large proportion of Interdisciplinary graduate students had not found an academic/research

adviser. The following table shows the distribution of students who had found academic/research adviser, disaggregated by college.

<i>Have you found an academic/research adviser? (n=338)</i>	Ag. & Life Sciences	Design	Eng.	Human Sciences	Business	LAS	Interdisc.	Vet Med
Yes	66% (n=23)	55% (n=11)	69% (n=42)	67% (n=43)	59% (n=13)	54% (n=49)	30% (n=13)	100% (n=3)
No	34% (n=12)	45% (n=9)	31% (n=19)	33% (n=21)	41% (n=9)	46% (n=41)	70% (n=30)	0% (n=0)
Total	35	20	61	64	22	90	43	3

Graduate Level

- Ph.D. and Masters students have found advisers at relatively the same proportion. Certificate and undeclared students have *not* found advisers at relatively the same proportion.

<i>Have you found an academic/research adviser? (n=338)</i>	Ph.D.	Masters	Certificate	Undeclared
Yes	64% (n=70)	61% (n=118)	31% (n=4)	24% (n=5)
No	36% (n=40)	39% (n=76)	69% (n=9)	76% (n=16)
Total	110	194	13	21

Amount and Type of Credits Enrolled

We wanted to know how many credits first-year graduate students were enrolled in as well as the type of credits, graduate level or undergraduate level. Students were asked about the *number and type of credits they were enrolled in* during the fall 2012 semester (n=352)

- 82 % of students were enrolled in nine or fewer graduate level credits
- 24 % of students were enrolled in at least one undergraduate-level credit
- The distribution of graduate-level credits (from 500-600 numbered courses) and undergraduate-level credits (from 200-400 numbered courses) are displayed below.

Number of credits	Graduate-level credits	Undergraduate-level credits
0	3%	76%
1 to 4	41%	16%
5 to 9	38%	6%
10 to 14	17%	1%
15 or more	1%	0%

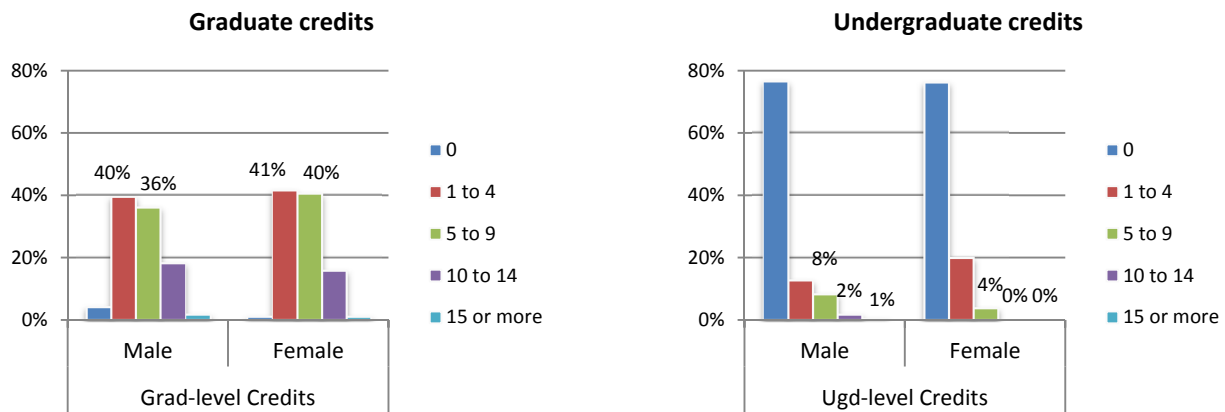
College

- Across the colleges, most students are enrolled in 1 to 9 graduate-level credits and the majority of students are not enrolled in any undergraduate-level credits.
- The following table provides percent distributions of students within each college and the number and type of credits. **Graduate-level credits=G, Undergraduate-level credits=U**

Credits enrolled	Ag.I & Life Sciences		Design		Eng.		Human Sciences		Business		LAS		Interdisc.		VetMed	
	G	U	G	U	G	U	G	U	G	U	G	U	G	U	G	U
0	0%	67%	5%	67%	5%	73%	0%	83%	0%	73%	0%	84%	11%	73%	0%	33%
1 to 4	31%	26%	29%	19%	42%	17%	44%	12%	45%	14%	34%	13%	61%	20%	33%	33%
5 to 9	49%	8%	24%	14%	36%	8%	44%	5%	41%	14%	44%	1%	18%	5%	33%	33%
10 to 14	21%	0%	29%	0%	16%	0%	12%	0%	14%	0%	22%	2%	7%	2%	33%	0%
15 or more	0%	0%	14%	0%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Total Students	39		21		64		66		22		93		44		3	

Gender

- 81% of females and 76% of males are enrolled in 1 to 9 graduate-level credits.
- Only 4% of females and 11% of males are enrolled in more than 5 or more undergraduate-level credits.
- The following chart provides a visualization of the number and type of credits enrolled disaggregated by gender



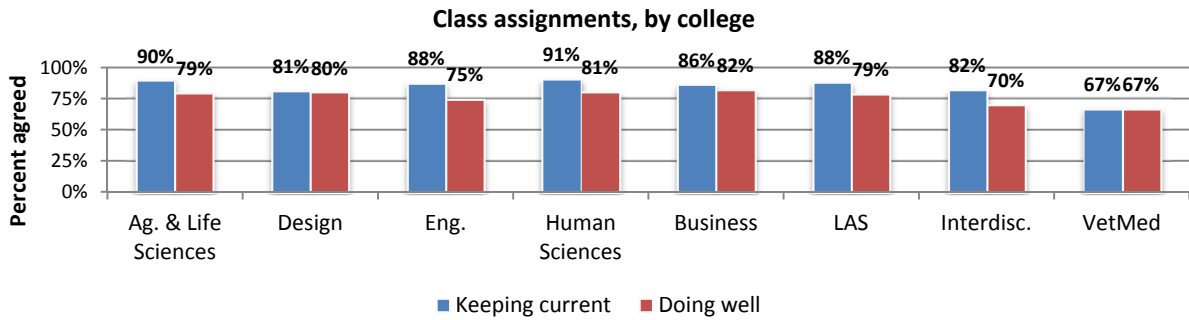
Class Assignments

Students responded to questions asking if they felt they were *keeping current with class assignments* (n=354) and if they felt they were *doing well on those class assignments/problems/tasks assigned* (n=352)

- 309 students, 87%, agree that they are keeping current with their class assignments
- 273 students, 78%, agree that they are doing well on the problems and tasks assigned in their classes and/or labs

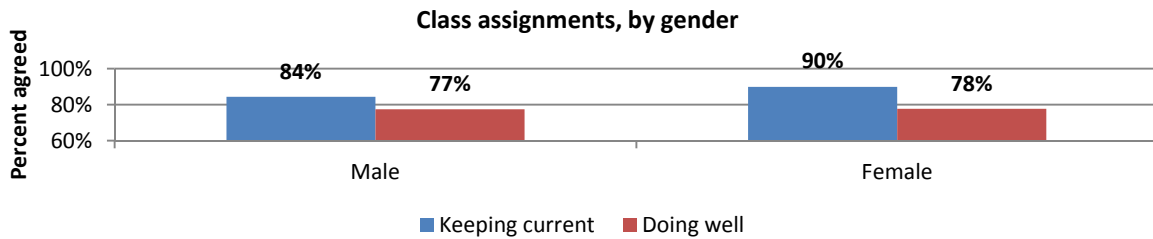
College

- Across all colleges, students agree that they are keeping current with class assignments more than they agree with feeling that they are doing well on those assignments. The chart below offers a visualization of the data across colleges.



Gender

- 166, 90 % of female graduate students reported that they were keeping current with class assignments
- 146, 78 % of female graduate students reported that they were doing well in the tasks assigned in class and/or labs.

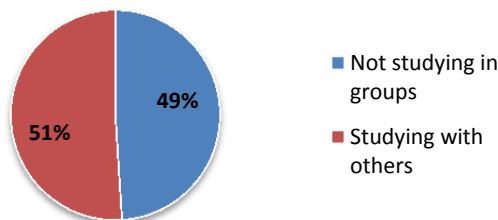


Studying with Other Students

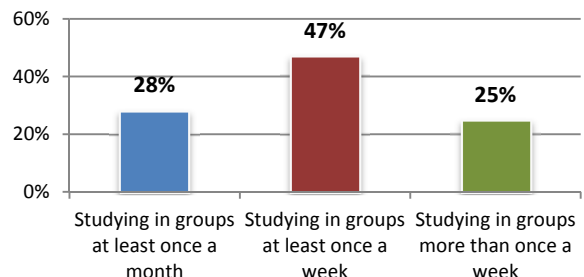
We also wanted to know if first year graduate students were forming study groups so we asked if they study with other students, either in a formal or informal study group (n=347)

- There was an even split here. 170 students, 49%, indicated they had not formed study groups with other students.
- Of the remaining 177 students, 72%, or 127 students, indicated meeting with their study groups once per week or more.

Studying in groups, all students (n=347)



Frequency of meeting with study groups (n=177)



College

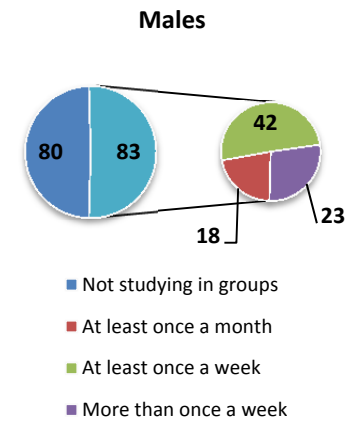
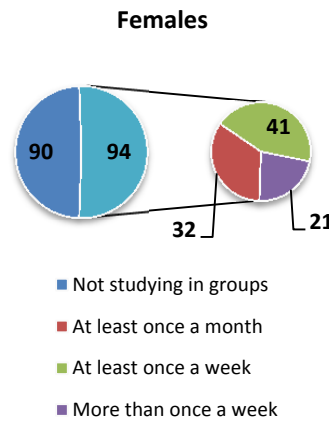
- Students in the Colleges of Business, Engineering, and Liberal Arts & Sciences report high participation in study groups

<i>Frequency of studying in groups (n=347)</i>	Ag. & Life Sciences	Design	Eng.	Human Sciences	Business	LAS	Interdisc.	Vet Med
Not studying in groups	61%	57%	37%	60%	19%	41%	66%	67%
At least once a month	13%	10%	14%	20%	14%	17%	5%	0%
At least once a week	18%	24%	33%	14%	19%	32%	18%	0%
More than once a week	8%	10%	16%	6%	48%	10%	11%	33%

Gender

- There was an even split with females and males, in each group 51% of students reported participating in some study group in varying frequency.
- The following charts provide a visualization of the data. The table the frequency and percent of students who participate in study groups and the two pie charts show the raw numbers for each gender.

<i>Frequency of studying in groups (n=347)</i>	Females	Males
Not studying in groups	49%	49%
At least once a month	17%	11%
At least once a week	22%	26%
More than once a week	11%	14%
Total	184	163



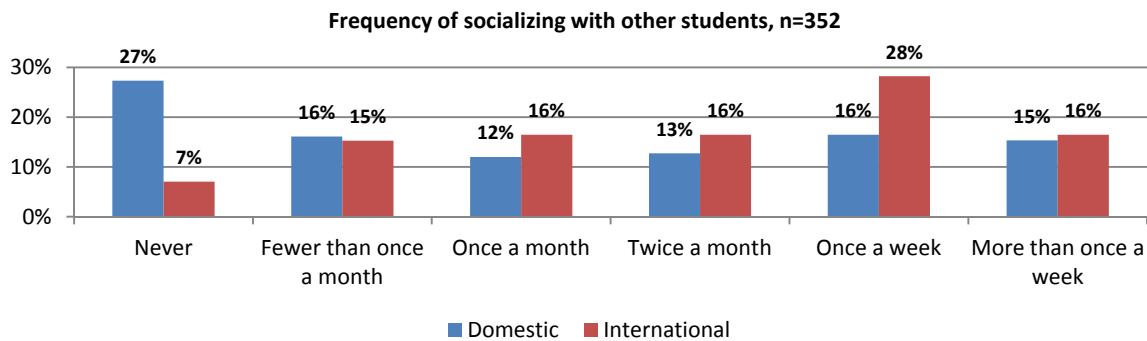
	Females	Males
Not studying in groups	49%	49%
At least once a month	17%	11%
At least once a week	22%	26%
More than once a week	11%	14%
Total	184	163

Social Integration

A major component of the transition for first year graduate students is related to their social integration on campus. We asked students three questions about their social integration.

We asked students about the frequency with which they socialize with other graduate students outside of campus for a meal, a drink, or some other social gathering.

- Overall, 62% of students reported that they socialize with other graduate students outside of campus once a month or more.
- Of note was that 25% of males and 20% females reported never socializing with other graduate students outside of campus
- International students also reported high levels of socializing with other graduate students outside of campus. Overall, 93% of first year international graduate students indicated some form of social gathering with other students outside of campus. This is noteworthy compared to only 63% of domestic students. Similarly, 45% of international students socialize with other students once a week or more. The following chart provides a visualization of the data.



We asked students about the likelihood they would attend some form of campus sponsored functions or events during their first year.

- Overall, 48% of students reported that it would be very likely they would attend campus events

We asked students about the likelihood they would join a student organization.

- Overall, only 34% of students reported they would likely join a student organization. The following tables summarize students' responses of their likelihood of joining a student organization, by college and by gender.

Likelihood of joining a student org. (n=353)	Ag. & Life Sciences	Design	Engineering	Human Sciences	Business	LAS	Interdisc.	Vet Med	Total
Very unlikely	21%	10%	17%	21%	23%	19%	48%	33%	23%
Unlikely	10%	5%	20%	24%	23%	23%	16%	0%	19%
Undecided	18%	19%	27%	26%	23%	30%	11%	33%	24%
Likely	36%	62%	25%	23%	14%	22%	16%	0%	25%
Very likely	15%	5%	11%	6%	18%	5%	9%	33%	9%

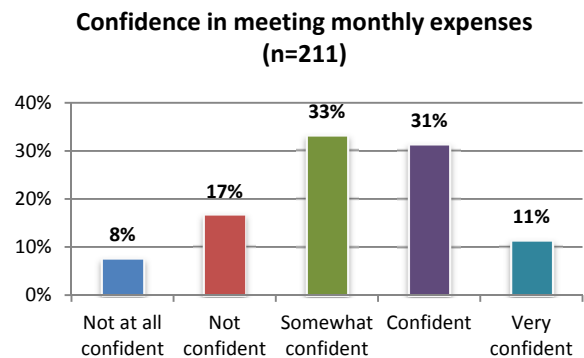
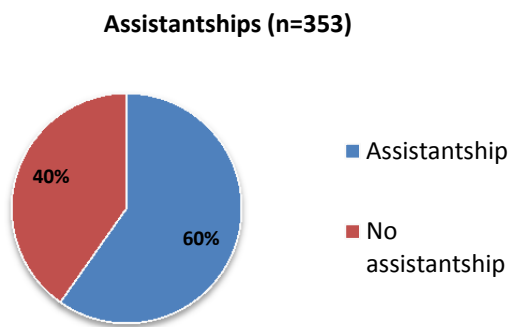
Likelihood of joining a student org. (n=353)	Male	Female	Total
Very unlikely	30%	16%	23%
Unlikely	19%	20%	19%
Undecided	22%	26%	24%

Likely	20%	30%	25%
Very likely	10%	9%	9%

Finances

We asked students if they had an assistantship, if they did we asked them how confident they were about meeting their monthly expenses given their assistantship funding.

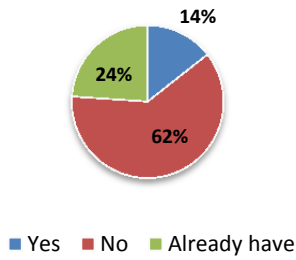
- Overall, 211 students, 60% of respondents indicated they had an assistantship.
- By gender, 64% of females (n=119) and 55% of males (n=92) indicated they had an assistantship
- Of the 211 students on assistantships, 76% (n=160) reported they were somewhat confident, confident, or very confident they could meet their monthly expenses on their assistantship funding.
- The following charts provide a visualization of the data



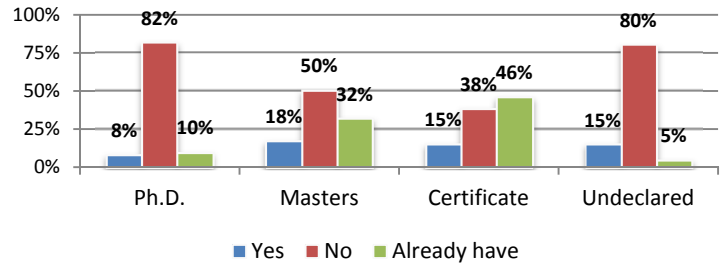
Finally, we also asked students if they had considered student loans to finance their graduate education (n=347)

- Overall, 214 students, 62% of respondents indicated they had not considered student loans to finance their graduate education.
- A very large proportion, 82%, of Ph.D. students indicated they had not considered student loans to finance their graduate education. For master students, there was more of an even split, 50% indicated they had not considered student loans to finance their graduate education.
- By college, students in the College of Design, 52%, and Human Sciences, 60%, reported the highest incidence of either already taking out student loans or considering taking out student loans. Students in the College of Engineering reported the lowest rates of considering a student loan, 22%.
- The following charts and table provide a summary of the data.

Student loans (n=347)



Student loans (n=347)



Have you considered taking out a student loan? (n=347)	Ag. & Life Sciences	Design	Eng.	Human Sciences	Business	LAS	Interdisc.	Vet Med
Yes	15%	14%	8%	22%	18%	12%	15%	33%
Already have	18%	38%	14%	38%	23%	24%	15%	33%
No	67%	48%	78%	40%	59%	64%	71%	33%

Engagement Index

An engagement index was developed to gauge how departments compared to one another. The index is an average of attendance at department seminars and talks, finding an adviser, frequency of meeting with an adviser, keeping current on assignments, doing well on assignments, studying with other students, and frequency of meeting with study groups. The index scale ranges from 0 to 4, with an index score of 4 indicating highly engaged first-year graduate students. The following chart displays departments ranked on the engagement index from highest to lowest.

