

UCI Graduate and Professional Student
Experience Survey
conducted by
Graduate Division
in partnership with
AGS
March, 2009

Survey Committee:
Carrie Carmody, President AGS
William Zeller, Director Graduate Resource Center
Graduate Division
UCI Leadership Academy
Natalie Schonfeld, DUE Senior Research Analyst

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	3
Survey Report.....	4
Survey Data.....	5
Graduate Resource Center.....	6
Housing.....	13
Financing graduate education.....	16
Recruiting factors.....	19
<u>Tables and Figures</u>	
Table 1 <i>Respondent demographics</i>	5
Table 2 <i>Response rate</i>	5
Table 3 <i>Means on grad student service items</i>	8
Table 4 <i>Funding by school</i>	16
Table 5 <i>Outside employment by school</i>	17
Table 6 <i>Factors of choice</i>	18
Graph 1 <i>Importance of services</i>	6
Graph 2 <i>Importance of housing guarantee</i>	15
Graph 3 <i>Funding challenge</i>	16
Graph 4 <i>Outside employment</i>	17
Chart 1 <i>Professional development importance</i>	6
Chart 2 <i>Social opportunities</i>	7
Chart 3 <i>Pub visits</i>	7
Chart 4 <i>Central location utilization</i>	8
Chart 5 <i>Grad services</i>	9
Chart 6 <i>Undergrad target services</i>	9
Chart 7 <i>Satellite services</i>	10
Chart 8 <i>Dedicated grad study space</i>	11
Chart 9 <i>Programming preferences</i>	11
Chart 10 <i>Level of preparedness</i>	12
Chart 11 <i>Off-campus housing</i>	13
Chart 12 <i>Importance of guarantee</i>	14
Chart 13 <i>Transition to grad school</i>	15
Chart 14 <i>Reason for choosing UCI</i>	19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In February, 2009 a survey was conducted of all UCI graduate and professional students to assess their general experiences and needs regarding campus life, campus services and professional development. A 50-question electronic survey was utilized and was offered through EEE to the entire graduate population. The survey received a 32% response rate (1521 responses) and is demographically representative of the UCI graduate student population. Below is a summary of the findings:

SATISFACTION: Respondents indicate that they generally enjoy being a graduate student at UCI (75% SA/A); believe UCI provides a quality experience for graduate students (70% SA/A); and (69% SA/A) report that they were satisfied with their selection of UCI for their graduate career.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: About half (54% SA/A) believe that the professional development programs in their academic unit have met their needs and 72% (SA/A) indicate that professional development services and programs are important to them.

CHOOSING UCI: Students chose to attend UCI for a variety of reasons and rated them according to the level of importance each played in their decisions. These included: A specific academic program (71% SA/A); geographic location (69%) Prestige of UCI (58%); To work with a specific faculty member (54%); stipend package (54%); Housing Placement Guarantee (41%) (*35% of respondents lived off campus).

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY INTERACTIONS: About half (54% SA/A) indicate that they only interact with graduate students within their field of study and 54% (SA/A) report that they would like more opportunities to interact socially with those outside of their department.

CAMPUS SERVICE UTILIZATION: About a third (32% SA/A) report that they are fully aware of campus services and resources and 32% (SA/A) indicate that they have sufficiently utilized campus services and programs to meet their needs. In regard to housing, 69% stated they are unaware or only somewhat aware of off-campus living options.

FINANCING ISSUES: Financing their education has been difficult for nearly half of our students (41% SA/A).

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS: Slightly Less than half of respondents indicated general satisfaction with social opportunities (42% SA/A) and recreational opportunities (44% SA/A). However, only 23% were satisfied with weekend activities available on campus and would like more opportunities to interact socially outside of their department (53%). Only 18% indicate that they are frequent visitors to the Anthill Pub and Grill.

GRADUATE RESOURCE CENTER: In regards to the Graduate Resource Center, 73% (SA/A) stated that they would prefer to use services tailored specifically for graduate students; 62% would use dedicated individual or group study space; 54% would use a 24/7 resource center; and 53% would use selected satellite services if offered in the center,. The top choices for programs include Writing Support (41%), Alternative Career Choices (39%), International Professional & Research (29%), and Financial Planning (29%).

SURVEY REPORT

Background

In 2005, the University of California, Irvine in its strategic plan, targeted growing graduate education as one of its top initiatives. Several changes were made in the next few years to enable the University to foster this growth. One of these was the formation of an ad hoc committee who was charged with assessing the level of services provided for graduate students on campus and in 2006 they released a report recommending a Graduate Resource Center. This Center would be a dedicated geographic location on campus serving the needs of graduate students while enrolled at UCI. Graduate Division was charged with Center oversight and an MOU was signed in 2007 between Graduate Division, Office of Research and Student Affairs to fund this center. Bill Zeller was appointed the Director of the Center in Spring 2008 and the Center launched in a virtual setting in Fall 2008 while negotiations for a dedicated space allocation were on-going. In Fall 2008 Graduate Division also entered into a partnership with the Associated Graduate Students (AGS) to ensure graduate student input, awareness and utilization of the new Center in its launch year.

Current Survey

In its inception, the Center was intended to have two very specific aims: professional development and socialization for graduate students. The first aim, professional development, must be a mandatory part of services UCI offers its graduate students if it wants them to be competitive in this shrinking academic job market and increasingly difficult budget time. Additionally, a mental health survey conducted in Spring 2008 had already identified 'silo-ing' and isolation as concerns among the UCI graduate student population. Thus, the other primary aim of the new Center is to foster a connection between graduate students and the general campus as well as a connection to fellow students across disciplines. It is believed that a social element to Center programming will be a key aspect for graduate students' utilization. Due to the new nature of a centralized Center on an otherwise decentralized campus, Graduate Division and AGS felt it necessary to survey the graduate student population on their current utilization and awareness of campus services offered. This would allow the Center to offer programming specifically targeting those areas that graduate students felt they needed at the same time identifying where current levels of service may be lacking and in need of development.

A 50-question, forced choice, electronic survey was designed with input from Graduate Division, AGS, the Leadership Academy, and University Communications. The survey was piloted in Fall 2008, reviewed by University Communications January, 2009 and revised. Four free response questions were also included in order to solicit any important points we may have overlooked. The anonymous data were collected during a 10-day period in early March, 2009 using EEE and a chance to win a \$200 grocery gift card was offered in the hopes of increasing participation. Several questions about general graduate life were also added to capitalize upon the opportunity to solicit graduate student opinion. These included housing, funding, satisfaction, and recruiting factors.

Conclusion

We conclude from these survey results that UCI graduate students both desire and support a dedicated Graduate Resource Center; would utilize the center programming for professional development and increasing social interaction; and there is a general need for an increase in graduate specific student services on-campus.

Additionally, the data support the revision of the current housing policy, high-light funding issues across academic units, and give a comprehensive snapshot of the factors that help graduate students select UCI for their graduate career.

DATA

SURVEY SAMPLE

1521 graduate students representing all graduate units on campus responded. This is the largest sample of UCI graduate survey participants to date. The response rate was 32% and the sample is demographically representative of the UCI graduate student population.

Table 1 *Respondent Demographics*

Professional students	15%
STEM students	37%
Non-STEM students	48%
Returning students	68%
New students	32%
Live on-campus	65%
Live off-campus	35%
Domestic students	75%
International students	25%

Table 2 *Response Rate*

<i>Academic unit</i>	<i>% of Responses</i>	<i>% of unit responding</i>	<i>Actual % of grad population</i>
Arts	4	34	3
Bio Sci	12	42	8
Business	9	17	18
Education	4	18	6
Engineering	16	36	14
Health Sci	1	34	<1
Humanities	10	34	9
ICS	8	37	7
Medicine	5	20	10
Physical Sci	13	40	10
Social Eco	8	49	5
Social Sci	10	43	7

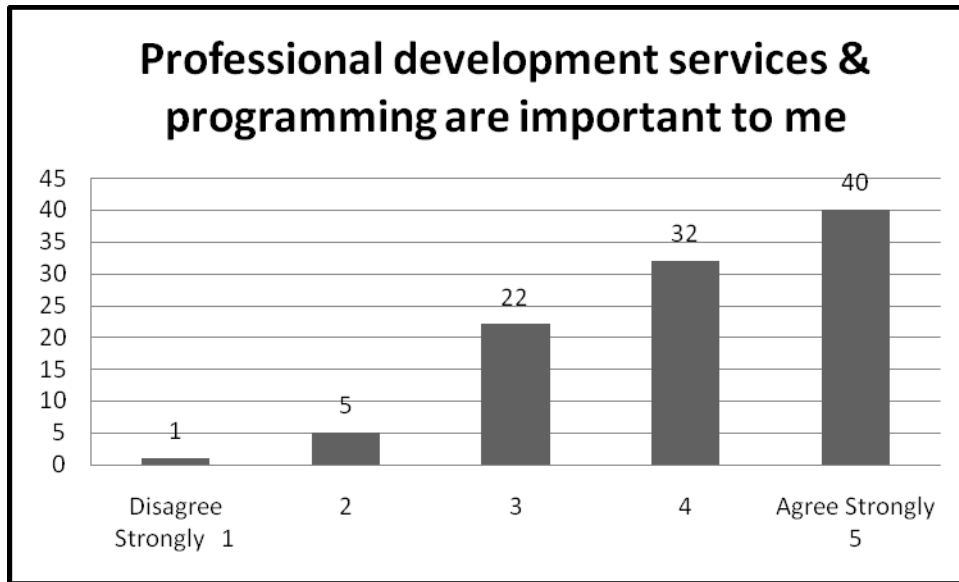
Survey Sections:

GRADUATE RESOURCE CENTER

Several questions were asked attempting to measure graduate student's desire for and anticipated utilization of a dedicated space in the Student Center for graduate student programming. A dedicated Graduate Resource Center would provide social interaction and professional development to graduate students as well as provide dedicated study space, centralized access to campus information and satellite services tailored uniquely for graduate student educational needs. Respondents were asked about the two general aims of the center.

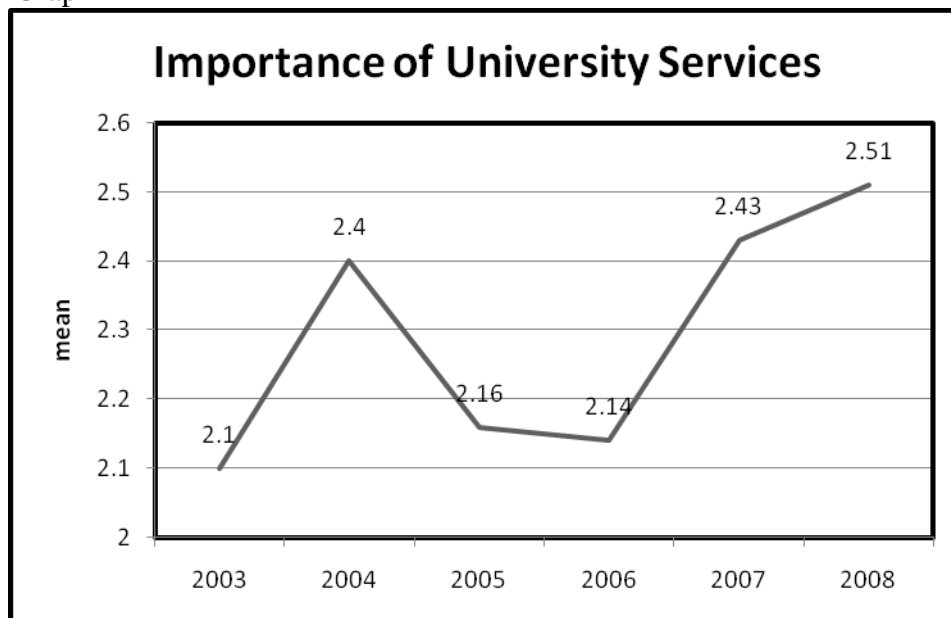
Overall 70% of grad students report that professional development services and programming are important to them with 40% reporting they are *very* important.

Chart 1



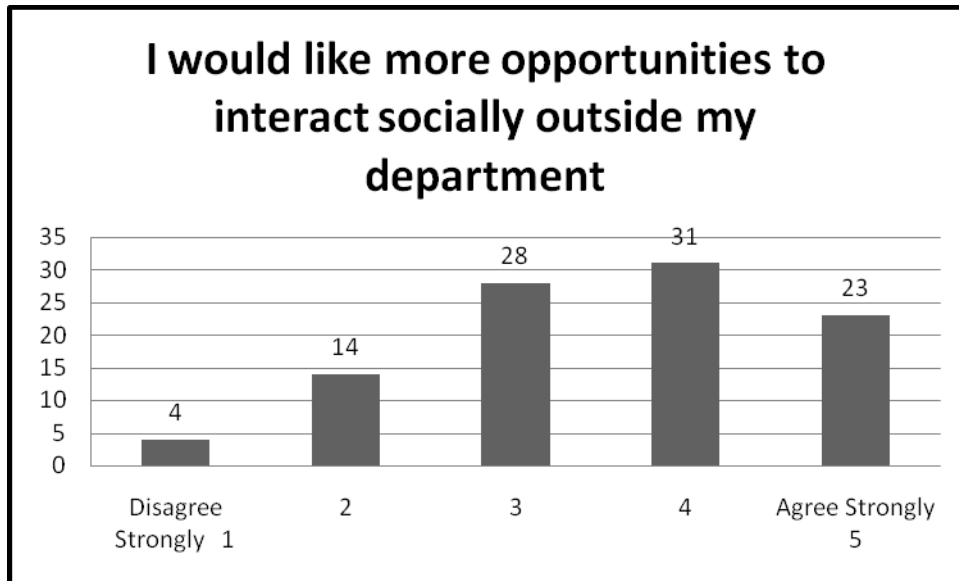
Additionally, students have been reporting an increasing importance in student services in their decision to attend UCI over the past few years.

Graph 1



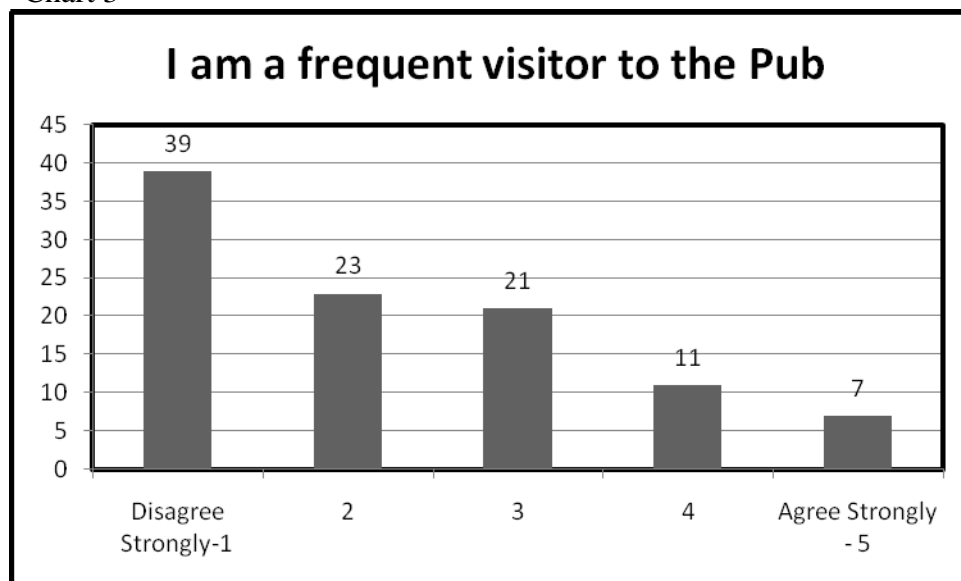
A majority of graduate students (62%) reported that interacting socially with fellow graduate students was important. Social interaction *outside* of one’s academic unit is also desired by grad students with nearly 1 in 4 students reporting it is *very* important and more than half reporting they would definitely like more opportunities. More than half the sample reported they do not currently interact outside their department.

Chart 2



Historically, AGS has owned and operated the campus Pub and utilized this location as the “heart” of graduate student socialization. The current Anthill Pub and Grill is operated by a third-party vendor with AGS input and we wanted to measure how many graduate students actually frequented the establishment. Only 18% of respondents reported they are frequent visitors to the Pub. Thus, the pub is not an adequate space for graduate student social activity when more than 80% of current students do not frequently “hang-out” there. Additional social activities must be provided to ensure a connection between students is made.

Chart 3



GRADUATE STUDENT PREFERENCES

In general, we asked grad students about their interest in and preferences about campus services. Overall, they reported they would use services if tailored to graduate student needs and offered through a centralized graduate student location.

Table 3 Means of items on graduate student services

	I would utilize a centralized location that grad students could access to get connected with campus services	I would prefer to use services that are tailored specifically to graduate students	I am comfortable utilizing campus services that primarily serve undergraduate students	I would utilize selected satellite services if offered in the Graduate Center	I would utilize dedicated graduate student individual or group study space
Mean	3.67	4.01	2.81	3.52	3.71

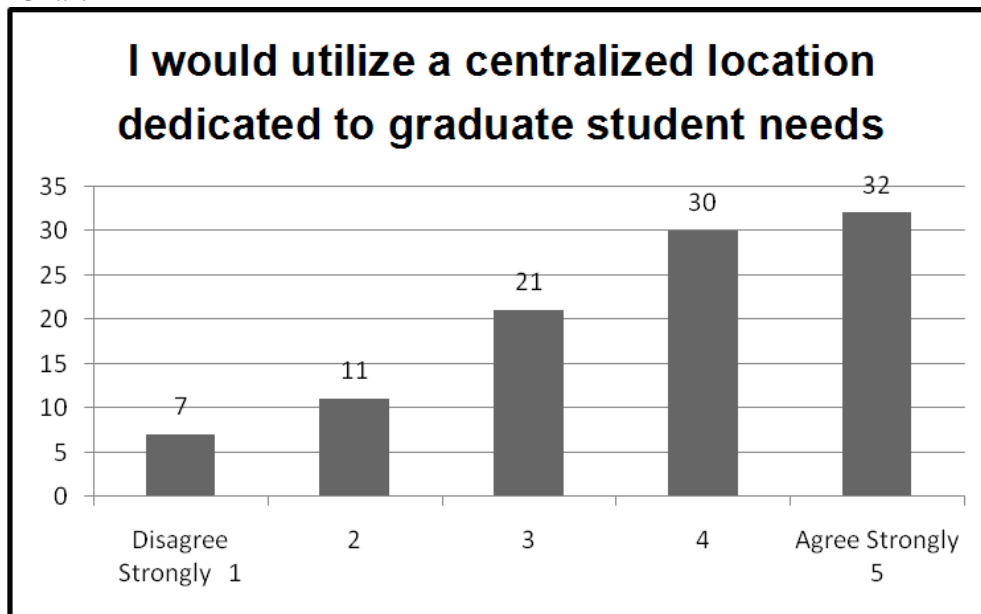
Responses: 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree

Only 1/3 of the sample reported being fully aware of all the campus services and resources offered and having sufficiently utilized these services. The majority of graduate student respondents lacked a comprehensive awareness of what services are offered and had not utilized them fully.

UTILIZATION

The main question in establishing a Graduate Resource Center is will the students use it. We asked graduate students if indeed they would use a centralized location to connect to the campus and nearly 2/3 of the sample answered affirmatively. More than 40% report already coming to central campus and placing the Graduate Resource Center in a central location makes sense.

Chart 4



There is a statistically significant difference between new students reported utilization and returning students. New students report they significantly frequent central campus more than returning students and 64% of new students report they would use the center and only 9% reported they would not. Returning students, who have

already acclimated and learned to navigate the UCI campus, reported lower overall expected utilization with 55% reporting they would use the center and 13% reporting they would not. However, even given their longer period of study at UCI, more than half the sample of returning students stated they would use a centralized location if offered.

GRADUATE SPECIFIC

Historically, graduate students have anecdotally stated they are not comfortable utilizing services that primarily serve an undergraduate population. Many service centers on-campus (Career Center, Cross-Cultural Center, Student Center, LARC) serve a primarily undergraduate population and offer little programming tailored specifically for Graduate students.

In this survey, graduate students were clear in their preference for programming designed to fit their particular graduate educational and development needs. Less than 6% of the sample stated a preference for general student programming but rather 73% preferred graduate specific programming and services. Less than 1/3 stated they were comfortable utilizing campus services targeting undergrads and nearly 40% explicitly reported discomfort with utilizing undergrad service centers.

Chart 5

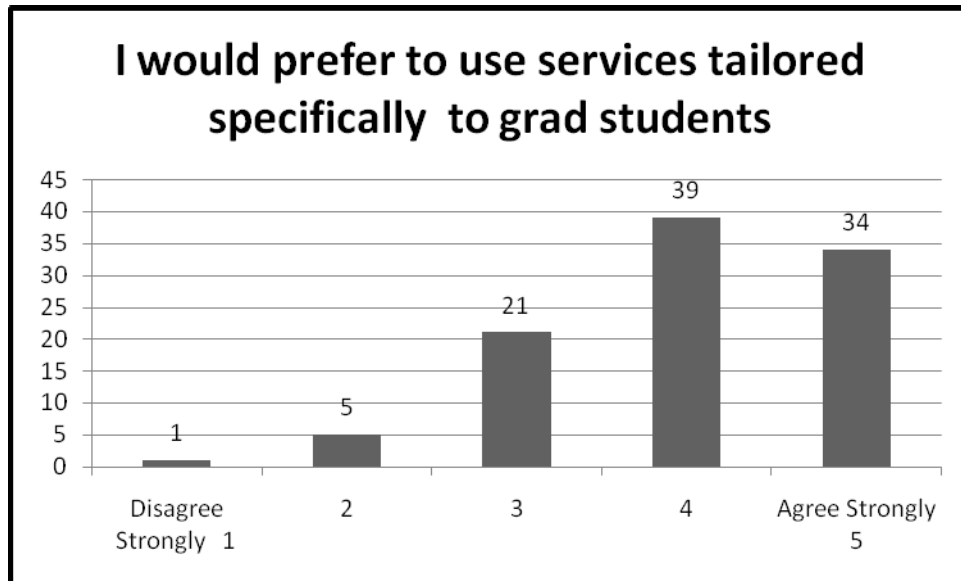
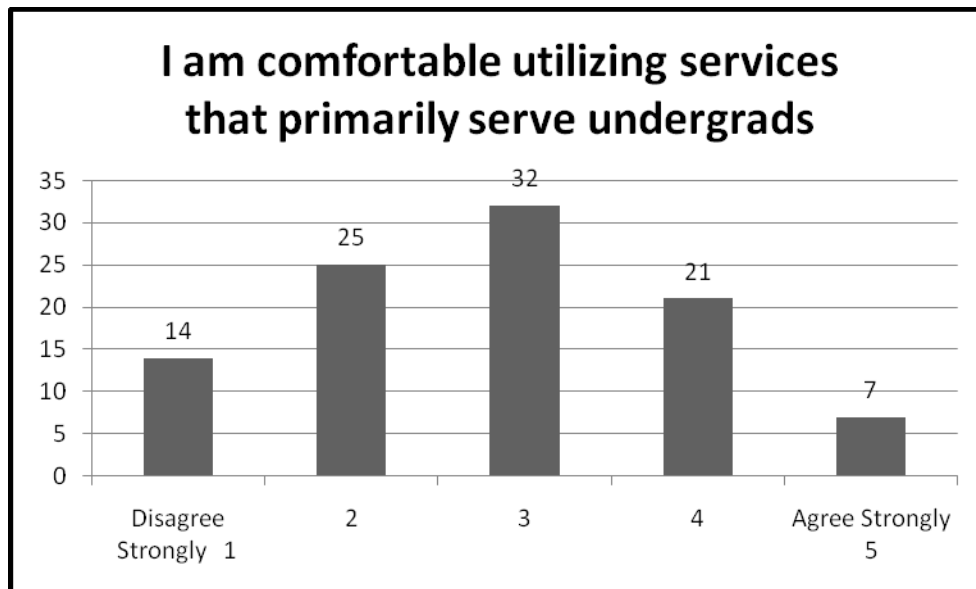


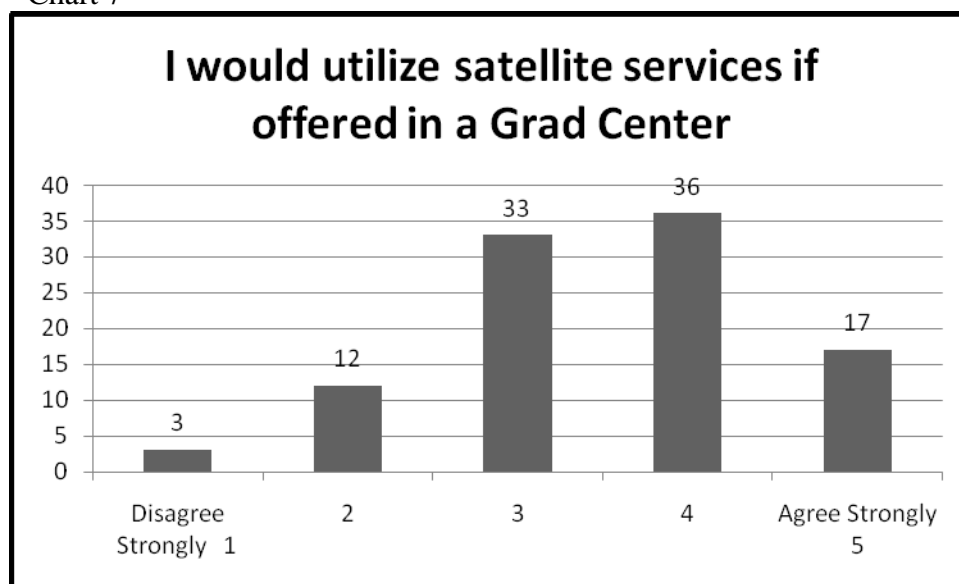
Chart 6



SATELLITE SERVICES

Currently services for students are offered within the actual service centers themselves. Given the nature of the UCI campus, these can often be difficult to locate, more heavily used by undergrads and have limited access for graduate students who may seldom leave their labs. The Graduate Resource Center would offer satellite services specifically designed for graduate students and act as the contact point for service units. We sought to determine if this would be a useful tool for graduate students. Over half the sample indicated they would utilize satellite services if offered in the Center and only 15% reported they would not.

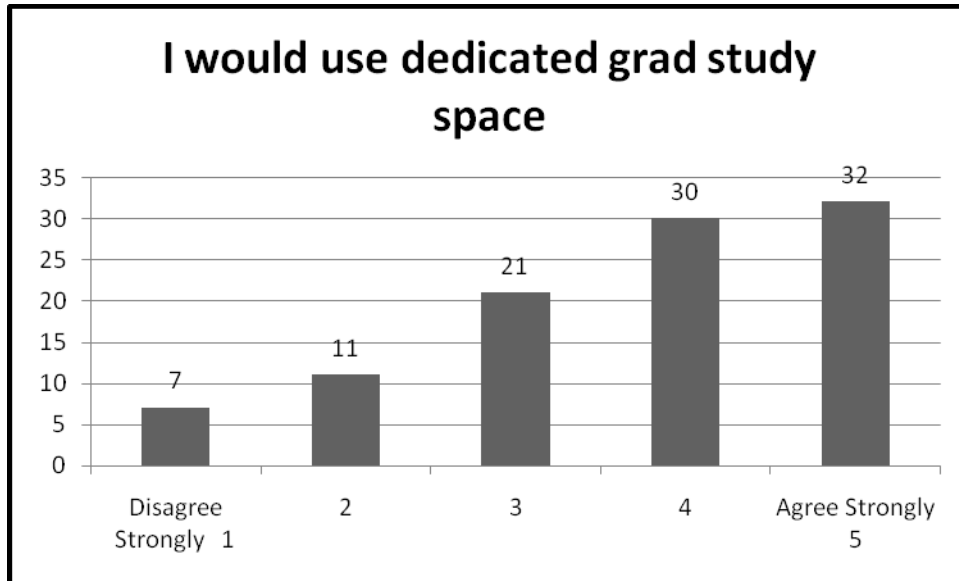
Chart 7



DEDICATED STUDY SPACE

While many programs offer graduate students office space within the academic unit, many do not. Over half the students in this sample stated they would utilize a dedicated graduate study space. Humanities and Business students have significantly higher means than the other academic units but all units indicated a desire for dedicated graduate study space.

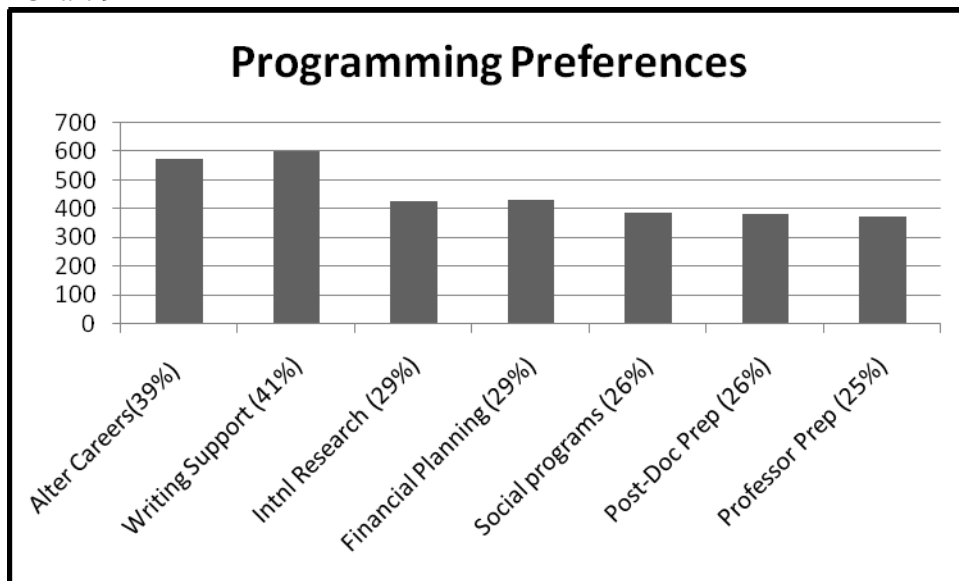
Chart 8



TYPES OF PROGRAMMING PREFERRED

We also asked graduate students what types of programming they would like to see offered at the Graduate Resource Center. There were 12 options given and respondents were asked to select their top 3 choices. Seven areas had a greater than 1 in 4 student preference:

Chart 9



GRADUATE RESOURCE CENTER CONCLUSION

Graduate students reported that the two main aims of a Graduate Resource Center, professional development programming and opportunities to socialize outside their academic units, were important. The survey results indicate that graduate students would utilize a centralized location to connect to the campus community and services if offered. A large portion of graduate students already frequent central campus and a Graduate Resource Center located in the Student Center would indeed attract graduate students. Graduate students also indicated that they would prefer programming and services tailored to graduate student needs rather than general undergraduate programming and would utilize a Graduate Resource Center for satellite services if offered. Finally, the campus Pub cannot act as the heart of graduate student social life as less than 20% of the graduate student population frequents the Pub.

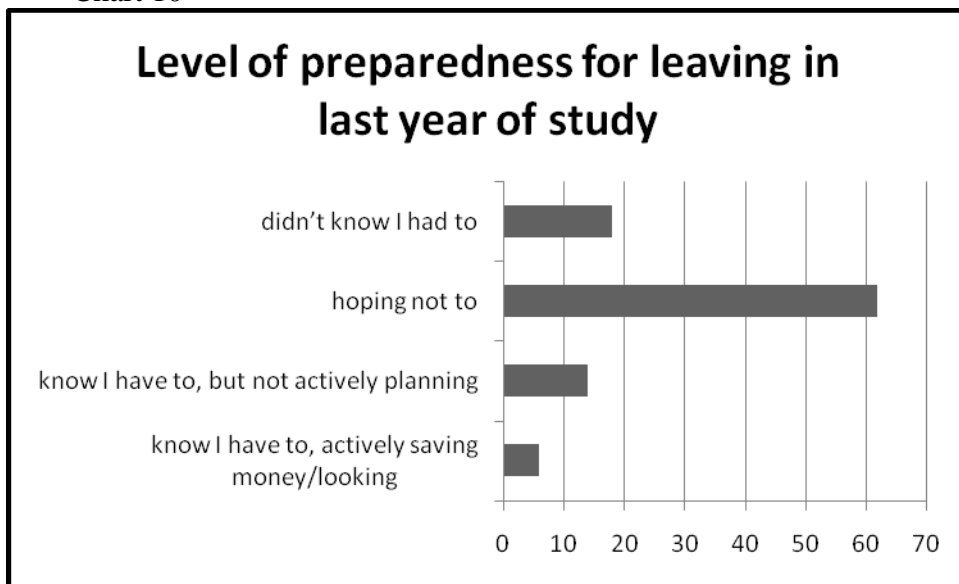
HOUSING

Housing is a major factor in the graduate student experience. Students have been advocating for a change in the current policy since its inception in February, 2006. Given UCI's limited Graduate Housing resource, it was important to get a current snapshot of students' understanding of housing policy. This past year Housing Administration also voiced some concerns with the continued implementation and structure of the Guarantee Placement policy and talks are underway to change the existing policy to a more student-friendly one that is easier to administer and manage. This survey was not intended to duplicate the annual Housing Services satisfaction survey administered by Housing Administration, but rather we sought to get an indication of students' understanding and satisfaction with the Graduate Guarantee specifically and to determine how important a factor it is in students' decisions to attend UCI.

We asked three specific housing questions in this survey:

- (1) **The Graduate Guarantee provides an on-campus housing spot until 1 year LESS that your normative time to degree (NTTD-1) for all grads who entered UCI since 2006. We would like to know your level of preparedness for leaving housing in your last year of study.**

Chart 10



* All students reporting entrance prior to 2006 OR living off campus have been removed

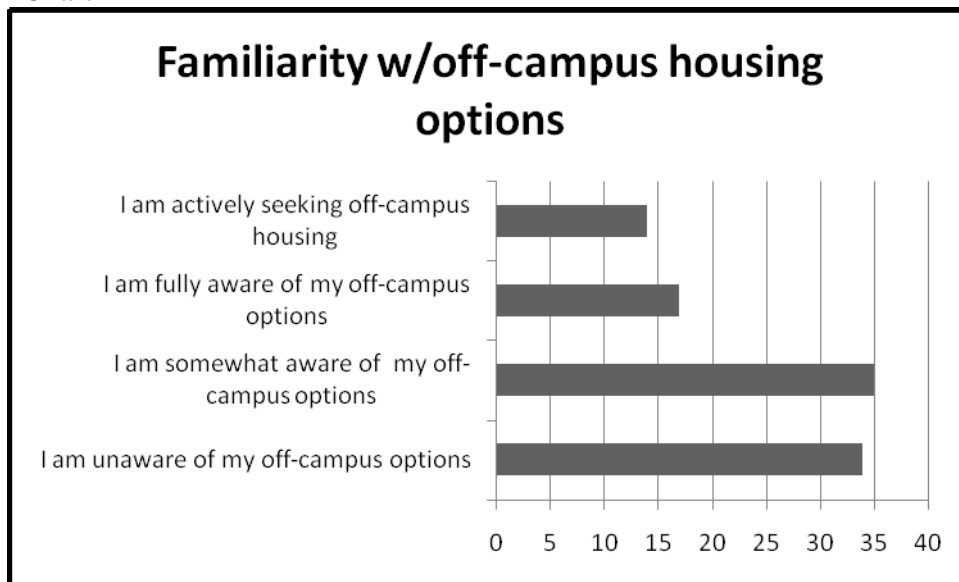
Almost 2/3 of the sample that entered under the Graduate Guarantee is not prepared to move in their last year of study in spite of the terms of their lease and the Graduate Guarantee. Nearly 1 in 5 students are not even aware they have a length of stay requirement.

There is a difference in the level of preparedness across academic units but all report a general unpreparedness to vacate housing at the NTTD-1 time limit. Each student is provided with a lease that explains the length-of-stay limits when the housing offer is made but it is possible that faculty recruiters are not adequately or consistently explaining the terms of the Guarantee when using it as a recruiting tool and students are not fully reading their lease agreements. However, as 62% are aware they have to move but are hoping not to, it is probable that most understand the NTTD-1 but accepted housing hoping for a change in terms more to their liking once housing was secured.

(2) Are you familiar with off-campus housing options?

Only about 1/3 of the sample was aware of what their options are for moving off-campus. This suggests that both incoming graduate students and current on-campus students would benefit from the implementation of an off-campus housing education and outreach program.

Chart 11

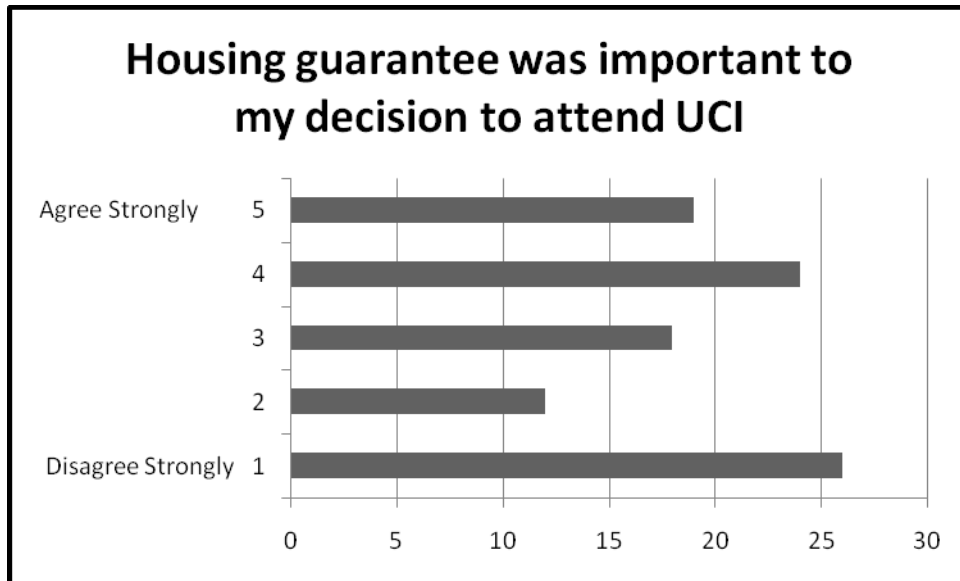


(3) The housing placement guarantee was important to my decision to attend UCI.

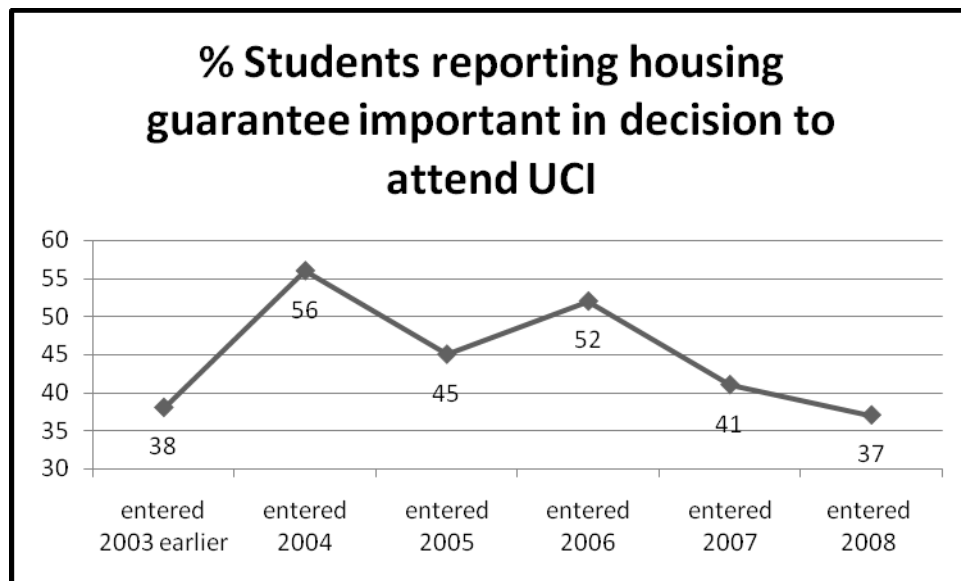
The current guarantee program implemented with the 2006 cohort was in part designed to assist in recruiting new graduate students. We asked students to rate how important this was in their actual decision to attend UCI. The sample was about evenly split on the level of importance the guarantee played in their decision. Overall 43% reported it was important or very important and 38% reported it was not important. When the responses are divided by year of entry it becomes clear that the Housing Guarantee has not played a significant factor in recruiting. In 2004 the waitlist was at its peak period of 18-24 months and 2006 was the first cohort to be offered the guarantee.

A percentage of students every year place a great importance on obtaining a housing guarantee to attend UCI but they are a large *minority* and the at least half of each incoming cohort does not need a housing guarantee to choose UCI for their graduate career.

Chart 12

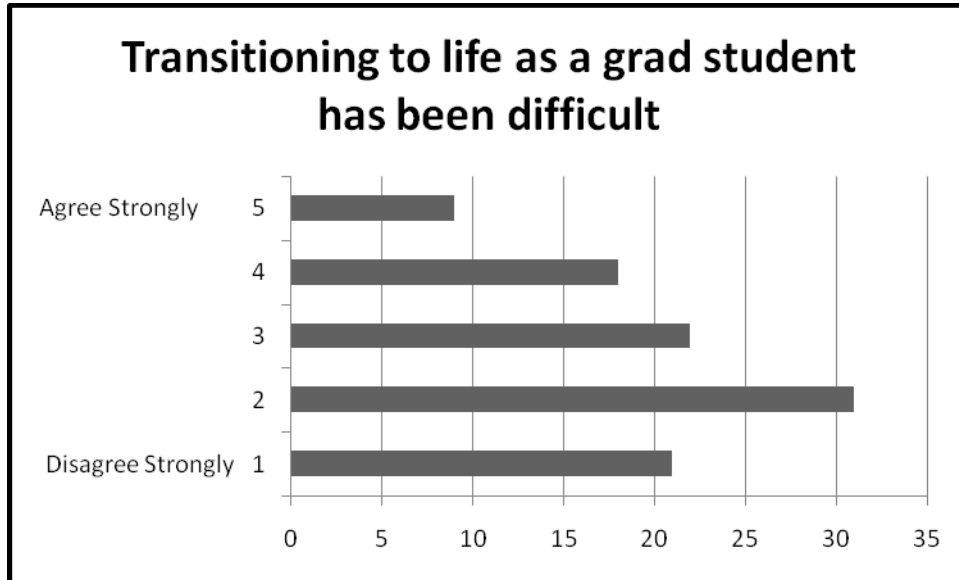


Graph 2



One final question was asked that impacts housing decisions. It has been suggested that graduate students need a “soft-landing” upon arrival at UCI. The current 100% housing placement guarantee that was implemented for undergraduates was also considered necessary for graduate students w/in this “soft-landing” paradigm. We asked graduate students how difficult they found their transition to graduate life experience. Over half the sample reported that it was not difficult to transition and less than 1/3 reported experiencing difficulty in the transition. There were no statistically significant differences in responses based upon cohort. Providing housing for all incoming graduate students did not change the transition experience.

Chart 13



HOUSING CONCLUSION

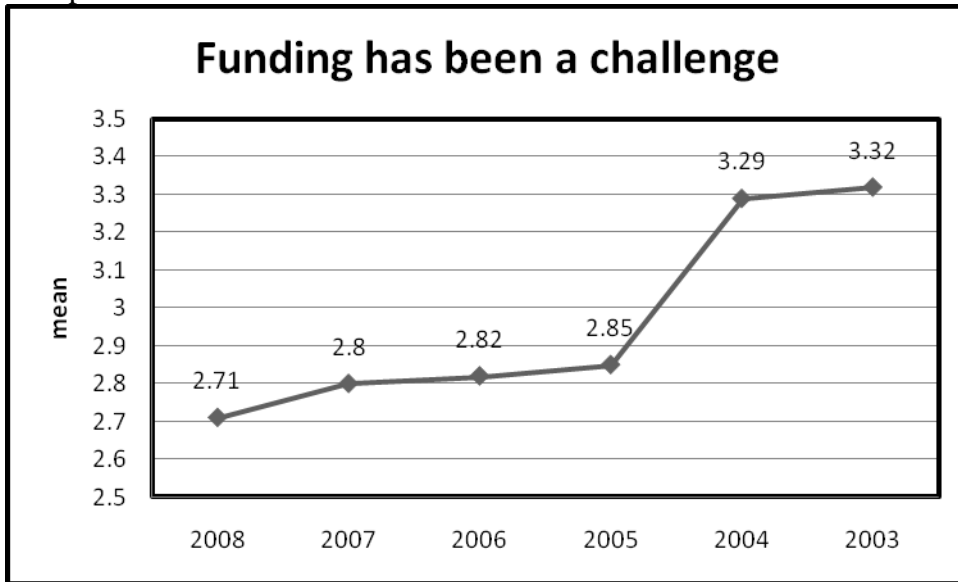
The current Housing Guarantee policy has not improved recruitment, aided in the transition, nor been widely embraced by graduate students. The survey results validate current efforts to revise the guarantee policy.

FINANCING GRADUATE EDUCATION

Funding graduate education has been a topic of focus for graduate division this year. The California State budget crisis and the deep cuts to higher education have negatively impacted UCI's ability to finance many student programs. The UC goal of enhancing graduate education and increasing recruitment cannot be met without the commitment of additional financial revenues targeting graduate education specifically. In Fall 2008 Graduate Division formed an ad hoc committee to investigate the current state of graduate education funding at UCI and several recommendations have been made. Because funding is a large part of graduate students' ability to finish a program of study, it was important to ask graduate students about their funding experience here at UCI. Having to take outside employment can delay a student's ability to successfully complete their program and obtain their degree. Because of the large disparity between academic units funding sources and amounts, we sought to obtain a comprehensive snapshot of the current graduate student funding experience.

In general, research graduate students entering their 5th year or more of study reported they have found funding to be more challenging than newer students. 35% of returning students reported they *agreed* and 1 in 5 reported they *strongly agreed* that financing their graduate education has been challenging.

Graph 3



Professional and Master's students exempted. Responses: 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree

There are significant differences across academic units with Biological Sciences and Physical Sciences students reporting significantly less challenges to funding and Education and Humanities students reporting significantly more challenges. Overall, STEM students report less funding challenges than non-STEM students

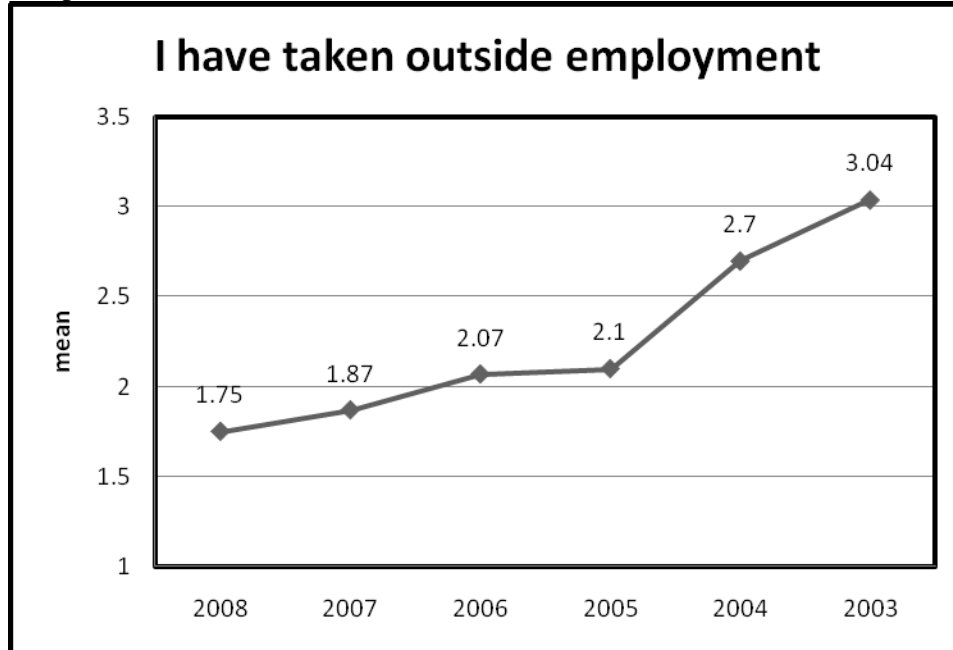
Table 4 Funding by school

Academic Unit	Mean
Arts	3.33
BioSci	2.29
Education	3.47
Engineering	3.25
HealthSci	2.89
Humanities	3.44
ICS	2.83
Medicine	2.99
PhysSci	2.40
SocialEco	2.99
SocSci	3.17

Many programs employ graduate students on-campus either through GSR or TA positions. However, recent recruiting efforts coupled with a reduction in undergraduate enrollment numbers may leave more advanced students without available campus employment. Additionally, the stipend amounts offered may not be sufficient to cover a graduate student's expenses. Many students have complained they have been forced to take outside employment.

We asked students if they had taken outside employment to help fund their expenses. Overall, 21% of research graduate students reported taking outside employment. Again, significant differences exist across cohorts and academic units similar to those found in the funding challenge responses.

Graph 4



Professional and Master's students exempted. Responses: 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree

Table 5 Outside employ by school

Academic Unit	Mean
Arts	2.78
BioSci	1.38
Education	2.67
Engineering	2.11
HealthSci	2.11
Humanities	3.15
ICS	2.04
Medicine	1.66
PhysSci	1.71
SocialEco	2.63
SocSci	2.48

Academic Unit	Mean
Arts	2.78
BioSci	1.38
Education	2.67
Engineering	2.11
HealthSci	2.11
Humanities	3.15
ICS	2.04
Medicine	1.66
PhysSci	1.71
SocialEco	2.63
SocSci	2.48

Professional and Master's students exempted. Responses: 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree

FINANCING CONCLUSION

When discussing funding challenges or making funding decisions, it is important for administrators to recognize that significant differences exist between the experience of STEM school students and non-STEM school students on our campus and a “one-size-fits-all” funding scheme is inadequate to properly address the issues surrounding funding.

FACTORS IN RECRUITING

UCOP conducted a final wave graduate student survey in Fall 2007. Many factors influencing graduate students’ decisions to attend a UC school versus the competition were explored. We wanted to know how those factors weighed in graduate students’ decisions to attend UCI specifically. Generally, the prestige of the University, the specific program and UCI’s geographic location played important roles. There were significant differences across academic units for every factor.

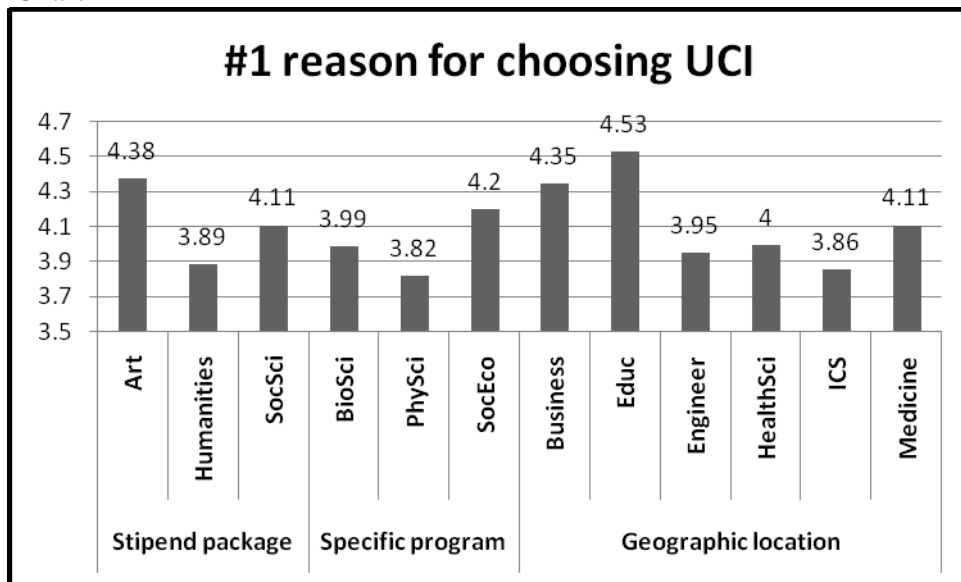
Table 6 Factors of choice- Research Students

	Mean
The prestige of the University of California and UCI	3.56
To work with a specific professor/mentor	3.61
UCI has the specific program I am interested in	3.94
The stipend package offered	3.55
The Housing Placement Guarantee	3.11
Geographic location	3.71
UCI support services	2.34
This was my only offer	2.01

Professional students exempted. Responses: 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree

There were three primary reasons that students reported as most important for choosing UCI: Stipend package, Specific program, and Geographic location.

Chart 14



RECRUITING FACTORS CONCLUSION

It is important to recognize the significant differences in factor importance across academic units when making recruiting recommendations.