

The Impact of COVID-19 on Graduate Education

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The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) fielded the Survey on the Impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic on Graduate Education to its member institutions. The survey was electronically disseminated to 456 CGS Regular Member institutions based in the United States and Canada between May 4 and 11, 2020. The total of 201 responses, or the response rate of 44%, was recorded. Public institutions, as well as Doctoral Universities-Very High Research Activity (R1) institutions, were overrepresented among the respondents. The link below summarizes the aggregated, unweighted findings from the survey. The full frequency tables, including the questionnaire items and descriptive characteristics of responding institutions, can be found [in the appendix](#).

Immediate Plans & Decisions Made to Date:

- Roughly three out of four graduate deans (76%) noted that their institutions had formed a campus task force or committee of stakeholders addressing the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on graduate education.
- Of the respondents, 64% of graduate deans reported that their institution had adopted holistic approaches to graduate admissions before the pandemic or have since instructed individual graduate programs to adopt holistic approaches in future graduate admissions decisions. A little over one out of five (22%) reported that their institutions have not decided on how the pass/fail or similar grade schemes for Spring 2020 will be factored into the graduate admissions processes, however.
- The majority of graduate deans reported that they do not anticipate changes to the current policies (18%) or are granting extensions on a case-by-case basis (47%). Fewer respondents (14%) indicated that their institutions have either granted an automatic extension or are granting extensions on a case-by-case basis.
- The pandemic has also affected some of the key summer activities for graduate schools. Of the graduate deans who responded and were aware of such decisions, 87% reported that dissertation camps or other place-based writing retreats for graduate students this summer had been modified to an alternative format. 21% noted that summer bridge and other place-based outreach programs for URM and master's students had been modified. Also, nearly two-thirds (66%) reported that they had modified the delivery mode of fall orientation.

Figure 1. Graduate Deans Confidence in Their Institutions' Ability to Do Select Actions During Academic Year 2020/21.



Data Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Survey on the Impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic on Graduate Education, May 2020.

Immediate Plans Continued:

- Many graduate deans (87%) reported that their institutions have or anticipate budget shortfalls due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the vast majority of them also noted that their institutions are committed to honoring all accepted financial support offers made to incoming graduate students (67%) and all financial support for commitments made to current/returning students (74%). Although relatively few, there are some institutions that have rescinded or given individual programs discretion to rescind graduate student financial support to meet the budgetary shortfalls for both incoming (5%) and current/returning students (7%).
- At the time of the survey, a number of graduate deans reported that either their institutions had not distributed any direct student aid through the CARES Act or do not know if aid was made available to graduate students.

Outlook for AY 2020/21 and Priorities

- Graduate deans responding to the survey reported a range of anticipated enrollment numbers for Fall 2020. Still, they expect a modest decline in overall enrollment, as well as in the enrollment of domestic, underrepresented minorities. Graduate deans reported a more pessimistic outlook for Fall 2020 international graduate enrollment.
- Looking toward Academic Year 2020/2021, graduate deans responding to the survey are optimistic about their institution's ability to provide training, support, or resources for stakeholders of graduate education to help them navigate the crisis. For example, graduate deans are somewhat/moderately confident about providing adequate training for graduate teaching assistants teaching online (Average=3.51 out of 5), graduate faculty to teach and mentor graduate students virtually (Average=3.47/5), and supporting administrators and departmental staff members to help graduate students (Average=3.37/5).

Table 1. Top Three Resources/Needs that Graduate Deans Will Seek to Protect in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic & Its Fiscal Impact to Their Institutions

Area	#1 Priority	#2 Priority	#3 Priority	Total
Grant aid, assistantship, fellowship, and other financial support for graduate students.	75	28	21	124
Supporting graduate students meeting basic needs during this crisis.	37	35	19	91
Offering graduate students support for coping with psychological challenges associated with this crisis.	10	21	41	72
Maintaining the staff FTE of my unit.	14	25	18	57
Engaging in domestic outreach and recruitment activities for graduate students to ensure the diversity of the incoming cohort.	14	19	20	53
Supporting graduate faculty to teach and mentor graduate students virtually.	17	15	14	46
Funds for direct student financial support for graduate student travels (e.g., conferences, field works, and professional development, etc.) and other professional development activities.	5	12	15	32
Engaging in the international outreach and recruitment activities for graduate students to meet the enrollment target.	8	8	9	25
Providing preparation and support for graduate assistants to transition to online teaching.	5	10	9	24
Programming for graduate career development activities.	0	7	14	21
Maintaining the student employment opportunities (both undergraduate and graduate) in my unit.	3	8	7	18
Other areas (Please specify).	2	1	1	4

Data Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Survey on the Impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic on Graduate Education, May 2020.

CGS also offers various platforms for member institutions to learn from each other as we navigate this uncharted territory together, and we encourage you to bookmark our [COVID-19 resource page](#) as a one-stop shop. The page features various U.S. government guidance, as well as resource pages put together by some CGS member institutions. You can also directly engage other CGS members via the [Dean's Discussion Board](#), where you can ask questions to your peers and also to weigh in on questions from others.

Outlook Continued:

- However, graduate deans surveyed were less confident about their institution's ability to allocate adequate resources for international outreach or recruitment activities (Average=2.29/5) or maintain the level of available financial support for graduate student travel and other professional development activities (Average=2.45/5). They were also less confident that their institutions could ensure graduate students would have access to experiential learning opportunities, such as internships and clinical training (Average=2.70/5).
- Finally, graduate deans in the survey identified protecting funds for grant aid, assistantships, fellowships, and other financial support for graduate students as the top priority in the wake of the pandemic and its impact on the institution's budget. This was followed by protecting resources for supporting graduate student basic needs during this crisis and offering graduate students support for coping with psychological challenges associated with this pandemic.
- Although graduate deans were not as confident in their institution's ability to do so, few of them identified engaging international outreach and recruitment activities or maintaining funds for graduate student travel and other professional development activities as a high priority area for protecting resources.

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