

Results from the 2018 Graduate Student Association Survey

Graduate Student Association

Introduction

In July of 2018, the Graduate Student Association (GSA) created and sent a survey to explore the climate amongst current graduate students at Baylor University. This report details the findings of the survey as well as their significance in light of a similar survey sent in 2016, a survey of science students, and national research on the topic. This report concludes with a handful of considerations for the future of graduate education at Baylor.

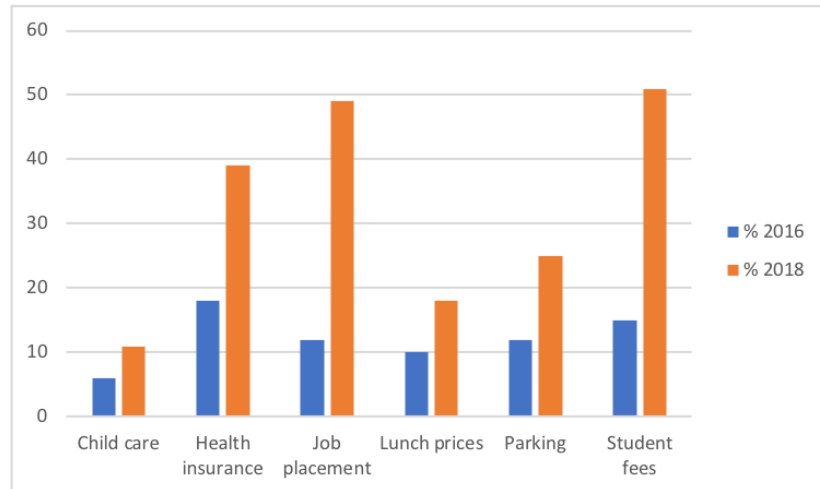
Executive Summary

Important Issues

- Students reported the following as “extremely important” or “very important” issues (ranked in order of magnitude)
 1. Student fees
 2. Post graduate job placement
 3. Health insurance
 4. Mental health resources
 5. Campus safety
- Free-response questions about issues facing graduate students yielded similar results. We received qualitative responses in the following categories and quantities:

Topic	Number of Responses
Fees	47
Health	45
Parking	36
Job Placement	16
Stipend Amounts	13
Campus Meal Prices	8
Housing	6

- The issues of least concern (determined through the response “not at all important”) were spousal employment and parental support (30%).
- Compared to 2016, all issues increased in importance for students.



Campus Resources

- Determined through whichever category had the highest percentage of students within it
- Resources that students know about and use include
 1. Healthcare
 2. Graduate Research Center (GRC)
 3. Travel/research funding
- Resources that students know about and *do not* use include

1. The marina	4. The Women in the Academy
2. Student tickets to athletics	Conference
3. The Graduate Writing Center (GWC)	5. Career services
- The following resources were unknown to graduate students: the community garden, the food pantry, the media lab, and all mental and teaching resources mentioned.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community garden 2. “The Store” (food pantry) 3. Media lab 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Mental health resources 5. Teaching resources
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A Few Considerations

The following is a selection of suggestions for important groups on campus to consider (a full list can be found on pages 10-11):

GSA

- Promote GSA and campus resources that students do not know about
- Contact resources that are not used to inform them of these results
- Research how other universities decrease financial burden

Campus Resources

- Well known resources: how do you promote your resources to students?
- Known but unused resources: investigate why grad students do not use your resources
- Unknown resources: reconsider communication/promotion

Administration

- Remain committed and open to innovation which could decrease the financial burden on graduate students
- Increase transparency regarding financial aid, fees, and health insurance
- Continue to bolster efforts which foster campus safety and security
- Consider redirecting funds towards resources which address the felt needs of graduate students

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Method

Measures

Questionnaires were developed by the GSA cabinet for the 2016 (Appendix A) and 2018 (Appendix B). Major issues were included based on cabinet experience and feedback from current graduate students. As some of the issues from the 2016 survey were no longer relevant, such as having a graduate student regent, some issues were changed to current needs. Respondents rated each issue on a scale from “extremely important” to “not at all important.” Open-ended questions were provided for students to elaborate on responses that were most important and submit other areas of need. For the 2018 survey, questions were also added to determine resource knowledge and utilization. All cabinet members submitted resources for graduate students and these were placed into categories of physical, professional, teaching, mental/spiritual, and financial categories to make it easier for respondents. The end of the survey included demographic questions. The survey was reviewed by the GSA faculty advisor and dean of the graduate school and the final version was completed in July 2018.

Participants

All graduate students were sent an email to the link and the link was also posted on social media two days before the survey closed. Students who agreed to participate included 142 individuals in 2018 and 106 individuals in 2016. Respondents from both surveys came from departments across the Baylor campus, with both humanities (i.e., English, history) and sciences (i.e., engineering and chemistry) represented. Approximately 75% of respondents were doctoral students and 25% were masters students. Half were in their first or second year of their program and the other half had been at Baylor for 3 or more years. In 2016, 8% of respondents were international students and this increased to 15% in 2018.

Analysis

To determine the most pressing concerns for graduate students, the open-ended questions were imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. Descriptive information, such as percentages of students who responded in various categories, were computed using Qualtrics.

Results

The results of the analyses will be discussed in two categories: issues graduate students find important and campus resource utilization.

Issues

From the list of possible issues, the majority of students reported that student fees, post graduate job placement, health insurance, mental health, parking, and campus safety were

extremely or very important issues to address. These are consistent with the open-ended responses. Fees, health, parking, and job placement were frequently mentioned.

Students compared the cost of fees to their stipend, wanted transparency regarding the services used, and did not feel they used the services the fees went toward. For health concerns, students mentioned both mental health needs and health insurance. In terms of mental health, students requested knowledge about and access to resources, stating that the issue of mental health concerns should be promoted to graduate students given their unique needs. Health insurance issues revolved around cost, simplification of the process, and gaps in coverage. Some positive aspects of parking were mentioned, such as the reduced price and better parking spots for teachers of record. However, other students suggested all graduate students should have increased access and reduced cost, possibly in prorated or semester-based pricing. Others mentioned they had to park far from their building, which could be dangerous when leaving their building at night. For job placement, students wanted to know what their options were and requested help in acquiring a job given the increase in a competitive market.

Compared to the previous survey, all issues increased, both in terms of the scale responses (Figure 1) and open-ended items (Figure 2).

Figure 1- Percentage of students rating the topics of most concern

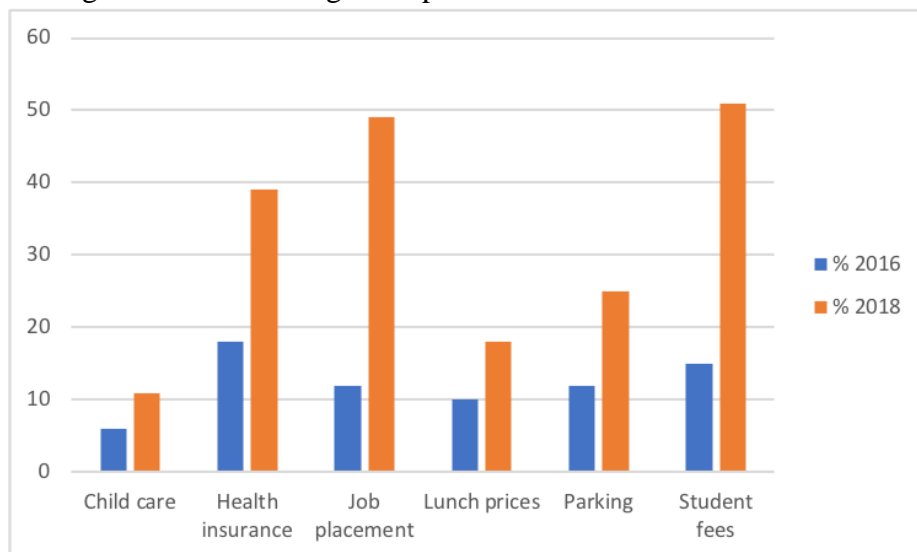
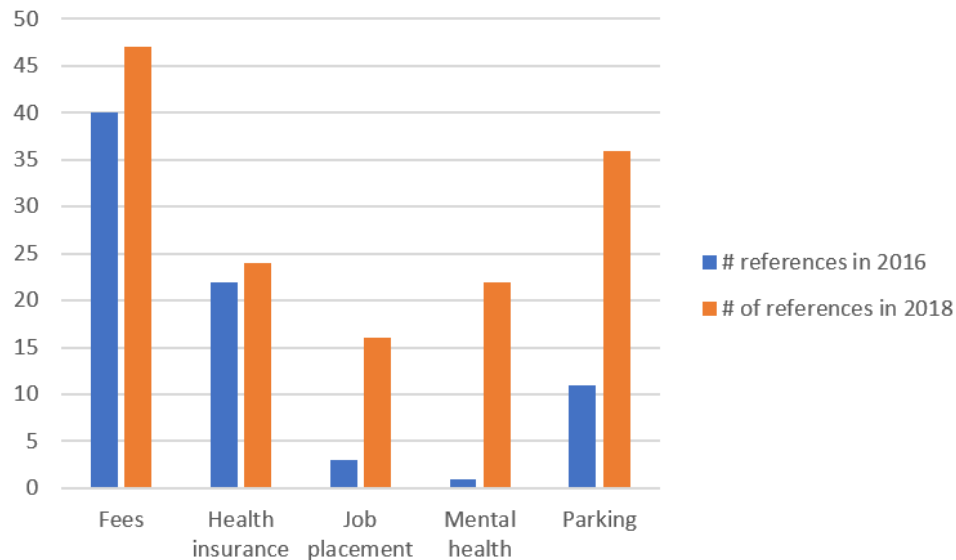


Figure 2- Number of Responses That Mentioned Pressing Topics



Graduate students also mentioned other areas for growth. Students requested more social activities, such as intramurals, mentoring, civic engagement, and interdisciplinary community building. Students also wanted to not be treated like undergraduate students but more like faculty members with resources such as teacher of record/graduate-specific ID cards, childcare options, grant assistance, and respect. Communication was another component; students wanted clearer communication between administrative offices to reduce confusion and allow students to know what funding sources were available. It seems like there are issues related to scheduling classes and not having adequate coverage of benefits (parking, insurance) that cause students stress.

These issues are consistent not only with the previous GSA survey, but a survey of science (i.e., geology, computer science, psychology) students regarding financial concerns. Of the 48 students who participated in the survey, 46 of them (98%) responded that finances were a significant source of anxiety or stress at least some of the time. This makes sense considering only 43% of the students received a fellowship and 57% have to borrow money to supplement their graduate student earnings. In response to these financial concerns, approximately 40% of students either want or need to pick up extra jobs to make ends meet. The majority of respondents also responded that the neglect physical or mental health because they can not afford to address them. Finally, students stated that finances impacted the ability to return home to visit (98%), socialize (85%), or attend conferences (62%). Overall, these results suggest that students' financial predicaments negatively impact their quality of life and increase stress for science students on campus.

Considering the research on graduate student well-being, these results show cause for concern. Recent studies have suggested that approximately half of doctoral students face mental health concerns (Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden, & Gisle, 2017) and are six times more likely to have depression or anxiety compared to adults in the general community (Evans, Bira, Gastelum, Weiss, & Vanderford, 2018). In the Graduate Student Happiness & Well-Being Report (Graduate Assembly, 2014), researchers found that the top predictors of students' satisfaction with life included living conditions, career prospects, and financial

confidence, all issues revealed from Baylor graduate student responses. Having few career prospects, inadequate living conditions, or low financial confidence were all top predictors of depression for graduate students. Since graduate students make significant contributions to research, their mental health concerns remain important for the scientific community (Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden, & Gisle, 2017).

Resources

While not all-encompassing, the list of resources that students know about and use, know about and do not use, and do not know about does highlight areas for growth. Results indicate there are many more resources that students do not know about than those that they do. These results can be found in Table 1.

Know About and Use	Know About and Don't Use	Do Not Know About
Health care	Marina	Community garden
Health clinic	Sporting tickets	SLC massages
Graduate Research Center	Graduate Writing Center	The Store (food pantry)
Travel/research funding	Career Services	Media lab
	Women in the Academy Conference	Digital Research & Innovative Visual Exploration Fellowship
		Women in the Academy mentoring group
		Graduate/Undergraduate Mentoring Program
		Life on the Grad Line (seminars)
		Seminars for Excellence in Teaching
		Designing for Online Teaching Success
		Teacher of Record Training
		Preparing Our Future Faculty
		Teaching Capstone in Higher Education

		Counseling specific to graduate students
		Conyers Scholars
		Ramm Scholars
		SIC'EM Grants
		GSA Grants

Considerations for Graduate Education at Baylor

Survey results indicated that there are many issues that graduate students are facing and many resources that are not utilized. The following sections provided proposed solutions for important groups on campus: GSA, the included resources, and administration.

GSA

- Promote GSA resources that students do not know about (grants, mentoring program)
- Contact resources that are not used to inform them of these results
- Promote resources at monthly assembly meetings
- Promote resources through social media
- Create more opportunities for social engagement, specifically:
 - Summer social event
 - Community service event
 - Faculty engagement at 3 Minute Thesis
 - All students welcome to monthly assemblies
 - Intramurals
- Research how other universities decrease financial burden

Campus Resources

- Research:
 - Why do students use this resource?
 - Why do students not use this resource?
 - What changes need to be made to increase usage?
- Utilize additional means (i.e., social media) for resource promotion

Administration

- Decrease financial burden through:
 - Reduction in student fees

- Increase in stipend
- Health insurance subsidies
- Parking subsidies
- Faculty lunch prices
- Childcare options
- Housing options
- Spousal employment assistance
- Increase transparency regarding:
 - Financial aid
 - Fees
 - Health insurance
- Increase campus safety
- Research:
 - Why do students use this resource?
 - Why do students not use this resource?
 - What changes need to be made to increase usage?
- Depending on the research, promote resources at multiple levels (faculty, email, social media, etc.), especially regarding job placement and mental health

References

- Evans, T. M., Bira, L., Gastelum, J. B., Weiss, L. T., & Vanderford, N. L. (2018). Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. *Nature Biotechnology*, *36*, 282-284. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nbt.4089>
- Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A., Van der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017). Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students. *Research Policy*, *46*(4), 868–879. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.02.008>
- UC Berkeley Graduate Assembly. (2014). Graduate student happiness & well-being report. Berkeley, CA.

Appendices

Appendix A- 2016 Survey

One role of Baylor's Graduate Student Association (GSA) is to listen to the concerns of graduate students. Please take this 5-minute survey so we can understand which issues you believe are most pertinent to achieving an excellent graduate student experience. How important to you are the following as issues GSA should address?

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not important
Unionization of graduate students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Responding to the recent executive orders limiting travel from specific countries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Child care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Title IX training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health insurance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reduced lunch prices for dining halls on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parking costs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Student fees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post graduate job placement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Access to legal counsel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Securing a graduate student position on the Board of Regents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please clarify or qualify any of your answers above, if applicable:

Are there any other important issues or topics that you think GSA should address?

School:

- College of Arts & Sciences
- School of Music
- School of Engineering and Computer Science
- School of Education
- Robins College of Health and Human Sciences
- Hankamer School of Business
- Other
- Unsure

Department:

Program Type:

- Doctorate
- Masters
- Other

Year in your program:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

-6+

Are you an international student?

-Yes

-No

If you would like to participate in addressing these concerns, please leave your contact information below. Would you like to be involved with GSA's efforts to address any of these concerns?

-Yes, specifically:

-Not right now, but keep me informed on:

-Not right now

First Name: (optional)

Last Name: (optional)

Email: (optional)

Appendix B- 2018 Survey

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) supports a holistic graduate student experience through engaging in compelling scholarship and research, facilitating enriching careers, nourishing personal well-being, and cultivating a culture of belonging and collegiality. Please respond to the following questions so that GSA may accurately represent graduate students.

How important is it to you that each of the following topics are addressed in the 2018-2019 school year?

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
Campus safety	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student fees	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Title IX training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health insurance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Campus meal prices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parental support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post graduate job placement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Spousal employment support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental health resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please elaborate on any topics you rated as extremely or very important.

What are other graduate student issues you believe should be addressed?

For the **physical and recreational** resources listed below, please indicate whether you know about the resource, do not know about the resource, or know about but do not utilize the resource.

	Know about and use	Know about but don't use	Do not know about it
Marina	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student health care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health clinic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community garden	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
SLC massages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The Store (food pantry)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tickets to sporting events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For the **professional** resources listed below, please indicate whether you know about the resource, do not know about the resource, or know about but do not utilize the resource.

	Know about and use	Know about but don't use	Do not know about it
Graduate Writing Center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Graduate Research Center/Incubator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Lab	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Life on the Grad Line	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Digital Research & Innovative Visual Explorations (DRIVE) program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women in the Academy (WITA) Conference	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
WITA mentoring group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Graduate/Undergraduate Mentoring Program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Career Services

For the **teaching** resources listed below, please indicate whether you know about the resource, do not know about the resource, or know about but do not utilize the resource.

	Know about and use	Know about but don't use	Do not know about it
Seminars for Excellence in Teaching (SET)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Designing for Online Teaching Success (DOTS)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teacher of Record Training (TORT)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preparing Our Future Faculty (PROFF)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching Capstone in Higher Education (TeaCHE)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For the **mental/spiritual** resources listed below, please indicate whether you know about the resource, do not know about the resource, or know about but do not utilize the resource.

	Know about and use	Know about but don't use	Do not know about it
Counseling resources specific to graduate students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Conyers Scholars	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ramm Scholars	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For the **financial** resources listed below, please indicate whether you know about the resource, do not know about the resource, or know about but do not utilize the resource.

	Know about and use	Know about but don't use	Do not know about it
SIC'EM grants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
GSA grants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Travel/research funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Department:

Program type:

- Doctoral
- Masters
- Other _____

Year in your program:

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- 6
- 7+

Are you an international student?

- Yes
- No

If you would like to participate in addressing any of these concerns, please leave your name and email address below.
