

## Office of the President

### TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:

#### DISCUSSION ITEM

*For Meeting of July 12, 2017*

### GRADUATE STUDENT WELL-BEING SURVEY<sup>1</sup>

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building on UC Berkeley's existing survey, the UC Office of the President (UCOP) worked with campus Graduate Deans and Graduate Assembly leadership to develop the UC Graduate Student Well-Being survey. The purpose for developing this survey was to collect information on these students' overall life satisfaction and depression, along with key aspects of their graduate student experience including mentorship and advising, food security, financial confidence, and career prospects, that can influence their sense of well-being and mental health. In Winter/Spring 2016, UCOP administered the UC Graduate Student Well-Being survey to more than 13,400 graduate students at all ten UC campuses and received 5,356 completed responses, for a response rate of 40 percent.

Survey results showed that almost three-quarters of respondents felt generally satisfied with their circumstances. About one-third reported symptoms indicative of clinical depression. Over two-thirds were generally satisfied with mentorship and advising (68 percent) and food secure (71 percent, comparable to other UC surveys), while about half were upbeat about career prospects (53 percent), and financially confident (48 percent). Concerns expressed included symptoms indicative of clinical depression (35 percent), quality of mentorship and advising (23 percent), lack of financial confidence (43 percent), and career prospects (30 percent). Responses frequently varied by student level/degree type, discipline, race/ethnicity, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) status with greater concerns likely to be expressed by doctoral students who had advanced to candidacy, students in humanities programs, underrepresented minorities, and LGBTQ students. Differences by gender were not statistically significant for any of the topics discussed in this report.

Respondents were asked to select the top three priorities where they would like the University's attention and resources. Across all graduate student respondents, mental health was the most frequently selected topic, ranking number one for academic doctoral students (both those who had not advanced and advanced to candidacy) and number two for academic masters and graduate

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<sup>1</sup> The Graduate Student Well-Being item was originally scheduled to be presented to the Academic and Student Affairs Committee at the May 2017 meeting. At the Academic and Student Affairs Committee Chair's discretion, the presentation was postponed to the July 2017 meeting. This item is identical in content to the item that was prepared for the May meeting.

professional students. Among the other 12 items that could have been chosen as a high priority, across all types of graduate students, financial resources and management, career development, housing, and/or academic progress/quality/engagement were ranked highly.

Campuses are using data from the survey to better understand current issues, address concerns about student mental health, prioritize attention and resources, assess and enhance current programs and training on professional development and career preparation, develop new initiatives to improve graduate student well-being, and select topics for faculty workshops on mentoring.

## BACKGROUND

### *Purpose*

Student well-being and mental health have long been recognized as important aspects of students' experience in higher education and important contributors to successful completion of their degrees. UC, like many colleges and universities, has recently sought to increase its understanding of problems and address them. UC has implemented initiatives to improve student mental health and well-being, including hiring additional clinicians for campus counseling centers, expanding training and social media campaigns to reduce mental illness stigma, and creating a central website, email list, and conferences to allow clinicians across campuses to share best practices. Increased funding for hiring clinicians came from a 2015 increase in the student services fee, of which 50 percent was earmarked for this purpose.

Having comparable data across campuses on graduate students' well-being and mental health and on selected factors that may influence them could be helpful in identifying and addressing areas of greatest concern. UC Berkeley had administered prior surveys and found the results useful in prioritizing how to direct support for graduate students. The UC Student Association (UCSA) expressed an interest in UCOP's administering a similar survey systemwide, including questions about graduate student relationships with their advisors. Campus Graduate Deans agreed on the importance of collecting this information, so UCOP worked with the Graduate Deans and Graduate Assembly members to develop and conduct a systemwide survey.

### *Survey Administration and Response Rate*

UCOP started with the existing survey instrument used in UC Berkeley's 2014 Graduate Student Happiness and Well-Being Survey. To better capture the status of students' mental health, the new survey incorporated the current version of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale Revised (CESD-R) with 20 items, which is widely used in the field of psychiatric epidemiology. Advisor-related questions were also expanded to better understand student-advisor relationships that were highlighted in UCSA's May 2016 resolution on this topic.<sup>2</sup> This survey also added items about food insecurity.

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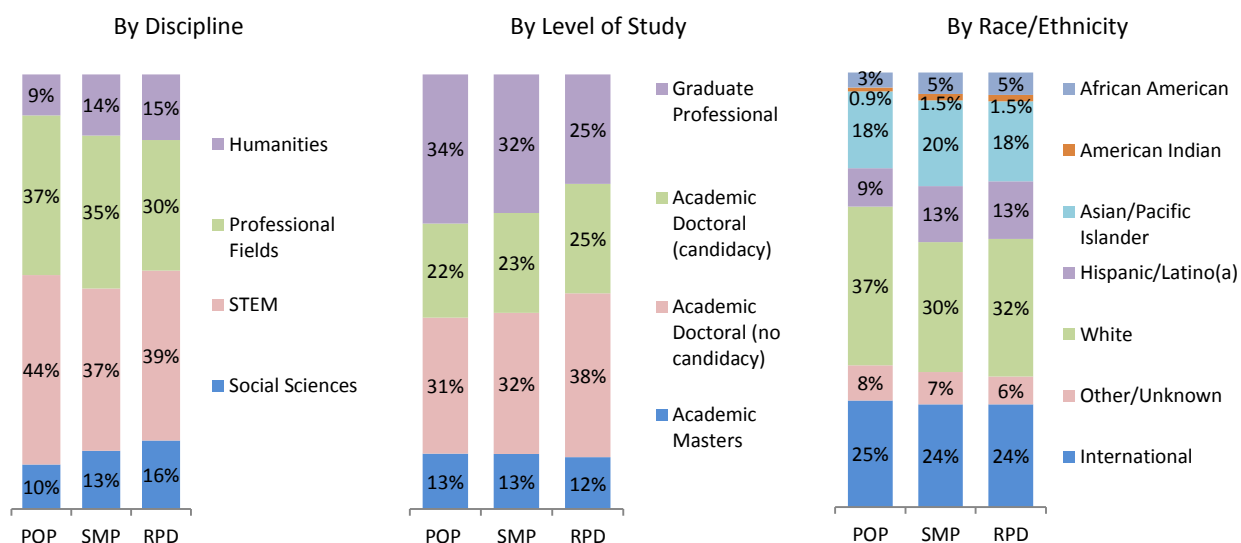
<sup>2</sup> University of California Student Association (UCSA). 2016. Accountability for Graduate Student Mistreatment by Faculty Advisors. <https://ucsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ResolutiononGraduateStudent-AdvisorAccountability.pdf>

In the Winter/Spring 2016 terms, the UC Graduate Student Well-Being survey was administered to a stratified random sample of more than 13,400 graduate students at all ten UC campuses, with oversampling of small subgroups by campus, ethnicity, and discipline. This oversampling increased the likelihood that there would be sufficient respondents by ethnicity and discipline for reliable analysis, particularly among underrepresented minority students (American Indian, African American, and Hispanic/Latino(a)).

UCOP received 5,356 completed responses, for a response rate of 40 percent. The representativeness of the population was analyzed by discipline (Humanities, Professional Fields, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and Social Sciences), level of study (academic master's students, academic doctoral students who had not advanced to candidacy, academic doctoral students who had advanced to candidacy, and graduate professional students), and race/ethnicity. Due to oversampling of certain small subgroups by campus, race/ethnicity, and discipline, underrepresented minority respondents, respondents in the humanities and social sciences, and academic doctoral respondents who had not advanced to candidacy were over-represented (Figure 1). White students, respondents in professional fields by student level and graduate professional respondents by discipline were under-represented. As the University's existing enrollment data do not include student LGBTQ status, it was not possible to determine whether LGBTQ respondents were representative of the LGBTQ graduate student population. Weights were constructed to adjust for differences between the population and respondents, but the weighted results were similar to those based on original responses, so the analyses used the unweighted results.

Figure 1

Comparison of UC graduate student population, survey sample, and respondents  
by discipline, level of study, and race/ethnicity



Key: POP=Population, SMP=Sample, RPD=Respondents.

## **SURVEY ANALYSIS, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Survey Analysis***

The major areas of analysis included graduate student responses regarding life satisfaction, depression, mentorship and advising, food security, financial confidence, and career prospects. Graduate Deans also requested inclusion of a question that would have respondents identify top priorities among the topics covered in the survey with regard to receiving greater attention and resources.

For each topic, UCOP staff looked at the data for UC graduate students overall and disaggregated by student characteristics: level of study, discipline, race/ethnicity, and LGBTQ status. For each of these four student characteristics, results were examined for statistically significant differences among categories, such as differences between academic master's and professional students.

### ***Survey Findings***

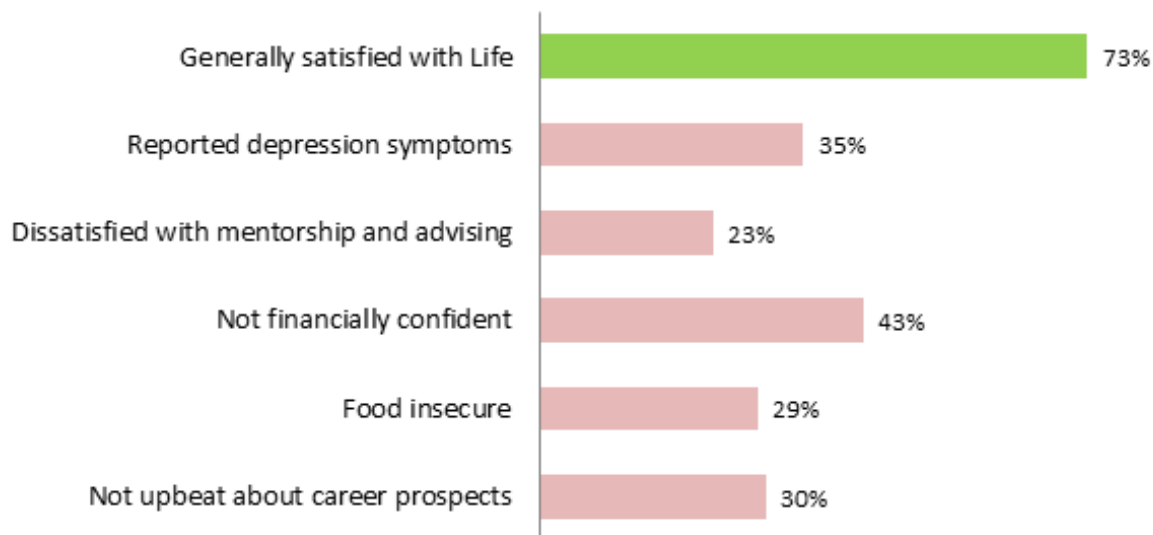
UCOP staff examined responses to questions to assess the overall sense of graduate student well-being associated with general satisfaction with life, depression, mentorship and advising, financial confidence, food security and career prospects.

Overall, nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated they were generally satisfied with life, but they also identified where challenges exist, as shown in Figure 2.

- Over one-third reported symptoms of clinical depression.
- Nearly one-quarter were dissatisfied with mentorship and advising.
- Over two-fifths were not financially confident.
- Over one-quarter experienced food insecurity.
- Almost one-third were not upbeat about career prospects.

Figure 2

Systemwide results on well-being measures



A more in-depth consideration of several of these areas highlights which graduate student populations had the greatest concerns within each area. (See Figures 3 through 6.)

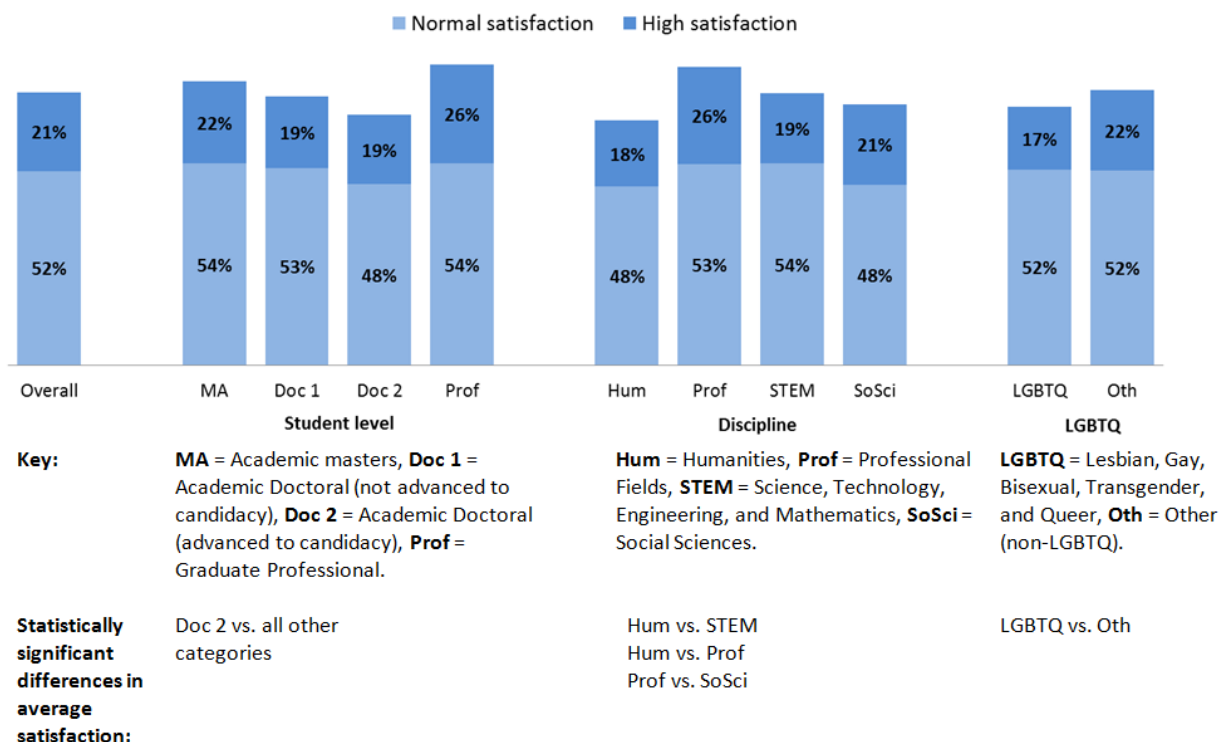
#### Satisfaction with Life

Systemwide responses indicated that 73 percent of respondents (n=3,873) were generally satisfied with life, including 21 percent (n=1,119) who were extremely satisfied. Those who reported lower rates of satisfaction (Figure 3) included the following:

- academic doctoral students who had advanced to candidacy (the last phase of doctoral work) (67 percent, n=884);
- graduate students in the humanities (65 percent, n=502), when compared with those in professional fields (79 percent, n=1,235) and STEM (73 percent, n=1,462), and
- LGBTQ students (68 percent, n=427).

Figure 3

Life satisfaction by student level, discipline, and LGBTQ status



### Clinical Depression

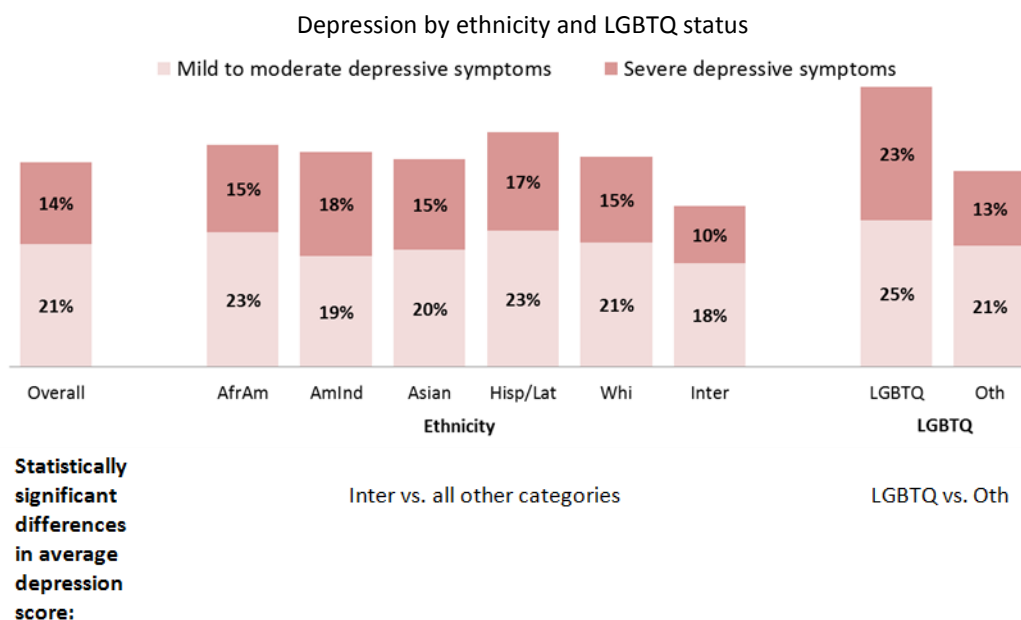
Students were also asked how often they had symptoms of depression in the past two weeks to measure the share of students who were experiencing symptoms suggestive of clinical depression.

- Overall, about one-third (35 percent, n=1,782) of survey respondents self-reported experiencing symptoms that met the clinical cutoff for a major depressive disorder (Figure 4). Within that group, 40 percent (n=715, or 14 percent of all respondents) self-reported symptoms suggestive of a severe depressive episode, which is close to the National College Health Assessment 2015 survey result that 12 percent of graduate students were diagnosed or treated for depression in the past year.<sup>3</sup>
- Figure 4 also shows significant differences in depression symptoms by ethnicity and LGBTQ status. International respondents were less likely to experience depression symptoms (28 percent, n=329) compared with other ethnic categories. LGBTQ respondents (48 percent,

<sup>3</sup> The calculation is based on the standard calculation of the overall CESD-style symptom score. The score is a sum of responses to the 20 questions. A score equal to or greater than 16 means a person has depression symptoms of clinical significance. A score equal to or greater than 28 means a person has more severe symptoms of depression.

n=289) were more likely to report such symptoms than were other respondents (34 percent, n=1,471).

Figure 4

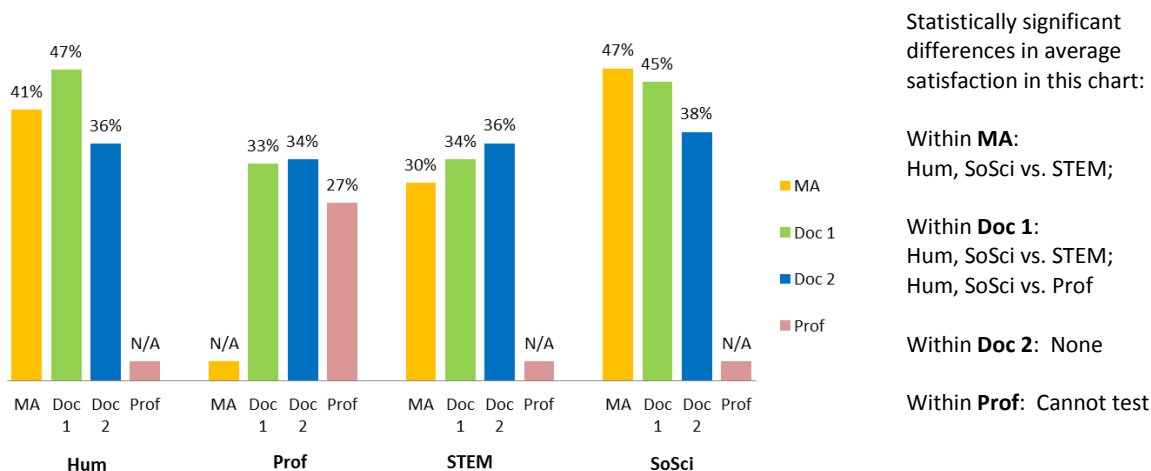


In addition, there were significant differences associated with different types of degrees and stages in the doctoral program and the student's discipline (Figure 5). Those reporting higher levels of depression symptoms included the following:

- academic doctoral respondents who had not advanced to candidacy in humanities (47 percent, n=182) and social sciences (45 percent, n=192), when compared with those in professional fields (33 percent, n=58) and STEM fields (34 percent, n=296);
- academic master's respondents in humanities (41 percent, n=47) and social sciences (47 percent, n=36), when compared with their peers in STEM (30 percent, n=110); and
- within humanities, academic doctoral respondents who had not advanced to candidacy (47 percent, n=182), when compared with academic doctoral respondents who had advanced to candidacy (36 percent, n=84).

Figure 5

Depression (mild to severe) by discipline and student level



**Note:** There is a statistically significant interaction between discipline and student level for depression. The category “multiple/other” for discipline and the category “Unknown” for level are omitted. Categories with a number of students smaller than 30 are marked as “N/A.” Statistically significant differences in average satisfaction in this chart:

Within **Hum**:  
Doc 1 vs. Doc 2

Within **Prof**:  
None

Within **STEM**:  
None

Within **SoSci**:  
None

Graduate students were also asked about their knowledge and usage of health and mental health services on and off campus. Around 90 percent of students knew where to get help with a medical need and around 80 percent knew where to get help with a counseling need. More than half of the students who indicated they had severe depressive symptoms received mental health care, with around 75 percent of those students reporting they were satisfied with the services.

### Mentorship and Advising

Students were asked about overall satisfaction regarding mentorship and advising in their programs, which may involve working with an official advisor, and/or receiving advice and mentoring from faculty and staff generally.

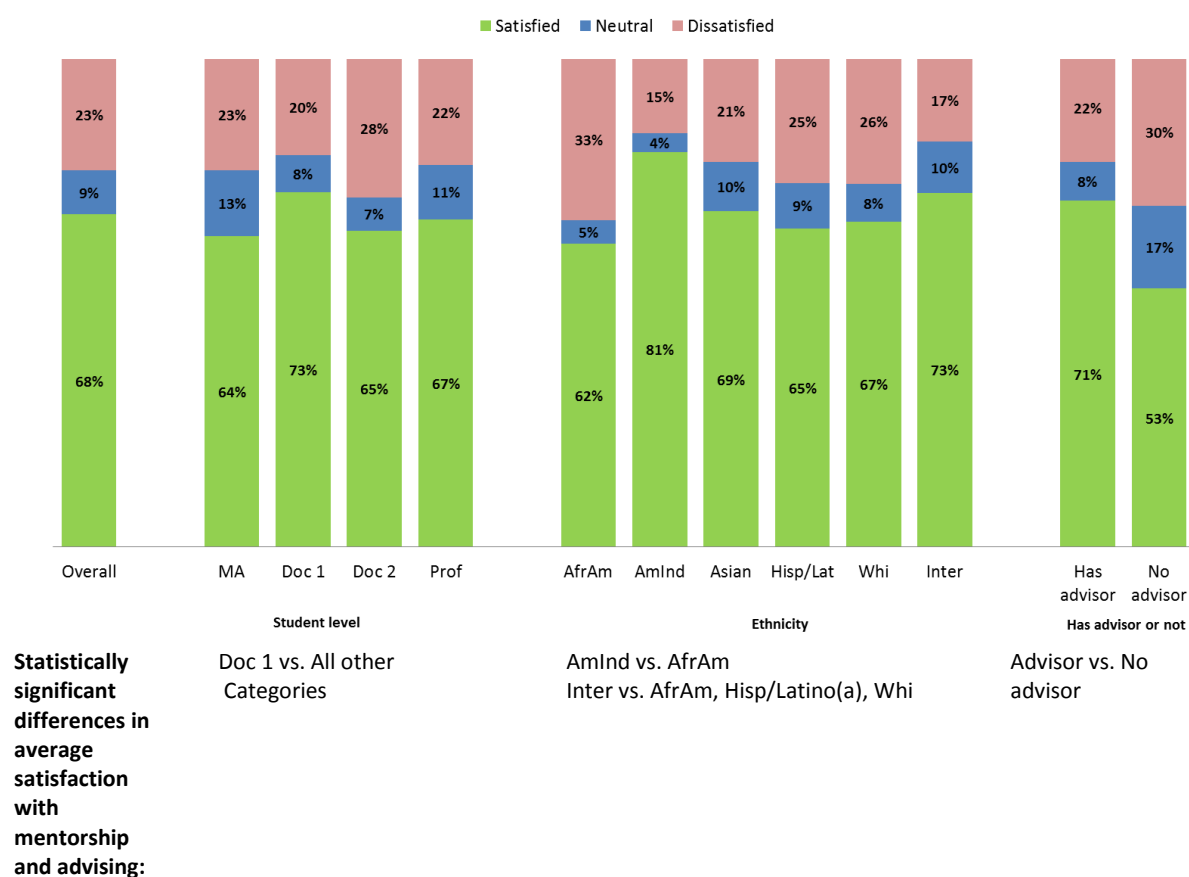
- About two-thirds (68 percent, n=3,598) of respondents reported being satisfied with the mentorship and advising they received in their programs, and about one-quarter (23 percent, n=1,204) were dissatisfied (Figure 6).
- Of those who were dissatisfied, the following reported higher levels of dissatisfaction:
  - academic doctoral respondents who had advanced to candidacy (28 percent, n=376), when compared with respondents who had not advanced to candidacy (20 percent, n=390);



- African Americans (33 percent, n=89), when compared with American Indians (15 percent, n=12) and international respondents (17 percent, n=209); and
- those who reported not having an advisor (30 percent, n=237), when compared with those who reported having an advisor (22 percent, n=967).
- There was no significant difference in satisfaction with mentorship and advising by discipline or LGBTQ status.

Figure 6

Satisfaction with mentorship and advising by student level, ethnicity, and having an advisor or not



The vast majority of respondents (84 percent, n=4,501) reported having an advisor. Virtually all academic doctoral respondents who had advanced to candidacy reported having an advisor (99 percent n=1,320). About 91 percent (n=1,819) of those who had not advanced to candidacy reported having an advisor. These students were asked specific ways in which their advisors support (or fail to support) them. Overall, 75percent (n=2,322) of academic doctoral respondents with advisors found their advisors supportive, while ten percent (n=316) did not. Looking in more detail at some of the ways these respondents found their advisors unsupportive:

- 12 percent (n=365) said their advisors did not provide advice and resources in support of their goals and ambitions;
- 18 percent (n=562) said their advisors were not real mentors to them; and
- eight percent (n=262) said their advisors were not an asset to their career and professional development.

#### Other Factors Associated with Graduate Student Well-Being

Finances are a common concern for graduate students that can interfere with academic work and other areas of life. Many respondents indicated general confidence about finances, but the results differed depending on the question.

- Nearly half (48 percent, n=2,543) of respondents indicated being confident about their financial situation.
- Over half (55 percent, n=2,911) reported that they can “get by financially” without having to cut back on things important to them, but almost two-thirds (65 percent, n=3,493) indicated they were “concerned about money lately.”
- Focusing on those who had less financial confidence, the following differences were found:
  - academic doctoral respondents who had advanced to candidacy (41 percent, n=547) compared with respondents in other levels of study;
  - respondents in the humanities (32 percent, n=253) compared with respondents in all other disciplines;
  - African Americans (38 percent, n=103) and Hispanics/Latinos(as) (41 percent, n=290) when compared with Asians/Pacific Islanders (49 percent, n=477); and
  - LGBTQ respondents (37 percent, n=232) compared with other respondents.

A two-question scale adapted from the U.S. Department of Agriculture was used to measure food insecurity.

- Over one-quarter (29 percent, n=1,514) of respondents reported that they experienced food insecurity in the most recent year, indicating concerns about and/or instances of having insufficient food. These results are similar to the earlier Food Access and Security (FAS) survey in Spring 2015, which found that 25 percent of graduate respondents experienced food insecurity. The FAS survey also found that 48 percent of undergraduate respondents were at risk for food insecurity. Together, about 42 percent of undergraduate and graduate respondents in the FAS survey reported they experienced food insecurity. These results suggest that UC graduate students experience food insecurity at a lower rate than UC undergraduates.

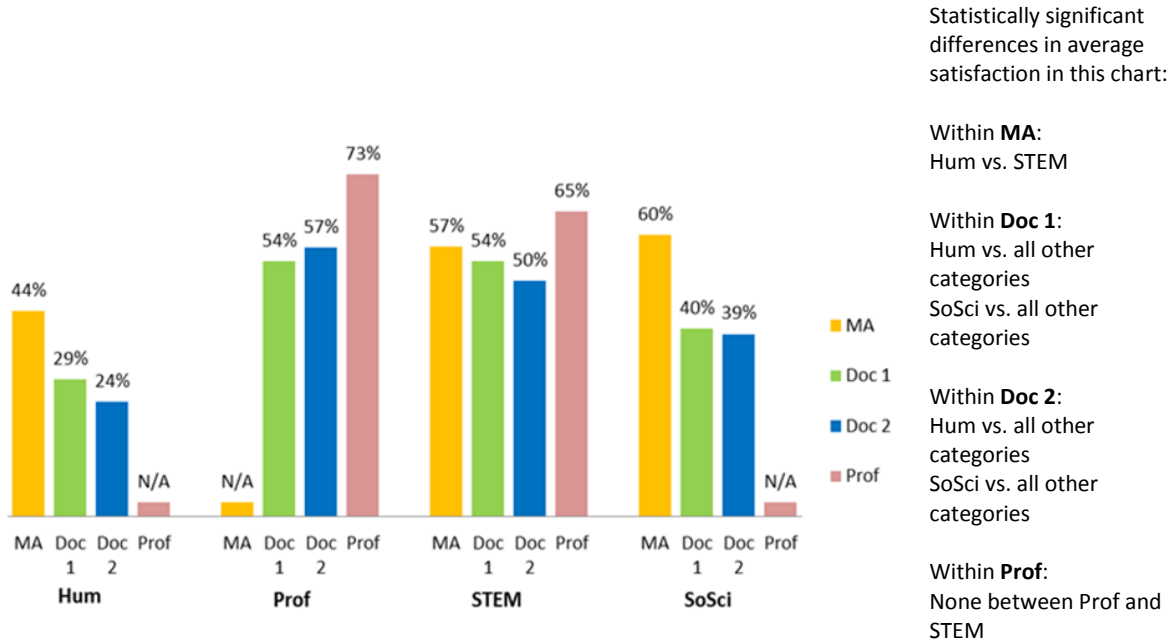
- Similar to findings for other survey questions, higher rates of food insecurity were found for the following groups:
  - respondents in the humanities (43 percent, n=331) and social sciences (36 percent, n=288) compared with their peers in all other disciplines;
  - African Americans (44 percent, n=117) and Hispanics/Latinos(as) (41 percent, n=287) compared to Asians/Pacific Islanders (26 percent, n=250), Whites (24 percent, n=409), and international respondents (27 percent, n=333); and
  - LGBTQ respondents (39 percent, n=241) compared with others.
- Academic master's respondents (33 percent, n=205) and academic doctoral respondents who had not advanced to candidacy (32 percent, n=624) compared with graduate professional respondents (25 percent, n=388).

Finally, graduate students are often concerned about their employment once their degree is completed.

- In the survey, about half (53 percent, n=2,823) of respondents reported being upbeat about their post-graduation career prospects.
- There was a significant difference in confidence about one's career as reported by respondents by discipline and student level (Figure 7).
  - For example, academic master's respondents in the humanities (44 percent, n=52) were less likely to be upbeat about their post-graduation career prospects than were their peers in STEM fields (57 percent, n=221).
  - Within STEM fields, academic doctoral respondents who had advanced to candidacy (50 percent, n=328) were less likely to be upbeat than were academic masters respondents (57 percent, n=221), academic doctoral respondents who had not advanced to candidacy (54 percent, n=494), and graduate professional respondents (65 percent, n=46).
- There was also a significant difference by ethnicity and LGBTQ status.
  - Asians/Pacific Islanders (51 percent, n=500) compared to African Americans (57 percent, n=156) and international respondents (53 percent, n=668) were less likely to be upbeat about their career prospects.
  - LGBTQ respondents (47 percent, n=290) were less likely to be upbeat about career prospects than were others.

Figure 7

Share of respondents upbeat about career prospects by discipline and student level



**Note:** There is a statistically significant interaction between discipline and level for career prospects. The categories “multiple/other” for discipline and the category “Unknown” for level are omitted. Categories with a number of respondents smaller than 30 are marked as “N/A.” Statistically significant differences in average satisfaction in this chart:

Within **Hum**:  
Doc 1 vs. Doc 2  
Doc 2 vs. MA  
Doc 1 vs. MA

Within **Prof**:  
Doc 2 vs. Prof  
Doc 1 vs. Prof

Within **STEM**:  
Doc 2 vs. all other categories

Within **SoSci**:  
Doc 1 vs. MA  
Doc 2 vs. MA

### *Potential priorities and campus strategies to improve graduate student well-being*

At the end of the survey, graduate students were asked to select the top three priorities they would like the University to prioritize with regard to attention and resources (Figure 8). Over all graduate students, mental health was the most frequently selected topic (42 percent of respondents), ranking number one for academic doctoral students (both not advanced and advanced to candidacy) and number two for academic masters and graduate professional students. Over all graduate students, the second priority was financial resources and management (40 percent); the third was career development (36 percent). Among the other items that could have been chosen as high priority, across all types of graduate students, housing, and/or academic progress/quality/engagement were rated highly.

Figure 8

Top priorities: all students by level

	All				Academic Masters				Academic Doctoral (not advanced to candidacy)				Academic Doctoral (advanced to candidacy)				Graduate Professional			
	1	2	3	All	1	2	3	All	1	2	3	All	1	2	3	All	1	2	3	All
Mental Health	925	594	588	2,107	89	57	62	208	380	235	231	846	199	165	168	532	247	131	123	501
Financial Resources/Management	842	604	534	1,980	69	61	63	193	363	246	189	798	239	152	134	525	162	138	141	441
Career Development	532	612	621	1,765	87	73	84	244	109	159	197	465	136	211	170	517	196	163	164	523
Housing	643	531	413	1,587	42	36	58	136	263	248	157	668	199	130	110	439	132	111	83	326
Academic Progress, Quality or Engagement	525	553	509	1,587	66	68	47	181	211	209	211	631	132	144	129	405	111	125	115	351
Health and Fitness	316	465	480	1,261	48	62	55	165	104	169	167	440	53	96	104	253	105	132	150	387
Faculty Advising	344	443	432	1,219	36	48	34	118	118	165	178	461	135	133	129	397	49	92	88	229
Campus Safety	293	264	228	785	52	34	27	113	101	96	75	272	51	54	58	163	88	79	65	232
Food quality or security	153	276	320	749	20	37	39	96	58	102	134	294	35	54	64	153	40	82	78	200
Graduate Program Climate and Belonging	159	240	327	726	14	27	31	72	76	103	131	310	42	57	85	184	26	52	78	156
Social Support	67	139	239	445	9	19	24	52	34	58	104	196	13	29	56	98	10	27	52	89
Campus Climate and Inclusion	86	122	154	362	4	10	13	27	40	53	66	159	24	18	34	76	17	39	38	94
Off-campus Safety	83	125	123	331	18	22	17	57	33	47	50	130	9	24	26	59	23	32	28	83

### *Campus Initiatives*

After reviewing survey results, campuses indicated they plan to use the survey findings to better understand current issues, address concerns about student mental health, identify priorities with regard to attention and resources, assess and enhance the current programs and training on professional development and career preparation, develop new initiatives, and select topics for faculty workshops on mentoring.

Areas of concern or priorities for most campuses include mental health, professional development and career preparation, mentorship, housing, and finances. Overall, some campuses plan to use the data to assess the impact of programs and inform and/or tailor program offerings. Some plan to identify key areas of concern or highlight issues with more information from their own sources. Some plan to target outreach efforts and interventions, while others plan to strengthen successful cross-campus collaborations and services.

*Discussion Questions*

- How can UC expand programs that diversify the faculty and strengthen the pipeline to the professoriate and other professional careers?
- What role can the Regents play in changing the prevailing culture from one that regards depression as expected to one that regards student well-being and professional success as a critical priority?
- How can UC strengthen programs that support student well-being and success as a complement to counseling and psychiatric services?

**Key to Acronyms**

CESD-R	Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale Revised
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UCOP	UC Office of the President
UCSA	University of California Student Association

**UC Graduate Student Well-Being Survey Report:** [http://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/ files/graduate\\_well\\_being\\_survey\\_report.pdf](http://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/files/graduate_well_being_survey_report.pdf)