

Evaluating the Social and Professional Priorities of SIParCS Graduate Students



Gabrielle Forbes

Mentors: Virginia Do & Jessica Amaya
NSF NCAR, West Chester University



Background

The Purpose of the CODE Intern

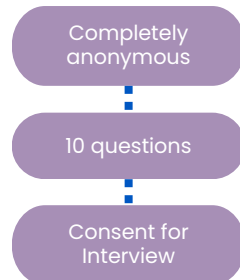
The SIParCS internship is unique because it employs both undergraduate, graduate students, and specifically a **CODE Intern**. The CODE Internship was created for aspiring Student Affairs professionals to gain experience in administration and program management. The CODE Intern is responsible for using their Student Affairs education & experience to foster an engaging, safe, and holistic experience for SIParCS students.

Gaps in Higher Education Training & Literature

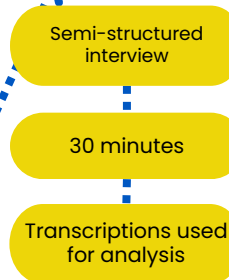
There are often gaps in Higher Education journals and research regarding the social and professional needs of graduate students, despite alarming dropout rates due to personal and professional issues (Holmes et al., 2025). Because of the lack of research into Graduate student success and needs, it can often be difficult, especially for early-career student affairs professionals, to create high-impact social and learning opportunities for a population they know very little about.

Research Methods

Preliminary Survey



Interview



Findings

- 44% of the participants that completed the survey felt a "competitive culture in their STEM graduate program"
- Technical Seminar/Deep-dive Research Presentations are the most important to academic/professional development among those surveyed. Formal professional development and Informal Networking Events followed.
- Among the numerous reasons graduate students experience limited social/professional engagement, overwhelming academic responsibility is the first. Burnout, time conflict, and lack of relevance to career goals
- Graduate students, especially PhD students, prioritize career advancement over departmental activities that do not pertain to or advance their career goals.

Motivations

Previous Experiences & Concerns

- SIParCS administrators mentioned previous reluctance to engage in social and professional activities
- Personal experiences have shown that STEM students tend to avoid social activities to meet project deadlines

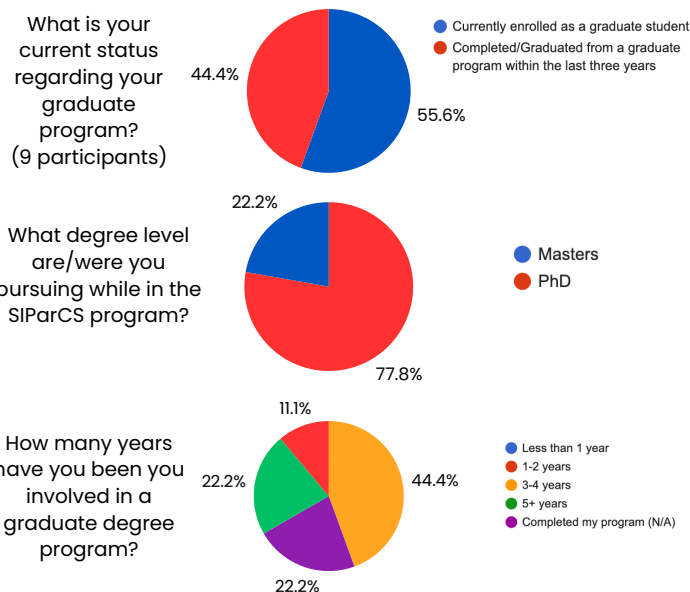
The "Why"

- With minimal literature & research + previous experience, it makes it difficult to know the **best** way to support graduate students.

Research Questions

- Does the competitive culture by STEM programs lead to graduate students experiencing institutional and cultural barriers to co-curricular engagement?
- What are STEM graduate students' interests, motivations, and values when it comes to social and professional development and support?
- How can student affairs professionals, specifically the SIParCS CODE Intern and staff, adequately support the graduate students in the program?

Participant Demographics



Limitations

- | Lack of Diversity | Limited Time & Resources | Potential Biases |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Unaware of the physical demographics of all participants3 out of 4 interviewees were the same race and genderLack of diversity + extremely small sample size= less confident findings | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Limited time to conduct interviews and analysisPrioritized other job responsibilitiesLack of incentives (i.e. gift cards) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Those who participated may be more likely to engage in co-curricular activitiesThose who may be less likely to engage may not have answered the surveyResults may be skewed |

Recommendations

- Implement separate PDWS sessions for topics that could look different for undergraduates
- Plan & execute targeted networking events & career fairs for graduate students who are looking to move to the next step in their career.
- Send out a survey to incoming interns asking what co-curricular events they would like to see throughout the program.