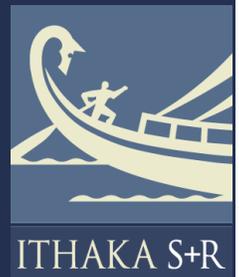


University of Nevada, Las Vegas Graduate Student Survey: Executive Summary

January 28, 2016



Overview

The following executive summary provides a high-level overview of findings from the Ithaka S+R Local Graduate Student Survey, which was administered at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The survey instrument was adapted from the Ithaka S+R US Faculty Survey¹, which has tracked the evolution of faculty members' research and teaching practices on a triennial basis since 2000. The Ithaka S+R Local Graduate Student Survey provides institutions with a heightened awareness about their campus constituents and helps academic leaders manage and address environmental change.

During Fall 2015, 3,912 UNLV graduate students received an email invitation to participate in a survey about their information discovery and usage patterns, engagement with and perceptions of the library, and higher education objectives. One Apple Watch Sport, five \$20 Rebel Cash transfers, and five UNLV Library swag bags were offered as incentives for participation. Three email reminders were sent before the close of the survey.

In total, 860 respondents clicked the survey link (about 22% of those who received the email invitation), with 830 of those starting the survey (about 21%) and 631 of those respondents completing the survey, for an overall response rate of about 16%. Due to the survey flow and skip patterns, not all UNLV graduate student respondents received every question in the survey.

The UNLV Graduate Student Survey was comprised of thematic modules with questions on students' objectives in obtaining an advanced degree (16 questions), their use of assigned course materials (22 questions), the role of the library in supporting students' needs (19 questions), their use of library space (27 questions), and their research (8 questions) and teaching practices (13 questions).

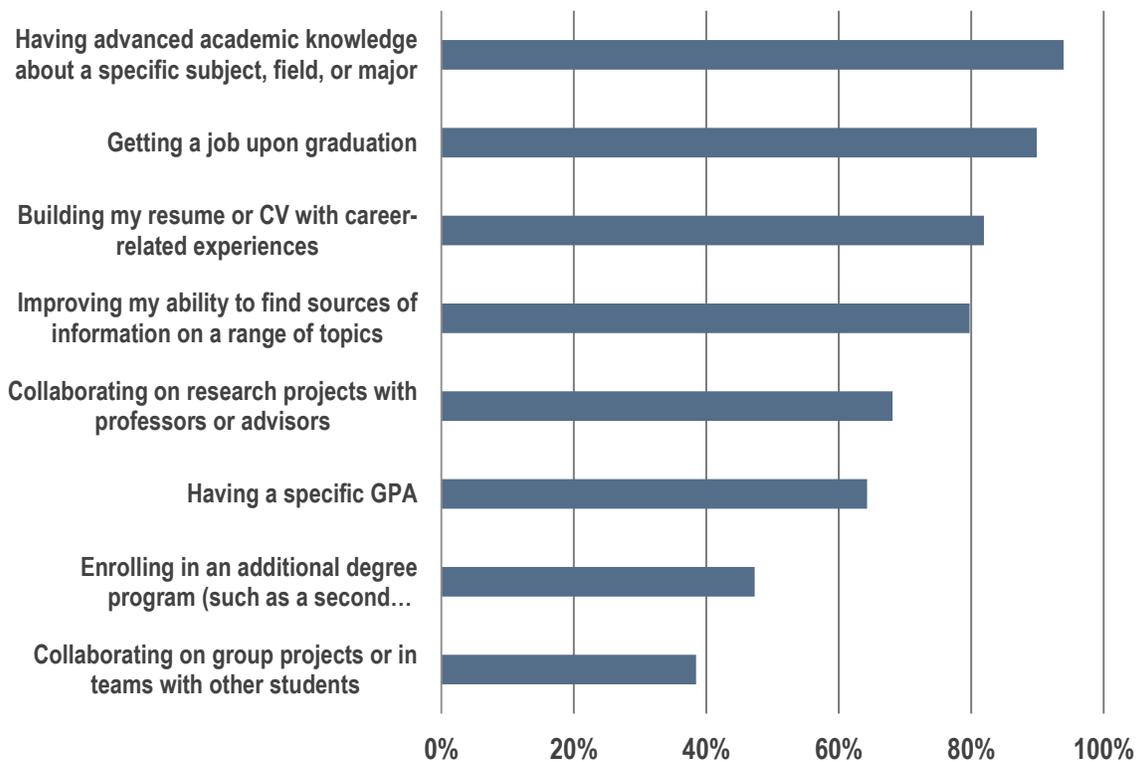
¹ Ross Housewright, Roger C. Schonfeld, and Kate Wulfson, Ithaka S+R U.S. Faculty Survey 2012, (New York: Ithaka S+R, 2013), available at <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/us-faculty-survey-2012>

Higher education objectives

Graduate students were first asked a series of questions on their goals for pursuing their current program, field of study, or major. The following findings represent some of the most interesting results on this topic.

When queried on the importance of achieving various goals at the university, graduate students expressed substantial differences across these goals, as displayed in Figure 1.²

Figure 1: How important or unimportant is it to you to achieve each of the following goals as a result of your experience at this college or university?*



*Percent of respondents selecting "very important" or "important"

Students assessed having advanced academic knowledge about a specific subject, field, or major as most important (94%, n=630), closely followed by getting a job upon graduation (90%, n=626). Collaborating on group projects or in teams with other students (38%, n=629) and enrolling in an additional degree program (47%, n=630) were rated as the least important goals.

² The goals in Figure 1 represent a selected subset of those included in the higher education objectives module.

Students were also asked to evaluate the usefulness of various factors in helping them get the type of job or career they hope to have. Students indicated that their major, field, or program of study (91% rated as “extremely” or “very” useful, n=630), their work experience or internship(s) (87%, n=628), and their professional network (85%, n=627) were the most useful. Conversely, their collaborative research experience with professors or advisors (64%, n=630) and their faculty mentor(s) or advisor(s) (69%, n=630) were rated as the least useful.

Coursework and academics

Students were then asked about their discovery practices and use of materials for academics, research, and coursework. Many of the questions in this module were dependent on what degree the respondent was pursuing; 59% identified that they were pursuing a Master’s degree, 43% a Ph.D., Psy.D., and/or professional degree, and 1% were not enrolled in a degree-granting program. These findings highlight many of the most noteworthy results in this module.

Students reported that in the courses they were currently taking, they were most frequently assigned research papers (53% selecting “regularly”, n=442), presentations or multimedia projects (38%, n=442), and literature reviews (33%, n=442) as compared to other types of work.

To complete their coursework or research projects, students who identified as being in the coursework phase of their Master’s degree most frequently use journal articles or other academic articles (71% selecting “regularly”, n=441) and textbooks or textbook chapters (64%, n=440), followed by books, book chapters, or novels that are not textbooks (36%, n=442). A smaller share of students indicated that they use electronic or e-book versions of textbooks or textbook chapters (28%, n=441) and e-books, e-book chapters, or electronic versions of novels (22%) as compared to print versions of these resources. Students who identified as being in the research phase of their Master’s degree also most frequently use the sources information selected by those students in the coursework phase, but were more likely to use data or datasets (39%, n=180 vs. 25%, n=441) and less likely to use other study resources, such as notes, flash cards, study guides, or handouts (14%, n=178 vs. 32%, n=440).³

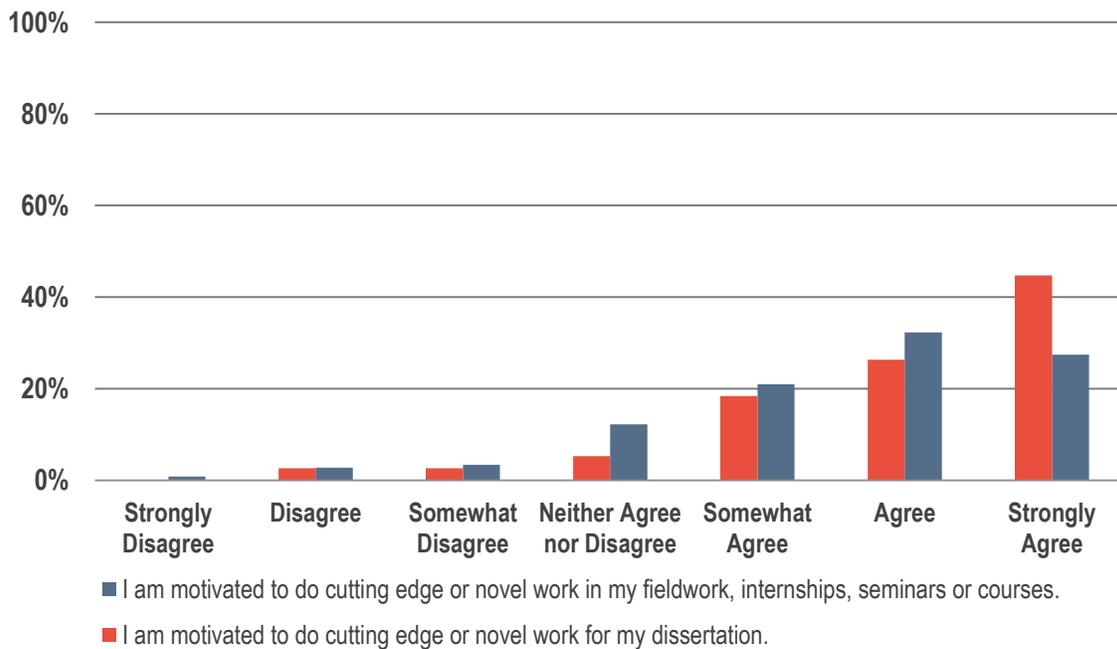
In completing their most recent research project, the largest share of graduate students reported starting the project with an academic search engine or database (such as Google Scholar or JSTOR) (35%, n=627), followed by the

³ Students pursuing a Ph.D., Psy.D., and/or professional degree were not asked these questions.

library’s website (32%, n=627) and a general search engine (such as Google, Yahoo!, or Bing) (23%, n=627). A majority of students described their ease of access to information and resources used for coursework or research projects as “somewhat easy” or “easy” (29% and 32% respectively, n=439).⁴ For students completing their dissertation, many students described their ease of access as “easy” (32%, n=38), “somewhat easy” (29%, n=38), or “somewhat difficult” (21%, n=38).

When queried on their motivation for doing cutting edge or novel work, a larger share of students working on their dissertation in doctoral programs identified as being strongly motivated (45%, n=38) as compared to those working on fieldwork, internships, seminars, or courses (27%, n=467), as displayed in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2



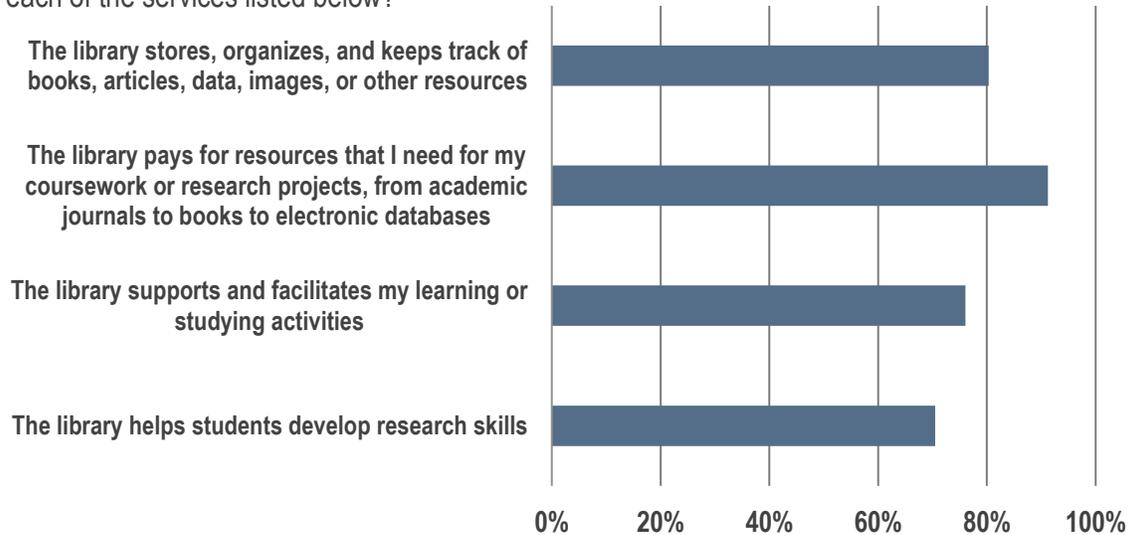
Role of the library

A section of the survey was devoted to questions on perceptions of the changing role and value of the campus library. The findings below highlight some of the meaningful findings on the usefulness of various library services.

⁴ On a labelled seven point scale, from “very difficult” to “very easy.”

Figure 3 below illustrates that graduate students most value that the library pays for resources that they need for their coursework or research projects (91%, n=625) and highly values the other services that the campus library provides.

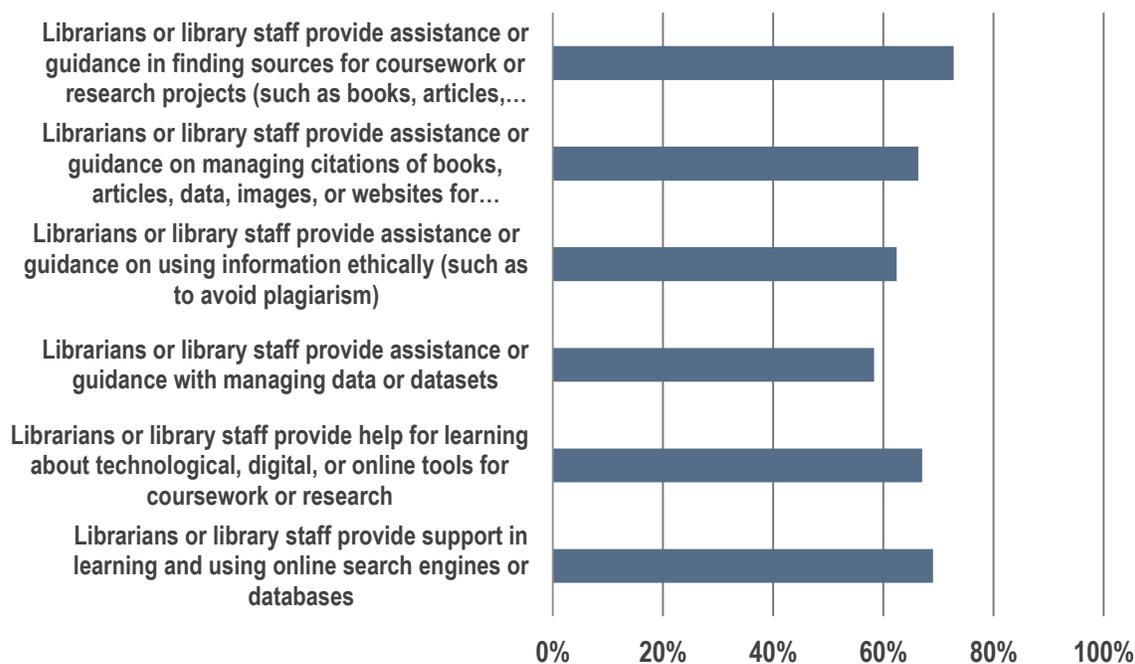
Figure 3: How useful is it to you personally that your campus library provides each of the services listed below?*



*Percent of respondents selecting "extremely useful" or "very useful"

When asked about the usefulness of services provided by campus librarians or library staff, students indicated a similar level of perceived usefulness across services as displayed in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: How useful is it to you personally that your campus librarians or library staff provide each of the services listed below?*



*Percent of respondents selecting “extremely useful” or “very useful”

Research practices

This module on research practices covered students’ understanding of, interest in, and opportunities for conducting or contributing to original research. The findings outlined below represent some of the most interesting results on these topics.

In choosing a topic for their dissertation, thesis, or capstone project, students rated their own interests (86% rating this consideration as “important” or “very important”, n=128), their perceptions of gaps in existing research (73%, n=128), and the practicality or feasibility of a project (73%, n=128) as the most important considerations. In conducting their research, only 35% (n=608) of students were directed by a faculty advisor, instructor, or professor to consult with a subject librarian or departmental library liaison at the university.

Students expressed that publishing in peer-reviewed journals or journal articles (68% rating this format as “very useful” or “extremely useful”, n=595) was the most useful to them professionally, with published conference proceedings or working papers (55%, n=597), open access articles published online in journals or institutional repositories (51%, n=596), and scholarly monographs, books, or edited volumes published by an academic press (49%, n=594) also rated highly.

Students indicated that it was most important that their research reached scholars in their specific subdiscipline or field of research (64% rating this audience as “important” or “very important”, n=601), followed by professionals outside of academia in areas related to their research interests (54%, n=599), and scholars in their discipline but outside of their specific subdiscipline or field of research (53%, n=600).

Teaching

Finally, graduate students who indicated that they had taught a course either as a teaching assistant or as an instructor were queried on their perceptions of their students’ research and critical thinking skills and the comparative responsibility of various parties to develop these skills.

Graduate students generally mildly agreed that it is principally their responsibility to develop the research skills of their students (31% somewhat agreeing, n=178). They were slightly more inclined to agree that improving their undergraduate students’ research skills related to locating and evaluating scholarly information is an important educational goal for the courses they teach (31% agreeing, n=175). A small share of graduate students indicated that they regularly assign the students they teach to conduct their own research (15%, n=178).