

Fall 2001 Questionnaire Report

Political Science Graduate Students

Questionnaire and Report Prepared
By
2001 Political Science Graduate Student
Association Officers
December, 2001

Acknowledgements

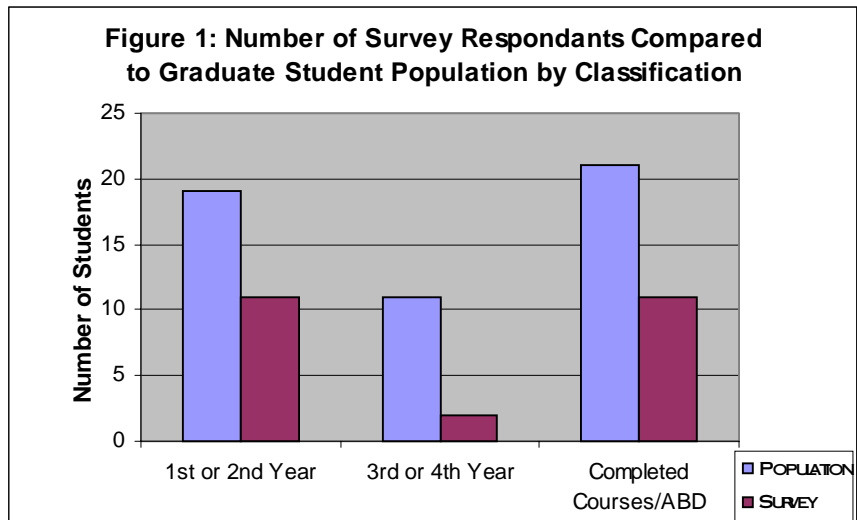
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The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was mailed in late October 2001 to all current political science graduate students. Of the 51 graduate students 24 completed and returned the questionnaire, representing a 47% response rate.

What classification best describes your status in the program?

The 24 respondents represented students in each of the three classifications of the program. The first and second year students (27 credit hours or less) comprised 46% of the responses with 11 of the 19 (58%) students in this category responding to the survey. The third and fourth year students (more than 27 credit hours) contributed 8% of the responses with 2 of 11 (18%) submitting completed surveys. Students who have completed their course work or are ABD provided 46% of the responses with 11 of the 21 (52%) completing and submitting the survey.



Students in 1st and 2nd year of the program and those who have completed course work or are ABD were well represented with more than 50% of each classification submitting responses to the questionnaire. The 3rd and 4th year students in the program were underrepresented. Figure 1 compares the responses

with the distribution of the total political science graduate student population by classification in the program. The responses to the questionnaire provide a similar distribution to the total population in terms of the students' classification in the program.

The responses for 3rd and 4th year students have been consolidated with the first and second year students to facilitate the analysis. This group of respondents will be referred to as "In-Class" for the remainder of the report. Additionally, the heading ABD will be used to refer to students who have completed their course work as well as those who are truly ABD.

Which of the following services do you expect from PSGSA?

Table 1 reveals that nearly all the respondents indicated that they expect networking or socializing opportunities from the PSGSA. Overall, financial assistance to attend conferences and information on speakers and activities were tied for second place as expected services from PSGSA. ABD's ranked financial assistance to attend conferences slightly higher than In-Class respondents did. Yet, In-Class respondents noted information on speakers and activities more often than ABD's. It is possible the difference, although minor, may be attributed to the likelihood of each of these groups being in a position to take advantage of these activities.

There is a sharp difference between the In-Class students and ABD's response for the expectation of the PSGSA serving as their representation to the department. The difference may be due to the fact that some currently enrolled students are unaware of the graduate faculty committee and the PSGSA officers' opportunity to meet with the committee to represent students on matters. ABD's, on the other hand, may have had past experience with this activity and now expect it to be a role of the PSGSA. This may explain their heightened expectation of representation to the department to be a service provided by the Association. It may also be function of the fact that ABD's may not spend as much time on campus and therefore feel a greater need for representation by PSGSA.

Professional development does seem to be of moderate interest for PSGSA members as does the web page. Leadership experience is not viewed as an important service for this organization.

Given these findings, PSGSA may serve the members by continuing to focus on networking opportunities, financial assistance to conferences, information on speakers and activities. They may also want to provide more information about the organization's function as a means of representation to the Graduate Faculty Committee. Professional development and the web page are types of services that demonstrate sufficient interest to warrant pursuing them for the membership.

Table 1: Average Percent Response to Types of Expected Services from PSGSA by Classification and Overall

Type of Service	In-Class	ABD	Overall
Networking/socializing opportunities	92%	64%	79%
PSGSA web page	38	45	42
Financial assistance to attend conferences	62	64	63
Representation to the department	31	91	58
Leadership experience	15	0	8
Professional development	62	26	50
Information on speakers and activities	69	55	63
Other	8	9	8

Note: respondents were instructed choose "all that apply", therefore column totals exceed 100%

Do you currently receive adequate benefits from other organizations(s)/ services listed in the previous question that lessen the need for these services to be provided by PSGSA?

The majority of students indicated that they do not receive benefits from other organizations that lessen the need for PSGSA to engage in these activities. A few students mentioned that they received some of these benefits from the political science department. PSGSA may want to make an effort to coordinate or work with the department to prevent the duplication of services and make the best use of resources and time.

In terms of professional development what types of activities would you like to see occur through PSGSA?

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents submitted suggestions for professional development activities. The students repeatedly suggested seminars as method for professional development. Seminar ideas included web page design, career information, teaching at the undergraduate level, sponsoring speakers, student presentations of current research, faculty presentations on taking exams, dissertation strategies, job interviews and making presentations. Information on conferences, professional organizations and finding a way to share conference experiences were also listed as possible ways to pursue professional development as an activity within PSGSA.

There appears to be a demand for professional development activities via seminars. Prior to the delivery of this report the PSGSA officers were informed the Political Science Department will be organizing seminars that provide an opportunity for students and faculty to present their papers and/or research. The seminars will begin winter semester 2002.

Would you like “Happy Hour” to remain at its present location, move to a different location or alternate between locations?

Overall, more than 50% of the respondents indicated they would like “Happy Hour” to remain at its present location of Blueberry Hill and more than 40% of the respondents suggested that it alternate between locations. Only three respondents suggested new locations: West Port, Tab Room, and Near South County. In-Class students demonstrated a preference for alternating between locations while ABD’s predominately indicated a preference that it remain at its current location.

Table 2: Average Percent Response to Happy Hour Location by Classification and Overall

Location	In-Class	ABD	Overall
Blueberry Hill	40%	64%	52%
Near Campus	0	0	0
Different Location	0	9	5
Alternate with Blueberry Hill	60	27	43

It may be worthwhile to alternate the location of “Happy Hour” at Blueberry Hill with other establishments given the majority of student attendees are from the In-Class category. It may also be helpful to have more specific information on suggested alternate locations before doing so.

What types of information would you like to see posted on the PSGSA web page?

More than half of the respondents provided suggestions for postings on the web page. Suggestions included information on students, such as research interests, CV’s, student profiles, contact information and helpful hints from other students as well as professional development opportunities/information on job searches, publishing, fellowships, financial aid opportunities, and conferences. Also, upcoming

events at UMSL, SLU, and Wash U on politics, public policy and administration. Additional suggestions included photos of students at functions, happy hour times, and information on current faculty research (articles and books), student achievements and good news about students, faculty and staff as well as links to sites of interest.

There seems to be sufficient interest in having a web page and several suggestions on what it might include. Since time is always an issue for students who maintain and update the web page, it may be worthwhile to weigh the suggestions in terms of usefulness to the student population and student volunteer time available to implement them. Student information and information submissions such as Internet links, meetings, speakers and conferences seem feasible. It may be difficult to find time to generate new information that is not submitted to the webmasters. If the web page is frequently accessed the demand for information is suspected to grow. Therefore, it may be necessary to consider a method or format for obtaining information for the web page as well as make a judgement about what is feasible to maintain and update.

Would you be more likely to use the student lounge in 907 Tower if the door was unlocked all of the time?

Overall, 73% of the student respondents indicated that they would not be more likely to use the student lounge even if the door were continuously unlocked. Students that share offices on campus can use their office key to unlock the student lounge door at their convenience and therefore may not see a need to keep the door unlocked. Only one ABD respondent indicated that they would be more likely to use the lounge if it were unlocked. A few In-Class respondents suggested they might use it more frequently if it was unlocked. It may be worthwhile to suggest to students that they should feel free to open and close the lounge for fellow political science graduate students and that students should feel free to ask colleagues who have a key to open lounge for them.

Would you like the student lounge to have more amenities (e.g., small refrigerator, coffee pot)?

Overall, 75% of the respondents were interested in the purchase of small appliances for the student lounge.

If you answered yes to the previous question, would you be willing to contribute financially to the purchase of items for the student lounge?

Seventy-four percent of all respondents indicated that they would be willing to contribute to the purchase of appliances for the student lounge. Some students that did not intend to use the appliances indicate they were willing to contribute to their purchase for fellow students while some students that “wrote-in” additional information indicated that they were not inclined to contribute unless everyone did or because they lived out-of-town.

The previous two responses suggest that PSGSA should investigate the cost and purchase of some appliances for the student lounge and then solicit funds for their purchase from PSGSA members. However, given that not all students are equally likely to contribute it maybe wise to collect the funds before making any purchases.

Would you like the student lounge to have more information such as a file of recommendations from fellow students on exams, classes or processes?

Eighty-two percent of the respondents indicated they would like the student lounge to have more information.

If you answered yes to the previous question, would you be willing to contribute information, insights or time to organize information for the student lounge?

Eighty-five percent of the respondents are willing to contribute information, insights or time to organize information for the student lounge. It should be noted that one respondent crossed out the word time in their questionnaire. This response may be typical as students may be willing to provide information but not necessarily have the time to help organize all the information received from fellow students or the existing information (books). Given the tremendous support for the idea, it may be worthwhile to seek volunteer(s) to head up and coordinate the information gathering and organizing that is need to make the student lounge a resource for PSGSA members.

Would you be likely to participate in a peer group such as the “ABD Club” (within the PSGSA) specifically designed to support and assist fellow students in moving forward with their dissertation after they have completed exams?

Eighty-six percent of the student respondents indicated that they would be likely to participate in the ABD club. Given the overwhelming support for the idea, the club will have its first meeting in January 2002, as originally planned. All students that have completed their qualifying exams will be invited to participate and help establish the forum. As students pass their qualifying exams they will be invited to participate, too.

Please indicate any concerns that you would like the PSGSA representatives to bring to the attention of the Graduate Faculty Committee on behalf of the students in an anonymous manner.

The responses to this question were brought to the Graduate Faculty Committee for their consideration in December.

Please let us know what you believe has worked well in the program recently or in the past and why you would like to see it continued or started again.

The respondents indicated that the faculty are very accommodating to the needs and interests of each student and that they are receptive and willing to help. It was noted that there is a great support system among faculty and students and the access to the entire political science faculty is a great asset and should be continued. Another comment indicated that the video conferencing classes with Mizzou are a good way of improving course availability at both schools. It was suggested that the program should emphasize international studies as well as public policy research, and American politics. It was also suggested that there be a greater role for the graduate director to bring students together.

Please let us know what you believe has worked well in PSGSA recently or in the past and why you would like to see it continued or started again.

Respondents commented that Happy Hours are good opportunity to socialize. There were also several comments to bring back PSGSA lunch meetings/brown bag/seminars on job interviews, dissertation tips, teaching issues, presentations and information on current research projects by faculty and students. It was also noted that the existence of the PSGSA is important no only because of the funding it provides to attend conferences but also because the work of PSGSA is good experience since service is a key part of academic life.

Please describe any other suggestions or ideas that you would like PSGSA to promote. These could be ideas for speakers series, opportunities to present papers, suggestions on the type of information you would like to be available in the student lounge, or any other ways the PSGSA may better serve your needs.

Suggestions included a political discussion group, conference for graduate students from SLU, Wash-U, UMSL, and UMC in political science public policy and expanding socializing opportunities to dining out, Karaoke, or a trivia night. Additional suggestions included seminars on career awareness, presentations, teaching techniques, and finding extra money for research. It was also suggested that PSGSA might promote opportunities to present papers and opportunities for publication.

Conclusion

Information from the questionnaire indicates that the PSGSA should continue focusing on networking opportunities, financial assistance to conferences, information on speakers and activities. PSGSA may also want to provide more information about the organization's function as a means of representation to the Graduate Faculty Committee. Respondents repeatedly suggested the idea of developing seminars and provided many topic ideas for professional development. Professional development seminars will be organized by the Political Science Department and begin winter semester 2002. The web page could be a source of needed information and should be developed further. There is sufficient support for the idea of alternating the location of "Happy Hours" and this should be considered as well. There is insufficient demand to warrant keeping the student lounge unlocked. However, there is sufficient interest and willingness to contribute to the purchase of small appliances. PSGSA should begin pricing items and then collecting contributions for their purchase. There is also sufficient interest in gathering and organizing information for the student lounge that volunteers should be sought to coordinate this activity. There is also sufficient support for the ABD club to commence in January 2002. Finally, the questionnaire itself has proven to be a useful means for obtaining student information to help guide the decisions for the development and maintenance of the PSGSA.