



UNIVERSITY OF LA VERNE

Survey of Graduate Students

Spring 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Of
Findings
From

Report I: Reasons for Choosing La Verne

Report II: Program Quality

Report III: Satisfaction with Climate and Services

Report IV: Gains in Competencies

Full reports available at: http://laverne.edu/institutional-research/assessment_academic/learning-environment

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Purpose

The purpose of the graduate student survey was to gather actionable information from students attending graduate programs across the University at all locations.

Method and Procedure

Survey Form

The survey items were developed after inspecting a number of graduate student surveys from a number of other universities. Altogether 82-items, including demographic questions, were developed with input from deans and graduate program directors. Additional three open-ended questions were included. Besides demographic, location and program status questions the following areas were covered in separate sections:

1. Factors influencing decision to attend La Verne
2. Quality of the different aspects of the program
3. Satisfaction with program climate and university support services
4. Areas of competence before entering the program, and enhancements of these competencies in the program thus far
5. Satisfaction with the dissertation process (for those who were working on their dissertations)

The open-ended questions asked about the strengths of the programs, changes they would suggest, and additional comments.

Procedure

The survey was administered online using the SNAP Survey software that protects confidentiality. It was conducted during the months of February and March 2011. Every graduate student who had enrolled in a class during the previous fall term (2010) received an email invitation to log on and complete the survey (N = 3628). Two follow-up reminders went out, and the data was extracted on March 31st, 2011.

Sample Characteristics

A total of 615 students responded, a return rate of 17%. The distribution of the respondents on the basic demographic information of gender, ethnicity, college, and degree level were quite comparable to the census population of 3628 students. The following are some of the salient characteristics of the sample:

- 50% main campus students
- 69% women
- 78% master's students
- 11% doctoral students
- 6.5% law students
- 21% had undergraduate degrees from La Verne
- 54% worked full-time

57% were currently working in jobs (Full or part time) related to their program
22% unemployed
93% felt doing as well as or better than expected in their course work
Age: Mean = 34.76 (SD = 3.71).

Ethnic and racial breakdown:

(Several respondents checked multiple ethnic and racial backgrounds, and 21 % did not answer this question)

9% African American,
9% Asian/Pacific Islander
30% Latino/a
43% white
8% international

Summary of Findings

Regardless of degree level or program of study, responses are presented for total sample, as well as broken down by status (full- and part-time), self-reported performance (doing better and worse than expected), ethnic and racial background, and campus locations (Main campus and RCA locations).

Break down of the data for all the academic areas by college and by program have been provided to deans and program chairs as subgroup sample sizes have allowed (normally around 20 respondents). Also, whenever possible, data have been broken down by main campus and off campus subgroups for programs that offer them away from the main campus, or on-line. "Not Applicable" responses were excluded from the computation of percentages.

Four separate reports were prepared, each dealing with a different section of the survey. Dissertation related feedback was provided to deans and program chairs. The executive summaries of the findings from each section (report) are presented below.

The full reports may be accessed at: http://laverne.edu/institutional-research/assessment_academic/learning-environment.

Report I: Reasons for Choosing La Verne

For this section of the survey the question was phrased as follows: "How much did the following factors influence your decision to ENROLL in your program at La Verne?"

Looking at "Very Much" responses for the total sample, the top five factors out of 13 were the following:

- Location where the program was offered (73%)
- Area of specialization that matched their interest (73%)
- La Verne's overall reputation (54%)
- Being near family and significant others (52%)
- Reputation of the program (50%)

The bottom five factors were as follows:

- Information on the webpage (33%)

- Mission and Values (33%)
- Affordability compared to other private not-for profits (29%)
- Encouragement of a La Verne faculty member while deciding (25%)
- Diversity of the student body (24%)

The top five factors held up generally quite well in the various subgroups examined. In several subgroups care and attention given by administrator and advisor, notably in RCA campuses, was in the top five factors that influenced decision to attend La Verne. For on-line students webpage information was also in the top five factors. There were notable differences in the responses of different ethnic and racial groups.

Recommendations

1. Use these findings in the recruitment and retention of graduate students
2. Develop culturally responsive approaches to recruit and retain graduate student
3. Improve the information on program web pages

Report II: Program Quality

For this section of the survey the question was phrased as follows: “How would you rate the following aspects of your program?”

“Excellent/Outstanding” and “Very good” response categories were combined in summarizing the data. On most items about two-thirds of the students endorsed the items, indicating high quality of their programs. The top five program qualities were as follows:

- Relevance of course content (76%)
- Quality of instruction by full-time faculty (75%)
- Level of academic standards (72%)
- Faculty accessibility outside of class (69%)
- Speed of progress through program (69%)

The other items in descending order of endorsement were as follows:

- Overall quality of the program compared to other schools considered (67%)
- Quality of Instruction by part-time faculty (66%)
- Extent of diversity issues addresses in courses (65%)
- Use of technology in delivering courses (64%)
- Faculty providing timely feedback (64%)
- Availability of courses (64%)
- Intellectual quality of fellow students (61%)
- Quality of academic advising (58%)

While the top five quality factors generally held across most of the subgroups there were notable variations. Availability of courses was an issue in almost all the subgroups. Quality of academic advising was presented as a concern especially by students who were “Doing worse than expected,” were part-time, and took courses at off campus locations. Relatively more of the international students valued academic advising highly, and relatively fewer Asian/PI and White students appeared to value academic advising highly. Accessibility of faculty outside of class appeared to be an issue at all RCA sites. Quality of instruction by part-time faculty was not

endorsed as highly as by full-time faculty, although online students did not show this discrepancy. Timely feedback by faculty and use of technology was an issue in some instance.

Recommendations

1. Increase the availability of courses
2. Provide better academic advising, especially at off campus sites
3. Improve the quality of teaching by part-time faculty.

Report III: Satisfaction with Program Climate and University Services

For this section of the survey the question was phrased as follows: “How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your program and university services, if they are applicable to you?” The response categories of “Very Satisfied” and “Somewhat Satisfied” were combined in the presentation of the data.

In the total sample very high percentage of the respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with the **climate** elements of the program:

- Opportunity to apply what has been learned in the classroom (89%)
- Opportunity for teamwork (86%)
- Rapport between students and faculty (85%)
- Feeling comfortable as a member of national, ethnic, racial, or religious group (83%)
- Collegiality of students (82%)
- Classroom facilities (72%)

Some variability was noticeable across various subgroups. Those who reported “Doing worse than expected) in their programs also report less satisfaction with the climate of their programs. Asian/PI and international student appeared to be somewhat less satisfied with collegiality of students, and feeling comfortable as members of racial or national groups (About 70%). Full-time and part-time students seemed be equally highly satisfied with the climate of their programs. Different campus locations did not appear to generate noticeable differences in their satisfaction with the climate of their programs.

In the University **service areas**, 10-40% of students indicated “Not Applicable,” suggesting that either they did not use the services or did not wish to express an opinion. The top five areas of satisfaction were:

- Library access and support (86%)
- Application process (80%)
- Registration process (76%)
- Financial Aid Office (76%)
- Computer and technology facilities and services (70%)

The reset of the service areas with descending order of satisfaction were:

- Office of graduate service (68%)
- Career advice from faculty (66%)
- Writing assistance from Learning Enhancement Center (64%)
- Study space (63%)
- Break areas (58%)

- Assistance from the Office of Career Services (54%)
- Parking (52%)
- Food services (47%)

About one-half of the respondents (53%) thought it was “Very Important” to have services such as the registrar, financial aid, or Learning Enhancement Center available at night or on weekends.

Some noticeable variability existed among some subgroups. RCA education non-Teacher Education students appeared to be less satisfied with services overall, and exclusively on-line students appeared to be more highly satisfied with services they used. Relatively fewer Asian/PI students seem to be satisfied with career services, computer and technology facilities and services, and writing assistance from LEC. Combined respondents from campuses other than Inland Empire, Orange County, and San Fernando Valley seemed to be somewhat less satisfied with career services, writing assistance, computer and technology facilities and services, and the Financial Aid Office.

Recommendations

1. Consider the needs of specific sub-population to improve the services provided.
2. Provide resources to the Office of Career Services to meet the demand by graduate students.
3. Provide resources to the Learning Enhancement Center to meet the demand of graduate students regarding assistance with writing.
4. Reconsider the way food services are provided
5. Find ways to make some essential services available on evenings and weekends, such as the registrar, financial aid and writing assistance.

Report IV: Gains in competencies

For this section of the survey the question was phrased as follows: “How would you rate:

- (a) Your following competencies BEFORE you started the program?
- (b) How well coursework and experience IN THE PROGRAM SO FAR have enhanced these competencies?”

Gain scores were computed by subtracting the percentage of combined ratings of “Very Good” and “Excellent/Outstanding” before starting programs from such percentage ratings of enhancements in the programs so far. In the total sample the top five competencies that received the highest gain scores were:

- Critically evaluating scholarly literature (39%)
- Quantitative and qualitative research skills (36% and 35%, respectively)
- Thinking critically and analytically (29%)
- Writing skills (28%)
- Leadership skills (27%)

These competencies also tended to be rated by relatively fewer students as “Very Good” or “Excellent” before they started their programs, suggesting more room for improvement.

For the total sample, across the board in all 14 competencies gains were reported, with an average gain score of 25%. The percentage of gain scores ranged from 39% for critically

evaluating scholarly literature, to 12% for computer and internet skills. This pattern and levels of gain held up more or less in the various breakdowns of subgroups. Full-time and part-time students rated their competencies very similar to the total sample, and to each other. Students who reported doing worse than expected had significantly lower mean gain scores (9%) compared to not only those who reported doing much better than expected (32%), but to all other subgroups. However, they also seemed to come in with relatively better self-reported competencies than other groups, which might suggest higher expectation in making progress. This trend seemed to be true also in other subgroups that had relatively lower gain scores.

The mean gain scores across all 14 competencies among different ethnic groups varied somewhat (22% to 31%), with white students being lowest. While the mean gain score of international students was comparable to the total sample and other groups (28%), they tend to report somewhat lower incoming competencies. The mean gain scores of main campus and RCA locations, as well as exclusively on-line students were very comparable to the total sample and to each other, with some variations in the specific competencies. However, RCA education students, in Teacher Education and non-Teacher Education had somewhat better gain scores compared to other RCA locations, 35% and 34%, respectively.

Overall, it appears graduate programs are making a positive impact on self-reported levels of competencies in critical areas of scholarship, writing, speaking, and leadership. Additionally, in the total sample noticeable gains were reported in mission related competencies such as working with ethnically and racially diverse individuals and groups (16%), examining own values and ethics (27%), and contributing to the welfare of own community (16%), even though incoming skills in these areas tended to be relatively higher.

Recommendations

1. Consider assessing wide variety of competencies as students start their graduate programs.
2. Include the assessment of wide variety of competencies, in the program reviews.
3. Include mission related competencies in assessing program effectiveness.