

Diversity Dialogues on Graduate Education 2013-14

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A series of Diversity Dialogues on Graduate Education was held during the academic year 2013-14 to understand the needs of various underrepresented graduate student groups at UC Davis. The discussions were centered on empowering eight graduate student groups including:

- Women graduate students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) related disciplines
- International graduate students
- Graduate students with disabilities
- Graduate students of color
- Undocumented graduate students
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual (LGBTQIA) identified graduate students
- Graduate student veterans
- Graduate student parents

Overall, seven sessions were held during the academic year 2013-14 to brainstorm on strategies to empower these student groups.

Methodology

The Graduate Student Assistant to the Dean and Chancellor (GSADC) in collaboration with members of Chancellor's Graduate and Professional Student Advisory Board (CGPSA) conducted five independent surveys to understand the needs and identify the challenges faced by students in the identified groups. At the beginning of each discussion, the GSADC presented the results of the surveys which identified the challenges being faced by these student groups. This presentation was followed by a strategy session, during which members of the UC Davis community broke into small groups to discuss the challenges and strategies for empowering these student groups for about 45 minutes. In the last 30 minutes of the session, each group reported on the strategies that they had identified.

Recommendations

A total of about 300 members of UC Davis community attended these sessions and identified tangible recommendations to improve the status quo for affected student groups and to help them succeed in graduate school. The recommendations have been categorized in the following themes (*recommendations in italics have been already implemented or are currently being implemented*):

Creating Awareness and an Inclusive Environment

- *Create more awareness of challenges faced by all the underrepresented groups through dialogues, forums with faculty and other campus stakeholders*
- *Provide sensitivity training for campus police on handling the challenges of underrepresented student groups*
- Faculty should create an inclusive environment in classrooms for students with disabilities, international students, women in STEM, students of color, LGBTQIA identified students and student veterans
- Build additional gender neutral and gender inclusive restrooms
- Include diversity discussions as a part of the curriculum

Improving Mentorship

- Mentorship training for faculty
 - Incentivize sensitivity training for faculty
 - *Train faculty to mentor students from various underrepresented groups, understanding that each student group is unique*
 - *Offer professional development training for faculty to mentor students interested in careers outside of academia*
- Peer to Peer Mentoring
 - Provide institutional support to peer mentor groups for all underrepresented student groups
 - Organize peer mentoring panels to humanize the graduate student experience

Building Community

- *Build a graduate and professional community center*
 - Include a space within the center for international graduate students to make them a part of UC Davis community
 - Include a social space for graduate students with kids, graduate student veterans and graduate students with disabilities
- Support student organizations that build community
- *Develop new affordable graduate student housing*
- *Organize more social events where graduate students from various backgrounds can interact informally*

Providing Support and Information

- *Organize Pre-Orientation for international students prior to Week of Orientation and Welcome*
- Offer orientation for veterans – helping them acclimate to civilian life
- Better organize information on the web (link through Graduate Studies) for students from different communities
- Hire an international Student Affairs Officer (SAO) *and a Graduate Student Retention Coordinator to help support the large international population*
- *Strengthen the Student Disability Center (SDC), more clearly identify its location and services, and hire more staff to assist students with disabilities*
- Ask about needs for disability services when students complete the SIR
- Expand services at CAPS for veterans, international students and students with disabilities
 - *CAPS hired one counselor with an international background in 2014-15*

Financial Support

- *Develop a parental and family leave policy for TAs and GSRs*
- Provide affordable daycare
- *Reduce the burden of supporting international graduate students (NRST)*

Professional Development for Graduate Students

- Create networking opportunities for underrepresented student groups
- Expand GradPathways and services offered by the Internship and Career Center (ICC) to enable students to explore careers outside of academia

Understanding Unconscious or Implicit Bias

- Offer training for admission committee members
- Provide training to TAs to recognize bias in evaluating students
- Help others become aware of the challenges faced by different underrepresented groups
- *Evaluate new faculty hires based on the diversity and sensitivity training they have had prior to their appointment*

Strengthen TA Training

- Include understanding of bias in the classroom and gender differences in learning styles
- Address the needs of students with disabilities
- Address the needs of non-native English speakers
- Make TA training more rigorous and more uniform

Role Models

- Increase the number of women faculty in certain disciplines and help them learn how to serve as role models without becoming overburdened
- Identify faculty mentors from various underrepresented groups to serve as role models
- Increase the number of faculty belonging to underrepresented groups
- Highlight student leaders and role models from various underrepresented groups
- Acknowledge various faculty and student role models for academics, teaching and community building

Action Items for 2014-15

Some of the recommendations that were put forward by the campus community are already being implemented (italicized above). Our goal is to prioritize some of these recommendations and present an update to the campus community in Winter 2015. We also plan to do the following:

Build an outreach team consisting of various campus stakeholders

- Present various surveys conducted during 2013-14 and educate campus community on the status quo
- Create greater awareness of diversity issues on campus
- Create a sustained dialogue series – building on diversity dialogues 2013-14

Engage faculty in diversity related discussions

In collaboration with various campus stakeholders in 2014-15, we plan to have discussions about faculty and graduate student positionality and the problems associated with it. This requires brainstorming with faculty in Graduate Council and the Academic Senate on how to develop effective strategies to build healthy partnerships and relationships between students and faculty.