



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
GRADUATE STUDENT SENATE

TO: University of Vermont Graduate Students

FROM: Jessica L. Bocanegra, Graduate Student Senate President

DATE: December 2nd, 2019

SUBJECT: Commitment to Graduate Student Success – Graduate Student Senate Action Plan

Over the course of the fall semester, the Graduate Student Senate has been working towards creating an action plan that addresses the challenges, concerns, and needs of the graduate student community that were highlighted by the results of the Campus Climate Survey (CCS). I am writing to share a list of challenges extruded from the CCS, a summary of the feedback we have collected, and a proposed list of action items moving forward.

Identifying Areas of Focus Using the Campus Climate Survey Data

When the CCS Dashboard went live (www.uvm.edu/oir/diversity), the Graduate Student Senate Executive Board entered and analyzed the survey data using statistical software (IBM SPSS Statistics) and highlighted areas of focus for GSS to utilize in an effort to improve the overall graduate student experience and emphasize student success. Four main areas of focus were brought to the forefront:

- Promoting a healthy work/life balance and overall graduate student mental health
- Fostering an environment at UVM where graduate students can safely express themselves with regards to cultural beliefs and disabilities
- Empowering graduate students to identify and report bias incidents by utilizing available resources and trainings
- Ensuring safety on campus and within the community surrounding UVM, specifically at night

Collecting Feedback from the Senate and from the Graduate Student Body

After the GSS Executive Board reviewed the results and identified preliminary areas of growth, the following document was presented to the Senate and to the Graduate Student Body in an open forum. (See Appendix 1 attached) In addition to the areas of growth already defined above, senators and members of the graduate population brought forward supplementary challenges that should be addressed by GSS:

- Housing and Transportation Resources
- Undergraduate/Graduate Student ‘Dual’ Courses – Compliance with Criteria Differentiation for 200-level courses approved for graduate credit and overreliance on these in graduate curriculum
- Furthering Partnerships Outside of Home Department (i.e. Identity Centers, Cross-Discipline Classes, Student Services, etc.)

Actionable Items Moving Forward

The Graduate Student Senate is committed to the betterment of the graduate student experience and the overall success of graduate students. With President Garimella echoing this sentiment, I would like to share a few of the initiatives GSS is working on and a few items that have recently been put into place:

Initiatives in Progress as a Result of CCS Data and Graduate Student Feedback:

- The GSS Mental Health Promotion Committee has been working with Counseling and Psychiatry Services (CAPS) to offer extended hours that are more in line with those of a graduate students' schedules. This committee has also been working with Dr. Harry Chen, Executive Director of the Center for Health and Wellbeing (CHWB) and Public Health Officer at UVM, to create a pamphlet designed to elucidate the resources available through the CHWB.
- The GSS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee will be hosting their second annual multicultural night to provide a platform for international students to discuss their experiences, concerns, and how to further promote an inclusive environment here at UVM.
- GSS will partner with UVM Student Accessibility Services to ensure our events are accessible to all graduate students.
- GSS will partner with the Graduate College to host a series of trainings and workshops throughout the year to address bias incidents, students of concern, and sexual harassment reporting.
- GSS will host more workshops with varying identity centers and student services on campus to inform students of different services each center provides.
- GSS is partnering with the Student Government Association to encourage UVM to transition to using the LiveSafe App (<https://www.livesafemobile.com/>) to protect students when on campus and within the surrounding community and to easily report unsafe incidents to mitigate risk.
- GSS has agreed to update the 'Pawbook' to serve as an information and resource guide for current graduate students and hopes for it to be sent out to the 2020-2021 incoming first-year graduate student class.
- GSS will partner with the Graduate College to develop a list of concerns regarding the current course use of 200-level courses approved for graduate credit and draft a resolution to present to the Faculty Senate Curricular Affairs Committee.

Movement on Issues as a Result of CCS Data and Graduate Student Feedback:

- GSS has hosted a workshop (Fall 2019) with UVM Living Well that focused on promoting healthy work/life balance and practicing mindfulness. We are planning to host more workshops in the spring semester to make graduate students aware of the services and resources available to us.
- UVM Transportation and Parking Services has put into place an occasional use parking pass program for graduate students. Graduate students, upon request with proper notice, will have access to a 24-hour parking pass for \$2/pass. Any graduate student, regardless of address, will be able to participate in this program. Each student will be allowed to utilize this pass up to six times per semester.
- The Dean of Students, Dr. David Nestor, has recently announced a web page containing all web forms necessary for incident and concern reporting. Although this is not a substitute for trainings and workshops, this is a step in a positive direction and makes the resources much more accessible. (https://www.uvm.edu/deanofstudents/student_advocacy)

GSS CCS Preliminary Summary

- **13.2 %** of graduate student respondents (N = 255) reported being somewhat or very ***dissatisfied with their non-academic experience at UVM***
- **10.9 %** graduate student respondents (N = 255) reported being somewhat or very ***dissatisfied with their social life experience at UVM***
- **10.9 %** of master's candidate respondents (N = 174) reported somewhat or strongly ***disagreeing that they can safely express themselves at UVM with regard to their cultural identity***
- **13.4 %** of graduate student respondents (N=145) reported somewhat or strongly ***disagreeing that they can safely express themselves at UVM with regard to their disability***
- **29 %** of graduate student respondents (N = 181) reported ***NOT being confident that they could easily find the answer, if they had a question regarding a disability or requesting an accommodation***
- **21.9 %** of graduate student respondents (N = 266) reported somewhat or strongly ***disagreeing that UVM provides the resources they need in order to thrive in a diverse environment***
- **46.5 %** of graduate student respondents (N = 210) reported ***NOT being aware of the protocol for reporting a bias incident at UVM***
- **69.6 %** of graduate student respondents (255) reported ***experiencing bias in their time at UVM*** (33 % Seldom, 25.6 % Occasionally, 10.9 % Regularly)
- **61%** of graduate student respondents reported another student as the source of the bias they experienced
- **46.9 %** of graduate student respondents reported a faculty member as the source of the bias they experienced
- **21.9 %** of graduate student respondents (N = 206) reported ***feeling somewhat or very unsafe in the community surrounding UVM at nighttime***

Data source: University of Vermont Office of Institutional Research. Campus Climate Survey, 2019.
<https://www.uvm.edu/~oir/catdat/campus/uvm-campus-climate-2019-dashboard.html>

Statistical package: IBM Corp. Released 2016. IBM SPSS Statistics for Mac, Version 24.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.

