Graduate and Professional Student Programs

A Research Report from the 2022 Student Life Survey and Supplementary Focus Groups

Center for the Study of Student Life

April 2022

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores graduate and professional students' needs and interests with regards to programming and resources offered by the Office of Student Life. Data for this report are from the 2022 Student Life Survey and from a series of focus groups conducted in February 2022. This report includes information about 552 graduate student respondents (response rate = 14.5%) and 114 professional student respondents (response rate = 10.4%). Data were weighted to be representative of the Ohio State Columbus campus population.

Additional students were recruited for focus groups through an email campaign and through collaboration with administrative staff across campus. A total of 10 professional students, 7 Master's students and 6 doctoral students attended.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Master's, doctoral and professional students were most interested in career success programming, where **37.9%**, **42.9%** and **37.4%**, respectively, reported either planning on taking part or having already taken part in career success events. Resume, CV and cover letter assistance was the career preparation program that each group of students was most interested in.
- Students were least aware of programs concerning service and community engagement. **36.2%** of Master's students, **32.9%** of doctoral students and **35.0%** of professional students reported being unaware of Student Life programming in this category.
- In focus groups, graduate students commonly expressed that the networking and socializing opportunities provided by the Office of Student Life were very strong.
- Doctoral and Master's students reported wanting assistance in finding non-academic jobs, and professional students wanted entrepreneurial training in order to better set up their practices in the future.
- More support for Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS) was discussed widely in each focus group. Suggested supplements to CCS included expansion of existing CCS programs to further support graduate/professional students.
- Graduate and professional students generally expressed that they did not have a strong understanding of what the Office of Student Life provided to students at Ohio State and suggested that Student Life should have representatives go to graduate and professional schools' orientation events to inform new students.

INTRODUCTION

This report explores graduate and professional students' interests in the co-curricular programs and services offered at Ohio State. First is a description of results from the 2022 Student Life Survey. Following this section are results from focus groups conducted with graduate and professional students at Ohio State about the support, resources and services they are aware of and use and resources these students may still need. Distinctions are drawn between graduate and professional students where necessary.

METHODS

STUDENT LIFE SURVEY

The Student Life Survey is administered annually by the Center for the Study of Student Life to examine trends in student engagement, sense of belonging and satisfaction with the college experience. The 2022 Student Life Survey was administered to a stratified, random sample of 11,701 Ohio State students at the beginning of spring semester (January 2022). This sample comprised 6,741 undergraduate students, 3,795 graduate students and 1,100 professional students, all on the Columbus campus. A total of 1,639 students responded to the survey. Three respondents were removed for mischievous or careless response patterns, resulting in a final sample of 1,636 respondents and an overall response rate of 14.0%. The response rate was 14.4% among undergraduate students, 14.5% among graduate students and 10.4% among professional students. Students who did not respond to the items used for this report were removed from analyses, resulting in an unweighted sample size of 510 graduate students and 110 professional students. Demographics of the students included in the report did not substantially vary from the overall Student Life Survey sample.

Weighting Procedure

Responses were weighted to address differences between the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents compared to the general student population at Ohio State in the spring semester of 2022. Weights were adjusted so the survey data are representative of the student population at Ohio State. For example, 63.1% of the survey respondents in the Student Life Survey were female, but 52.3% of the total population at Ohio State was female. The rake weight procedure adjusts for the over-representation of female students in the data to make responses more reflective of the student population, thus making the data more generalizable to Ohio State students. The procedure adjusted the base weight to the demographic data available on the sampling frame using sex, race/ethnicity and student status (i.e., undergraduate, graduate student or professional student).

FOCUS GROUPS

An interview guide was developed using two main sources for question development: the relative frequencies of expressed interest in programs described on the Student Life Survey (e.g., students were most aware of and planned to attend workshops related to career success and health and well-being) and the themes that arose in the open-ended responses from the Student Life Survey (e.g., desire for more opportunities to network and socialize). The former informed the primary questions asked, while the latter informed potential follow-up questions. All participants were asked the same six questions during each focus group, and additional follow-up questions were asked to further elicit or expand on participant answers. The primary questions asked about the kinds of programming and opportunities students would like to see from the Office of Student Life, career development support,

socializing, mental health support, physical health and wellness, and barriers to accessing Student Life programming. The results described below are organized around those questions.

Focus groups were facilitated by staff from the Center for the Study of Student Life. All in all, 121 graduate or professional students expressed interest in attending a focus group, and invitations were sent to 20 professional students, 10 Master's students and 10 doctoral students. Each focus group was conducted virtually via Zoom. A total of five focus groups were conducted, with a total of 23 students attending one of the five; some of the groups were run simultaneously by different staff. No more than 8 individuals were included in any Zoom focus group room. Groups were audio- and video-recorded, and all recordings were destroyed following the completion of this report.

Analysis

The focus group recordings were reviewed by three staff members in the Center for the Study of Student Life. Staff independently coded their assigned focus group(s), identified key themes and transcribed quotes related to those themes. The report describes the key themes, organized around three key areas: strengths, opportunities for growth and barriers to success. Strengths and opportunities for growth are organized by the primary content questions listed in the methods section above. Barriers to success are discussed in aggregate unless noted. All quotes included below were said by a graduate or professional student during a focus group.
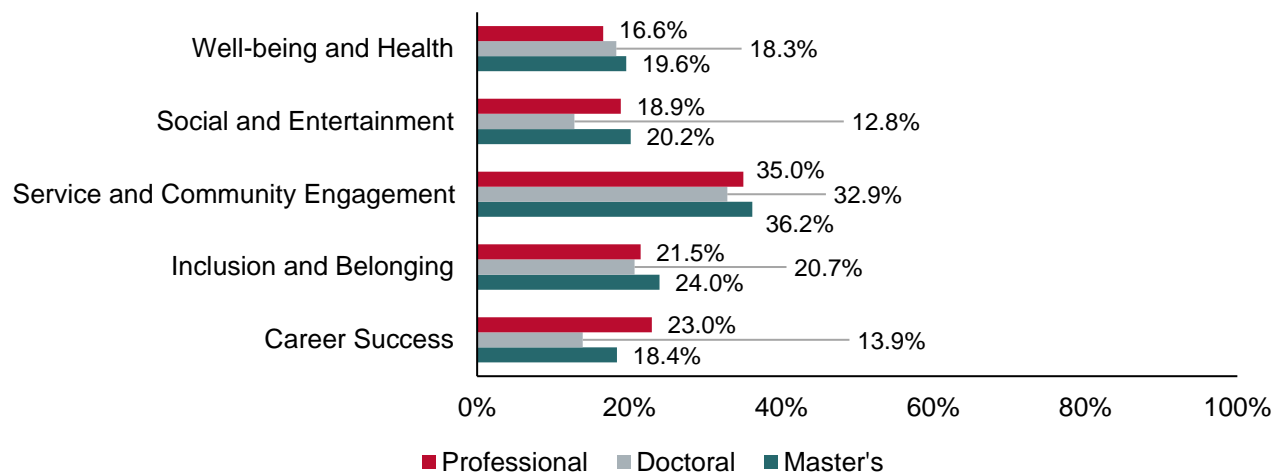
STUDENT LIFE SURVEY FINDINGS

EXPERIENCE WITH AND INTEREST IN OFFERED PROGRAMS

To understand which programs and events were of most interest and use to students, students were presented with categories of events (e.g., career success, social and entertainment, etc.) and asked to indicate their level of awareness and interest in the event. Provided options were *Not aware of this*, *Aware of this but have no plans to take part*, *Aware of this and plan on taking part this year* and *Have already taken part at least once this year*. Percentages of each response category are presented below, disaggregated between Master's students, doctoral students and professional students in separate tables. The chart below presents the percentages of students who indicated "not aware of this" when asked about programming from a particular category of Student Life programming. For example, 32.9% of doctoral students reported being unaware of Service and Community Engagement programming, while that was true of 36.2% of Master's students.

Percentage of Students Not Aware of Programming[a]

Well-being and Health
- 16.6%
- 18.3%
- 19.6%

Social and Entertainment
- 18.9%
- 12.8%
- 20.2%

Service and Community Engagement
- 35.0%
- 32.9%
- 36.2%

Inclusion and Belonging
- 21.5%
- 20.7%
- 24.0%

Career Success
- 23.0%
- 13.9%
- 18.4%

■ Professional ■ Doctoral ■ Master's

[a]; *n* for Professional students = 76 to 77 depending on item; *n* for Doctoral students = 134 to 135 depending on item; *n* for Master's students = 105 to 106 depending on item

Table 1: Master's Students' Programming Awareness and Interest

	Not aware of this	Aware of this but have no plans to take part	Aware of this and plan on taking part this year	Have already taken part at least once this year
Career Success (such as resume workshops, Handshake workshops, academic and non-academic job search series) (*n* = 105)	18.4%	43.8%	24.7%	13.2%
Inclusion and Belonging (such as Involvement Fair, Multicultural Center events) (*n* = 106)	24.0%	53.1%	11.8%	11.1%
Service and Community Engagement (such as Buck-I-SERV, Community Commitment) (*n* = 106)	36.2%	43.3%	17.0%	3.5%
Social and Entertainment (such as Quiz Night and other OUAB events and activities) (*n* = 105)	20.2%	58.5%	12.7%	8.6%
Well-being and Health (such as Wellness Wednesday workshop, OUAB in the Kitchen cooking class, group fitness classes) (*n* = 106)	19.6%	51.9%	19.7%	8.9%

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Table 2: Doctoral Students' Programming Awareness and Interest

	Not aware of this	Aware of this but have no plans to take part	Aware of this and plan on taking part this year	Have already taken part at least once this year
Career Success (such as resume workshops, Handshake workshops, academic and non-academic job search series) (*n* = 134)	13.9%	43.2%	31.5%	11.4%
Inclusion and Belonging (such as Involvement Fair, Multicultural Center events) (*n* = 133)	20.7%	56.0%	15.6%	7.8%
Service and Community Engagement (such as Buck-I-SERV, Community Commitment) (*n* = 133)	32.9%	53.0%	13.1%	1.0%
Social and Entertainment (such as Quiz Night and other OUAB events and activities) (*n* = 134)	12.8%	54.8%	17.9%	14.6%
Well-being and Health (such as Wellness Wednesday workshop, OUAB in the Kitchen cooking class, group fitness classes) (*n* = 134)	18.3%	45.6%	22.1%	13.9%

Table 3: Professional Students' Programming Awareness and Interest

	Not aware of this	Aware of this but have no plans to take part	Aware of this and plan on taking part this year	Have already taken part at least once this year
Career Success (such as resume workshops, Handshake workshops, academic and non-academic job search series) (*n* = 77)	23.0%	39.6%	24.3%	13.1%
Inclusion and Belonging (such as Involvement Fair, Multicultural Center events) (*n* = 77)	21.5%	54.5%	15.2%	8.8%
Service and Community Engagement (such as Buck-I-SERV, Community Commitment) (*n* = 77)	35.0%	48.9%	12.8%	3.3%
Social and Entertainment (such as Quiz Night and other OUAB events and activities) (*n* = 77)	18.9%	49.7%	21.5%	9.9%

Well-being and Health (such as Wellness Wednesday workshop, OUAB in the Kitchen cooking class, group fitness classes) (*n* = 77)	16.6%	51.3%	24.3%	7.8%

Interest in Resources

Students were presented lists of resources associated with various areas of concern (professional development, belonging and inclusion, etc.) and asked to indicate whether they would be interested in utilizing such a resource. Tables below present the percentages of Master's, doctoral and professional students who expressed interest in each kind of resource, broken up into different tables for each area of concern.

Table 4: Percentage of Students Interested in Professional Development Resources

	Master's[a]	Doctoral[b]	Professional[c]
Career counseling/coaching	48.3%	44.6%	32.7%
Job fair strategies	15.2%	19.8%	11.0%
Job talk critique and strategies	25.1%	35.5%	15.2%
Job/internship search strategies	39.7%	36.1%	27.9%
Leadership trainings	35.8%	26.6%	22.6%
Mock interviews and interviewing techniques	36.9%	40.2%	36.4%
Networking strategies	39.3%	41.6%	38.9%
Professional communication etiquette	24.2%	22.5%	18.5%
Resources for entrepreneurs	13.6%	9.6%	12.7%
Resume, CV and cover letter assistance	57.0%	57.1%	51.2%
Transition to the job market	32.2%	42.0%	27.8%
None of the above	8.7%	8.0%	13.9%

[a]*n* = 105 to 106 depending on item; [b]*n* = 134 to 135 depending on item; [c]*n* = 76 to 77 depending on item

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Table 5: Percentage of Students Interested in Social Engagement Resources

	Master's[a]	Doctoral[b]	Professional[c]
Family friendly programs	21.5%	20.5%	18.1%
Comedy, concert, lecture, film, or visual or fine arts events	44.8%	48.6%	39.4%
Cooking or art events	29.0%	32.1%	32.5%
Discounted tickets to local events	65.7%	69.1%	63.2%
Large graduate/professional student events (picnics, Valentine's Ball)	25.0%	31.7%	37.4%
Networking opportunities with other professionals or academics	41.6%	42.5%	29.2%
Opportunities to bond with graduate/professional students across the university	38.8%	43.9%	30.7%
Socials and happy hours	32.9%	35.8%	42.3%
Speed dating	9.1%	9.5%	4.9%
None of the above	5.3%	7.5%	9.5%

[a]*n* = 105 to 106 depending on item; [b]*n* = 134 to 135 depending on item; [c]*n* = 76 to 77 depending on item

Table 6: Percentage of Students Interested in Health and Well-being Resources

	Master's[a]	Doctoral[b]	Professional[c]
Alcohol and other drug prevention or recovery services	6.8%	4.8%	3.7%
Body image and eating concerns programs	20.7%	16.9%	16.6%
Drop-in counseling	18.7%	19.7%	25.0%
Financial coaching	20.5%	21.4%	20.6%
Food pantry on campus	18.7%	21.8%	16.8%
Formal therapy or counseling services	32.0%	41.3%	32.0%
Group counseling with other graduate and professional students	12.0%	19.6%	8.9%
Group fitness classes	30.3%	31.4%	34.1%
Intramural sports	19.5%	22.8%	29.2%
Nutrition and wellness coaching	27.0%	25.2%	27.7%
Relationship education/violence prevention	7.50%	8.30%	5.90%

Sexual health and wellness services (such as HIV/STI testing, Condom Club)	16.0%	16.4%	16.6%
Spaces to exercise (indoor and outdoor)	48.8%	50.6%	60.1%
Stress management programs	33.2%	36.6%	41.5%
None of the above	11.3%	10.9%	13.1%

[a]n = 105 to 106 depending on item; [b]n = 134 to 135 depending on item; [c]n = 76 to 77 depending on item

Table 7: Percentage of Students Interested in Belonging and Inclusion Resources

	Master's[a]	Doctoral[b]	Professional[c]
Affinity groups (groups formed around a shared identity that provide a safe space for connection and affirmation)	16.0%	17.1%	11.7%
Cultural and Intercultural initiatives	19.8%	25.3%	17.3%
Disability services	12.8%	11.3%	18.4%
Opportunities for local community engagement and social change	24.3%	19.7%	19.6%
Opportunities for service outside of central Ohio	8.3%	5.8%	6.1%
Opportunities to connect with others in my same racial/ethnic group	7.1%	15.3%	7.1%
Opportunities to connect with others in my same religious affiliation	9.9%	10.0%	15.6%
Opportunities to connect with others in the LGBTQ+ community	10.5%	11.1%	9.1%
Resources about living in Columbus	26.9%	33.5%	33.9%
Resources about living off-campus	29.3%	35.3%	36.0%
Resources for DACA and Undocumented students	6.2%	4.2%	3.9%
Resources for first-generation students	11.3%	12.8%	18.1%
Resources for individuals new to The Ohio State University	20.7%	20.6%	23.7%
Resources for international students	14.1%	22.6%	3.5%
Resources for parenting or pregnant students	9.1%	9.8%	2.9%
Resources for veterans	6.8%	1.7%	5.1%
None of the above	25.7%	21.8%	27.1%

[a]n = 105 to 106 depending on item; [b]n = 134 to 135 depending on item; [c]n = 76 to 77 depending on item

WRITE-IN SUGGESTIONS

Following the above questions, students were asked what other programs they would find valuable as a graduate or professional student at Ohio State. This item was a free text response. A total of 132 responses were received, and these were reviewed and coded for themes. The responses that contained relevant suggestions elicited 8 themes: support services, fitness and recreation, engagement and networking, financial assistance and advice, career help, specific skills training, diversity, equity and inclusion and integration with Ohio State. Below are the frequencies for those themes along with some exemplar comments for each. Statements have been edited for brevity, denoted by ellipsis (…), and for clarity, denoted by brackets ([ ]).

Support Services (*n* = 20)

- Anything about disabilities. Students with disabilities have little representation and aren't included in many inclusion activities
- I really wish that we had doctoral student specific counselling opportunities here. The doctoral journey and experience is all encompassing and highly stressful. Considering the much higher rates of mental health concerns for graduate students compared to the rest of the population, I would have benefitted from there being a few embedded counselors in the Graduate School (similarly to ODI) who were specifically for doctoral students
- More access to counseling with a quick turnaround
- Set study groups/study time, more meaningful breaks from classes instead of university telling students to practice self-care

Fitness and Recreation (*n* = 17)

- Access to an outdoor running track
- Experiences outside
- Free fitness

Engagement and Networking (*n* = 16)

- As a graduate student, COVID-19 has prevented us students from engaging and networking with alumni using pre-COVID method (ex. In-person interaction, social events). BE INNOVATIVE! Find a method that allows students and alumni to engage in a similar manner. As an example, schedule coffee chats with… small groups of students and an alumni leader
- Engagement with local schools [in] Ohio
- Opportunities to share research and collaborate on research projects across departments

Financial Assistance and Advice (*n* = 14)

- Collective bargaining for better treatment as graduate students
- Financial planning and investing advice
- Tax workshops for international students, grant writing workshops

Career Help (*n* = 11)

- Academic writing, scholarships that non-American F1 visa holders can apply to, on campus job opportunities if GRA/GTA ship is not available
- Non-academic career groups

Specific Skills Training (*n* = 10)

- Dissertation writing group - trying to get connected
- Research intensives - i.e., on implementation science, or mixed methods research, or innovative statistical analysis strategies

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (*n* = 5)

- More social change and climate change initiatives
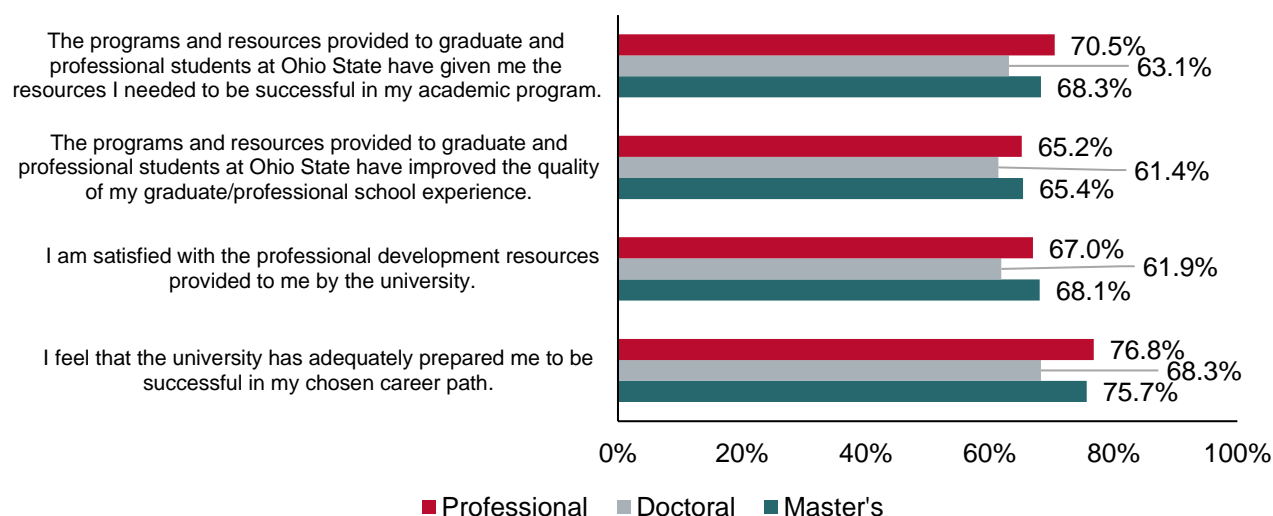- Women in STEM [which is] only available in undergrad

Integration with Ohio State (*n* = 5)

- Maybe a better introduction to the city and being a Buckeye (at the graduate level)
- Resources for online-only students, Better ways for online-students to connect with campus students.

PROGRAM SATISFACTION

To ascertain students' level of satisfaction with programs, they were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements below. Items have the responses *Strongly disagree*, *Disagree*, *Neutral*, *Agree* and *Strongly agree*. Results below are broken down between Master's students, doctoral students, and professional students. Responses were collapsed into three categories: *Strongly disagree/Disagree*, *Neutral* and *Strongly agree/Agree*. The chart below presents percentages of students who expressed *Strongly agree* or *Agree* to each item in question.

Program Satisfaction by Student Group[a]

The programs and resources provided to graduate and professional students at Ohio State have given me the resources I needed to be successful in my academic program.
- 70.5%
- 63.1%
- 68.3%

The programs and resources provided to graduate and professional students at Ohio State have improved the quality of my graduate/professional school experience.
- 65.2%
- 61.4%
- 65.4%

I am satisfied with the professional development resources provided to me by the university.
- 67.0%
- 61.9%
- 68.1%

I feel that the university has adequately prepared me to be successful in my chosen career path.
- 76.8%
- 68.3%
- 75.7%

Legend: ■ Professional ■ Doctoral ■ Master's

[a]; *n* for Professional students = 76 to 77 depending on item; *n* for Doctoral students = 134 to 135 depending on item; *n* for Master's students = 105 to 106 depending on item

Table 7: Master's Students' Program Satisfaction

	Strongly disagree/ Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ Agree
I feel that the university has adequately prepared me to be successful in my chosen career path. (*n* = 106)	5.5%	18.8%	75.7%
I am satisfied with the professional development resources provided to me by the university. (*n* = 106)	9.8%	22.1%	68.1%
The programs and resources provided to graduate and professional students at Ohio State have improved the quality of my graduate/professional school experience. (*n* = 105)	12.4%	22.2%	65.4%
The programs and resources provided to graduate and professional students at Ohio State have given me the resources I needed to be successful in my academic program. (*n* = 105)	6.9%	24.8%	68.3%

Table 8: Doctoral Students' Program Satisfaction

	Strongly disagree/ Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ Agree
I feel that the university has adequately prepared me to be successful in my chosen career path. (*n* = 135)	10.1%	21.6%	68.3%
I am satisfied with the professional development resources provided to me by the university. (*n* = 135)	10.9%	27.2%	61.9%
The programs and resources provided to graduate and professional students at Ohio State have improved the quality of my graduate/professional school experience. (*n* = 135)	12.8%	25.8%	61.4%
The programs and resources provided to graduate and professional students at Ohio State have given me the resources I needed to be successful in my academic program. (*n* = 134)	11.1%	25.8%	63.1%

Table 9: Professional Students' Program Satisfaction

	Strongly disagree/ Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree/ Agree
I feel that the university has adequately prepared me to be successful in my chosen career path. (*n* = 77)	5.9%	17.4%	76.8%
I am satisfied with the professional development resources provided to me by the university. (*n* = 77)	12.7%	20.2%	67.0%

The programs and resources provided to graduate and professional students at Ohio State have improved the quality of my graduate/professional school experience. (*n* = 77)	15.7%	19.1%	65.2%
The programs and resources provided to graduate and professional students at Ohio State have given me the resources I needed to be successful in my academic program. (*n* = 77)	13.1%	16.4%	70.5%

Barriers to Attendance

Students were asked, "If you have not attended any graduate/professional programming or have not attended as often as you want to, what has kept you from attending?". They were given five choices and a write-in option. Students could select all that apply. The table below displays the percentage of Master's, doctoral and professional students who answered yes to each item.

Table 10: Barriers to Attendance by Student Type

	Master's[a]	Doctoral[b]	Professional[c]
Lack of personal time	71.0%	72.8%	83.6%
Lack of interest in program offerings	28.4%	28.0%	24.3%
Negative experience(s) with previous programs	2.2%	5.2%	5.7%
Conflict with academic/program commitment	30.5%	33.1%	43.4%
Didn't know these programs existed	22.1%	18.1%	25.8%
Other (please specify)	13.7%	9.8%	4.5%

[a]*n* = 105 to 106 depending on item; [b]*n* = 134 to 135 depending on item; [c]*n* = 76 to 77 depending on item

Write-in Answers

Students who answered *Other (please specify)* were given the opportunity to further explain their answer. Fifty-four unique responses were provided. Five categories emerged from their answers: COVID-19 concerns, transportation, lack of interest, other priorities, need for childcare and social awkwardness. Below are the frequencies for those themes along with some exemplar comments for each. These comments were not edited for brevity or clarity.

COVID-19 Concerns (*n* = 19)

- COVID concerns for in person events
- COVID, I currently don't do anything that involves being around other individuals that could make my family sick besides going to class

Transportation (*n* = 14)

- I live in Mansfield so can't often attend events on the Columbus campus
- Lack of accessible parking and transportation
- Literally no way to cheaply get onto campus. It's either an hour commute via bus or paying ridiculous prices to park

Lack of Interest (*n* = 9)

- Also everything is very generic. I can only hear the same advice so many times
- Programs are not relevant to my field
- Very few, if any, about disability

Other Priorities (*n* = 7)

- Not planned with working professional's schedules in mind
- Scheduling conflicts...too often take place during work day

Social Awkwardness (*n* = 3)

- My shyness and social awkwardness

Need for Childcare (*n* = 2)

- Lack of childcare
- No childcare in evenings

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Focus groups were conducted to learn more about graduate and professional students' interests in and satisfaction with programming and events specific to this population. The following sections first describe the areas where students thought that offerings were strong, then areas where students thought Student Life could improve its offerings and then barriers students observed regarding attendance and utilization of existing programming and events.

STRENGTHS

In this section, students' positive interactions with Student Life programming and events are described. Themes are presented below in order of perceived relative importance to those in the focus groups. Relative importance was determined by the number of times one topic was discussed over another.

Networking and Socializing

Students generally liked the events that allowed them to meet other students in a non-academic setting. Those events set up through the Ohio Union Activities Board (OUAB) proved especially popular, including cooking classes, trivia nights and the Fall Welcome Picnics. The benefits of those OUAB events extended to other similar events that allowed students to do something new. Specific events included horticulture, candle-making and axe-throwing. Those events that took students into Columbus and other locations beyond Ohio State's campus also were especially appreciated for getting them out into the community.

For students who found it difficult to attend in-person events, virtual events through CarmenZoom were appreciated. Those that had specific instructions and breakout rooms also made it easier to engage with other students without feeling awkward. Several international students also mentioned enjoying those virtual events and would like to see them remain available even as COVID-19 restrictions are loosened going forward.

One student specifically cited meeting Dr. Shivers at an event as a highlight, which helped make the Student Life feel more accessible to them.

> "I get to go and make a meal and learn how to do it… and forget about school for a bit."

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"It's nice to meet people outside of your program who do not know what you do so you don't have to talk about academics with them."

"There was an event welcoming the new vice president Dr. Shivers… She walked around, and we got to meet her. It made her seem like part of the community… I don't feel like that exclusively needs to be done for vice presidents, it could for anybody with a role in Student Life."

Mental Health

One student said that they regularly attended OUAB's Technical Tuesdays and Wellness Wednesdays, finding them very helpful during their stressful graduate school experience.

Many professional students felt that embedded counselors, offered through a partnership between Counseling and Consultation Service and their colleges, who were able to focus on their specific situations in their degree programs, were a boon to their success in school.

"Since you tend to be secluded within your specific area, having that embedded resource is really easy because you know who to go to."

Physical Wellness and Fitness

Many students with graduate associate appointments appreciated the subsidized health insurance offered to students in those roles. The health services and facilities being readily accessible on campus were an additional benefit that was discussed. Recreational Sports was also mentioned multiple times for its fitness programming, as was the Student Wellness Center and its nutrition services.

Financial Difficulties

Though they did not elaborate on the circumstances that led to their needing it, multiple students mentioned that the Student Emergency Fund was helpful for them.

"The emergency fund credit… was very helpful across different contexts."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Students thought that there were certain areas where services offered by Student Life were lacking. The following themes describe these opportunities for growth. Themes are presented below in order of relative importance to the focus groups. Relative importance was ascertained by the number of times one topic was discussed over another.

Networking and Socializing

There was a widely expressed preference for casual social events where networking or career advancement was not the primary focus. Many, especially professional students, mentioned that their programs and colleges assisted in providing networking opportunities, so they wanted to see more purely recreational offerings from Student Life. Several wanted events off campus, such as sponsored visits to the Columbus Zoo or to COSI, especially if they knew that they could bring their family and children.

Others mentioned a desire for more guided experiences, such as opportunities to showcase their graduate research in informal and lighthearted ways. They mentioned the television show Drunk History as a potential model for how this showcase might be implemented. Others liked virtual events, especially ones where there were specific instructions for how to engage with the programming and other attendees. The virtual events were also helpful for students who were not able to attend programming during the day due to other conflicts.

One student specifically mentioned that community building for graduate students of color is paramount to their success. However, a lot of that community-building work goes unpaid. Creating specific graduate associate positions to develop and support these spaces would make sure that such work is not an additional burden. Another student in a different group also recognized that there are already informal spaces that students created to develop community and support each other, and Student Life may find more success in supporting those spaces rather than trying to reinvent the wheel with new events and programming.

> "The need for community is urgent, even before the first day of class comes."

> "This is a big, big school… and resources need to be redistributed to spaces that students are already in that allow them to flourish."

Career Development

Doctoral students in academia-oriented programs widely felt that it was unrealistic to expect to find a tenure-track position following completion of their doctoral degrees. This led to two separate, but related, lines of discussion. Those students who wanted to work in academia wanted assistance in understanding the academic job market so that they could better plan their development while still a doctoral student. Others expected to need to shift into industry and wanted there to be more programming and workshops to assist them in finding positions that would pay better than being an adjunct instructor. One student wished that Student Life could prioritize creating more Graduate Administrative Associate (GAA) and Graduate Research Associate (GRA) positions so that humanities students have more opportunities to develop a body of work that can help them attain non-academic jobs.

> "A lot of professional development… is focused on becoming a faculty member when for the vast majority of us… that's not going to be a reality."

> "I am pretty much committed into going into a non-academic role… [which] is influenced by the academic job market… which does not seem to be improving."

Despite only 13% of professional students expressing interest in entrepreneurship workshops on the Student Life Survey, professional students in the focus groups wanted assistance in understanding the entrepreneurial aspects of setting up their practices, whether it be legal, dental, veterinary or medical practices. These students referred to these skills as financial management, which may explain the discrepancy. Because courses are almost exclusively focused on theory or practical skills, the financial aspect of operating a business are often learned ad hoc and informally. Additionally, these skills are also often learned through alumni and other professional connections, rather than through their schooling. Professional students also mentioned that workshops where they could learn about how to communicate with individuals with different identities would give them an advantage when entering the workforce. A general desire to learn soft skills was also prevalent among some of the professional student focus group attendees.

> "As professional students, if we can develop a strong background in [communicating with people with different identities] already before entering the real world, our patient interactions would be so much better."

Others wanted to see career salary data be made available to students so that they had better information when approaching the negotiation stage of their career searches.

Mental Health

The ways in which students would prefer for Ohio State to approach mental health took up a considerable portion of the focus groups' time. There was a commonly expressed desire for more

comprehensive mental health services from Counseling and Consultation Service (CCS), including frustration with wait times and lack of consistent therapists. However, solutions they offered did not solely fall on expansion of CCS. Several thought that organized and facilitated support groups would be a good way for graduate and professional students who needed assistance to process difficulties and struggles in their lives without overloading CCS.

As mentioned above, many professional students positively mentioned the utility of CCS's embedded counselors. These students thought that embedded counselors in every school and college throughout Ohio State could do graduate and other professional students a lot of good, which matches recommendations offered by Ohio State's Mental Health Task Force. When thinking about efforts at the college level, it was also often expressed that faculty members could also be an important liaison in promoting graduate student well-being.

> "Short term therapy model where you only get 10 sessions a year is not sufficient, where at least one session per month should be implemented because we are here year-round."

> "I tell new students to get in [to CCS] as early as you possibly can even if you don't think you need it because by the time you might see someone you're probably gonna need it."

> "I've been using those services since Day One, and I scheduled that phone appointment as soon I knew I was coming [to OSU for graduate school] … other current students said that it would take many months to get into their first appointment with a counselor."

> "Folks who are specialized in the kinds of things that graduate students are going to be dealing with."

Others mentioned wanting more opportunities to incorporate their family into their school life. They felt that it could serve as an important support if their families better understood what their schooling and training entailed.

> "They don't know what I do…. Really show our families what we do in dental school so that when we get out, they can be by our sides as they will love to do. And they will be there, but if we can educate them on what we do more, they can then help us out more."

Financial Difficulties

Students requested tax workshops, specifically referring to the difficulties that international students face with regards to the tax system. Others wanted these tax workshops to also focus on the implications of being funded through fellowship compared to being funded through graduate associate positions. General financial literacy classes were also requested.

> "My previous campus… we had several workshops dedicated to the tax preparation software for international students."

> "I try to Google things but nothing really specific so something like that [financial management workshops] would help me make a game plan. Especially about something like paying off student loans for those of us that didn't get scholarships. That's a big burden we are going to have to deal with when we graduate."

The several students who mentioned finding the Student Emergency Fund helpful mentioned that they would like to see it expanded to cover more situations for more students.

Students with families also mentioned needing help finding childcare and housing.

Physical Wellness and Fitness

Students desired more kinds of fitness programming that could better fit their busy schedules. Some professional students also wanted there to be intramural sports between cohorts of professional students.

BARRIERS

Most students mentioned that it was difficult to go to Student Life events and programming because they simply did not have the time to attend. Those time conflicts were due to classes, working in clinics, schedule-dependent research activities and lab obligations. Although these students recognized that their hectic schedule was not something that Student Life could ameliorate, they still had some desire to attend Student Life events and programs.

Others found that events, especially those in the middle of the day, were difficult to attend because they were often on North or South campus between High Street and the Olentangy River. Students who spent most of their days on West campus or various hospitals throughout Columbus found the prospect of commuting and finding parking to attend these events time-consuming and expensive. Others mentioned that if they planned on utilizing a service on North or South campus, they would have to plan their entire day around that due to the time involved in commuting from West campus.

For events and programs scheduled in the evening, several students, both graduate and professional, mentioned that they would be much more likely to attend if their children were welcome at the event or if childcare were provided during the events.

> "…professional students may have some different life circumstances than the majority undergraduate population as far as just the nature of our school day to day life. A lot more of us are older, may have families. A lot more of us may...not be living on campus or even in the area. So just accommodating to those needs...would be a good thing to emphasize."

> "I've tried and considered going to more University events, but I think it is more out of my comfort zone as a professional student as I do not want to mingle with people outside of professional schools. I think the age gap is a little bit harder so having events that are grad/prof specific tends to be a lot more appealing. And I think since we have different needs, I tend to be more confident in the fact that the event will be catered better to something relevant to me rather than all students here."

> "I wasn't able to join any for professional development; most of the time it was because I had patients scheduled at the time. Our time scheduled is not as flexible; that's why we miss a lot of important things. If they could hold the same event on several different days or on different months would help me a little bit."

Marketing Expansion

Many graduate and professional students, both in the focus groups and on the Student Life Survey, expressed a desire for programs that the Office of Student Life already offers, including fitness classes and instruction, mental health services, career support, teaching support and more. It is clear that there is a deficit in graduate and professional students' knowledge of Student Life offerings. Both groups of students noted that they felt siloed in their program without much contact with the larger university. Several students mentioned that they would appreciate a representative of Student Life being a part of their specific orientation to graduate school, and several focus group participants agreed with the idea when it came up during discussion.

Regarding communication methods, some students appreciated receiving one or two emails a week describing what events and programming were coming up. Another found event postings on

Instagram helpful because it meant that they could easily forward the event's information to their peers. Another student mentioned that their favorite way of hearing about events and programs was through their peers and their collective cohort group chats.

> "If you want professional students to know more about what [the Office of Student Life] offers, you should find a way to infiltrate orientation."

> "I almost wish that there was orientation for everyone that at least gave you a very fast rundown of where to go if you are looking for something. I think part of the problem is that I don't know what I don't know…I don't know these things exist so I can't ask someone where they are."

CONCLUSION

Results from the Student Life Survey indicated the programming priorities of graduate and professional students. These results also described which specific types of programming were most interesting to students. Furthermore, graduate and professional students reported specific barriers to attendance. Students were most interested in career development resources, especially resources that made preparing job application materials easier. Students indicated disinterest in social and entertainment programming and belonging and inclusion programming, but when looking at survey results, they expressed interest in specific types of programming within those categories when asked more detailed questions. For example, over a third of professional and doctoral students expressed interest in resources for off-campus living, a belonging and inclusion program. Common barriers to program attendance included lack of time and conflicts with academic obligations.

Focus groups with current graduate and professional students revealed many key strengths and future directions for the services the Office of Student Life provides to Ohio State graduate and professional students. Students discussed their preferences for events that helped them de-stress as well as the opportunities to improve career development and mental health support. Their discussion of specific barriers when trying to access events and programming also provides Student Life with potential ways to make programs more accessible to those who might want to attend.

On both the Student Life Survey and in the focus groups, students expressed interest in certain specific programs or resources that Student Life offered but that they (i.e., the students) did not seem to know existed. Graduate and professional students would benefit from more direct interaction with Student Life representatives to learn more about offered programming, perhaps at orientation events.

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