ADVOCACY REPORT SPRING 2021

University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Graduate Student Organization (GSO)

Email: gso@louisiana.edu

Website: gso.louisiana.edu

Facebook: @ULLafayetteGSO

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA Lafayette

GSO Graduate Student Organization

PREFACE

The following report identifies areas that the Graduate Student Organization (GSO) in partnership with others at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (faculty, staff, student organizations, and campus offices) can continue to develop to sustain our graduate students.

Our goal is to **raise awareness** of the role of GSO in advocating, funding, and communicating with and for graduate students to address the issues that they face throughout their graduate education.

Thus, this report will add value to the ongoing University-wide discussion on how to **better support graduate students** to develop professionally.

Using real student responses, this report also strives to **provide a platform for unheard graduate student voices**, candidly sharing ideas and sentiments that may otherwise never find an audience.

Lastly, the Organization has needed to adapt in 2020-2021, and our Department Representatives and Executive Board have put in, perhaps, more work than ever before to increase the Organization's profile and maintain operations despite exclusively remote meetings. This report seeks to **honor the initiative of our graduate student leaders** during this particularly difficult time in searching for new ways to represent (and care for) our fellow students.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORGANIZATION

All graduate students at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette are automatically members of the Graduate Student Organization (GSO).

We are here to advocate for you! The GSO supports graduate students in several ways:

Advocacy

One of the most important things we do is to represent the needs and concerns of our members to the university administration. The GSO president serves on the University Graduate Council, the Graduate Appeals Committee, as well as other administrative committees the Dean of Graduate School deems appropriate. Student representatives from graduate departments meet regularly each semester to discuss issues that are important to graduate students.

Funding

Grad students know that conducting research and presenting at conferences puts a strain on our limited budgets. The GSO uses student-assessed fees to help offset the cost of research and travel related expenses! We also provide one-time grants for purchasing thesis, dissertation, or project supplies.

Communication

The GSO is one of many important relays to get vital information to graduate students. Check out Facebook and this website often for the latest GSO information. Your representative is also a great source of information. Find your representative here!

If there is an issue that you would like to see the GSO address, or if you are interested in helping out, please don't hesitate to contact us at gso@louisiana.edu.

Like us on Facebook!

SPRING 2021 REFLECTIONS

The pages that follow are insights from an "Advocacy Survey" GSO conducted in Fall 2020. The results, perhaps unsurprisingly, speak to students' difficulties in adjusting to a rough semester of an already challenging experience (graduate studies). Though many comments are pandemic-specific, there are nonetheless evergreen responses that GSO can ponder in developing a refreshed Advocacy Platform and in defining areas of prioritization for the Organization.

Based upon the responses in the Fall 2020 Advocacy Survey, GSO worked with the SGA Graduate School President and the Graduate School Office to organize a December 2020 Grad Gather & Grow Series. Featuring external speakers, the virtual sessions gave students and faculty an opportunity to convene and dive into four topics: motivation and commitment to pursue graduate studies, self-advocacy as an international student, remote learning, and how universities can address graduate student mental health.

In the Fall 2020 Advocacy Survey, respondents asked for more opportunities to connect with fellow students at other universities and identified professional development as a priority. In Spring 2021, GSO has opted to make a small appropriation to facilitate a bulk order of tickets to the National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS) South Central [Virtual] Regional Conference where students could network with graduate students from across the region and across all disciplines. Attendance at the conference, wholly subsidized by GSO funding, allowed UL graduate students to explore workshops on topics of career readiness and professional development.

In reflecting back on Fall 2020 Advocacy Survey responses and various initiatives by GSO through the 2020-2021 academic year, Department Representatives are now able to foresee a future of relative "normalcy" with a return to campus and the possibility of more in-person interactions.

GSO's Advocacy Committee (an internal subgroup that relaunched in mid-Spring 2021 to better support the Organization as a whole) has engaged in ongoing discussions on GSO's future (see Advocacy Committee Minutes). Informed by many conversations with graduate students and Department Representatives, GSO has come to three central initiatives that GSO will pursue in 2021-2022.

GSO 2021-2022 OBJECTIVES

Advocacy: Engagement & Empowerment

1. Pivot to an action-oriented Advocacy Committee
2. Identify specialized roles for Advocacy Committee to reflect our diverse graduate student population
3. Connect GSO with regional and national graduate education advocacy efforts
4. Train GSO Department Representatives to be true peer advocates
5. Create a culture of activism with GSO weighing in on issues that affect graduate students
6. Facilitate regular meetings between GSO Department Representatives and University administrators

Funding: Accessibility & Equity

1. Increase understanding of funding procedures within Funding Committee to make recommendations to the GSO General Council
2. Develop a virtual Funding Workshop (synchronous or asynchronous) to educate potential applicants on GSO funding opportunities
3. Present concrete examples of GSO appropriations to potential applicants
4. Investigate and resolve barriers to application for funding; determine which restrictive policies are state or University-based
5. Collect feedback on applicability of current funding opportunities to graduate students in each department
6. Align GSO Bylaws with webform funding application procedures

Communication: Visibility & Relevancy

1. Leverage Communications Committee for delegation of workload
2. Ensure Department Representatives have graduate student lists to communicate announcements directly to their departments
3. Design a semester-long communication plan for when and with what message GSO and Department Representatives contact graduate students
4. Establish a GSO social media presence on one additional social media platform (Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter)
5. Encourage Department Representative attendance at in-person and virtual Graduate School and department events as a visible extension of GSO
6. Find opportunities for GSO to assist with programming and/or co-organize events with other organizations or campus offices

FALL 2020 ADVOCACY SURVEY

The new GSO leadership team sought to understand graduate students' interests and concerns in Fall 2020.

At the first Graduate School Townhall Zoom of the semester (August 28), students aired their anxieties and uncertainties about the University's policies for return to campus amid the pandemic, along with questions about the effects of remote learning and assistantship expectations.

On August 30, after brainstorming students' priorities for potential GSO programming, the Executive Board contacted a handful of students (new, returning, American, international, Master's, doctoral, STEM, Humanities) to sample the survey.

On September 8, the GSO Advocacy Survey was then shared on Facebook and the link distributed by our Department Representatives to their classmates on September 11.

On October 20, the Graduate School emailed the Survey link to students, a push that garnered more responses than the previous efforts.

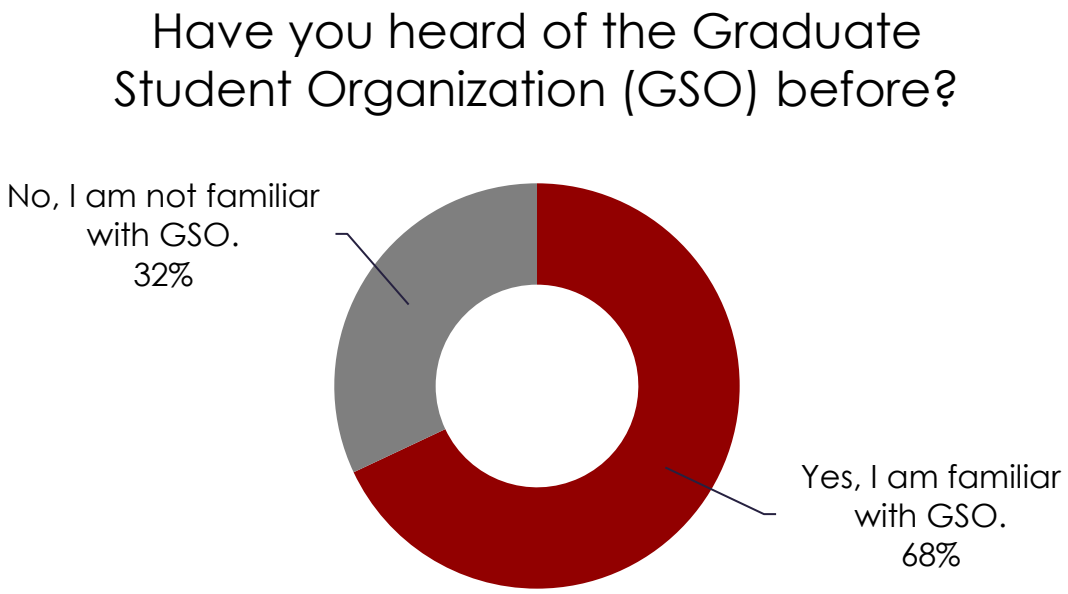
The Advocacy Survey aims to understand students' familiarity with GSO and their previous contact with the organization. Then, students are asked about their interest in various potential programming offerings. Finally, the survey includes an invitation for students to give narrative feedback on the challenges they face and what they would like to see from GSO in the future.

The Advocacy Survey was anonymous, yielding frank feedback. However, the anonymity proved problematic for instances where students expressed individual concerns that could easily be remedied by directing them to existing campus resources.

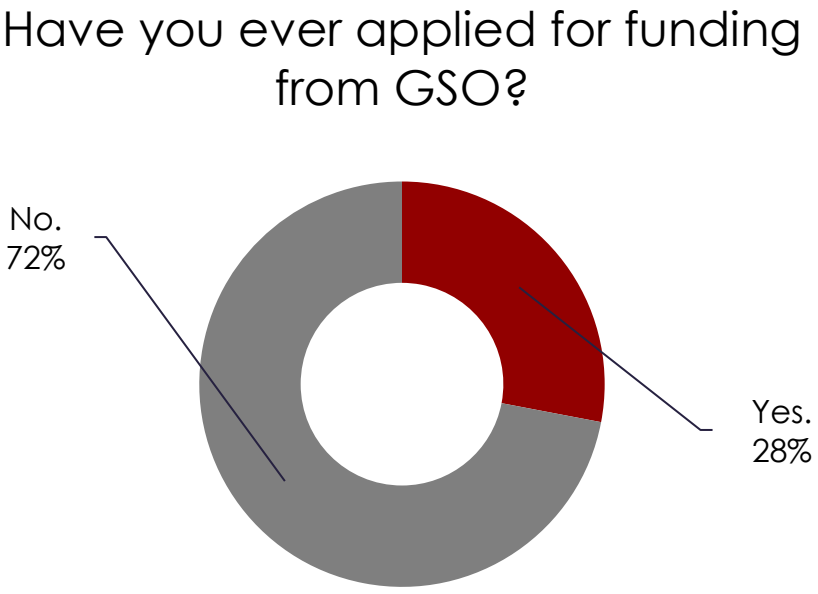
SURVEY RESULTS

Part I: Background Demographic Information

Question 1: Familiarity



Question 2: Personal Experience with GSO Funding



Of the 50 graduate student respondents for the Advocacy Survey, most say they are familiar with GSO, however, the majority of students have never applied for funding from GSO (an activity that has been highly prioritized since GSO's inception).

Of the 34 students who indicated familiarity with GSO, 20 have never applied for funding, 14 have.

It is encouraging that most student respondents have heard of GSO. The organization, is, after all, the voice of graduate students on campus. GSO Executives traditionally participate in the Graduate School's Orientation activities, introducing new students to the world of research funding through the student-assessed GSO fee. This year, the GSO President promoted GSO in the virtual Graduate Student Orientation (Moodle) in short video clips.

As of the preparation of this report, the GSO Facebook has 575 users who like the page. Since August 12 (the first day of the Fall 2020 semester), the GSO Facebook page has grown by 60 likes, a *very* modest given the number of new students who start Graduate School each year. The Organization has come to realize that it may be time to expand to an additional social media network to reach more students.

It is revealing that most respondents have heard of GSO but have never applied for funding. For an organization that has channeled its efforts into offsetting graduate students' research costs, *most* of our students are not accessing these funding opportunities. Visibility is a clear problem, and many students may have heard of GSO but do not know their Department Representative. Students who are aware of GSO's funding opportunities may not find that the categories correspond to their own research costs. Other students may not, in fact, incur prohibitive costs for their research because of the nature of their academic program or because of access to other funding sources.

At the beginning of the Fall 2020 semester, 11 of GSO's 27 Department Representative seats were vacant (40.7% vacancy). At the end of the spring 2021 semester, we expect to need to fill 7 seats. Due to students' short tenure in graduate programs, turnover of representatives (particularly in terminal master's programs) is quite high. A lack of Department Representative for students means students' concerns may be unheard by the GSO membership. Additionally, students unrepresented by a Department Representative are not eligible to apply for funding. As an organization, GSO over the last few years has had periods of trouble maintaining quorum at meetings (at times, funding appropriations were even in peril) because of this gap in even and consistent representation from across campus. Thus, it may be most practical when vacancies arise at the end of an academic year for a *new* representative to be chosen among *new, incoming* students (with the goal of finding a delegate who can stay with the Organization for two or more years).

The Organization has also entertained discussions of designing a representation system where more positions are available, not simply a "one department, one student" model.

As of the preparation of this report, the GSO Executive Board has contacted the Graduate Coordinator of each of the departments without representation in fall 2020. Thirteen new representatives joined GSO in Fall 2020 or Spring 2021. Although it is exciting to have new representatives join the Organization at a time of such momentum, it is also difficult to orient new students with such a lack of institutional memory. New representatives who joined in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 had access to a new Department Representative Training video and have been active participants in our meetings this semester.

The vacancies that remain in GSO are largely from departments with online programs or the seat has been unfilled for several years. As of Summer 2020, GSO meetings have been held remotely (via Zoom), ensuring that even students who live far from campus are able to attend the meetings and/or serve as a Department Representative. Perhaps students and Graduate Coordinators from these programs without current representation could reconsider what GSO can offer their students. We believe participation in GSO is, indeed, valuable for students in all departments.

Year-Long, Unfilled GSO Department Representative Vacancies (2020-2021)

Department	Programs
Accounting	Accounting, M.S.
Electrical Engineering	Engineering, M.S.E., Electrical Engineering Concentration; Systems Engineering, Ph.D.
Nursing	Nursing, M.S.N. programs; Doctor of Nursing Practice, D.N.P.

Part II: Defining GSO Priorities

Question 3: Interest in Advocacy and Programming

In the next part of the survey, GSO requested that graduate student survey respondents provide their feedback on advocacy priorities. Informed by ongoing initiatives from the Graduate School and various campus student services, GSO would like to pinpoint graduate students' current preoccupations to provide supplemental support and programming.

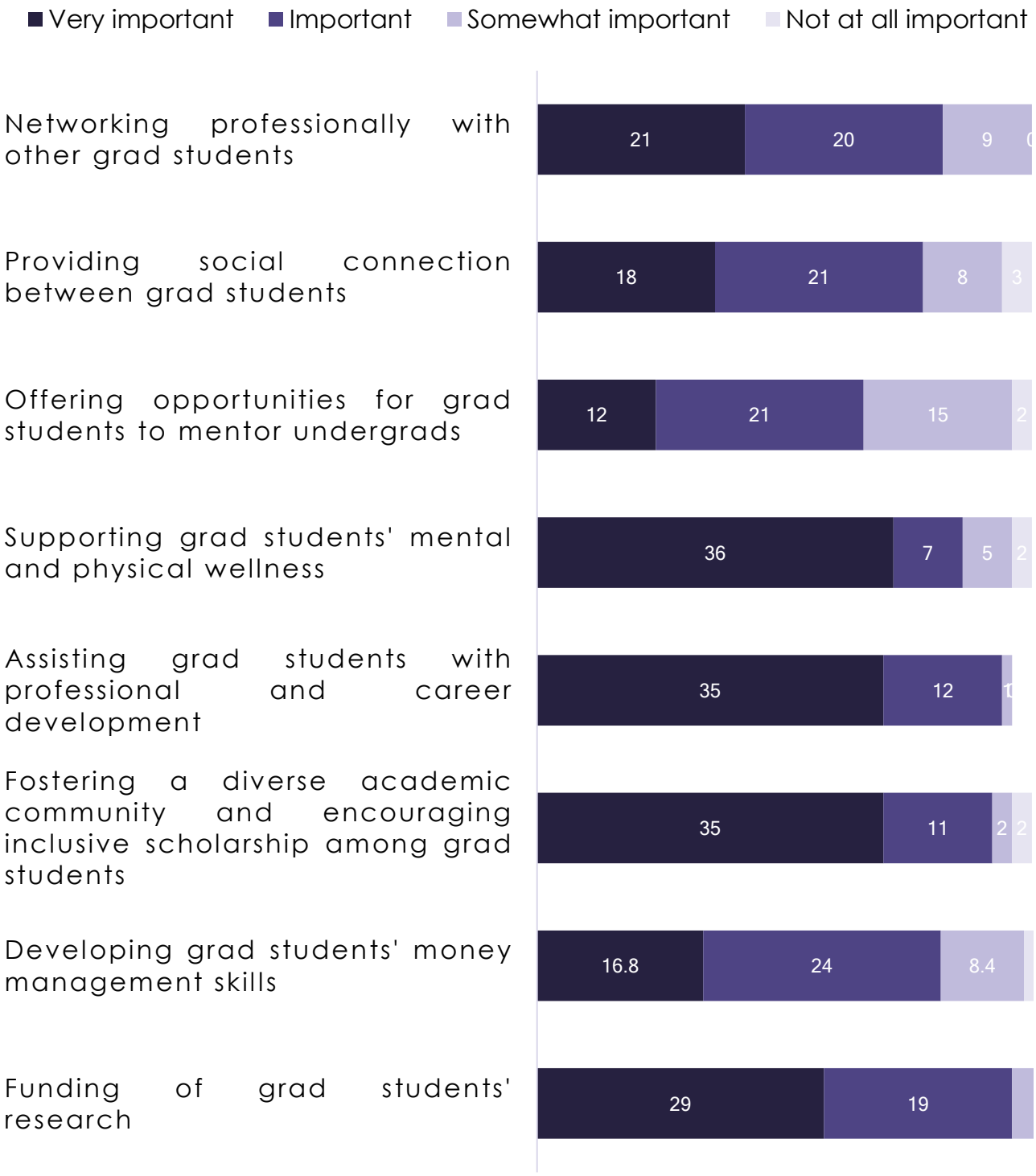
On the following page, students' responses are noted. For each question, a paragraph of commentary is provided to contextualize its inclusion in the Advocacy Survey, to assist in the interpretation of the results or to offer an update on progress toward these goals since the survey's initial release.

The conversation bubbles interlaced in the commentary are students' responses to the prompts, grouped for your convenience by topic. However, in the original survey, students were asked to rate the importance of various advocacy and programming ideas (as illustrated in the chart), then answer three questions:

- Do you have ideas on how GSO can better support graduate students? Specific initiatives? Programming suggestions? Additional categories for funding opportunities?
- What is your biggest challenge as a graduate student this semester? Is there a way GSO can help?
- Any additional comments?

GSO would like your help in determining how to prioritize advocacy and programming for our UL Lafayette graduate students.

Please rate the following areas by level of importance to you as a grad student.



3a. Networking professionally with other graduate students.

In a typical academic year, the Graduate School would offer beginning-of-semester mixers for graduate students from different departments to meet one another (Trivia at Jefferson Street Pub, Grad School Bingo, etc.). Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the Graduate School's programming has been limited to virtual events (Zoom) and although during these events students do minimally interact with one another by video or in the chat, most conversation is limited to a presenter (Dean Farmer-Kaiser, Assistant Dean de Mahy, faculty speakers) and individual students who come forward to participate as invited panelists.

Additionally, because of social distancing restrictions and the risk of congregant events, many departments have likely forgone new student orientation events where returning students greet newcomers and all department faculty members and students share their research interests.

Until social distancing restrictions are lifted and in-person events resume in earnest, networking with other graduate students may be limited to Zoom events and virtual connections (for example, through LinkedIn). Unless a virtual networking event is devised by GSO or the Graduate School, graduate students' professional connections may be restricted to members of their own program because, as of yet, no event has targeted this specific need in an interdepartmental fashion.

Do you have ideas on how GSO can better support graduate students?

3b. Providing social connection between grad students

Although social connection did not rank as high as engaging with others for professional or academic gain, the narrative comments in the survey showed how students, especially new graduate students and international students, are feeling isolated and disconnected from campus life and the traditional graduate school experience.

In response to this observation of a lack of social connection, GSO organized a "Tea & Talk" Zoom session, though no students attended. Although students say they would like opportunities to socialize – even if it has to be virtual – the lack of attendance at the event did not match the apparent interest. A GSO Zumba event similarly had few attendees (it was originally devised as in-person event with an online option, later converted to "Zoomba" only as the University restricted student organization events). As GSO increases its visibility and reaches more students, such events should surely be more widely attended.

GSO is working to remind graduate students that they may participate in other student organizations around the University with a page dedicated to Student Organizations on its website. However, some graduate students feel like outsiders in these organizations with such strong undergrad participation and membership.

Do you have ideas on how GSO can better support graduate students?

More interaction between the disciplines, maybe intramural sports when we can get back on campus.

(survey response)

Creating more online opportunities for students to engage remotely. Getting creative with hybrid options (ie, drive thru meal and then Zoom meeting for a Lunch & Learn)

(survey response)

Initiatives for international graduate students to interact with local/domestic graduate students for adjustment to graduate school system in the USA.

(survey response)

What is your biggest challenge as a graduate student this semester? Is there a way GSO can help?

I'm wondering if it's possible to have some happy hours on Zoom so that we can break ice and get to know each other more.

(survey response)

Feeling connected with others and getting involved in campus activities due to most classes/ activities being online.

(survey response)

Fostering social connections and intradepartmental bonding/socialization with other graduate students. I feel sad that I don't have the same opportunities to get to know my department and other students as I would during a normal semester. I don't have concrete suggestions, but more opportunities to get to know other new grad students would be appreciated.

(survey response)

Feeling secluded and not a part of campus life

(survey response)

GSO could have a Zoom meeting room which graduate students may log into for doing remote group discussions.

(survey response)

3c. Offering opportunities for grad students to mentor undergrads

This prompt was included after a conversation between two graduate students in a Zoom with the Dean of the Graduate School. Mentoring undergrads is a great CV-builder and it allows graduate students entering an academic job market to have concrete experience to draw from in an interview. In addition, our graduate students are – perhaps – a more diverse body than our graduate faculty, thus, undergraduates are more likely to see a scholar who looks like them and who may be more familiar with their lived experience. However, graduate students in the survey expressed little interest in being paired with undergraduates to help guide their research, so this does not appear to be an endeavor that GSO will pursue. It seems that this semester graduate students already have a lot on their plates.

3d. Supporting grad students' mental and physical wellness

In a semester of remote learning, slowed research, a worldwide pandemic, acts of social injustice, an overactive hurricane season, everchanging international student visa situations, and a polarized presidential election… some graduate students are decidedly struggling.

GSO has reminded Department Representatives to spread the word about the University's free, confidential counseling (and its telehealth accommodations). GSO has shared numerous posts from the UL Counseling & Testing Center Facebook page.

As the survey data shows, wellbeing is a major preoccupation of our University's graduate students. However, students' narrative comments in the survey are particularly telling of how difficult it is to complete graduate coursework and research in a time of such uncertainty.

At the beginning of the semester, several students who responded to the survey cited concerns for their personal health and safety on campus. One suggestion from a respondent was for a campus COVID testing site, which has become active since the survey's release. The development of the University's COVID Dashboard surely assuaged some graduate students' concerns over transparency in number of cases and risk level on campus; the data included in the Dashboard reveals that UL has been able to greatly isolate cases in our University community.

What is your biggest challenge as a graduate student this semester? Is there a way GSO can help?

Time management, perfectionist trap and minimizing helping other graduate students while getting my work done. GSO can help with online 10-minute videos on these topics Motivate graduate students to overcome failure, self-doubt

(survey response)

My biggest challenge is managing my time and making sure I get all my work done on time. I'm not sure that GSO can help except maybe providing a self-care or time-management education to help during COVID especially. Usual resources don't seem to fit well with COVID restrictions.

(survey response)

Adaptation.

(survey response)

Mental health and wellness. With working from home, it has become increasingly challenging to separate work and relax time. I'm not sure if the GSO could help with this specifically.

(survey response)

Mental health.

(survey response)

The pandemic.

(survey response)

Mental Health & Lack of Productivity

(survey response)

All courses online with Two hurricanes. Teachers and the university were not sensitive to the situation.

(survey response)

COVID and trying to figure out how to do my work, graduate on time, lab work is taking extra long due to COVID loss of time, I just want to be able to graduate. I don't even want to come to the lab most of the time but I've compromised to nights when people aren't there. Otherwise I have no way to get data.

(survey response)

Can you let the UL upper admins know the pandemic isn't over.

(survey response)

3e. Assisting grad students with professional and career development

It comes as little surprise that graduate students have ranked professional and career development in the top three priorities for GSO's potential advocacy initiatives. Students did not offer many narrative comments in the survey pertaining to this topic (other than those already shared, like connecting with international employers). Between the Graduate School, Career Services, and department-specific programming, students are likely well-served in this regard. In Fall, for example, both the Graduate School and Career Services have oriented their events and messaging to online environments (i.e. online interview etiquette, remote job search). The programming that GSO may offer will surely only supplement the existing plans.

In a recent GSO meeting, we asked Department Representatives to brainstorm topics for an invited speaker series that may draw a wide audience of students from across disciplines. Among the top suggestions were professional or career development-minded subjects, like grant writing, machine learning from industry professionals, data analytics, LinkedIn for graduate students, informing graduate students of in-demand careers and current job market demand, etc.

3f. Fostering a diverse academic community and encouraging inclusive scholarship among grad students

Students resoundingly support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives as one of the three highest scoring advocacy concerns. Comments in the survey point to underserved graduate student populations: international students (feeling particularly isolated, having tighter budgets, linguistic challenges), students who are parents (time constraints, difficulties managing childcare), students entering graduate school years after completing their undergraduate degree, students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds, etc. Of course, some students belong to several of these groups simultaneously!

The Graduate School, in conjunction with the Office of Campus Diversity, has been particularly responsive to DEI concerns. This semester graduate students have been invited to participate in Town Hall Listening Sessions for the Graduate Council's Diversity and Inclusion Committee to gather students' perspectives, a Project ALLIES workshop and meeting to learn of campus and local resources for the LGBTQIA+ community, and a forum for international students' experiences and cultural diversity.

The Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the Graduate Council asked GSO to put forward the names of two graduate students from our membership to serve alongside its faculty members. Two students had already come forward after a Diversity and Inclusion event, and GSO was happy to support their participation with the group. One of GSO's Department Representatives volunteered to work specifically with the James Jackson Community of Scholars working group of the Graduate Council Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

What is your biggest challenge as a graduate student this semester? Is there a way GSO can help?

Graduate students who are also international students

I am an international student and need more assistance on graduate academic writing. I needed help on writing, but I struggle to manage help from the Writing Center.

(survey response)

Many of us are forced to be on Zoom for classes. However, international graduate students can seldom save up for purchase of webcams and decent headsets after meeting housing expense, food, and other university related expenses.

(survey response)

Graduate students who are also parents

Many hurdles from children's schools and daycare surrounding pandemic

(survey response)

My biggest challenge is making sure I have enough money to take care of my family while also earning my master's

(survey response)

Graduate students who are also returning to the University setting

Older students returning back to school could use more support. There may not be many of us, but things have changed. A grad seminar or series prior to our first semester on writing expectations, formatting papers, synthesizing articles, literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, frequently used technology programs, etc. unique to our disciplines would have been very helpful! For example, we had fewer papers to write, format was not that important, tests were basically the measure of our grades--coming into a doc program and having to write literature reviews, journal articles, etc. is intimidating. It is assumed we know how to do this and we should. However, some of us are in unique situations and haven't been in school for over 20 years. The Writing Center and tutoring are GREAT and I use both, but many of us could use refreshers prior to beginning or in conjunction with our first semester.

(survey response)

3g. Developing grad students' money management skills

This prompt was included in the Advocacy Survey following a conversation with Assistant Dean de Mahy about a personal finance resource that has been offered to the Graduate School by a member of the College of Business Administration faculty.

Money seems to be one of the more divisive issues for graduate students. Some welcome the extra support in understanding their finances. However, others find money-related programming to be condescending or insensitive to the socioeconomic reality of assistantship stipends that force some to live paycheck to paycheck. One comment in the Diversity and Inclusion Listening Session echoed this sentiment, that perhaps efforts to help students manage their limited resources skirt frank and necessary conversations about the problems of trying to survive and thrive on too little.

Nonetheless, GSO did offer Money Monday Facebook posts in the month of October, sharing small suggestions. For example, GSO directed graduate students to seek out Red Dot Discounts (negotiated by SGA and the Alumni Association) when frequenting local businesses. The Money Monday series culminated in a Zoom session Q & A with the GSO Faculty Advisor, Dr. David Khey, who volunteered to share his experience navigating the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. Drawing a group of students from various Liberal Arts and Education graduate programs, the Q & A proved valuable to attendees and several students who were not able to join the live session requested a link for the recording.

Do you have ideas on how GSO can better support graduate students?

Talk about maybe unionizing like other universities to advocate a better wage, working conditions because of COVID

(survey response)

Advocacy for raises in salaries

(survey response)

Don't know how feasible this would be but accessible financial advising for graduate students would be amazing! I have so many questions about starting a career, paying off student loans, saving for retirement, etc. It would be amazing to have a resource for financial advising/counseling on campus that was accessible to those on a limited budget (aka grad students) as I don't really feel I have the money to pay for financial counseling myself, but would be incredibly beneficial and helpful to me and others.

(survey response)

What is your biggest challenge as a graduate student this semester? Is there a way GSO can help?

The cost of grad school is immense. Not all grad students understand the process for acquiring funding.

(survey response)

Concerned about finances, especially summertime for graduate assistants

(survey response)

My biggest challenge has been income.

(survey response)

Any additional comments?

Grad students generally have better money management skills than this survey seems to indicate; we survive on very little, particularly if we have families we are also helping to support during a global pandemic and two natural disasters. We need better pay and insurance, not workshops on money management.

(survey response)

3h. Funding of grad students' research

The prompt on funding was included as the last of the prioritization questions because GSO officers for years have lamented, "GSO is not just a bank!" After a spring 2020 and summer 2020 of relative inactivity (COVID disruptions), this fall GSO has tried to ramp up its messaging about funding opportunities, seeking to reach new audiences. With a thorough update of the Funding pages of the GSO website, the Executive Board has attempted to eradicate any confusing, redundant or contradictory wording. New this fall, students are now able to complete their Application for Financial Support through an online webform.

In combing through the organization's Bylaws, the Executive Board discovered a few underutilized funding opportunities that have gone unpromoted for several years, like reimbursement for InterLibrary Loan requests and help with comprehensive exam preparation. Because of current travel restrictions, GSO has wholeheartedly encouraged students to seek virtual events at which they can present their research. Thanks to our Faculty Advisor, Dr. David Khey, GSO was able to advertise to students that a space on the UL campus is available to them by reservation; the Conference Room at the Ernest J. Gaines Center has kindly lent their space for graduate students needing a quiet, professional setting to deliver conference presentations.

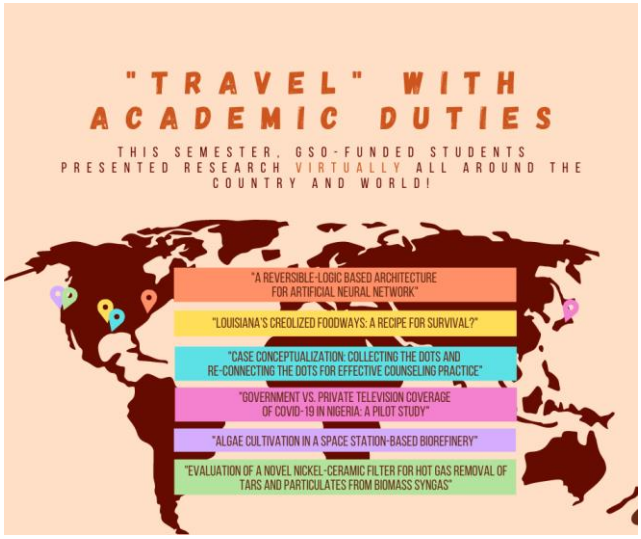
As the Advocacy Survey reveals, awareness of GSO funding could be more widespread and students have some misconceptions about our current budget and our funding procedures. For example, one student argues that it is difficult to apply for *Travel with Academic Duties* (presenting at a conference) funding if you do not yet have a confirmation of your abstract's acceptance from a conference. In fact, you may apply for funding before receiving confirmation from the conference.

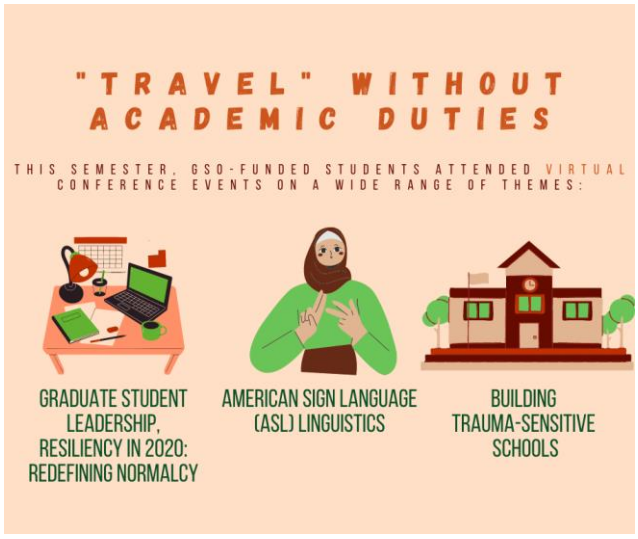
Some students say that $160 for Research Equipment and Supplies does not stretch far enough.

Many students suggested that GSO funds be used to offset technology costs. GSO's Bylaws restrict the purchase of certain technology items for students' use (and all equipment and supplies purchased through GSO funds, if not consumed by the end of the semester, must be surrendered to University laboratories or the University library, per GSO Bylaws). An overhaul of GSO's Bylaws on funding may be in order to align with student needs and demands.

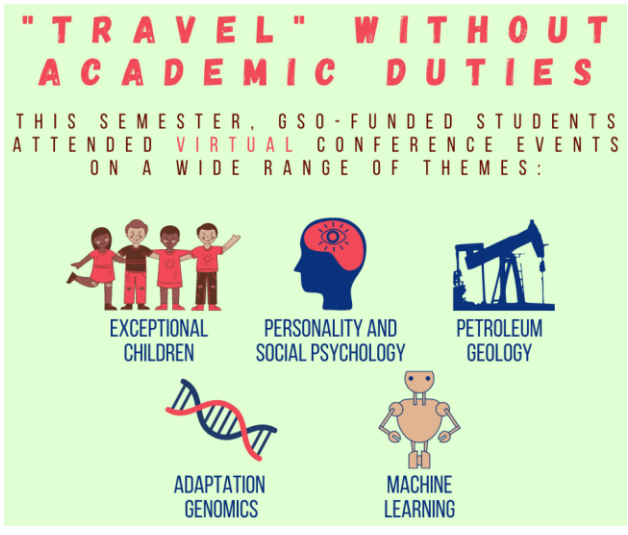
GSO has shared with Department Representatives and on Facebook that there is technology equipment available for student use around campus. The Dupré Library has headsets and webcams for checkout, the Guilbeau Center in the History Department has a variety of gadgets for conducting research (podcast mics, voice recorders, video cameras, etc.). Perhaps an underutilized funding pool is STEP Grants, which must be submitted by a faculty or staff member but could be used to better outfit buildings with the technology students need and could help with licenses for software specific to graduate programs.

Fall 2020 Funding





Spring 2021 Funding



RESEARCH & SUPPLIES

THIS SEMESTER, GSO-FUNDED STUDENTS PURCHASED ITEMS NECESSARY TO CONDUCT THESIS AND DISSERTATION RESEARCH.

OUR STUDENTS WORK ON FASCINATING AND DIVERSE TOPICS!

ZOOPLANKTON | BIOPROCESS DEVELOPMENT | C*-ALGEBRA
WASTE TO ENERGY GASIFICATION HOT GAS CLEANUP
APPLE SNAILS POMACEA MACULATA | CRYSTALLINE ALGAE
MARINE FOOD WEBS | LITERATURE OF FRANCOLOUISIANA
LEASTKILLIFISH | THE COMMON NIGHTHAWK | MICROALGAE
RHESUS MACAQUES MU RECEPTOR ANTIBODY | MAP TURTLES
PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM
CONFRONTING POVERTY & RACE IN SCHOOLS

RESEARCH & SUPPLIES

FACIAL TRACKING OF EMOTIONS AND MACHINE LEARNING
AVIAN MALARIA | STRENGTH & CONDITIONING | APPLE SNAILS
WASTE TO ENERGY GASIFICATION HOT GAS CLEANUP
BROWN PELICAN REPRODUCTIVE ECOLOGY | TRANSGENIC MICE
MARINE FOOD WEBS | COMMON NIGHTHAWK | CORALLINE ALGAE
LEASTKILLIFISH | ZOOPLANKTON | BIOPROCESS DEVELOPMENT
PREDATOR-POLLINATOR INTERACTIONS | COVID-19 IN NIGERIA
NANOMECHANICAL CHARACTERIZATION OF GLASSY POLYMERS
POSTMEMORY PRODUCTIONS | ACANTHOGORGIID OCTOCORALS
STUDY: PARASOCIAL INTERACTION IN ATTITUDE CERTAINTY

DISSERTATION & THESIS COSTS

THIS SEMESTER, TWO GSO-FUNDED STUDENTS RECEIVED ASSISTANCE TO DEFRAY THE COSTS FOR DISSERTATION PRINTING.

BOTH STUDENTS ARE FROM EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS & LEADERSHIP!

DISSERTATION & THESIS COSTS

THIS SEMESTER, TWELVE GSO-FUNDED STUDENTS RECEIVED ASSISTANCE TO DEFRAY THE COSTS FOR THESIS OR DISSERTATION PRINTING.

OTHER FUNDING

THIS SEMESTER, GSO WILL FUND FOUR EVENTS TO BENEFIT ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS.

STAY TUNED FOR MORE DETAILS!

OTHER FUNDING

THIS SEMESTER, GSO IS FUNDING ATTENDANCE AT A VIRTUAL CONFERENCE JUST FOR GRAD STUDENTS

IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO NETWORK AND HONE CAREER READINESS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

In speaking directly with Department Representatives, the GSO Executive Board has learned that its traditional funding categories favor certain degree programs and certain types of research over others. For context, GSO funds within five categories:

- Travel with Academic Duties (up to $500) | presenting at a conference
- Travel without Academic Duties (up to $100) | attending a conference
- Research Equipment & Supplies (up to $160) | laboratory items or books used for thesis or dissertation research, items needed for comprehensive exam preparation, InterLibrary loan fees
- Thesis, Dissertation or Graduation Project Costs ($100) | for printing and binding
- Other Funding (up to $500) | for events designed to benefit all graduate students

Department Representatives have suggested that their constituents may see the funding category list and think their research costs do not fall into GSO's set of funding opportunities.

Here is a list of additional potential funding ideas suggested by GSO Department Representatives to better reflect their students' research costs:

- Professional organization membership dues, specifically when membership is a requirement for certification or licensing in graduate students' fields (example: Speech Language Pathology)
- Exam fees for professional certifications that complement graduate students' academic preparation (example: Project Management certification for an MBA)
- Supplies (implements) that graduate students often purchase themselves to be used when completing clinical hours in school settings (example: Counselor Education, Speech Language Pathology)
- Travel:
    - to conduct research outside of the context of a conference (example: visiting museums or archives for History, collecting data samples for Biology)
    - as part of a twice weekly commute to complete internship duties that are tied to thesis research (example: medical research center for Kinesiology)
    - to pick up equipment that is too large to be reasonably shipped but is necessary for dissertation research (example: machine for Physics)

If requested, the Executive Board is committed to meeting with each department (GSO Department Representative, Graduate Coordinator, and other interested

students) to determine how the existing funding categories can best support graduate students and to discuss potential new funding opportunities to serve students across programs.

As of the preparation of this Advocacy Report in April 2021, GSO has received 78 funding applications from 56 graduate students. Of the 56 students who have been approved for funding, 11 (19.6%) are themselves GSO Department Representatives. Semester after semester, GSO Department Representatives themselves are among the top funding requestors. This could certainly be the product of very proactive graduate students who are heavily engaged in research and well-supported by faculty mentors. It is also possible that understanding of GSO funding opportunities (categories, ease of application, likelihood of approval, funding procedures) is not reaching far beyond the Department Representatives who have inside knowledge of the process through their regular meeting attendance.

Another long-standing trend to note is the skewing of funding applications toward STEM fields. Laboratory supplies *do* add up and that disposable equipment is often expended in a manner and speed unlike books for dissertation research in the Humanities or needs of students in the Arts or Social Sciences. However, GSO could do a better job of educating *all* graduate students on the available funding categories.

GSO FALL 2020 & SPRING 2021 FUNDING ALLOCATIONS

DEPT	TRAVEL				RESEARCH				TOTALS
	With Duties		Without Duties		Supplies		Printing		
	FA20	SP21	FA20	SP21	FA20	SP21	FA20	SP21	
BIOL				$100.00	$1,917.20	$1,918.84		$100.00	$4,036.04
CHEE	$290.00				$320.00	$320.00			$930.00
CMCN	$50.00					$320.00			$370.00
CODI			$100.00						$100.00
CMIX	$400.00	$160.00				$313.53		$200.00	$1,073.53
COUN	$200.00								$200.00
EDFL		$74.00		$79.00	$153.93	$160.00	$200.00	$400.00	$1,066.93
ENGL		$55.00							$55.00
GEOS				$50.00				$100.00	$150.00
KNES						$160.00		$100.00	$260.00
MATH		$50.00			$119.74				$169.74
MCHE						$160.00		$100.00	$260.00
MODL	$50.00	$80.00		$28.16	$46.30	$99.12		$100.00	$403.58
PETE				$95.00					$95.00
PSYC		$535.00		$95.00	$107.43			$84.99	$822.42
Other - events/programming for all students (Grad Gather & Grow; NAGPS SC)									$2,000.00

Departments without applications:

ACCT	BUS/MBA	CJUS	EECE	ITEC	NURS
ARCH	CIVE	EDCI	HIST	MUS	PHYS

Do you have ideas on how GSO can better support graduate students?

Categories for funding opportunities for research supplies that cost more than $160.
(survey response)

Providing funding for research management tools to be used for thesis research
(survey response)

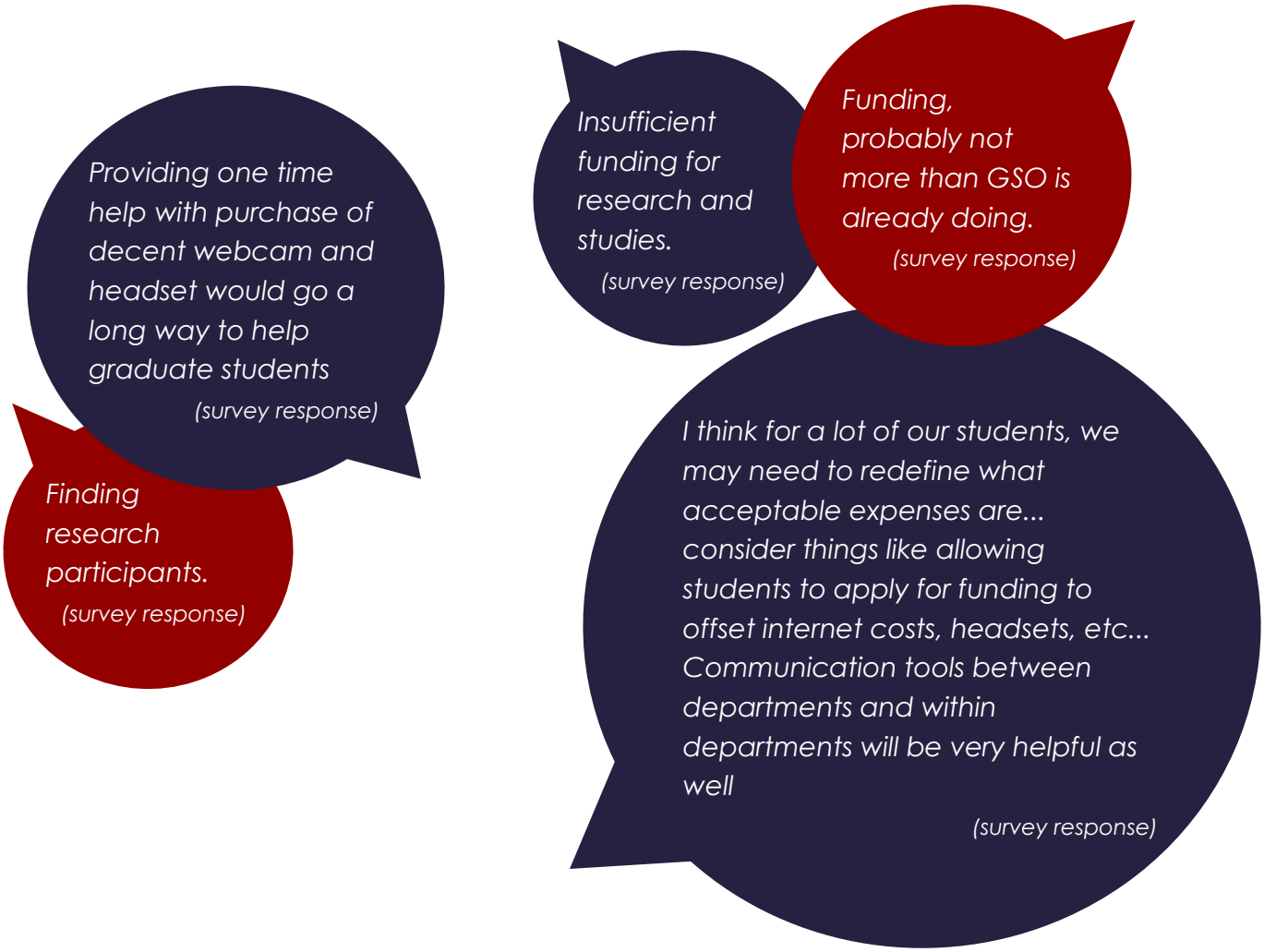
More money towards research supplies and less towards travel
(survey response)

Funding for research related trips like museum collections visits
(survey response)

We should have funding for purchase of webcams and headsets. I think GSO should supply some webcams and headsets to each lab if supporting individual students with these two items becomes too expensive. Additionally, GSO may partner up with technology companies to give students big discounts which would then make purchase of such devices manageable.
(survey response)

Funding is often unavailable midway through the semester and may of us don't get notices of conference and such until then. Perhaps split the funds in half and only allow half of the funds to go out the first semester with a new open application process at midterm. Also, please ensure that anyone presenting can have their fees paid regardless of the time they apply. These individuals often don't know if their proposals or papers are accepted until close to the conference day.
(survey response)

What is your biggest challenge as a graduate student this semester? Is there a way GSO can help?



Other Concerns

Throughout the comments in the GSO Advocacy Survey, students expressed concerns that did not neatly fit with the prioritization questions. However, their voices should nonetheless be heard. The remaining student concerns are grouped and summarized below.

Remote learning:

Difficulty of following a class by email when instructor had late access to Moodle

Virtual format of classes is challenging to adjust to

Self-learning of unfamiliar classes with no direct instructor teaching is difficult

All graduate students should be given access to a Zoom pro license

Hard time adjusting to a new class schedule in hybrid format

It is not easy to feel connected to the University at a distance

Campus resources:

Limited parking permit options for graduate students; grad lots are far away from many academic buildings, especially if you have night classes

Difficulty scheduling machines [laboratory?]