

Graduate Climate Survey Report 2017

September 2017

Diversity Working Group
Department of Government
Harvard University

Executive Summary

Progress since 2014

When the Diversity Working Group (DWG) ran the first wave of the Graduate Climate Survey in 2012, the overarching concern was that issues related to gender and diversity, while prevalent in the department, were not being acknowledged nor addressed at a systemic level. The DWG ran the first wave of the Graduate Climate Survey in 2012 (and published a report in 2013) to shed light on the graduate student experience, identify areas for improvement, and generate creative solutions that would benefit graduate students going forward. The DWG ran a second graduate climate survey in 2014 and published a subsequent report in 2015 to assess current initiatives and needed areas of improvement.

Since 2012, the DWG has developed a close working relationship with the Department Chair and the Director of Graduate Studies. Working both independently of and closely with faculty, the DWG has implemented several initiatives that address some of the problems discussed in the 2013 and 2015 Reports. Some of the major areas in which the DWG is currently working include:

- *Faculty Hiring:* In order to increase student representation in decisions of faculty hiring, the DWG worked with the Director of Graduate Studies and Department Chair to devise a system to formally include student input in hiring decisions. Specifically, in collaboration with other students, the DWG compiles a list of plausible candidates, which the faculty hiring committee considers at its first meeting. The job candidates also have more meetings with graduate students beyond breakfast, and 3 graduate students are able to ask questions during the Q&A portion of job talks. In addition, an anonymous survey is sent to all graduate students for feedback on all candidates for that particular search.
- *Professionalization:* To address the fact that professionalization information tends to be transmitted through informal networks that not all students can access equally, the DWG continued to work with the Director of Graduate Studies to launch a series of professionalization workshops, beginning in the fall of 2014. These workshops include topics such as applying for grant funding, writing a dissertation prospectus, and going on the academic and/or non-academic job market. Preliminary feedback on this series has been largely positive, and assessment is ongoing.
- *G1 Orientation and Handbook:* To clarify and better communicate Government Department policies to Graduate Students, the DWG worked with the Department's administration to launch a formal, one-day orientation for incoming G1s. The first G1 orientation was held in September 2014. Moreover, the DWG wrote the first ever Department Handbook of Policies and Procedures, which contains a compilation of all the policies and processes graduate students should be aware of throughout their graduate career.

- *Admissions:* Since 2014, the DWG has worked closely with the Faculty Chair, the Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair of the Admissions Committee to implement concrete steps to improve awareness of diversity during the admissions process. The DWG identified two parts of the admissions process where women and minorities may get filtered out: (1) within the admissions committee and (2) in the recruitment process. The DWG worked closely with the admissions committee this year to ensure that the members were aware of gender imbalances in previous cohorts. We also made a strong effort to recruit women admits by re-conceptualizing the “Women’s Breakfast” as a “Diversity Breakfast,” and hosting a successful Women’s Happy Hour during the admit visit.
- *Community among Government Department Women:* To create a sense of community among women graduate students and faculty, the DWG has hosted well-attended happy hours at least once per semester.
- *Outreach and Recruitment:* The DWG sent student and faculty representatives to the Bunche Program at Duke University, a program for minority undergraduates to learn more about political science research. Two DWG representatives also attended the Summer Gathering and Graduate School Fair in 2016.

Findings from 2016-2017 Survey

In 2016-2017, the DWG implemented the third wave of the Climate Survey. Below, we report the findings from 2016-2017 Graduate Climate Survey. In general, we do not focus on comparisons to the previous years’ data because it is inadvisable to draw conclusions from time trends over this short of a time frame, but in a few cases, we note some encouraging progress, as well as some concerning changes.

Pathways to Harvard:

- Respondents in all groups have considered Harvard mostly because of the high ranking enjoyed by its Government program (92 percent of respondents). 63 percent were encouraged to apply by a professor, adviser or other mentor. 53 percent were interested in working with a specific professor, an increase from 39 percent in 2014.

Experiences while in the program:

- Women and men did not differ in their assessment of being supported by their peers. 85 percent of all respondents reported feeling supported by their peers.
- However, women and minorities were more likely to express higher rates of discomfort due to their identities.
- The majority of women (74 percent) reported feeling discomfort at the lack of gender diversity in department workshops.

Discrimination and Sexual Harassment:

- Women are more likely to feel discriminated against; however, women feel more adequately informed about the sexual harassment policy than men.
- In terms of experiencing sexual harassment, 16 percent of women have felt as though sexual harassment has happened to them personally or to someone they know, in comparison to only 6 percent of men.

Diversity:

- In general, most students in the department reported wanting more diversity in the graduate student body (72 percent in terms of both race/ethnicity and gender), as well as among the faculty (68 percent and 80 percent respectively).

Fieldwork:

- Many students in the department have either done (35 percent), or are considering conducting fieldwork (32 percent). Within this group, women are slightly more likely to report having done fieldwork; 36 percent of women versus 33 percent of men have already done fieldwork.
- Students reported a range of problems related to doing fieldwork. Most common logistical issues included documenting field notes, receiving guidance from advisors, and making contacts with informants.

Professionalization:

- Only 42 percent of students feel equipped to prepare a dissertation; this represents 54 percent of both G3-G4's and G5-G7+'s. Additionally, women feel less prepared than men to both present and publish their work.
- 62 percent of respondents do not feel prepared to go through the publication process. Women feel less prepared to publish their work than men, a similar result found in previous years. 49 percent of male respondents feel prepared to publish compared to 21 percent of female respondents.
- 34 percent of respondents reported feeling not sufficiently informed about Teaching Fellow pay, a decrease from 40 percent in 2014. However, 60 percent of respondents still did not have enough information about how TF appointments are made.

Departmental Strategic Vision:

- Respondents noted that the Government Department's strengths include regional expertise, access to resources, and inter-departmental collaboration.

- For needed areas of improvement, respondents urged the hiring of faculty in areas of International Relations, African politics, Middle Eastern and North African politics, and South Asian Politics.
- Respondents also noted that faculty advising and graduate student support should be improved.

Moving Forward

While the DWG is very excited about the progress in student experiences over last four years, there remain opportunities within the Department of Government to improve upon. Given survey results, the three areas on which the DWG will continue to focus are:

- *Admissions:* We will continue to work with the Chair of the Admissions committee to ensure that the committee is cognizant of gender and diversity issues during the admissions process. We hope that through this collaboration, the Chair of the Admissions committee will generate a handbook of best practices to be passed on to future Chairs. This handbook will ensure that future committees have access to best practices and can help to institutionalize knowledge from year to year. Because diversifying the discipline requires action at every key point in the academic pipeline, the DWG is also committed to continuing our ongoing efforts to recruit a diverse pool of applicants to the program. This will ensure that we can continue to build on this year's admissions and yield successes.
- *Outreach and Recruitment:* The DWG will continue to attend outreach events to recruit potential applicants for the Government Department. Some of these events include the Bunche Program and the Graduate School Fair at Harvard. The DWG will also conduct recruitment efforts for accepted students during the admissions visit by hosting a Women's Happy Hour and through personal contacts.
- *Research Workshops:* One of the main findings in the 2016 report, particularly in open-ended questions, is that the environment in research workshops can deter certain students from attending and contributing to intellectual conversations. The DWG will develop a document to distribute to graduate student and faculty coordinators of the research workshops highlighting ways to create a more welcoming environment in which all students can contribute.
- *Dissertation Guidance:* One key finding is that less than half of graduate students feel equipped to prepare and complete a dissertation. The DWG recommends that the Department consider developing a formal process for the dissertation prospectus--a key benchmark in the dissertation process. This could take a variety of forms, including required workshops for G3s or required check-ins with the dissertation advisor. We hope to work with faculty and other graduate students to discuss both the relevant findings from the survey on this issue and the potential proposals for creating a more transparent process for dissertation writing.

The pipeline issues highlighted by the 2012 survey continue to be a problem not only for the Government Department, but for the discipline as a whole. The initiatives listed above aim to

address the pipeline problem. By admitting gender-balanced cohorts with increased levels of racial and ethnic diversity, Harvard will contribute to the next generation of scholars, many of which will go on to expand the intellectual boundaries of the discipline, and provide the mentorship and informal channels that are currently lacking amongst women and minority graduate students and faculty.

By being intentional about supporting students at key points in the academic pipeline, including admissions and dissertation preparation, the DWG hopes that students successfully complete every step of the PhD process. Furthermore, by identifying periods in the graduate student career – parenting, and fieldwork – that are disproportionately costly for women and minorities, the DWG hopes to generate solutions that will provide support during these periods. Doing so will ensure that all Harvard Government students have the resources to produce excellent academic research and help Harvard remain at the forefront of the field.

However, the DWG cannot do this alone. While we will continue to be involved in these efforts, we rely on the support of the faculty and administration. We hope that by the next iteration of this survey, we will be able to assess initiatives that have been institutionalized in the department. By working closely with faculty, the DWG is confident that we will continue to make progress on issues of diversity in the Government Department.

Introduction

In the fall of 2012, a group of graduate students interested in diversity (the Diversity Working Group) came together and designed a survey to gather input from active graduate students in the Government Department. The purpose of the survey was to assess personal and professional needs in our graduate program, particularly related but not limited to diversity issues. We wanted information to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of the program to help set the agenda for future developments. We conducted a follow-up survey in 2014 in order to assess any changes in the graduate climate and set new priorities.

Since 2012, the Diversity Working Group has coordinated with the Department Chair, the Director of Graduate Studies, and other faculty to implement several initiatives, including: a G1 Orientation and Graduate Student Handbook, the Professionalization Workshop Series, and monthly Gov Women happy hours. The Diversity Working Group also worked closely with the chair of the Admissions Committee to encourage awareness of diversity issues, along a number of dimensions, during the admissions process.

The following report is our analysis of the third wave of the survey we first ran in 2012. We present findings by gender and ethnic/racial identity wherever we found it to be relevant. We hope that the report generates continued discussion within the department about what we do well and what we might be able to do better.

If you are interested in learning more about the Diversity Working Group, please contact Thom Wall, the Department of Government's Graduate Program Administrator. We welcome feedback, and would be keen to hear from any graduate students who would like to work with us on diversity-related issues.

Methodology

This report relies on data collected in an original web-based survey of active students in the Harvard Department of Government. The survey invitation was sent multiple times to the graduate student email distribution list between December 2016 and January 2017. The survey invitation did not mention gender or diversity specifically, but asked potential respondents to share information about their experience in the graduate program. The recruitment process yielded a total of 76 completed surveys, for a response rate of 53 percent of active students as of that time period.

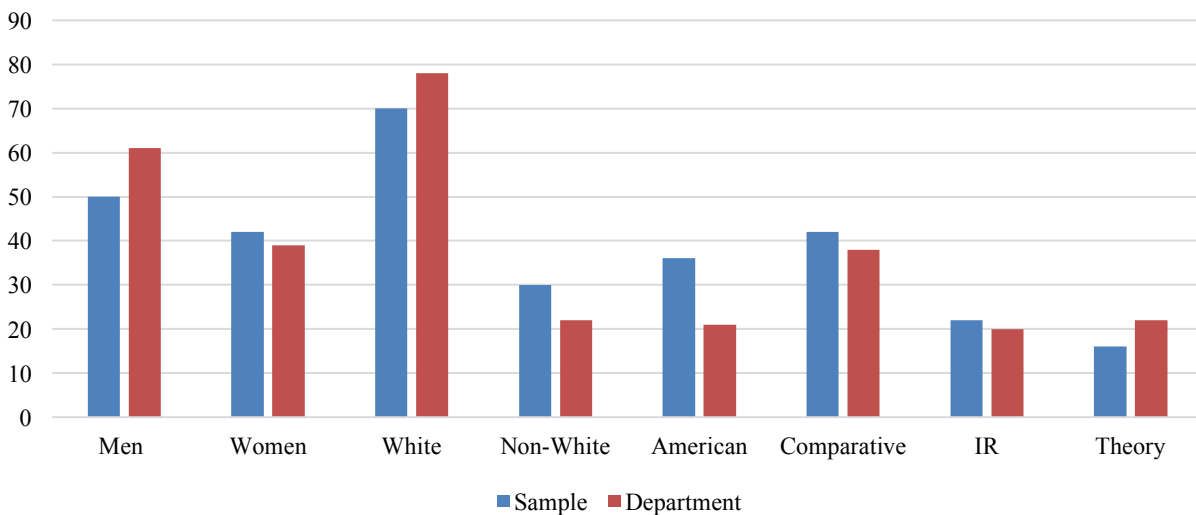
Note that not all respondents answered all questions, so the sample sizes in the below figures vary. Also, in the following analyses, when we do not observe differences at conventional levels of statistical significance we say there are no differences, although because of the small-n for certain comparisons, there may still be unobserved differences.

The data in this report comes from the third round of our survey. We first ran the survey in 2012, and hope to run it again in 2018-2019. In general, we do not focus on comparisons to the previous years' data because it is inadvisable to draw conclusions from time trends over this short of a time frame, but in a few cases, we note some encouraging progress, as well as some concerning changes.

As shown in Figure 1, the survey sample looks mostly similar to the demographics of the active student population overall. However, women, non-White students, Americanists, and Comparativists are somewhat overrepresented.¹

¹ In our survey we allow individuals to select multiple subfields, while the departmental data does not, so some of the “overrepresentation” in subfields may just be differences in the way the data were collected.

Figure 1. Survey Sample versus Department Demographics



Note: n=76. Wording of questions: “What is your gender? (free response),” “Do you identify as a racial or ethnic minority? Yes/No,” and “What are your subfields (check all that apply): IR, Comparative, American, Theory, Social Policy.”

The survey instrument (available upon request) was designed by a team of current graduate students (the Diversity Working Group), and collected both quantitative and qualitative (free response) data. The working group cleaned and analyzed the resulting dataset between January and August of 2017.