BISB/BMI Town Hall Survey Summary - 2018

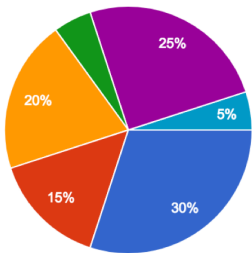Compiled by Yue Qin and Dana Nachmanson

Survey Overview

The Graduate Bioinformatic Council at UCSD conducted a survey to students in the Bioinformatics and Biomedical Informatics (BISB/BMI) programs. In total, 40 (~50%) students responded (Figure 1).
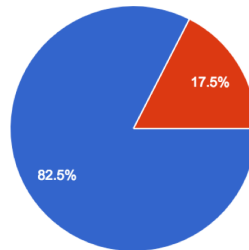
Figure 1

40 students total

Administration:

65% of students are not satisfied by the current administrative resources provided by the program (Figure 2). Only 17.5% of students feel that 'yes', there is someone they can rely on for help or advice with program requirements

Figure 2

Are you satisfied with the current administrative resources provided by the program?

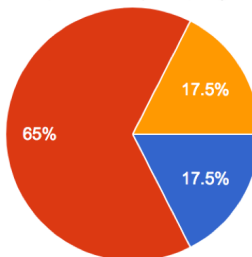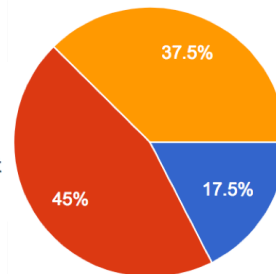**Figure 3**

When a problem or question regarding program requirements arises, is there someone you can rely on for help or advice?

1. **What changes in administrative support do you believe you could benefit from?**
   ● Students report an overall uncertainty of who to go with with program requirement questions "**Do we have a coordinator? It is ambiguous as to who helps with what**. "

- Almost every response indicated the **imperative need for one or more administrators who are committed to the BISB/BMI programs**. Students suggest that relying on interim administrators from other departments results in feeling that "they consistently place us as a lower priority vs. the Bioengineering graduate program." As a result of administrators being split between programs students feel that these administrators are "...<u>not knowledgeable about our program</u>...".

2. Recently there has been a change in administrative support, has this impacted you in anyway? If so, please describe your experience.

Since Begum's departure at the beginning of the academic year, we wanted to ask the students about their experiences through the transition in administration.

- **Students are having difficulty getting responses to emails**, "<u>Very slow to have questions answered, constantly have to send reminders or follow ups</u>".

- Administration issues resulted in:

  - Troubles **registering for classes.**

  - **Tuition being paid late** resulting in all classes being dropped for a student, **fines/holds placed on accounts** and **<u>temporary loss of health insurance.</u>**

  - Trouble getting official approval for senate committee.

  - No responses about recruitment weekend until the week of.

Program Diversity:

<u>Summary of Students' Suggestions in improving program diversity:</u>
- The program should **hire faculty with more diversity**, such as <u>female faculty and URM faculty</u>. In addition, the leadership positions in our program is not balanced in gender.

- The **program should send representatives to more diversity-oriented conferences** (E.g. SACNAS, Grace Hopper, Tapia, conferences led by NSBE, SHPE, SWE, etc.). The lack of administration in the program is impeding students' efforts in improving program diversity via attending conferences and hosting outreach events.

- **Are URM students not applying or are they not accepted?**

- **There is a lack of support for female students in the program.** Female students don't know where to ask for help when gender-based problems occurred. According to students, there have been issues that went unreported due to the lack of support in the program.

Program Curriculum:
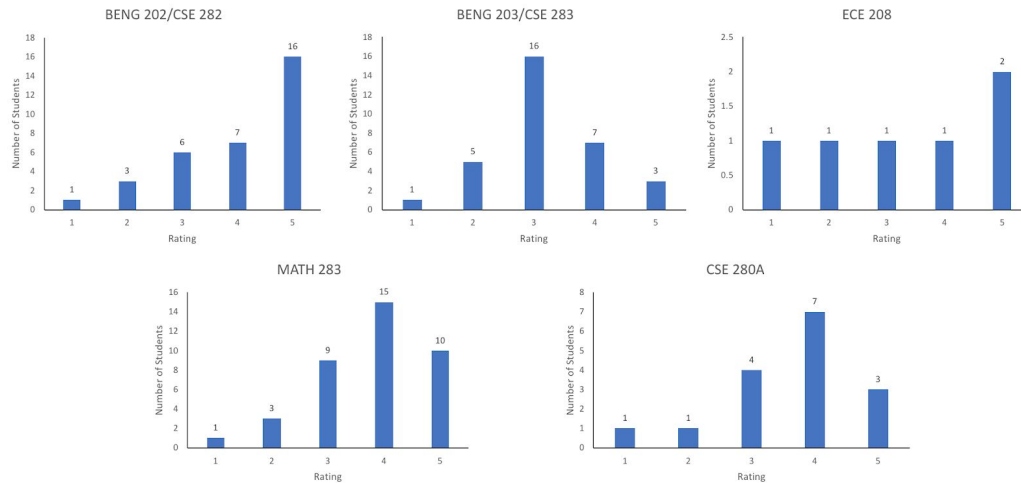
Usefulness of course content:

Figure 4. Rating of 1 indicates that the course is less helpful for research, rating of 5 indicates that the course is very applicable for research.
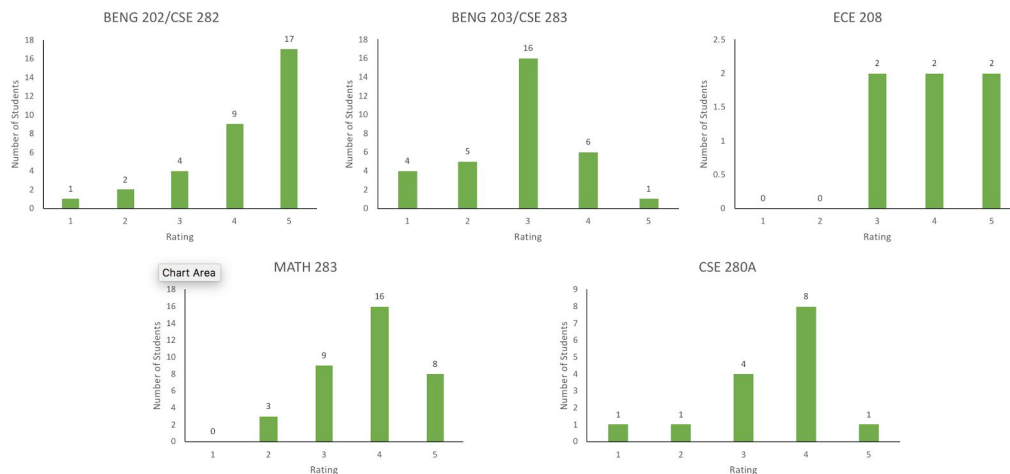
Quality of instruction:

Figure 5. Rating of 1 indicates instruction quality is poor, rating of 5 indicates that the student is very satisfied with the quality of instruction.

Summary of Students' Suggestions for BISB Curriculum:
- The curriculum is very challenging for students who have weak background in computer science and statistics. <u>The curriculum could include more intermediated and introductory courses to better help those students.</u>
- A wider variety of elective courses taught by Bioinformatics faculty.
- The curriculum could have more flexibility in core classes students can take classes that are more helpful for their research.

Summary of Students' Suggestions for BMI Curriculum:
- Some DBMI required courses, like MED 267, are offered every other year due to low enrollment rate. BMI program needs more well-populated courses for its requirement.
- The curriculum is heavily biased toward bioinformatics and does not cover enough topics in public health or clinical informatics.

Written response questions

Exams (Quals, Senate, Defense):
- The program administrator should inform students about their Quals committee earlier.
- The program website should improve on clarity about these exams.
  - Add more information about **timeline expected for preparing for the exams.**
  - Provide students with templates and examples for the exam.
- Add individual meetings with committee members to help students get more feedback.
- The program should improve its communication with faculty about expectation for Quals. Many faculty show up to the Quals exam thinking it is advancement to candidacy.

Social Events:
- At some point do we consider organizing a program retreat like other UCSD programs?

Interview Process:
The interview process has been much more structured and organized during the past few years.
- The program should do a better job pairing candidates with the professors that candidates are interested in.
- **Candidates should get more interviews (at least three)**
- The program should **inform candidates about who they are interviewing with earlier**.
- Some recruits reported that the professors they interviewed with were very discouraging, saying they shouldn't apply to BISB because they lacked a computational background.

New Student Experience:
- The rotation list on BISB webpage is too outdated. The program should update the webpage to better assist students in finding rotations.

Funding:
- Students noted comparable programs within UCSD (i.e. BMS, Neuroscience) which have overall higher stipend than BISB/BMI (~$33-34,000). The cost of living in San Diego has steadily increased over the past couple of years but the stipend has not been adjusted to reflect this.

Summary of **Other Comments** from Students:
- The program could consider giving more incentives to students who get fellowships.
- Provide healthier food for seminars like BNFO 281 and BNFO 283.