

## 2019 SIPS Graduate Student Climate Survey Results

Report compiled by Janani Hariharan (jh2622)

Total # of responses: 47 (SIPS section websites reflect approx. 179 enrolled graduate and professional students as of April 2020)

### **Q1: Should there be an introductory curriculum for all incoming SIPS graduate students and if yes, what should the classes be? [37 responses]**

Responses:

14: No, SIPS is too diverse, and my section/committee already guides me on the essentials.

7: Maybe, professional development courses like grant writing, seminar etc. A few students expressed the need for a common class so as to have the opportunity to meet students from other SIPS sections.

16: Yes

Suggested topics for class: Exposure to general research in SIPS. Introduction to graduate school, eg. scientific writing, presentation skills, teaching pedagogy. RCR, TAing advice, research methods, statistics, communication, leadership and mentorship skills.

### **Q2: How can we increase interactions between graduate students from different sections?**

- a. Joint social events, preferably informal and regular like (i) SNEEB, (ii) “Meals with Strangers” where 4-5 graduate students from different sections are matched up and given a dinner allowance, (iii) greenhouse parties, bowling nights, board game nights, (iv) SIPS club or Graduate Student

Association, (v) heading to TGIF at the Big Red Barn together, (vi) reviving Cheers with your Peers in PPPMB, student funded and held on Thursdays semi-regularly with snacks, beers and sodas.

- b. Joint academic events like lightning talks or colloquia
- c. Introductory class to bring SIPS grad students together in their first year
- d. Common meeting spaces like a graduate student lounge

A few respondents wondered why social interaction needed to be encouraged between SIPS, i.e. to foster collaborations or simply to make SIPS more interconnected, and whether greater social interaction was even needed between the different sections.

**Q3: Do you have any suggestions for the SIPS building renovations that would be helpful for graduate students?**

Responses:

- a. Windows (for Bradfield occupants)
- b. Common meeting spaces exclusively for graduate students, with comfortable chairs, tables and desks. The goal of such a space is to increase grad wellness and socializing.
- c. Greater transparency about plans, expected changes and timelines, especially with time-sensitive nature of some experiments
- d. Gender neutral bathrooms, and more even distribution of M/F bathrooms in Bradfield Hall.
- e. Accessibility for non-hearing grad students: open spaces where people can see each other and communicate, less noisy ventilation and heating systems, high contrast stairs.
- f. Additional privacy/accessibility: bright lights that don't cause eyestrain, cloth dividers to ensure privacy and mute noise, more ergonomic seating.
- g. Communal lab spaces would kill productivity and create resentment among lab groups, possibly reducing peer interaction.

Direct quote: “Getting work done for your thesis/dissertation is hard enough without also being plopped into an open space with little privacy, or worse, having to tiptoe around other people in the same lab. The workplace does not need to be the venue for social interaction, or even for professional connection-making.”

- h. More power outlets at the ends of the halls in Bradfield.

**Q4: What do you think about the application and review process for the Schmittau-Novak Small Grants Program?**

Respondents had either not heard of it or applied and hence did not know anything about it, or had positive opinions about the program. They thought it was fair and offered good feedback, efficient, promoted collaborations within SIPS, and that it was one of the few funding options open to non US citizens.

One respondent mentioned wanting more reminders so that they could plan their application better, and another mentioned lack of clarity about the review process.

**Q5: How can SIPS support graduate students in mentoring undergraduates?**

- a. Setting clear expectations on mentoring, aided by mentorship training.
- b. Creating a common SIPS webpage where graduate students or PIs looking for undergrads would post details of project and pay. This could be promoted via undergrad listservs.
- c. GSMU-style dinners and mentorship programs.
- d. Greater connection with undergrads wanting research experience through listservs or online forums, connecting with undergraduate research organizations.
- e. Provide funding specifically for undergraduate mentoring.
- f. Impostor syndrome is a barrier to mentoring undergrads.
- g. Support from PI with the mentoring process: Flexibility to say no, autonomy to pursue independent ideas with undergraduate research project.
- h. Could mentoring an undergraduate count towards a teaching requirement or course credits?

- i. The Schmittau-Novak program was mentioned as a good way to promote undergraduate mentoring.
- j. Some students mentioned having plenty of undergraduate mentees and having no questions about the mentoring process.

**Q6: Are you interested in extension or international training/jobs and if yes, how should information about jobs/training be made available?**

Yes: 24/33

Communicate via a central website that students could also contribute to, weekly emails (Magdalen's emails or from section Chair, email listserv), advice from faculty from similar backgrounds, increased opportunities for extension work through an established program

No: 9/33

**Q7: What type of careers are you interested in? Pick all that apply.**

Professor at large research institution: 21/46

Professor at small research institution: 21/46

Teaching: 16/46

Business or entrepreneurship: 16/46

Extension or Outreach: 12/46

Consulting: 11/46

Science communication or publishing: 11/46

Government or policy: 10/46

Non-profit: 10/46

Industry: 7/46

Tech transfer or patent law: 2/46

Research for development Institutions/Botanic Gardens/EHS: 1/46

**Q8: How can SIPS support students in learning about and preparing for different careers?**

- a. Utilize the BEST program more.
- b. SIPS should require students to do more career exploration. Making this mandatory will discourage PIs from interfering with this process.
- c. Make internships or industry experiences more common.
- d. Invite seminar speakers from non-academic backgrounds.
- e. Mentor pairing for different careers with SIPS alumni.
- f. Promote existing resources for professional development like career fairs or library workshops.
- g. Lunchtime career chats with scientists working in non-academic roles.
- h. Encourage students to take 1 class per semester that isn't directly related to their thesis work.

**Q9: How can SIPS support graduate student mental health and wellbeing?**

- a. Clear instructions to TAs and professors on how to deal with mental health issues.
- b. Roundtable, structured group discussion on mental health led by students.
- c. Have advisors check in about work-life balance and mental health.
- d. Mental health support at off-campus locations like Cornell AgriTech.
- e. Windows in Bradfield Hall.
- f. Improve clarity on graduate student expectations and requirements. It is sometimes unclear who is the right person to ask which question, or set up a time to meet them.
- g. Sensitivity training for advisors.
- h. Official time off policy for graduate students.
- i. Regular meetings between DGS and graduate students.
- j. Active discouragement of "70 hour week" culture by faculty and staff.
- k. Focus on chronic stressors instead of acute stressors, i.e. long-term issues that could be aided with therapy.
- l. Formalize TA and RA expectations.

- m. Follow a do-no-harm policy and allow for flexibility and time to let students take care of their own mental health.
- n. Build a sense of community with other graduate students.
- o. Hire new faculty with strong mentorship skills or interests.

**Q10: Does SIPS have an efficient process for dealing with bias and/or harassment incidents? If no, what could be improved?**

29/30 responses said that they were not aware of what policies SIPS had in place to combat bias or harassment in the workplace. They indicated a desire to learn more about what to do when faced with such an incident, and concerns about retaliation when filing complaints. Respondents said they did not know whom to talk to if they were being harassed (especially in small fields), and a feeling that people in power wouldn't take the complaint seriously. One respondent suggested a SIPS ombudsman, and another suggested training for staff on confidentiality and conflict resolution.

**Q11: Have you seen an improvement in SIPS' commitment to diversity and inclusion over the last 2 years? If not, what more needs to be done?**

14/37 responses said Yes. They cited SIPS' participation in DPW and individual lab hiring practices as encouraging.

The majority of responses were more ambivalent, citing concerns of:

- a. Lack of sensitivity training for professors and teaching staff.
- b. Little follow-through on conversations related to D&I.
- c. Some sections still use the GRE as a requirement for applications.
- d. SIPS ABC is very slow to shift the dial. Lack of participation from graduate students in SIPS ABC.
- e. Lack of updates from SIPS ABC to the general SIPS audience.
- f. Resistance from faculty towards harassment training creates an unwelcome environment for minorities in SIPS.

- g. Lack of representation in SIPS faculty, absence of faculty of color was specifically noted. This leads to lack of appropriate mentorship and lack of belonging.
- h. Expanding funds for international students to visit Cornell and SIPS.

A few respondents did not comment since they had been here for <2 years.

**Q12: Any other comments or concerns for the SIPS Graduate Student Council?**

- a. Remove mandatory duties or commitments in Ithaca for Geneva-based students. It can be hard to be a part of both communities, and some people would like to focus on strengthening bonds with the existing Geneva community.
- b. More information on SIPS working groups and how to get involved in them.
- c. Create more SIPS-wide graduate student events.
- d. Support for graduate student conference travel.
- e. What is the role of graduate students in building cohesion between departments?