Gender Differences in the Graduate School Experience

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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

1. With the exception of Humanities, men are more satisfied with their mentor relationship than women. In all disciplines, men are also much more likely to consider their mentor to be a friend.

2. Across disciplines, women observe more gender differences in their departments than men. Despite this, many women firmly believe that their disciplines are becoming more gender-integrated.

3. Wave 3 data collection will begin February 2010.

4. We will continue to follow this cohort of graduate students throughout their academic career at Rice – until they exit the university through graduation or dropout.

STUDY AIMS

(1) To identify gender differences in markers of success (e.g., publication rate, satisfaction with department), between STEM and non-STEM disciplines, as students progress through graduate school.

(2) To explore explanations for any observed gender-by-discipline differences in graduate school success, including research and financial support, socialization and climate, psychosocial factors, academic preparation for graduate school, and background characteristics.

SAMPLING FRAME

The entire 2007-2008 incoming cohort from the schools of Engineering, Natural Sciences, Humanities, and Social Sciences (n = 288).

Wave 1 data collection

In February 2008, students completed a 98-question on-line survey about their graduate school experiences (n = 229; response rate = 80.1%).

Topic areas and example measures:

- Individual characteristics (e.g., race, citizenship, parent education)
- Current family status (marital status, children, childcare responsibilities)
- Family expectations (ideal time to have a child, work-family balance)
- Undergraduate academic experiences (academic awards, GRE score)
- Undergraduate mentorship (importance of mentor, mentor gender)
- Choosing a graduate program (reasons for attending Rice)
- Campus environment (workspace, community integration)
- Funding and departmental resources (funding source, other resources)
- Relationship with other grad students (closeness, professionalism)
- Teaching experiences (number of courses prepped and taught)
- Opinion about department (satisfaction, description to outsiders)
- Views on gender (gender balance, discriminatory experiences)
- Graduate mentorship (relationship with mentor, mentor gender)
- Scholarly productivity (publications, grants, conference presentations)
- Academic intentions (thought given to leaving graduate school, attrition)
- Research and Financial Support
- Opinions about the social sciences and humanities
- Opinions about the physical sciences and engineering
- Other academic experiences
- Psychological health
- Teaching experiences
- Student orientation
- Social class background, racial identity, and academic preparedness may also shape gender and disciplinary differences in grad school outcomes.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Rice in many ways presents a “best case scenario” for gender equity and graduate success in both STEM and non-STEM fields.

Most graduate students are young, unmarried, and do not have children. Across groups, most entered with similarly high academic training and qualifications, and nearly all students have guaranteed funding during the initial years of their program.

Yet, despite similar starting points, differences do emerge across gender and disciplinary groups during the first 2 years of study.

1. Women report more concerns with work/family balance than men (especially in the Natural Sciences and Engineering schools), except in the school of Humanities.

SAMPLE AND MEASURES

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- Scholarly productivity (publications, grants, conference presentations)
- Teaching experiences (number of courses prepped and taught)
- After graduate school (academic intentions, thought given to leaving graduate school, attrition)
- In-depth interviews were also completed with a random sample of 23 male and female respondents, stratified by gender and discipline (average interview length = 45 minutes).

Wave 2 data collection

180 students completed a follow-up survey in February 2009 (response rate = 86.1% of 200 Wave 1 respondents still enrolled at Rice). In-depth interviews were completed with 24 students.

Preparations for Wave 3 data collection are currently underway.

NEXT STEPS

- Wave 3 data collection will begin February 2010.
- We will continue to follow this cohort of graduate students throughout their academic career at Rice – until they exit the university through graduation or dropout.