

## GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

A graduate student experience survey was conducted in September 2017 at the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) to support the UTIA strategic planning effort. The survey was voluntary and all CASNR students were sent a series of emails inviting them to participate. Teaching faculty were also asked to invite students to participate. The outcomes and key themes are summarized below.

### RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS

- Mixed balance of Tennessee, out-of-state and international students; most from urban environments
- 89% of students indicated satisfaction with decision to attend CASNR
- Students identified financial support, faculty, and specific programs as reasons to enroll in CASNR
- Mixed views on competitiveness of graduate financial support; 54% students who received multiple offers during recruitment indicated that CASNR's offer was competitive, but 33% disagreed
- 98% of students responded positively to gaining relevant research experience; relevance of teaching experience yielded a less enthusiastic positive response at 54%
- 86% viewed their graduate experience as relevant to professional goals with positive responses on instruction (88%), communication skill development (85%), and professional networking (75%)
- Faculty/advisors and research experience frequently noted as CASNR strengths
- Graduate student financial support and professional networking/career development identified as areas for improvement

### STUDENT PROFILE

A total of 77 CASNR graduate students completed surveys, representing 29% of graduate enrollment and spanning academic levels.

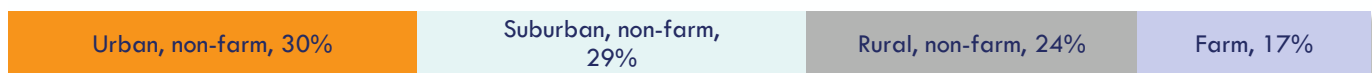
Tennessee students were largest percentage of respondents, but a combined 51% were from out-of-state or international students. Of Tennessee students, 62% were from the eastern region, 24% from the middle region, and 15% from the western region.

#### *Where Are You From?*



The largest percentage of respondents came from urban environments. However, a combined 41% of respondents were from farm and/or rural environments.

#### *Which Describes Your Home Environment Prior to Attending UT?*



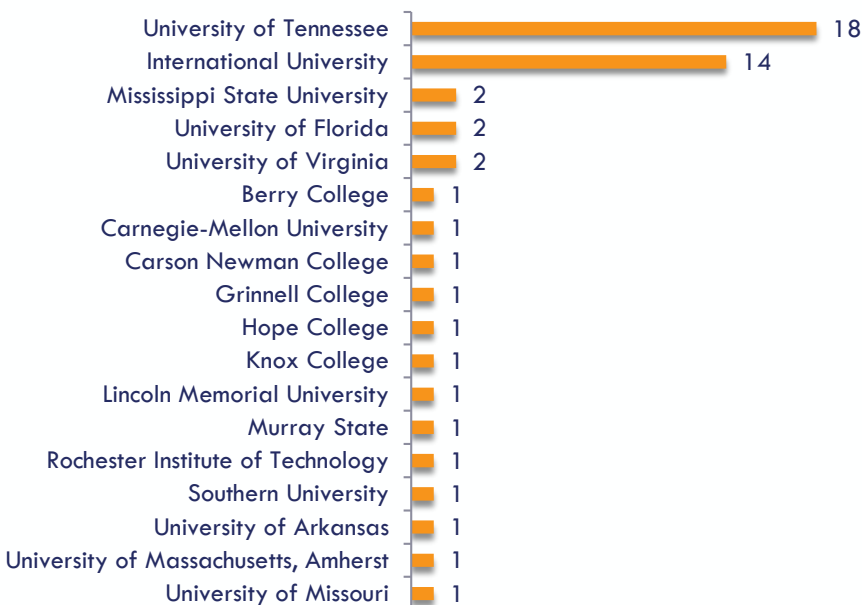
## CHOOSING CASNR FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION

Survey participants were given the opportunity to describe in their own words why they decided to enroll in CASNR as a graduate student.

The responses aligned with the following themes:

- **Assistantship (21%)** – An assistantship or offer of financial support
- **Faculty (19%)** – The opportunity to work with a faculty member, either known to the student from previous experience or due to a national reputation in an area of study
- **Profession (15%)** – Advancement in a current profession or ambition to enter a specific profession
- **Program (15%)** – Graduate students enrolled for a specific program offered at CASNR
- **Research Interests (13%)** – Opportunities to pursue specific research interests
- **Other** – Other reasons for enrollment included family/agriculture background, positive CASNR undergraduate experience, international recruitment programs, and location.

The highest percentage of respondents completed undergraduate degrees at the University of Tennessee. Students also hailed from a wide variety of schools in the United States and abroad.



### STUDENT VOICE: WHY CASNR?

*“Major professor with funding, and the research his lab was conducting was of interest to me.”*

*“The opportunity to work with my BESS advisor was the main reason I decided to pursue my PhD at UT.”*

*“For my undergraduate degree, I studied microbiology and chemistry, so enrolling in a Food Science graduate program was a perfect applied science route to further my knowledge.”*

*“Was offered an assistantship.”*

*“Offer of assistantship to work on research of importance to planet earth and (faculty).”*

*“Connection to a mentor professor/assistantship.”*

## OVERALL STUDENT SATISFACTION

89% of respondents were satisfied with their decision to enroll in CASNR.

*You are satisfied with your decision to enroll in CANR and would do so again if you had it to do over.*



Note: Neither Agree Nor Disagree = 5%, Somewhat Disagree = 4%, Strongly Disagree = 2%

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

For students who received financial support for graduate education, the most frequent type was a graduate research assistantship.

*From which sources have you received financial support for your graduate education in CASNR (check all that apply):*



Nearly one-third of respondents received offers from one or more other schools before choosing to enroll in CASNR. Students were split on the competitiveness of graduate financial support packages. 56% indicated that the offer from CASNR was competitive with other offers. One-third felt the offer was less competitive than others received, but still enrolled.

*Did you receive offers of financial support to enroll in one or more other graduate programs during the recruitment process?*

Yes – 35%

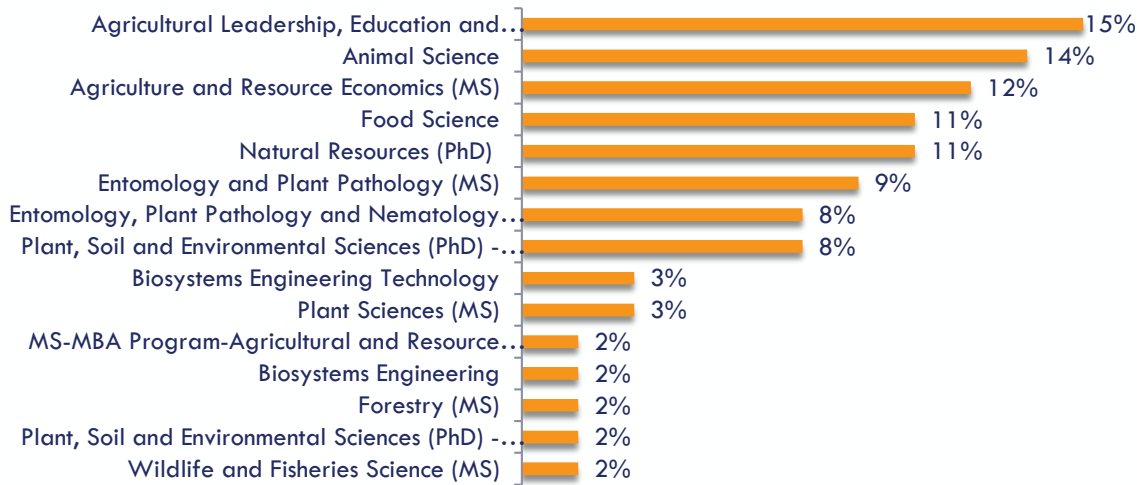
No – 65%

*The full package of financial support you received to enroll in your CASNR graduate program was competitive with the offers you received to enroll in other graduate programs.*



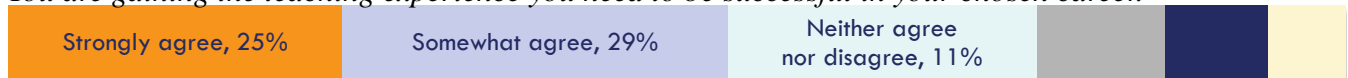
## ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

Survey respondents included both masters and doctoral students with representation across a diverse mix of programs.



The survey evaluated the student experience across the teaching, research, and outreach mission areas. Students were offered the opportunity to for students to designate “not relevant to my chosen career.” Outcomes show that students are extremely satisfied with their research experience with positive responses from 98% of students. While both teaching and research had overall satisfactory feedback, students were less enthusiastic in these areas than research. In comparison to research, teaching yielded a 54% positive response and outreach and engagement had a 75% positive response.

*You are gaining the teaching experience you need to be successful in your chosen career.*



Note: Somewhat Disagree = 10%, Strongly Disagree = 8%, Not Relevant to Career = 6%

*You are gaining the research experience you need to be successful in your chosen career.*



Note: Neither Agree/Disagree = 2%, Somewhat or Strongly Disagree, Not Relevant to Career = 0%

*You are gaining the engagement or outreach experience you need to be successful in your chosen career.*



Note: Neither Agree/Disagree = 6%, Somewhat Disagree = 6%, Strongly Disagree = 1%, Not Relevant to Career = 2%

The survey reviewed student satisfaction in terms of relevancy to professional goals. 86% of survey respondents indicated that their programs were relevant to future career and graduate education plans. 88% of students were positive on the support and guidance from major advisors. Students were also satisfied with the communication and professional networking skills with 85% and 75% positive response, respectively.

*The courses required for your program are relevant to your future career and graduate education plans.*



Note: Neither Agree/Disagree = 6%, Somewhat Disagree = 6%, Strongly Disagree = 2%

*You receive effective training, guidance, and support from your major advisor.*



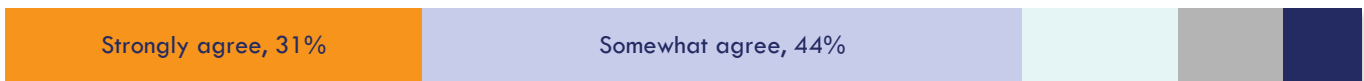
Note: Neither Agree/Disagree = 8%, Somewhat Disagree = 2%, Strongly Disagree = 2%

*You are gaining the communication skills you need to be successful in your chosen career.*



Note: Neither Agree/Disagree = 6%, Somewhat Disagree = 6%, Strongly Disagree = 4%

*You are gaining the professional networking skills you need to be successful in your chosen career.*



Note: Neither Agree/Disagree = 12%, Somewhat Disagree = 8%, Strongly Disagree = 6%

## BENEFITS OF THE CASNR GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Survey participants were asked to describe in their own words “what have been the most important benefits related to your CASNR graduate student experience.”

Responses fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Faculty and Advisors (30%)** – Students most frequently noted the importance of faculty and advisors as benefits. Many comments focus on the quality of faculty and effectiveness of advisors.
- **Research Experience (27%)** – Students also mentioned the importance of research experience. When describing the experience, many noted the hands-on nature of the research.
- **Other** – Students noted the importance of assistantships and financial support to their graduate student experience. Other comments related to:
  - Community/ sense of collaboration
  - Opportunity to build communication skills
  - Conferences and professional networking
  - Positive comments on facilities and available resources
  - Opportunity for international exposure

### STUDENT VOICE: BENEFITS OF GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

*“The advising I get from my major professor, and the opportunity to gain research experience working in his lab, is the most important benefit I receive as a graduate student.”*

*“The most important benefits are experience developing a research project, learning effective teaching and public speaking skills through workshops and presentation opportunities, developing effective proposal writing skills, and learning opportunities from the very good faculty.”*

*“Having a great advisor who pushes me to learn and also being able to network and meet new people in the agriculture industry.”*

*“The community and close connections of faculty members.”*

*“The library system at UT is incredible.”*

## HOW COULD THE CASNR STUDENT EXPERIENCE BE IMPROVED?

Student participants were asked to describe in their own words “how could the CASNR graduate student experience be improved?”

Responses fell into the following thematic categories:

- **Funding/ Financial Support (22%)** – Students most frequently cited the need for increased funding, financial support, or scholarships for graduate students.
- **Professional Development/ Career Networking (17%)** – A frequent theme was the need for increased focus on professional development and career networking. Respondents recommended additional opportunities to connect with other graduate students, increased attention for professional development, and support for conference participation.
- **Program Specific (17%)** – Students offered recommendations related to specific programs and courses.
- **Other** – Students also noted opportunities for improvements in parking and transportation, additional teaching opportunities, upgrading of campus facilities, and support for diversity and inclusion programming among other recommendations.

### STUDENT VOICE: IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

*“I think that there is not enough focus on graduate student education in CASNR compared to the undergraduate students. Funding for graduate student assistantships and teaching assistants needs to be increased, which would allow faculty to be more competitive in recruiting top graduate students.”*

*“A higher focus on graduate education, opportunities for scholarships, chance to exhibit graduate work.”*

*“I would enjoy seeing a directory of students to increase networking among peers. Seeing their professions, hobbies, or research interests could help engage students in agricultural activities.”*

*“PARKING, always PARKING. If I can't come and go to and from research plots and to visit growers and other professionals, it makes for an unnecessarily exhausting and stressful day.”*