

State of SILS Graduate Students

Key Findings

2022-23 Academic Year

Funding and quality of life survey created and sponsored by
DSA, ILSSA, & GPSG

Jan. 18, 2023

Introduction

Introduction

Who We Are

- Representatives from DSA, GPSG, and ILSSA who wanted to create a starting place for discussions around student welfare and progress at SILS

What We Will Cover

- Key findings
- Areas we've identified for action and improvement
- Next steps as part of a collaborative, community process

Goals:
Awareness & Advocacy

Goals

1. Bring awareness of the state of SILS graduate student finances and quality of life, per survey responses, to SILS faculty and staff.
2. Continue a broader community conversation about graduate student wellness within SILS.
3. Advocate on behalf of students for better access to funding, communication, healthcare and wellness etc.

Methodology

- Survey conducted in Aug. 2022
- Used Typeform to conduct survey
 - Self-funded to avoid any issues with UNC privacy incursions
 - Features allowed for more advanced question formats and types
- Distributed via word-of-mouth, email, and during orientation
- See end of slide deck for a full list of survey questions

Who took the survey?

Overall Student Breakdown by Program

- 348 graduate students*
 - 147 MSIS
 - 177 MSLS
 - 24 PhD

32% of all SILS graduate students

Respondent Breakdown by Program and Demographic

- 112 graduate students
 - 34 MSIS
 - 67 MSLS
 - 9 PhD
- International / Domestic
 - 11 international students
 - 3 U.S. residents
 - 97 U.S. citizens
 - 1 no response

**MS student numbers are as of Fall 2022; PhD student numbers are as of Spring 2021*

Cost of Living Analysis for Orange County

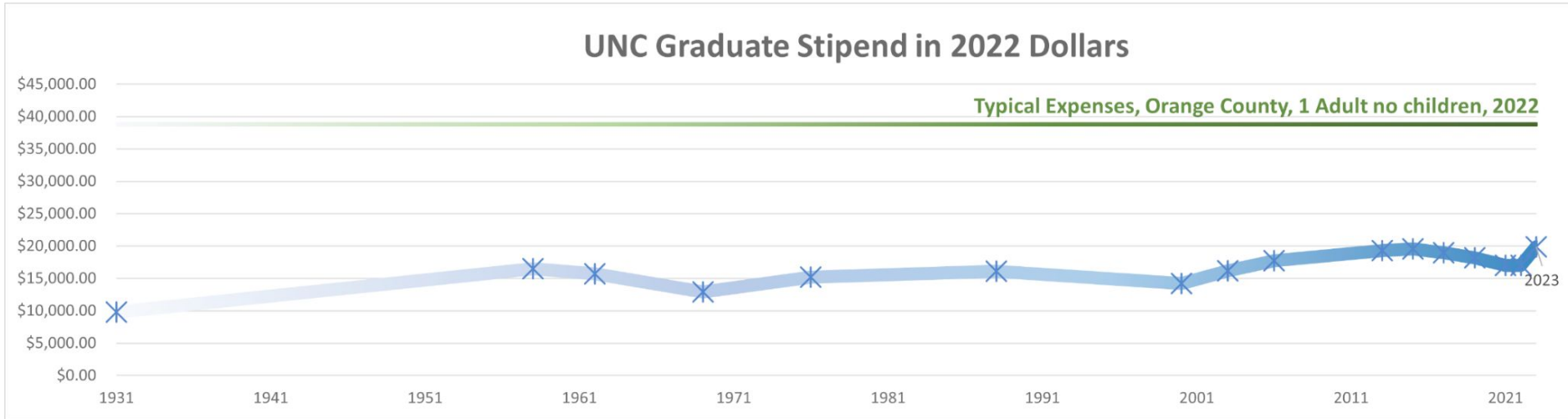
Cost of Living in Orange County, NC

	1 Adult, 0 Children	2 Adults, 1 Adult Working, 0 Children	2 Adults Working, 0 Children	2 Adults Working, 1 Child
Required Annual Income Before Taxes	\$38,766	\$56,441	\$56,441	\$83,724
Required Annual Income After Taxes	\$31,323	\$45,604	\$45,604	\$67,649

MIT Living Wage Calculator. (2022). "Living Wage Calculation for Orange County, North Carolina." Accessed Jan. 12, 2023 from <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/37135>

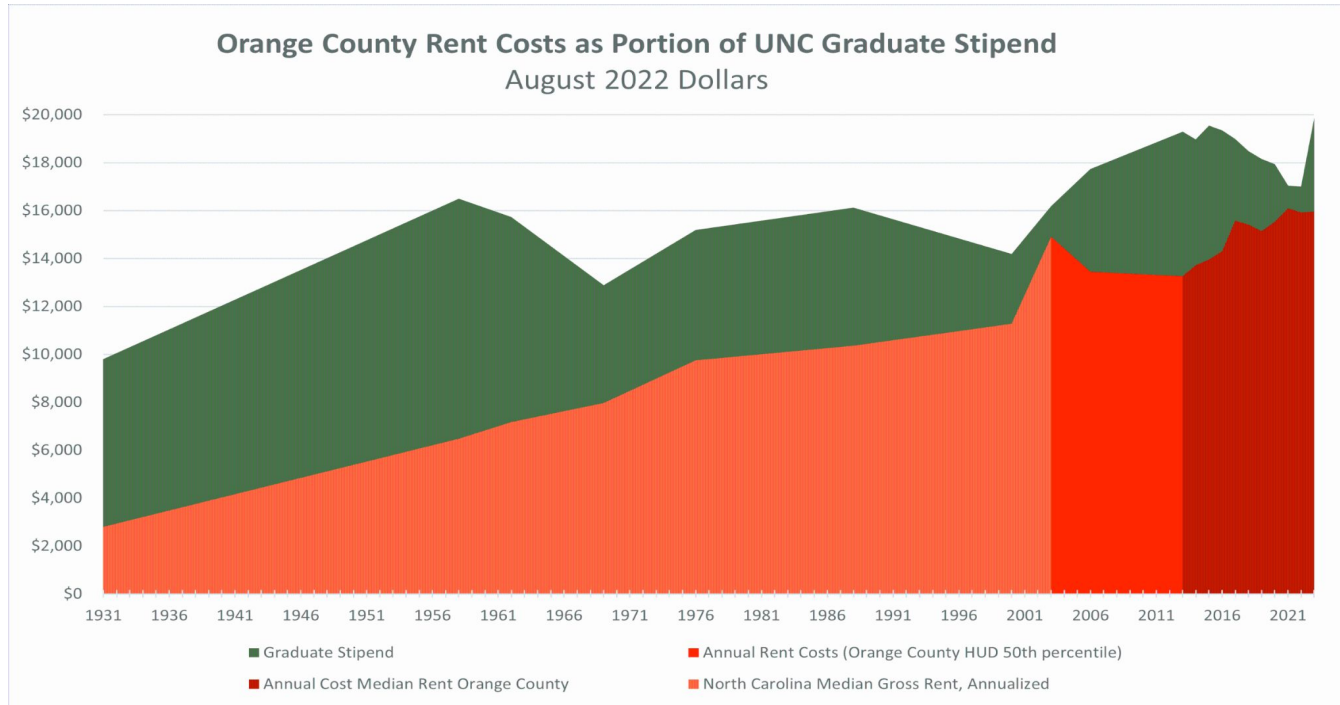
Nadeau, C.A. & Moser, S. (2022). "Living Wage Calculator User's Guide / Technical Notes." <https://livingwage.mit.edu/resources/Living-Wage-Users-Guide-Technical-Documentation-2022-05-10.pdf>

Background: Snapshot of UNC Graduate Stipend



“Graduate stipends in real dollars (2022) paired with 2022 expenses for 1 adult, no children in Orange County, North Carolina, via MIT’s Living Wage calculator” from Kern, J. (Dec. 2022) “A History of UNC Graduate Stipends.” <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/3ca1a8705ac64093bcbdb622b7784892>

History of Rent-to-Stipend Ratios



Current UNC Stipend Rates

Minimum Stipend Fall 2022	
Doctoral Programs and Master's/Doctoral Programs: \$8,500/semester (RAs and TAs)	Terminal Master's Programs: \$6,500/semester (RAs and TAs)
Minimum Stipend Spring 2023	
Doctoral Programs and Master's/Doctoral Programs: \$10,000/semester (RAs and TAs)	Terminal Master's Programs: \$8,000/semester (RAs and TAs)
Maximum Stipend Fall 2023	
Doctoral Programs* \$45,000	Master's Programs Unknown

“Beginning January 1, 2023, the minimum stipend required to qualify for tuition remission awards and in-state tuition awards will be increased to \$16,000 per nine-month service period for students in master’s programs and \$20,000 per nine-month service period for students in doctoral programs.”

The UNC Graduate School. (2022). “Stipend and Benefits Information.” <https://gradschool.unc.edu/funding/s-tipends/>

*J. Montaigne, personal communication, Dec. 6, 2022

Cost of Living

Student Input

“The inflation thing is very frustrating but an unknown and moving situation. The cost of living here has gone up significantly since I moved here in the fall of 2018. The lack of housing or rent control makes housing an insecure situation, and that is only going to worsen as tech companies move in. The parking issue is ridiculous - Chapel Hill overcharges for paid parking and hourly parking is one of the only ways you can park near campus if you do not get into the parking lottery. As bus times are very approximate and unpredictable, it's really stressful trying to get to campus in a timely fashion, and when that results in having to spend \$15 to park for a day, that adds up fast. I cannot expect UNC/SILS to solve issues of inflation, but graduate students, especially in SILS where there is no stipend, should not have to pay fees that go to primarily or exclusively undergraduate resources. Since that is unlikely, it would be helpful for SILS to ensure that graduate students are aware of the resources that our fees pay that are available to grad students.”

Cost of Living

Student Input

“Houses are too expensive. I have to live with 5 plus people to afford a house.”

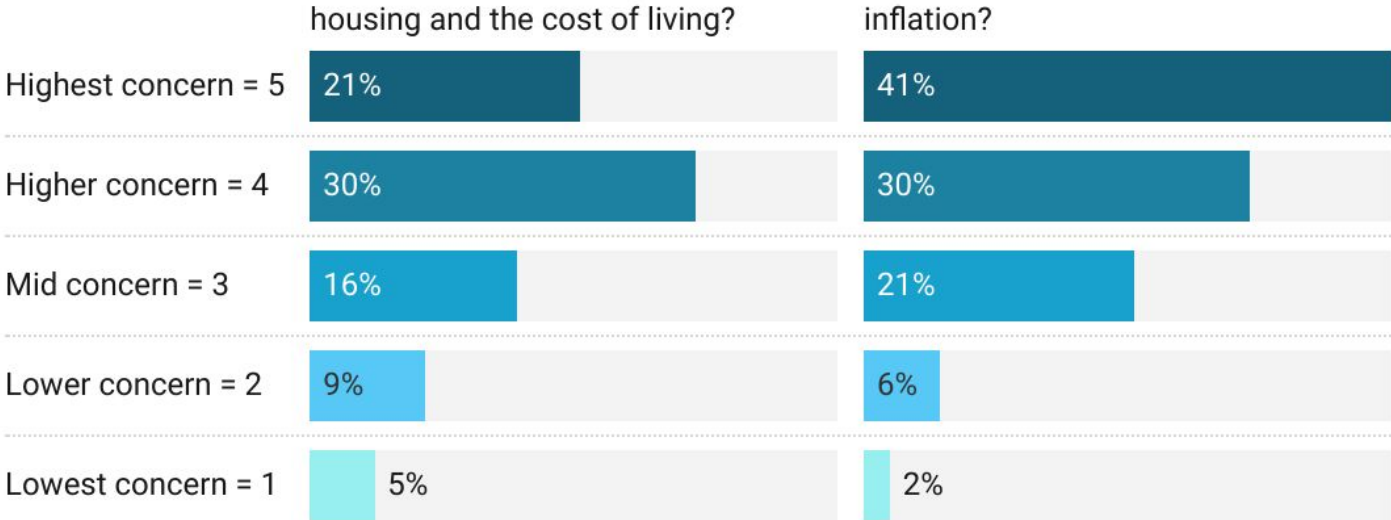
“It's cheaper for me to live in Raleigh and pay for gas to commute to CH than it is for me to live in CH.”

“Assistantships should increase annually to reflect rising costs of living in the triangle.”

Key Survey Findings: Cost of Living

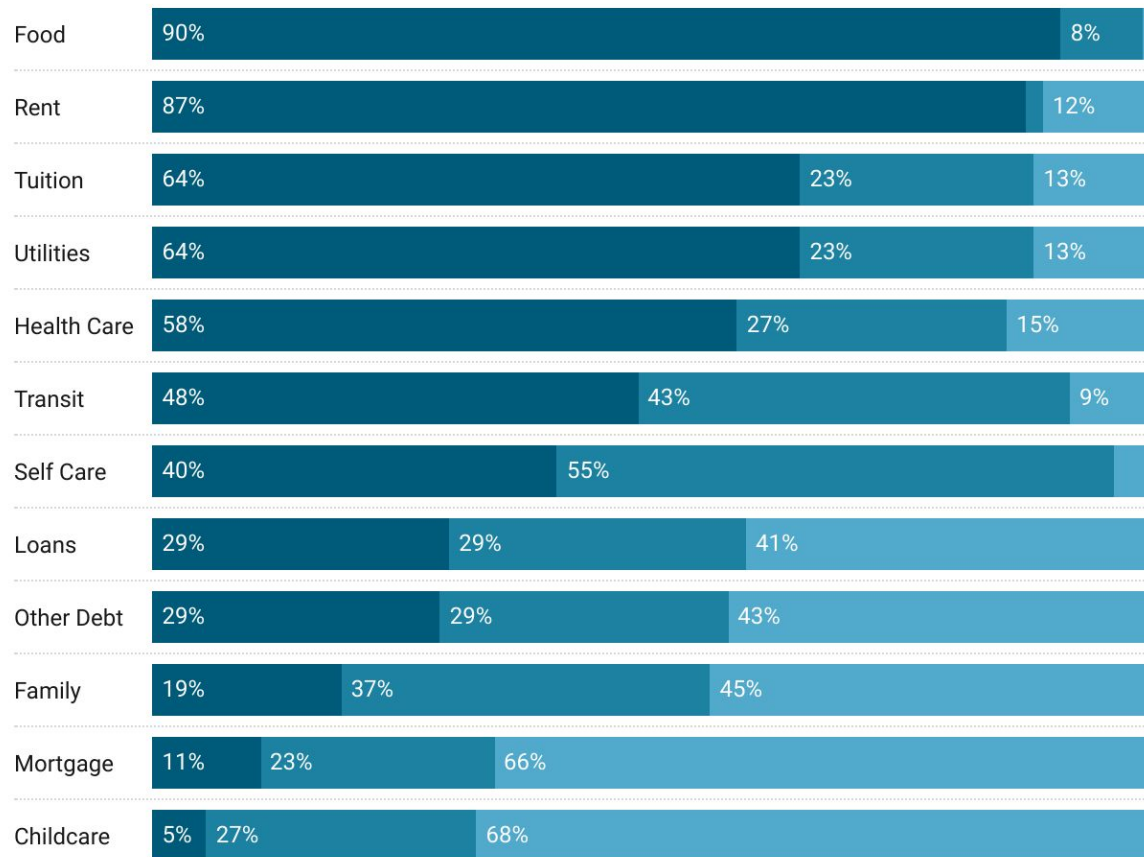
Cost of Living Concerns

On a scale of 1-5, what percentage of students are concerned about:



Significance of Expenses as a Proportion of Budget

■ Significant ■ Not Significant ■ Not Applicable

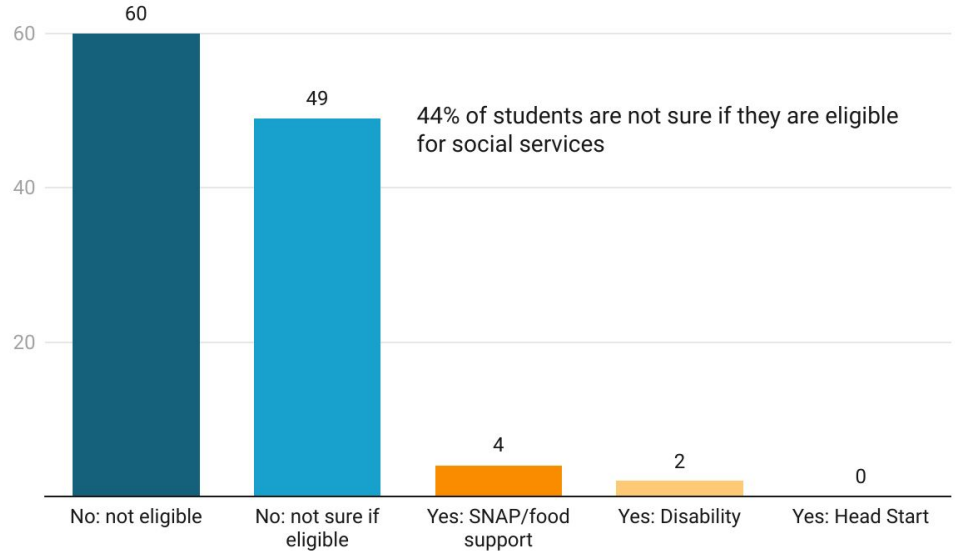


Use of Social Services

The SILS Student Food Pantry is an excellent way to address the rising costs of food and student uncertainty about social services eligibility, although a wider resource matching effort might be useful to improve student well-being.

Feb. 2023 is the final month for expanded benefits for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits (SNAP) for students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students Using Social Services



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Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2022) "Students."

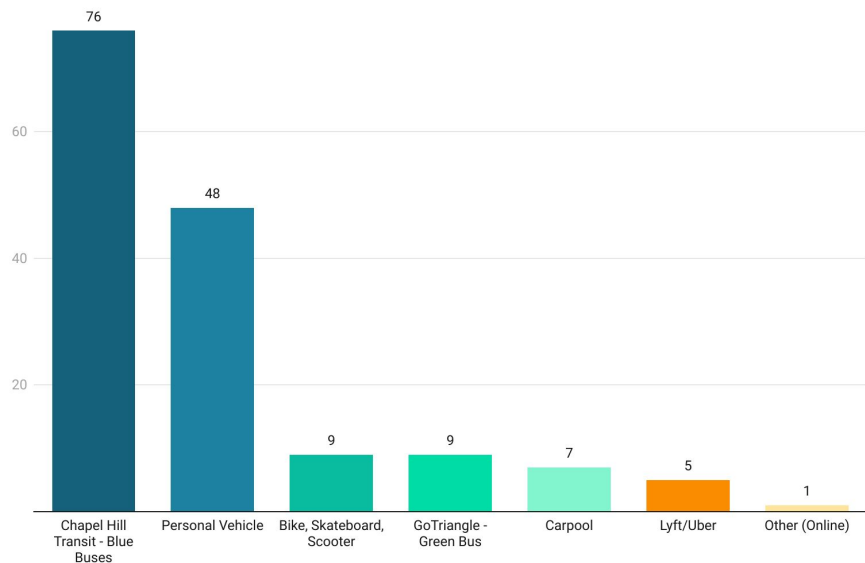
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/students#:~:text=In%20general%2C%20students%20enrolled%20at,is%20considered%20half%2Dtime%20enrollment>

NCDHHS. "Food and Nutrition Services (Food Stamps)." Retrieved on Jan. 17, 2023 from

<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/child-and-family-well-being/food-and-nutrition-services-food-stamps>

Transportation

Student Usage of Transportation by Type



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Campus accessibility is crucial to continuing the vitality of graduate residential programs at SILS.

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“Taking remote courses saved a lot of gas, which saved money. I know we don't [want] to be fully remote but the options we had as a result of Covid were helpful.”

Key Survey Findings: Healthcare

Pain Points

56% of students are **highly concerned** about affording healthcare.

48% of students do not have dental insurance, **59%** do not have vision.

Abortion services are selectively available depending on UNC's student healthcare plans.

Campus Health charges a separate, largely unpublicized, fee for students to receive healthcare during the summer.

Insurance and Campus Health

Student Input

“I appreciate the ease of Rx access on campus from the health center.”

“The deductible for GSHIP is quite high. When I had to go to in-network, non-UNC healthcare providers, nothing was covered until a \$500 deductible was met. The UNC Health Center doesn't offer many specialist services so this is unavoidable.”

“I do think it is ridiculous that we have to 'opt in' to the abortion coverage with StudentBlue and that if you don't enroll on time, you could have to wait for that to kick in. It is health care, they don't charge extra for it, just cover it!”

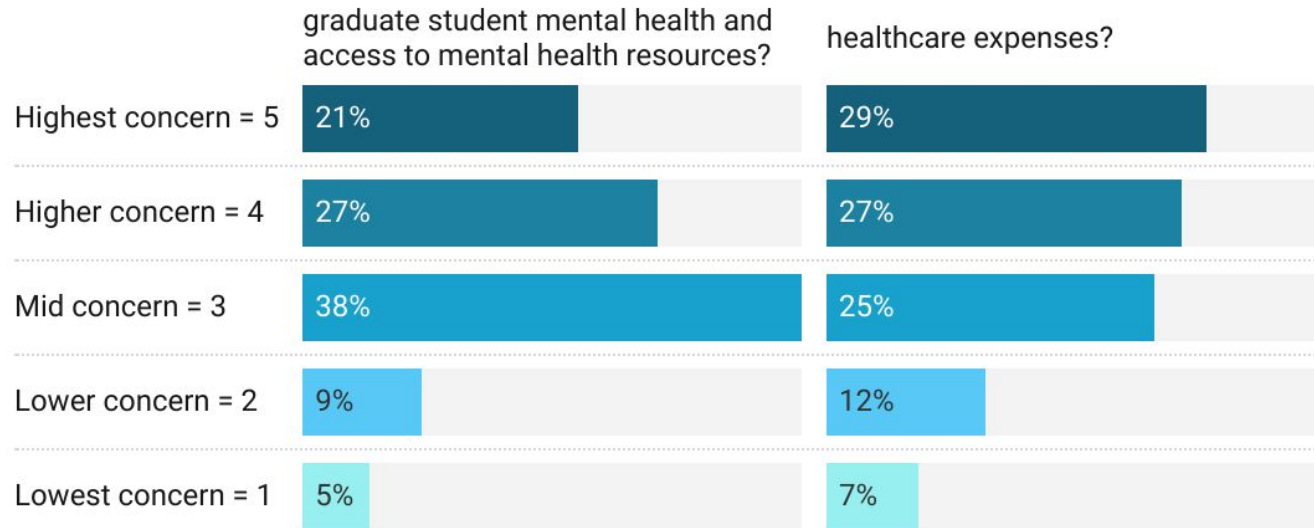
Insurance and Campus Health

Student Input

“I was not aware that the graduate student health insurance was an option, I would there was only StudentBlue. Given that there is no orientation to teach people about the program, it's very difficult to find out what the options and resources are. Health insurance and care in our country are a joke, and campus health is a nightmare where you go to get sick and will never ever give you proper mental health support, but these are all out of the control of SILS. It would be great to have some sort of orientation to issues like navigating health care options or how to use campus health, or what is Smiles? Trying to crowdsource answers through the cohort or social media is not ideal and it would be really helpful to have some sort of resource.”

Mental Health Resources and Healthcare Expenses

On a scale of 1-5, what percentage of students are concerned about:



Healthcare Plans: Abortion Coverage

Plan	Abortion Services Status
Student Blue (no dependents covered)	Excludes Abortion Services
Student Blue (no dependents covered)	Includes abortion services through first 16 weeks of pregnancy (opt-in required during registration; no cost difference from other Student Blue Plan*)
GSHIP (RA/TA plan, dependents covered)	Available through the first 16 weeks of a pregnancy for members, excludes dependents

ENROLL or waive coverage today!

Fall 2022 Open Enrollment period ends 9/12/22

All students eligible for the UNC System Hard Waiver Plan **MUST enroll or waive coverage during the Open Enrollment period. Students who are enrolled by default will receive a policy with limited abortion benefits.** In order to select additional benefits, you must actively enroll or call the number on your member ID to change policies prior to receiving services. No applications posted after Sept. 12, 2022, will be accepted without a qualifying event. Please refer to the online Student Blue Benefit Booklet for a complete list of qualifying events, as well as eligibility requirements and benefits.

Deadlines to Waive/Enroll/Renew

Fall Semester Sept. 12, 2022

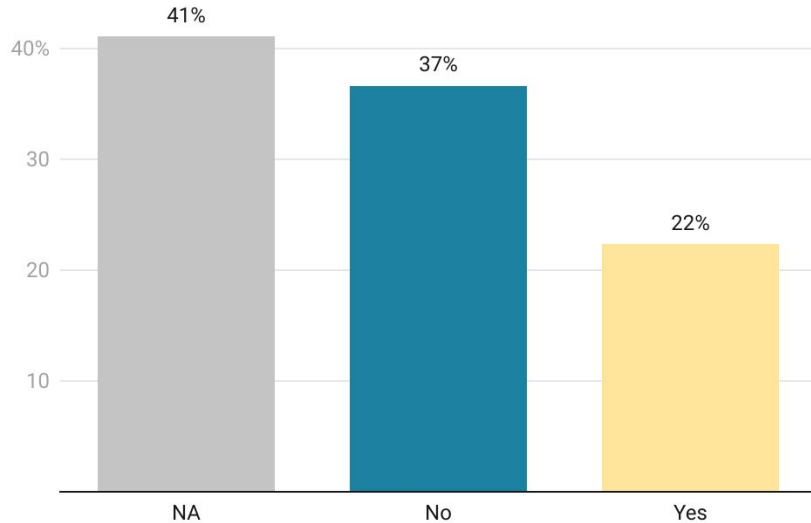
Spring Semester Jan. 31, 2023

Student Blue. "Plan Benefits." Retrieved Jan. 12, 2023 from <http://studentbluenc.com/#/uncch/benefits>

*Information obtained through a phone call to Student Blue on Jan. 12, 2023

Campus Health Summer Health Fee

Have students delayed or avoided medical care as a result of the summer health fee?



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“I definitely did not know about the summer health fee, which would not have been prohibitively expensive but was certainly a surprise, since I assumed that ‘continuing coverage’ through 7/31 would not involve an extra deductible. Maybe this is because I didn't read the fine print, but whoever leads Student Blue for UNC should be more explicit about this extra cost.”

Key Survey Findings: Academics

High Value of a SILS Education

Student Input

“Overall, because I am in-state the degree has been affordable and worth the career outlook improvements.”

“I think SILS is a good value, at least for IS and its job prospects, when compared to other similar programs at other schools and compared to some other master's degrees at UNC, which can be quite expensive.”

“It's high, but not as high as some other programs ... and my concerns about master's funding would be the same, if not worse, at similar schools.”

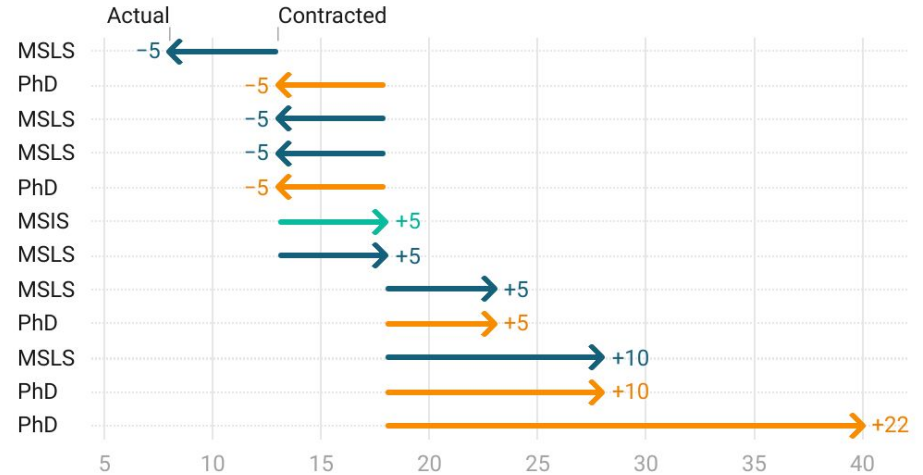
Graduate Workers

44 graduate workers reported how many hours they estimate they work in a given week and how many hours they are contracted to work.

32 of these graduate workers (73%) are not generally working outside their contracted hours.

Graphic reflects all graduate workers contracted to work 5 hours or more per week, who are working either more or less than their contracted hours.

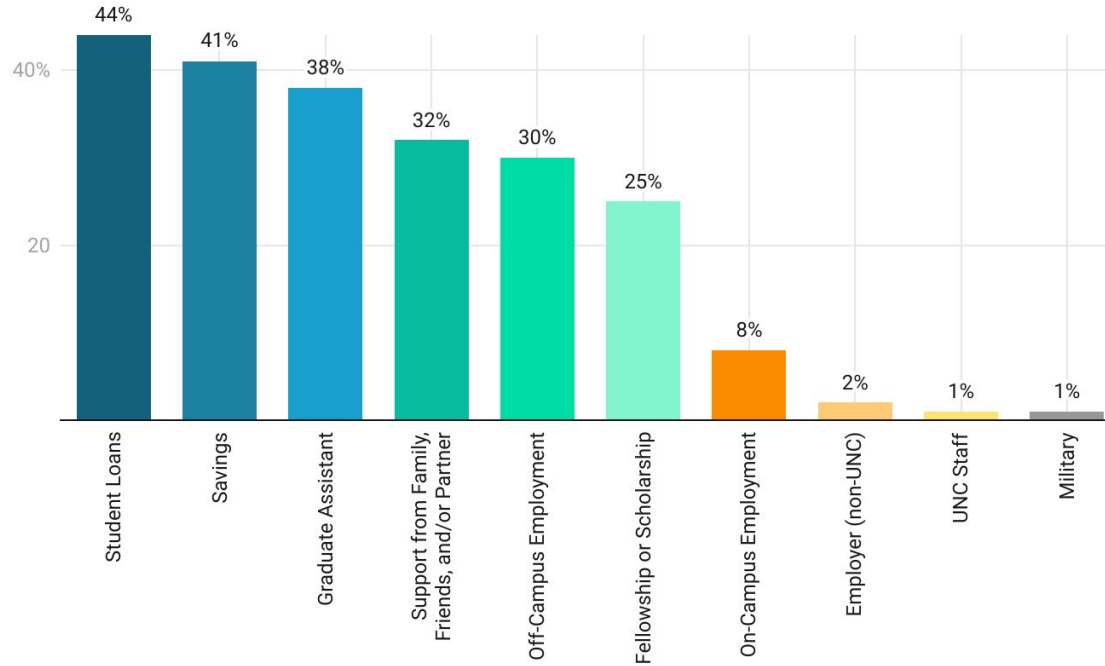
Graduate Workers' Reported Hours



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Varied sources for educational funding

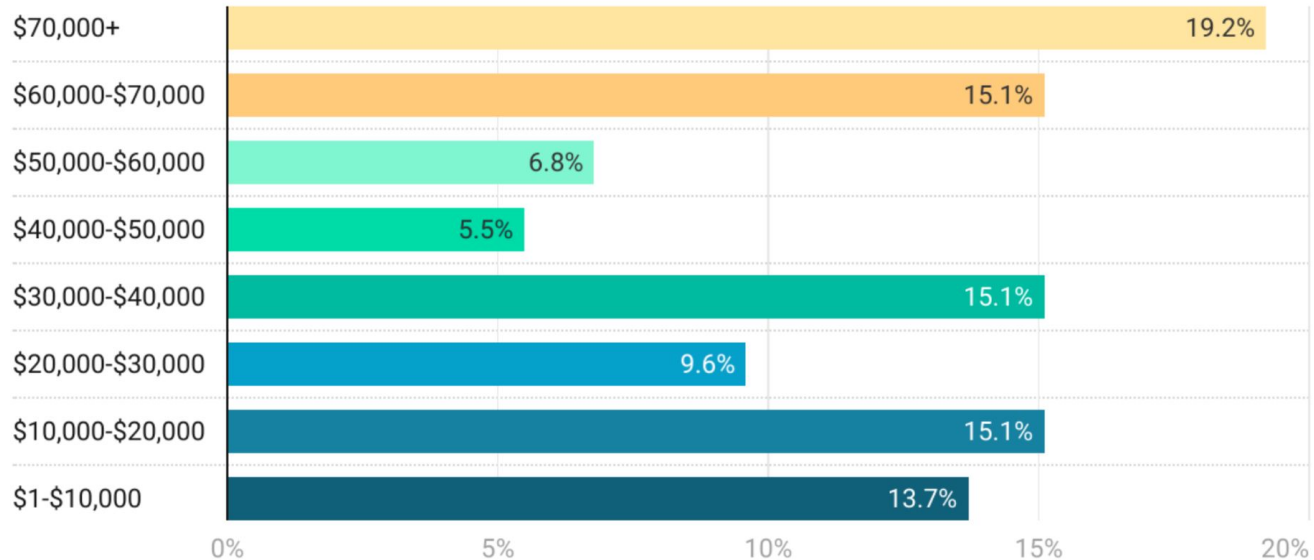
Sources of Graduate Funding



Student Debt Upon Graduation

Student Loan Balance Owed

Loan burden of SILS graduate students with student debt (65%).



PhD Student Progress (As of August 2022)

Year	Comps finished?	Proposal defended?
5th+ year	0	
5th+ year	0	
5th+ year	1	1
5th+ year	1	1
5th+ year	0	
4th year	0	
3rd year	0	
3rd year	0	
3rd year	0	

Support and Resource Gaps

Student Input

“I wish there was more support for students seeking employment related to our field of study. I appreciate the listserv and the ability to check university libraries for employment opportunities, but I'd like more info on how to get those jobs (interview prep, coaching, etc.)”

“There are financial webinars and resources I didn't find out about until starting here that would have been useful in preparation for my first year. I don't believe I'm alone in this boat. I wish the Graduate Funding Information Center would send information upon [acceptance].”

“The RA, TA, and similar positions that would cover the cost of attendance are not given out in a transparent manner. Little to no funding outside of loans appears to be available for SILS students.”

Community Collaboration Process

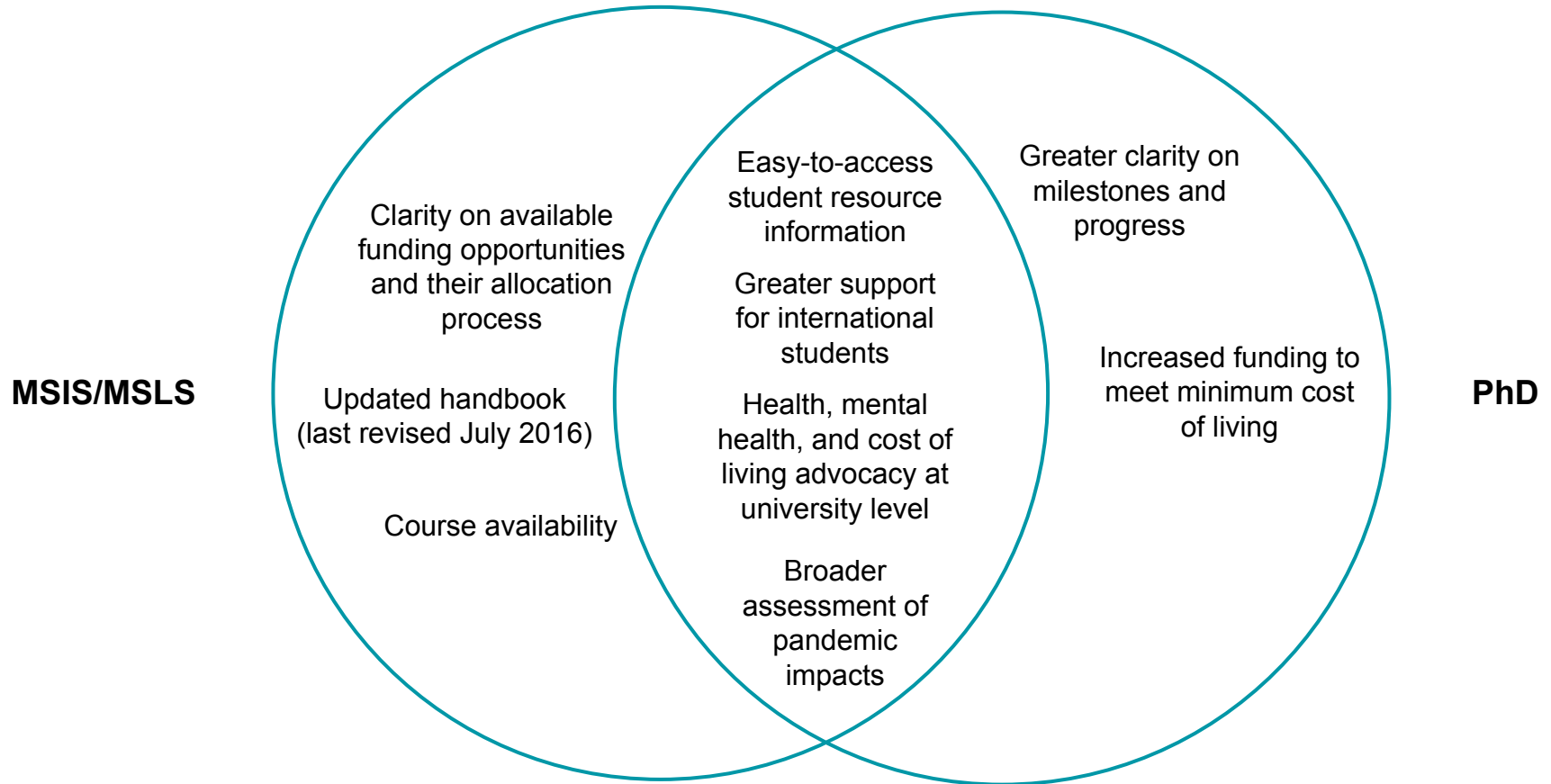
Proposal: Working Group

We are interested in starting a working group to address some of the issues raised here today, comprised of students, staff, and faculty.

Possible goals:

- Identify what issues raised here are actionable by SILS internally
- Identify areas where we need more information
- Articulate mechanisms for clearer communication going forward
- Articulate avenues where we (students, faculty, staff) can tag-team further university-wide advocacy for student welfare

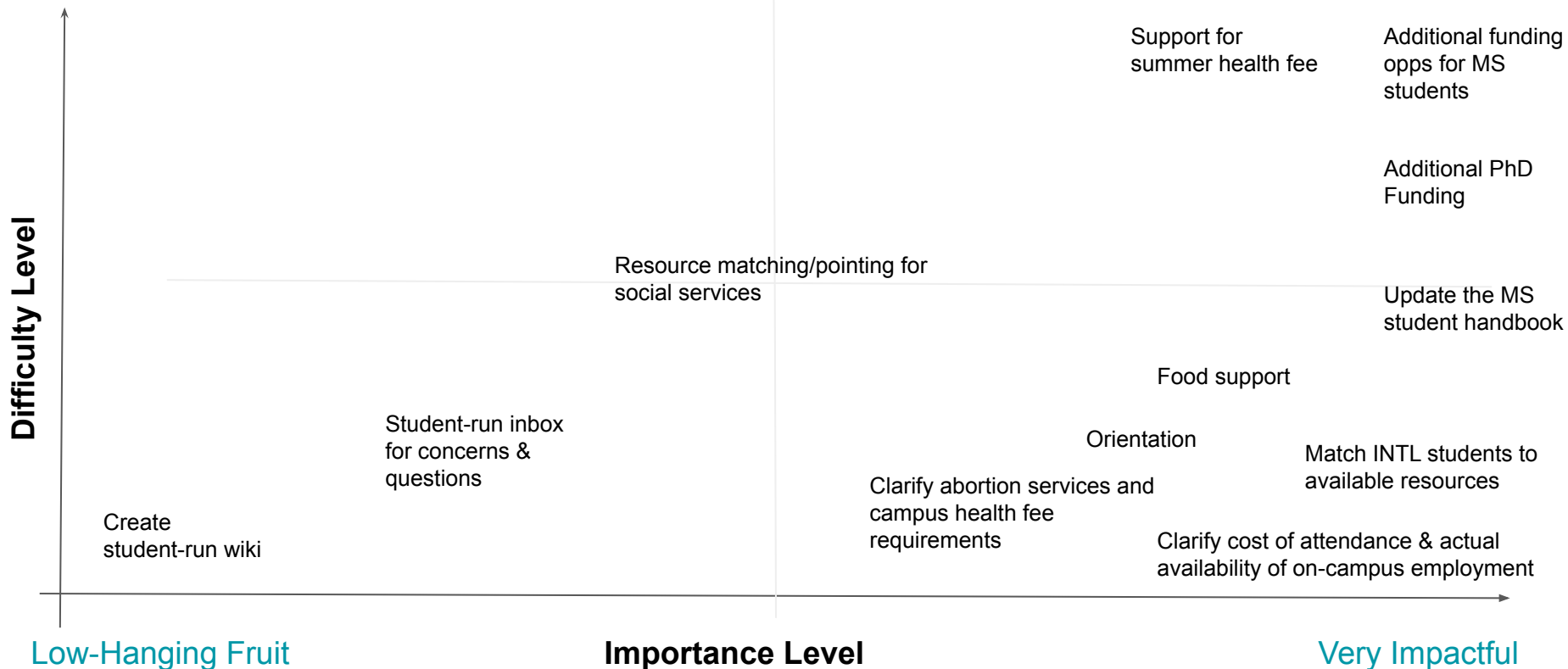
Student Needs by Program



Importance Difficulty Matrix

Nice-to-Have

Investments



Low-Hanging Fruit

Importance Level

Very Impactful

Further Reading

Kern, J. (Dec. 2022) “A History of UNC Graduate Stipends.”

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/3ca1a8705ac64093bcbdb622b7784892>

Killian, J. (May 2022) “Low pay, high cost of living are sending UNC System grad students to food pantries.”

<https://ncpolicywatch.com/2022/05/11/pw-special-report-low-pay-high-cost-of-living-are-sending-unc-system-grad-students-to-food-pantries/>

Survey Questions

Survey Questions - Student Specific

- MSIS/MSLS
 - Are you MSIS or MSLS?
 - What year are you in your Master's program?
- PhD
 - What year are you in your PhD program?
 - Have you finished comps?
 - Have you defended your proposal?

Survey Questions - All SILS Graduate Students

- What is your student status for tuition purposes?
- Full-time or part-time student?
- How are you funding your graduate education this academic year?
 - If you are a graduate student employee, how many hours are you contracted to work per week at UNC?
 - How many hours are you *actually* working as a graduate student employee?
 - What is your annual salary from UNC before taxes?
 - Are you primarily funded by SILS
- What portion of your tuition are you responsible for this semester?
- What portion of your mandatory student fees are you responsible for this semester?
- How often are you paid during the academic year? (Monthly, biweekly, etc.)
- How many hours are you working outside UNC?
- App. what portion of your educational expenses this semester are being covered by UNC?

Survey Questions - All SILS Graduate Students

- Please indicate the amount of debt you will have upon graduating from your program.
- Are you concerned about having sufficient funding to complete your degree program?
- Do you have anything you want to share about the cost of graduate school at UNC?

Mental Health:

- On a scale of 1-5, how concerned are you about graduate student mental health and access to mental health care resources?

Health Insurance

- What type of health insurance plan are you on? (GSHIP, Student Blue, Employer etc....)
- Do you have dental insurance?
- Do you have vision insurance?
- During your time at UNC have you paid the Campus Health summer health fee?
 - Have you delayed or avoided medical care as a result of this fee?
- On a scale of 1-5, how concerned are you about healthcare expenses?

Survey Questions - All SILS Graduate Students

- Are you currently making use of some type of social services?
- Please use the table below to indicate the proportion of your budget allocated to the following expenses (Tuition, Rent, Mortgage, Utilities, Student Loans, Other Debt, Food/Groceries, Healthcare, Transit/Commute, Supporting Family, Childcare, Self-care and Wellness)
- How do you commute to campus?
- Please describe your parking situation for the semester?
- What is your monthly housing payment? (Including utilities etc.)
- On a scale of 1-5, how concerned are you about housing and the cost of living?
- On a scale of 1-5, how concerned are you about inflation?

Survey Questions - All SILS Graduate Students

- Demographics:
 - Age
 - Marital Status
 - First-generation graduate student?
 - International student?
 - Do you consider yourself disabled?
 - Select all that apply to your gender identity: (Woman, Man, Transgender, Non-binary/non-conforming, Prefer not to respond, Other)
 - How would you describe your racial/ethnic identity?
- Any other concerns you'd like to share with us?

Acknowledgements

A sincere thank you to the SILS faculty, staff, and students who provided feedback and expertise in the development and implementation of this survey.

Especially:

Katy Peters, CITAP

Brian Sturm

DSA and ILSSA