



2026 APSA GRADUATE STUDENT SURVEY: **RESEARCH BRIEF**

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Research
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Summary

The 2026 APSA Graduate Student Survey, conducted in conjunction with the APSA Committee on the Status of Graduate Students in the Profession, was conducted from February to April of 2026. The survey was sent to 1,870 graduate students (as self-reported in the APSA membership database) and was also advertised in the APSA Graduate Student Newsletter. The survey collected 207 responses for a response rate of 11.1%, comparable to the results of the 2025 survey (response rate of 11.5%).

The majority of respondents were APSA members. Responses were generally consistent with patterns observed in the 2025 survey; respondents reported generally positive feelings about the climate within their departments and institutions, though high proportions of respondents also reported experiencing challenges related to mental health and financial security. One notable change from 2025 is the number of students who reported being on the job market during the previous academic year, which, at thirty percent, was nearly double the proportion reported in 2025.

Full findings are detailed below. Nonresponses were excluded from percentage calculations. We encourage you to read the report carefully, and welcome your questions, suggestions, or ideas. Please contact us with any specific questions at surveys@apsanet.org.

Respondent Characteristics

The majority of respondents (84.5%, n=175) were current graduate students, with the remainder being recent graduates within the past one or two years. Most graduate students were enrolled in or had completed a PhD program (94.7%, n=196), with only eleven responses from master's students. Among students still enrolled in a graduate program, most responses came from later-career students, with two-thirds of responses from fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-year students.

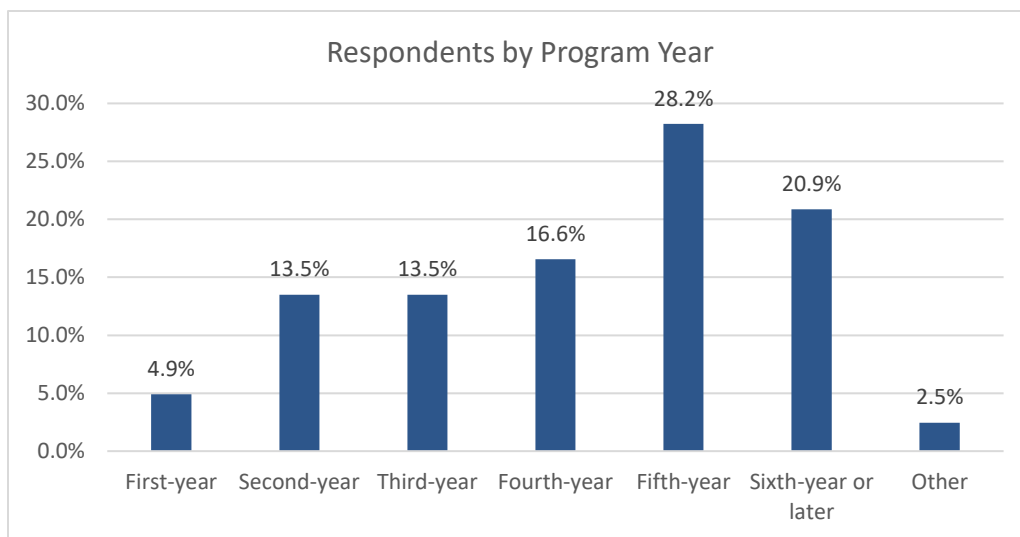


Figure 1. Respondents by program year. Only current graduate students who reported their program year (n=163) are shown.

One hundred ninety-three of the two hundred and seven respondents (93.2%) were APSA members. Asked to select their reason(s) for not being an APSA member, graduate students most commonly cited cost, with fifty-seven percent of nonmembers saying that membership was too expensive and fifty percent saying that they lacked funding to purchase a membership.

Comparative Politics, American Politics, and International Relations were the most common subfields of study among survey respondents, as is the case within APSA membership overall. Proportions among respondents differed only slightly from membership, with more respondents studying Comparative Politics (32%, membership 29%) and fewer studying International Relations (17%, membership 21%). The proportion of respondents studying American Politics was nearly identical to that among APSA membership (20% and 21%).

Sixty percent (n=114) of respondents were studying at a public institution, and eighty-eight percent (n=167) were studying at an institution in the United States. Thirty-seven percent (n=70) of respondents reported being an international student; of these, the majority (89%, n=62) were non-U.S. students studying at U.S. institutions.

The survey asked a set of questions about parental education and first-generation scholar status. Just over half of respondents (51%, n=96) reported that both of their parents or guardians had graduated from college, while twenty-three percent (n=43) reported that none of their parents or guardians had graduated from college, similar proportions to the 2025 survey. Fifty-three percent (n=102) of respondents were the first in their families to pursue a graduate or professional degree, while fifty-seven percent (n=128) were the first in their families to teach or conduct research at a U.S. college or university.

As in 2025, the survey had a higher proportion of women among its respondents (50%, n=104) than either the proportion of women among students reported in the Graduate Placement Survey, which collects data from graduate program directors about enrolled students (41%) or APSA membership overall (41%). The distribution of racial/ethnic identity among survey respondents was broadly similar to APSA membership overall, with non-Hispanic white, Latino/a or Hispanic, and East Asian/Asian American participants making up the three largest groups among respondents.

Table 1. Racial/ethnic distribution of respondents. Participants were asked to select all groups that described them. Respondents who selected multiple groups were grouped into the “Two or More Races” category.

Which of the following best describes your racial/ethnic identity?	Percentage among survey respondents	Percentage among APSA membership
Another group	2.6%	3.8%
Black, Afro-Caribbean, or African-American	4.8%	4.7%
East Asian or Asian American	12.2%	14.5%
Latino/a or Hispanic	13.2%	6.7%
Middle Eastern or Arab American	3.7%	2.2%
Native American or Alaskan Native	1.1%	0.14%
Non-Hispanic White or Euro-American	47.6%	51.9%
Prefer not to respond	2.6%	10.8%
South Asian or Indian American	4.8%	3.6%
Two or More Races	7.4%	1.7%

Finances and Insurance

A slight majority of respondents (54.9%) were at least somewhat satisfied with the base financial compensation provided by their institution, a similar proportion to 2025, and about ten percent of respondents were “very satisfied” with their compensation. The proportion of respondents who were “very unsatisfied” dropped compared to 2025, from fourteen percent to eight percent.

When asked about their feelings of financial security, respondents were generally more pessimistic about their long-term financial security than their short-term financial security, with fifty-six percent of students reporting feeling at least “somewhat” insecure about their long-term financial security compared to forty-five percent feeling insecure about their short-term financial situation. Eighteen percent (n=37) of respondents reported taking out a student loan as a graduate student.

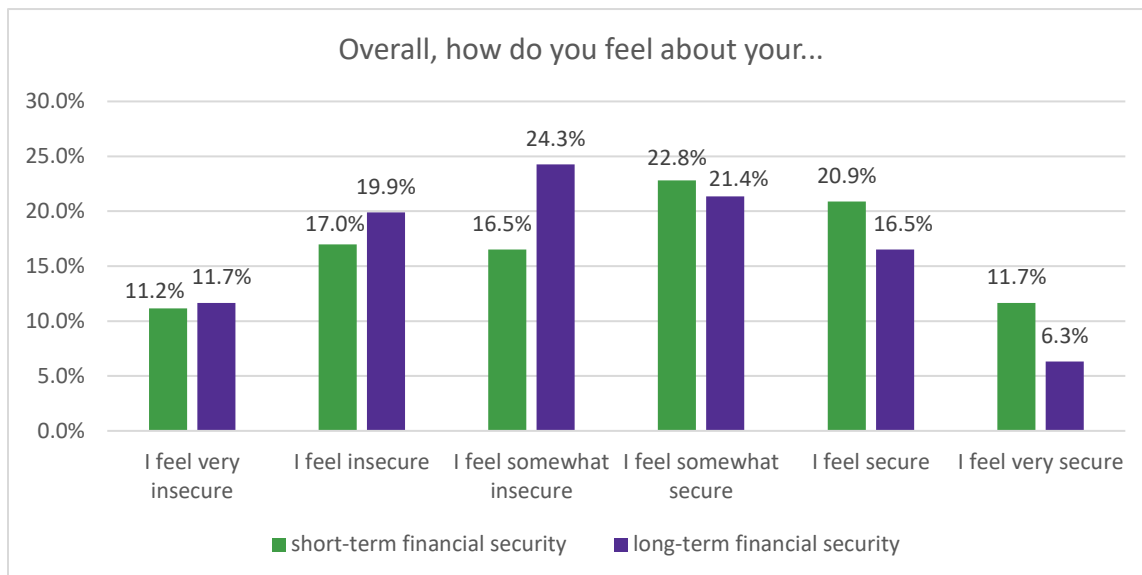


Figure 2. Reported feelings of security regarding short-term and long-term financial security. Both questions received n=206 responses.

Fifty-six percent of graduate students reported taking on additional on-campus employment to support themselves or their families while in graduate school, and thirty-six percent reported taking on additional off-campus employment, similar (though slightly higher) proportions than in 2025. When proportions were calculated only for students who were eligible for additional employment (n=172 for on-campus employment, n=153 for off-campus employment), these proportions rose to sixty-seven percent and forty-eight percent, respectively. Respondents were slightly more likely to take on either kind of employment during the academic year than during a summer or winter break (54% for on-campus employment and 52% for off-campus employment).

Compared to 2025, slightly more students reported having health, dental, or vision insurance provided through their institutions in 2026 (health: 83.2% vs. 75.7%; dental: 56.6% vs. 48.5%; vision: 49.3% vs. 43.2%). A plurality of respondents reported that their institution covered the full cost of their premiums (46.4%), with more than one-third reporting that their institution subsidized or shared their premium costs (36.3%). Twelve and a half percent of respondents were responsible for paying the full cost of their premiums.

Careers and the Job Market

Thirty percent (n=63) of respondents were on the job market in 2025-26, nearly double the proportion reported in 2025. It should be noted that the survey was conducted at a different time of year in 2026 than 2025 (February-April rather than July-September), and that the 2026 survey collected a higher proportion of responses from late-career (fifth- and sixth-year) students (49.1% compared to 41.7%). As in 2025, respondents most often applied to assistant professor and postdoctoral positions. Respondents were asked to estimate the number of job applications they submitted and the number of interviews they

received; the average respondent submitted 44 job applications, receiving 2.7 interviews for academic positions and 1.3 interviews for nonacademic positions. Over twenty percent of respondents (n=44) were still active on the 2025-26 job market at the time of survey distribution.

Nearly seventy-five percent of candidates on the job market used APSA eJobs as a resource in their job search, while high proportions of candidates also relied on word of mouth among their professional networks (63%), higher education job resources such as HigherEdjobs.com (58.7%), and announcements circulated by other organizations or sub-organizations such as an APSA Organized Section (55.6%).

The survey also asked a set of questions about nonacademic careers. About a third (33%, n=68) of respondents said that their department offered resources to help doctoral students find nonacademic positions, with nearly as many (28%, n=58) saying that they didn't know if their department offered such resources. By far the most commonly reported resource offered was contact information for alumni who had taken nonacademic positions (n=49, 72%), followed by information about nonacademic job opportunities (n=36, 53%).

Forty-five percent (n=93) of graduate students said that within their department, nonacademic careers are seen as less desirable than academic ones. About a third (32%, n=66) reported that their department viewed nonacademic careers as equally valid to academic ones.

Climate, Challenges, and Concerns

Consistent with 2025, the majority of respondents felt supported by their committee, their department, their institution, and APSA itself, though the proportion dropped at each level: eighty-nine percent felt supported by their committee, seventy-two percent by their department, fifty-five percent by their institution, and fifty percent by APSA. The majority of each decrease was accounted for by a drop in responses in the "strongly agree" category; forty to forty-five percent of respondents "agreed" that they felt supported at each level. Fifty-four percent of respondents felt comfortable voicing their opinion on campus, while sixty-seven percent felt comfortable voicing their opinion within their department, comparable to 2025.

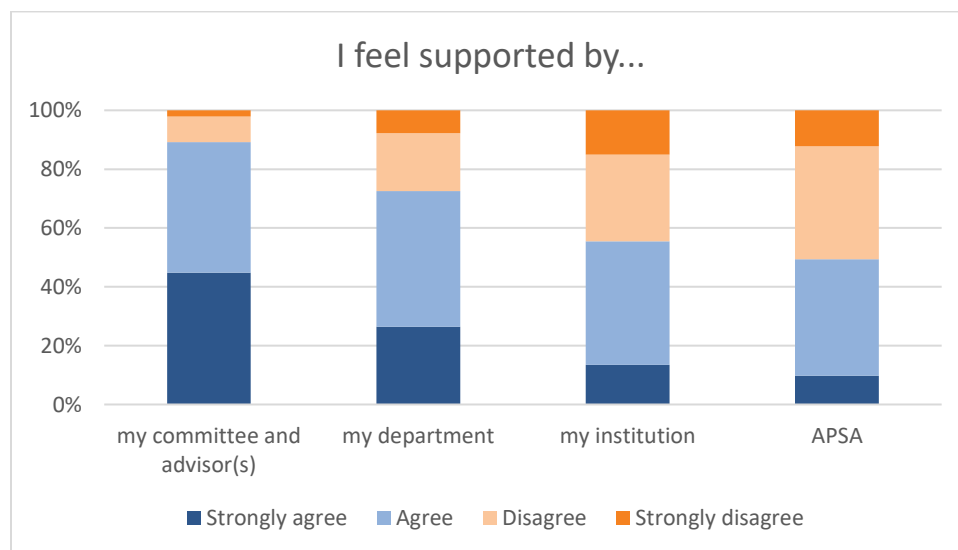


Figure 3. Reported feelings of support at the committee, department, institution, and APSA levels. n=194 (committee), 193 (department), 193 (institution), 164 (APSA).

Respondents were also asked if their department fostered a respectful environment for individuals of different religious identities, gender identities, migration statuses, and racial/ethnic identities. Between thirty-eight percent and forty-four percent “strongly agreed” that their department encouraged a respectful environment for each characteristic, while forty-two to forty-eight percent “agreed”. As in 2025, students were slightly less likely to agree or strongly agree that their department fostered a respectful environment for individuals of different racial and ethnic identities, though an overall higher proportion agreed than in 2025.

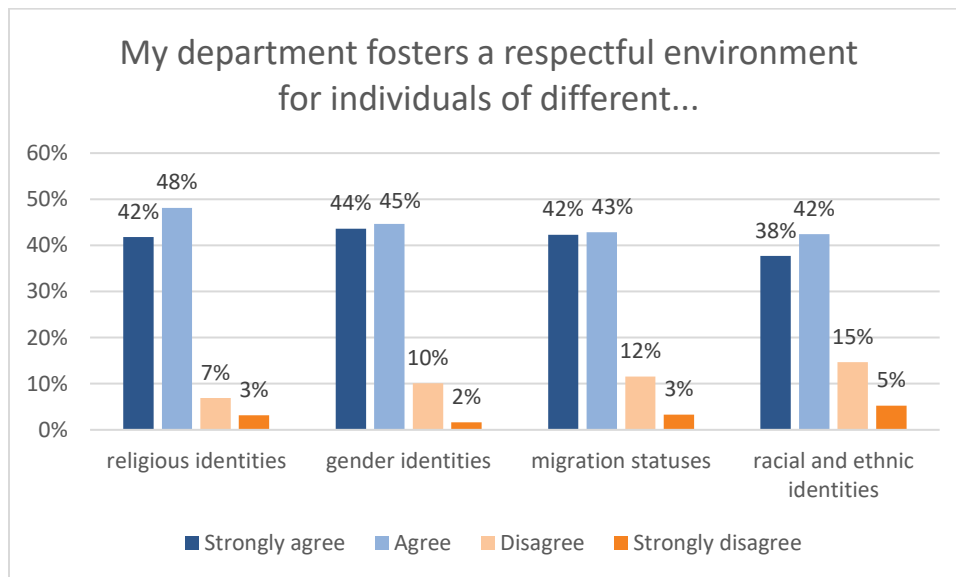


Figure 4. Reported perceptions of department climate with regard to respect for different characteristics. Reported percentages based on n=182 responses (migration status), n=189 responses (religious identity), n=188 responses (gender identity), n=191 responses (racial and ethnic identity).

When asked about the top issues they were facing as a graduate student, respondents most often selected concerns about job prospects (88%, n=183), followed by financial concerns (52%, n=107) and mental health challenges (47%, n=97). When ranking the severity of each concern, job and financial concerns were also rated as the most pressing issues, followed by challenges related to being an international student. Taken together, these survey responses suggest that graduate students generally feel that their departments foster a positive climate and offer them support, but also face high levels of stress related to career prospects and finances.

Conclusion

The findings of the 2026 Graduate Student Survey remain largely consistent with those from the 2025 survey. Financially, though about fifty percent of students are satisfied with their compensation, a similar proportion report concerns about both their short-term and long-term financial security, and more than half have taken on additional employment to support themselves while in graduate school. Respondents generally agree that their department supports them and fosters a respectful environment, though nearly half of students cite mental-health struggles as one of the primary issues they face as a graduate student. Job prospects and financial worries remain at the top of graduate students’ list of concerns, and nearly three-quarters of students on the job market reported using APSA eJobs as a resource in their job search, emphasizing the need to continue creating and maintaining career resources for graduate students in the discipline.