

Graduate Liaison Committee Survey Report

June 25th 2025

Survey Administered: February 2024
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Background Information

In January 2025, the Graduate Liaison Committee (GLC) administered a survey to all graduate students in the Department of Chemistry. Below is the statement we provided with the survey outlining the organization's intentions and goals with respect to administering the survey.

Dear Chemistry Graduate Students,

The Graduate Liaison Committee (GLC) focuses on establishing and ensuring reliable two-way communication between the graduate student body and the faculty of the Department of Chemistry.

At this time, we seek your input (via the **survey** below) so that we can better understand the graduate student experience and evaluate how we can best improve the culture and environment within the Department. **The survey is anonymous, and the results will be kept confidential and will be analyzed only by the GLC.**

Please take a few minutes (5-8 minutes) to contribute to this effort. We look forward to hearing from you and hope that we can continue making strides toward a better graduate student experience and improved department culture.

We greatly appreciate your time.

Sincerely,
The GLC

I. General Information

In all cases, unless otherwise noted, the axes titled “Average Rating” are with respect to the following scale (1-5): 1 (strongly disagree), 3 (neutral), 5 (strongly agree).

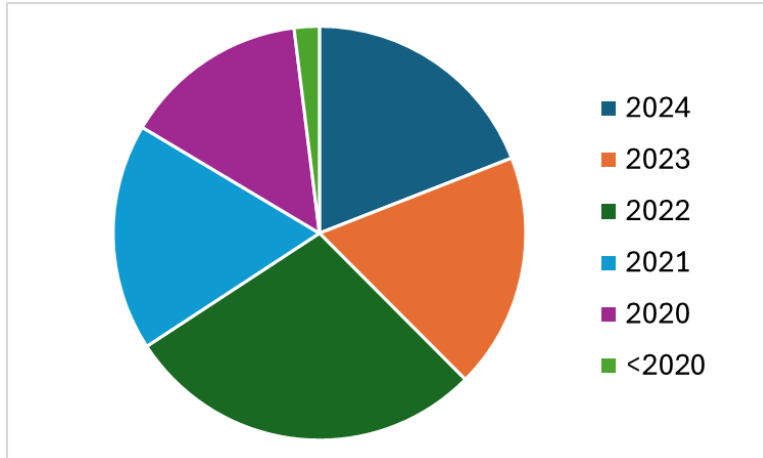
For reference, data from the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic year surveys are provided where available.

II. General Statistics

Responses: 152 students responded

What year did you enter the program (Fall of ____)?

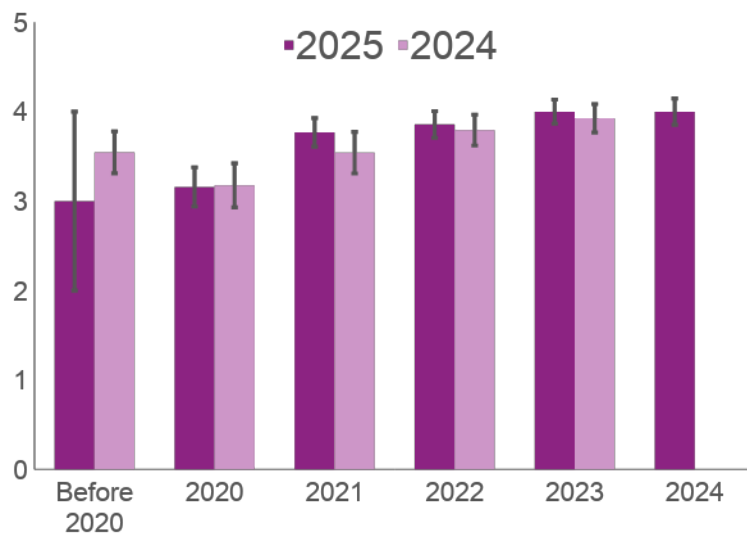
Year	Count
2020	22
2021	27
2022	43
2023	28
2024	29
Before 2020	3
Total	152



III. Research Experience

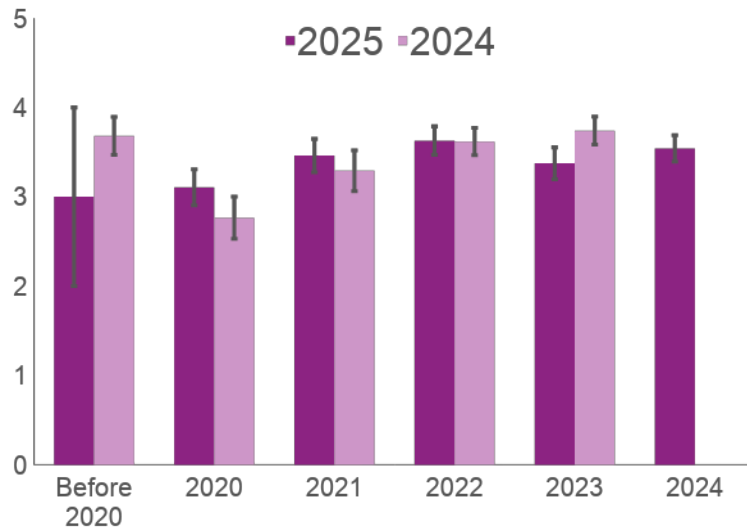
I am aware of my advisor's expectations.

- 75% responded agree/strongly agree
- 10% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 67% responded A/SA, 16% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 70% responded A/SA, 15% responded D/SD



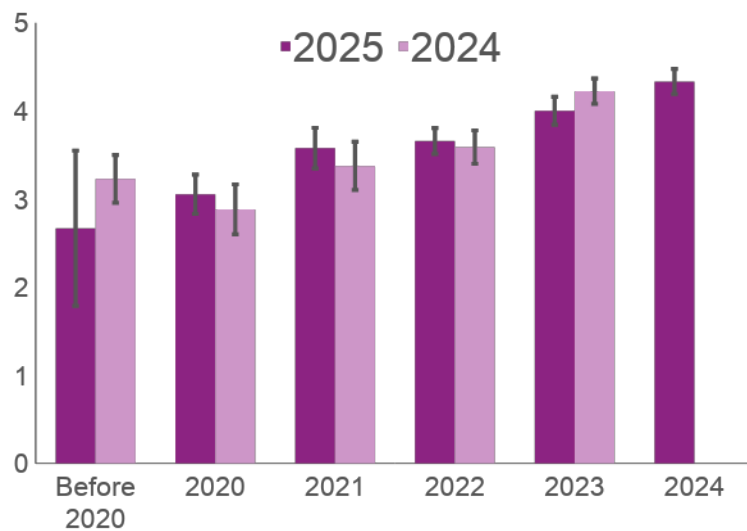
I am aware of my advisor's satisfaction with my progress in research.

- 56% responded agree/strongly agree
- 17% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 57% responded A/SA, 19% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 50% responded A/SA, 21% responded D/SD



I feel my advisor contributes to a positive work environment.

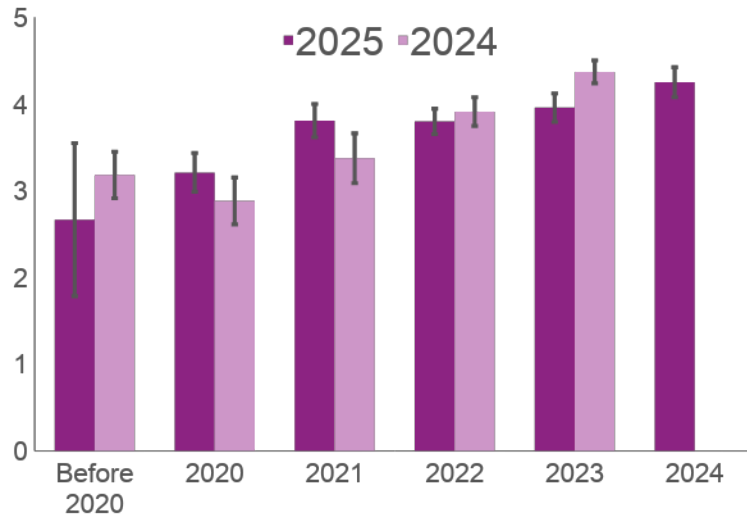
- 64% responded agree/strongly agree
- 11% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 60% responded A/SA, 21% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 61% responded A/SA, 20% responded D/SD



I feel my advisor encourages open communication.

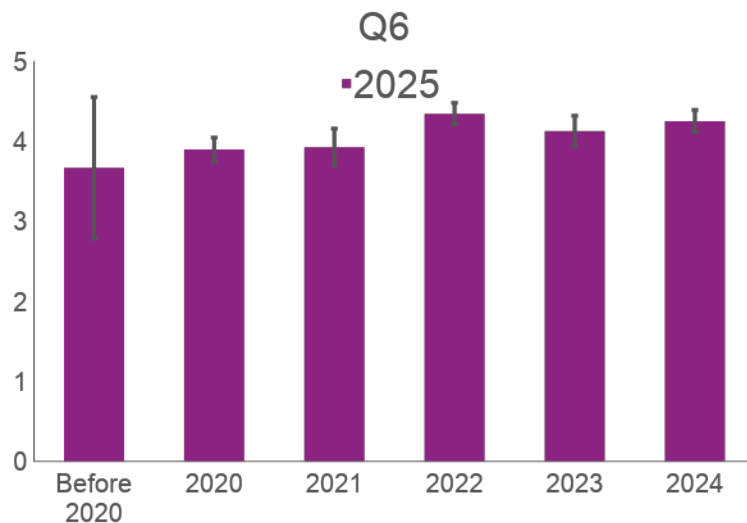
- 70% responded agree/strongly agree
- 11% responded disagree/strongly disagree

- **2023-2024:** 66% responded A/SA, 21% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 63% responded A/SA, 18% responded D/SD



I feel my advisor supports my future career choices.

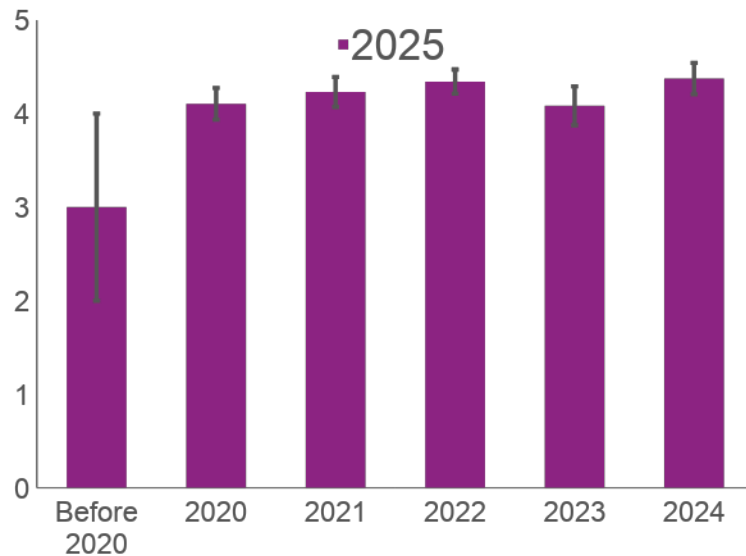
- 80% responded agree/strongly agree
- 5% responded disagree/strongly disagree



I am able to schedule one-on-one meetings with my advisor in a timely fashion.

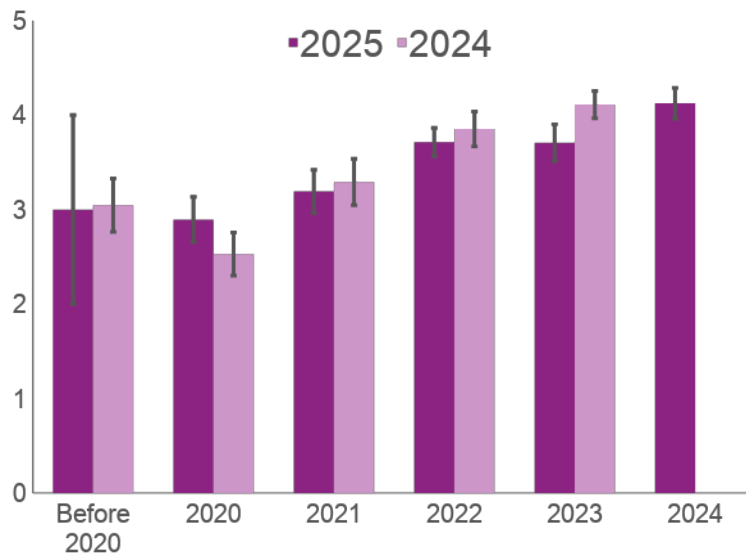
- 84% responded agree/strongly agree
- 5% responded disagree/strongly disagree

- **2023-2024:** 84% responded A/SA, 10% responded D/SD



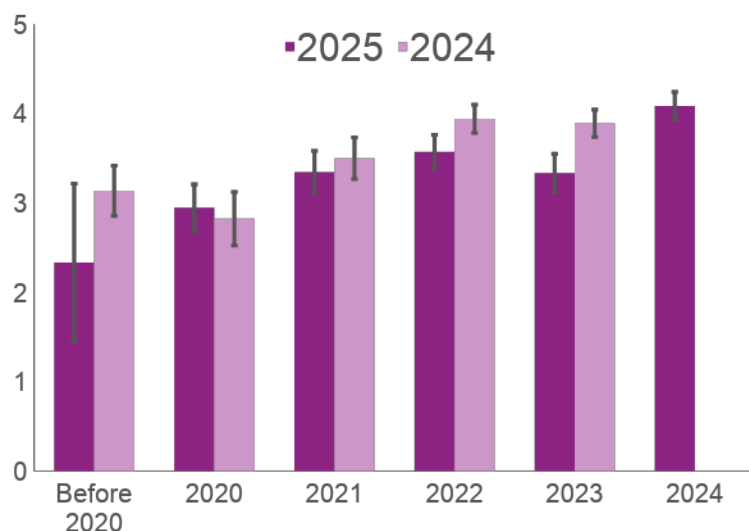
I am satisfied with the quality of the feedback I receive from my advisor.

- 60% responded agree/strongly agree
- 17% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 61% responded A/SA, 24% responded D/SD



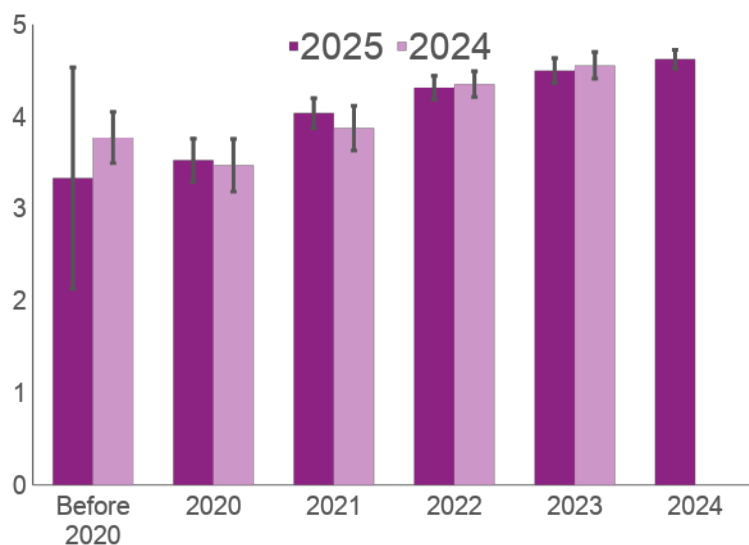
I am satisfied with the frequency of the feedback I receive from my advisor.

- 56% responded agree/strongly agree
- 22% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 53% responded A/SA, 19% responded D/SD



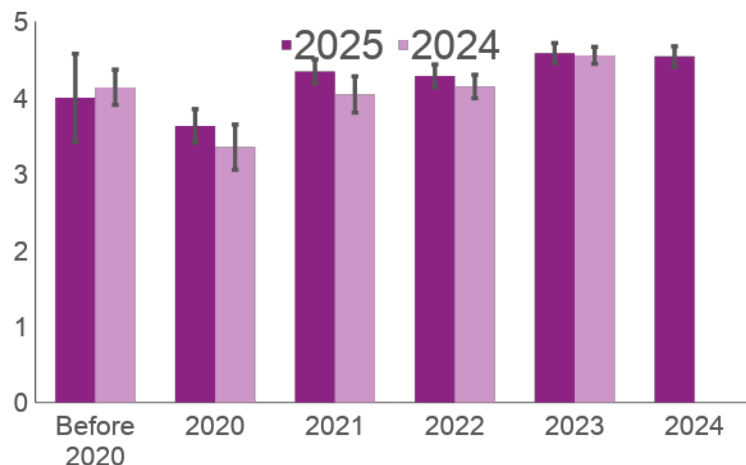
I feel treated with professionalism and respect as a researcher by my advisor.

- 89% responded agree/strongly agree
- 5% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 78% responded A/SA, 11% responded D/SD



I feel treated with respect based on my personal identity and background by my advisor.

- 84% responded agree/strongly agree
- 5% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 78% responded A/SA, 8% responded D/SD



Notable Quotes:

“Specific feedback, e.g. satisfaction with particular experiments or specific criticisms about experimental design, would be more helpful.”

“Although my advisor tries to encourage open discussion, their feedback is often unhelpful and does not give any direction for research or addressing difficulties in my work”

“the paper demands keep changing for each person so im worried i wont be able to graduate when i want”

“I feel like specific expectations for conducting research were never discussed; I was told by older members of the group that as long as I'm making "progress" between meetings with my advisor, that's a good sign- but we never define what exactly that means, so I wish we had more guidance with that.”

“While I can make one-on-one meetings with him if I wanted to, I do wish he would encourage it more rather than rely on my [sic] to initiate the process.”

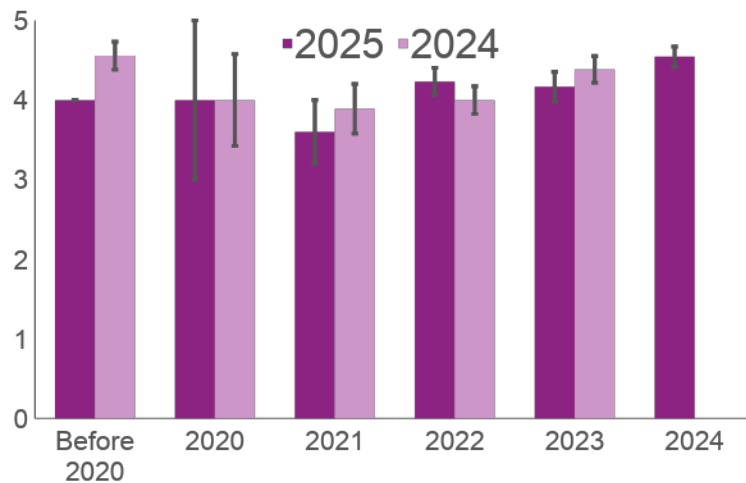
V. Teaching Assistant Experience

Have you been a TA in the past two years?

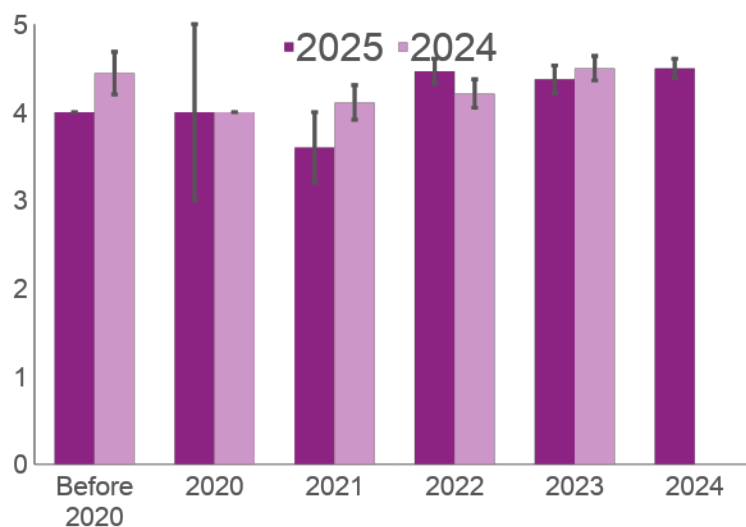
- 66% responded yes
- 34% responded no

Of those responding “Yes” to the above question:

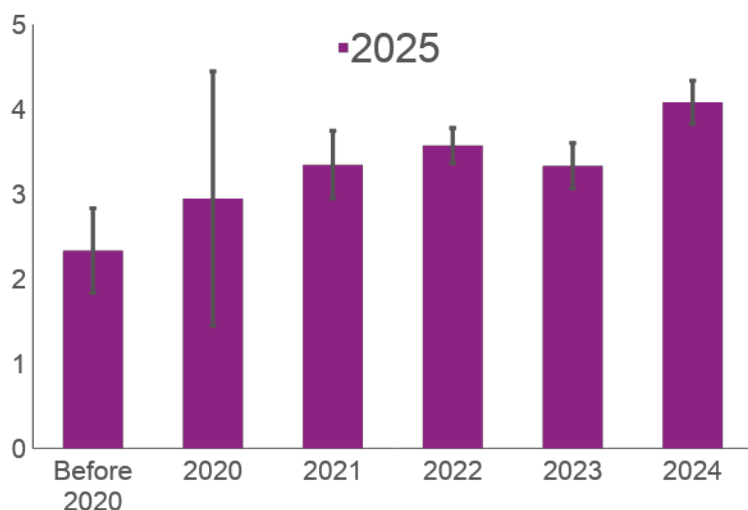
I feel treated with professionalism and respect as a teaching assistant by my TA assignment supervisors (course faculty instructors).



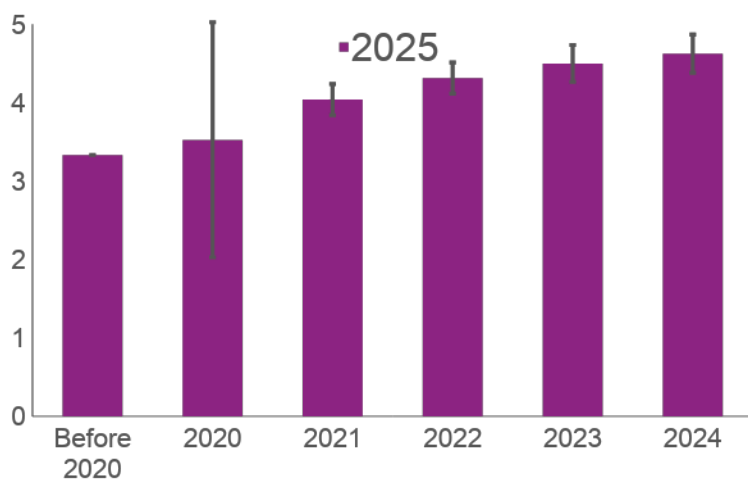
I feel treated with respect based on my personal identity and background by my TA assignment supervisors (course faculty instructors).



In my graduate teaching experiences, I feel supported by my TA assignment supervisor to balance all expectations of the chemistry program requirements (teaching requirements, classes, and research).



In my graduate teaching experience, I feel that I have had been adequately trained to meet my teaching expectations (i.e., grading, leading a discussion, leading a lab).



Notable Quotes:

“I have had nothing short of a wonderful experience being a TA. The faculty I work with in the organic division are lovely and I continue to TA past the required 5 quarters to help my lab financially, but it is not a burden to my spirit at all.”

“concerns about grading deadlines coinciding with our exams...having most information communicated to us over the weekends made for very haphazard preparation”

“As a first year, incredibly difficult to find time to meet advisor's research progress standards while TA-ing and taking classes.”

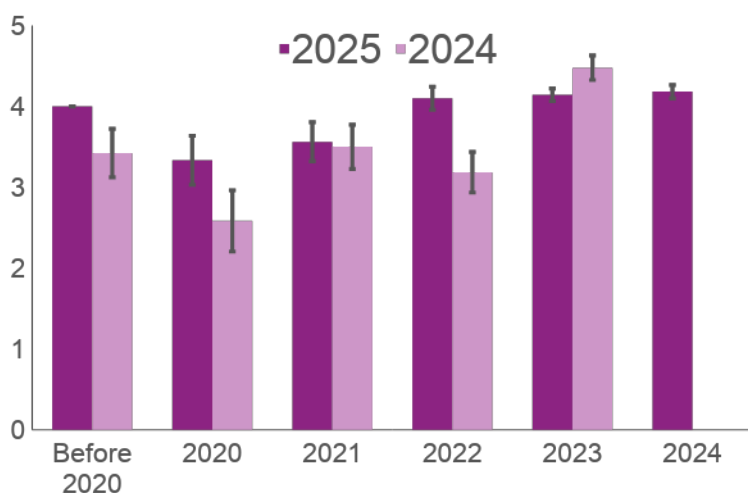
“I feel that the TA training didn't focus enough on how to LEAD a discussion but more so how to explain things and without my prior experience I would be at a lost and super nervous.”

“I think there is an imbalance between TA assignments. Lab, recitation, and super TA assignments require vastly different time commitments. While I consider being a Super TA a privilege, it was really difficult to balance classes, research, and super TAing at the same time. It would be nice if Super TAs could have one less quarter of required TAing since the time commitment is so much higher than being a lab or recitation TA.”

IV. Department Community

I feel treated with professionalism and respect as a researcher by the overall faculty and the department.

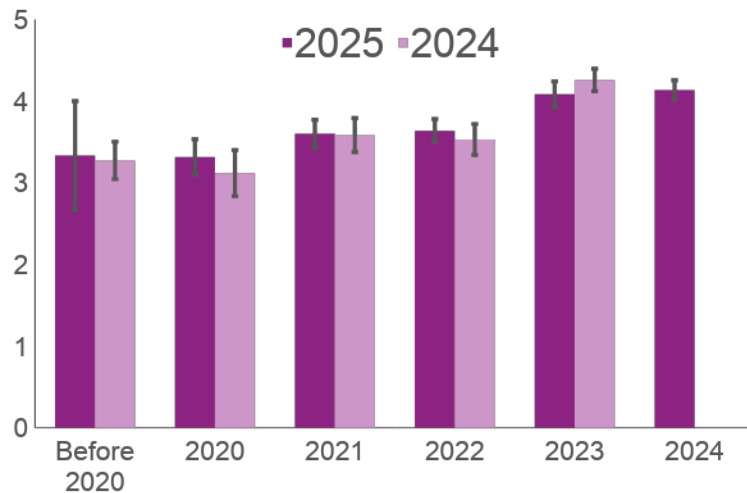
- 69% responded agree/strongly agree
- 7% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 58% responded A/SA, 25% responded D/SD



I feel treated with respect based on my personal identity and background by the overall

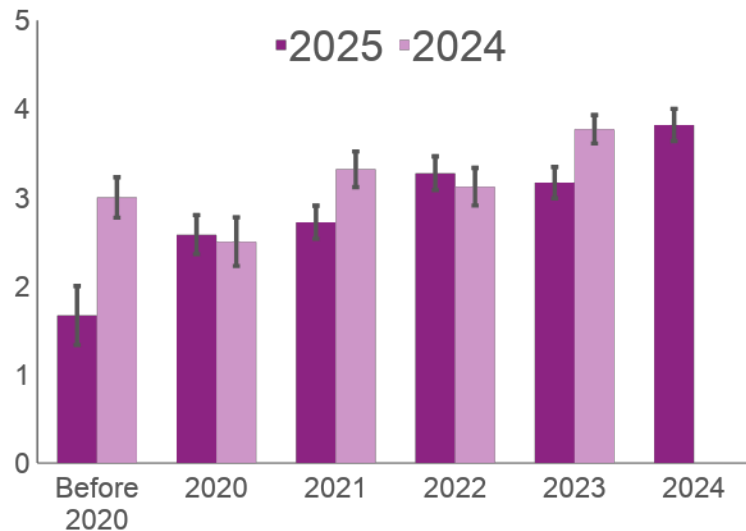
faculty and the department.

- 67% responded agree/strongly agree
- 7% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 55% responded A/SA, 13% responded D/SD



I feel a sense of community within our department.

- 40% responded agree/strongly agree
- 31% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 46% responded A/SA, 27% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 40% responded A/SA, 31% responded D/SD



Notable Quotes:

"I wish our community events were organized by the department instead of mostly led by students (thank you for the coffee hours though!). Hire more staff in the program office please. Other departments (ex: ChBE) have way more staff/student ratio and organize community events, such as a simple Christmas party every year in addition to their special seminars. Everything doesn't have to be catered with fancy food, we could have more "low key" events and it would make faculty more approachable."

"I also see reinvigorated efforts to foster more social events and community within the department, which I really appreciate and respect."

"Currently in the department it feels that both students are hesitant to interact with faculty and faculty don't want to interact with students outside of research. While attempts have been made to establish events, without PIs selling these events to their students nothing will change in my opinion."

"I have not had any negative interactions with respect to professionalism, but I don't feel any strong sense of respect. Although there are community events in the department, I don't feel like there is any strong link to faculty other than professional courtesy"

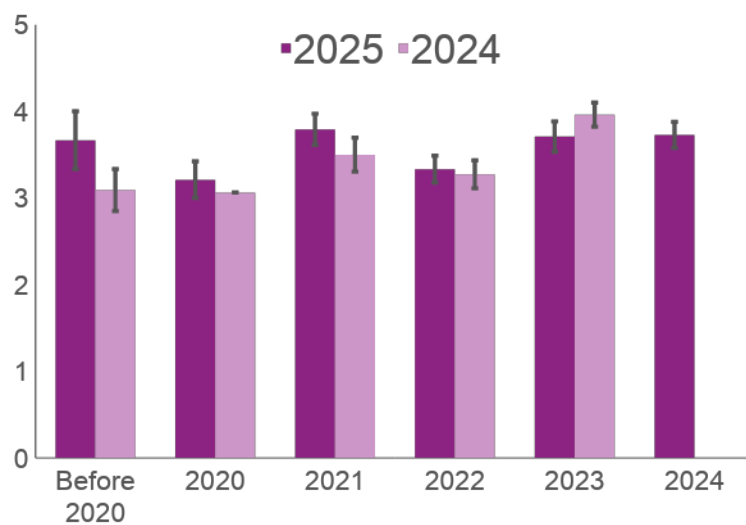
"I don't feel a strong sense of community with the whole department. at social events, i see generally the same people over and over again."

"The department does not host/encourage a community within the department. Most group socials or community building efforts come from students/student groups, but not the department themselves."

VI. Quality of Life

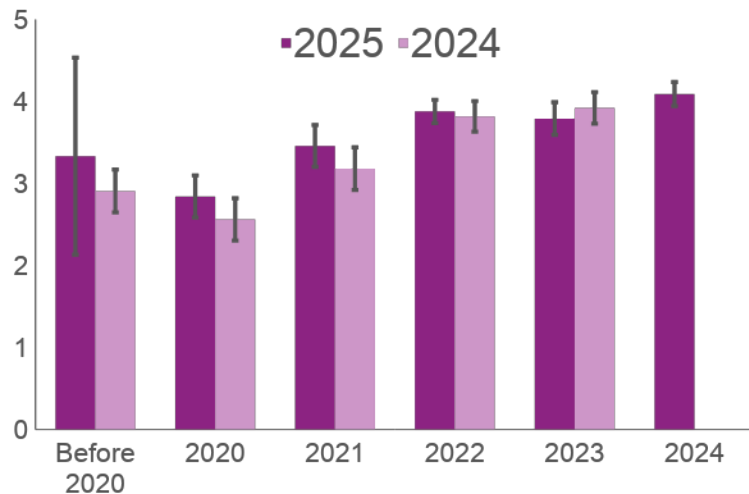
I am able to balance research and my personal life.

- 63% responded agree/strongly agree
- 15% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 55% responded A/SA, 23% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 46% responded A/SA, 29% responded D/SD



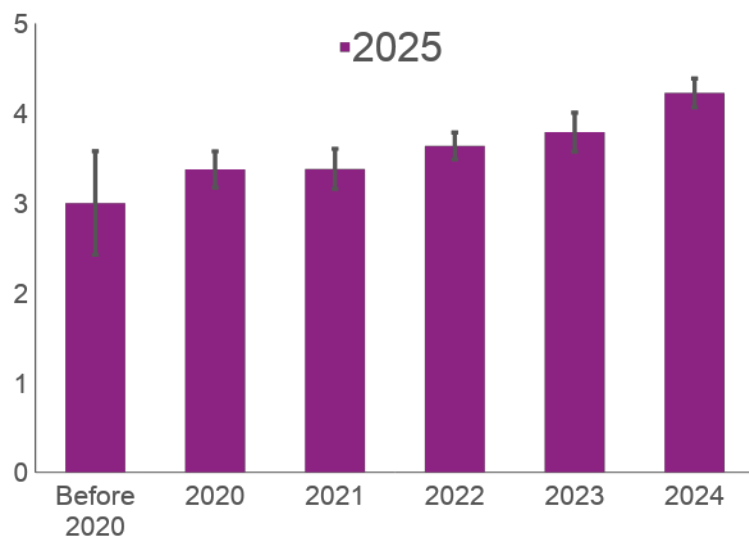
I feel as though my advisor understands the value of mental health and its effect on research productivity.

- 68% responded agree/strongly agree
- 16% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 54% responded A/SA, 26% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 53% responded A/SA, 24% responded D/SD



I feel that my advisor understands departmental and university policy about mental health support.

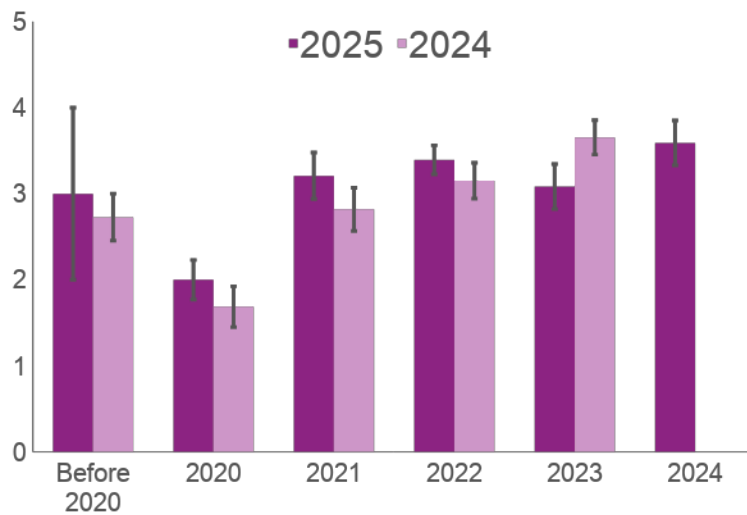
- 58% responded agree/strongly agree
- 17% responded disagree/strongly disagree



I feel comfortable addressing my mental health and its effect on research productivity with my advisor.

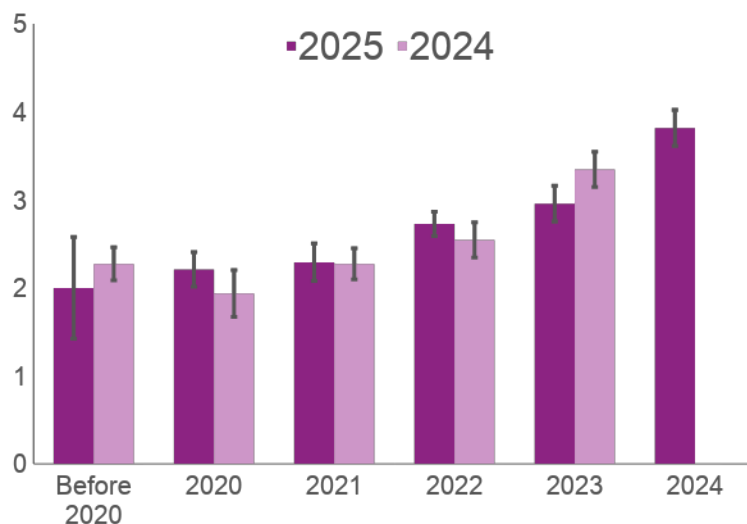
- 44% responded agree/strongly agree
- 36% responded disagree/strongly disagree

- **2023-2024:** 34% responded A/SA, 38% responded D/SD



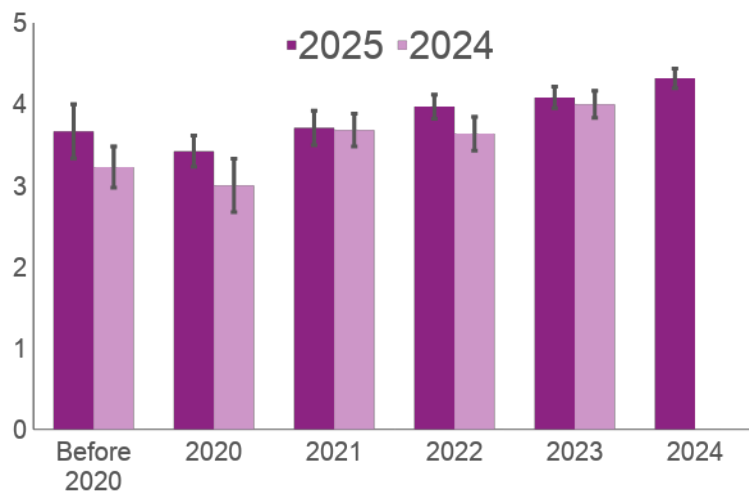
I feel as though the Faculty understands the value of mental health and its effect on research productivity.

- 24% responded agree/strongly agree
- 43% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 16% responded A/SA, 49% responded D/SD



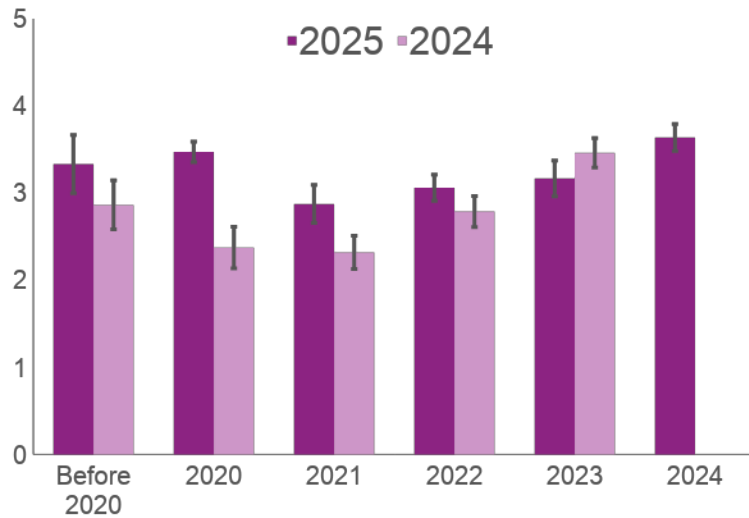
I feel as though the administration (e.g. Graduate Program Office, Program Assistants, Main Office, Business Office) understand the value of mental health and its effect on research productivity.

- 71% responded agree/strongly agree
- 3% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 58% responded A/SA, 15% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 61% responded A/SA, 10% responded D/SD



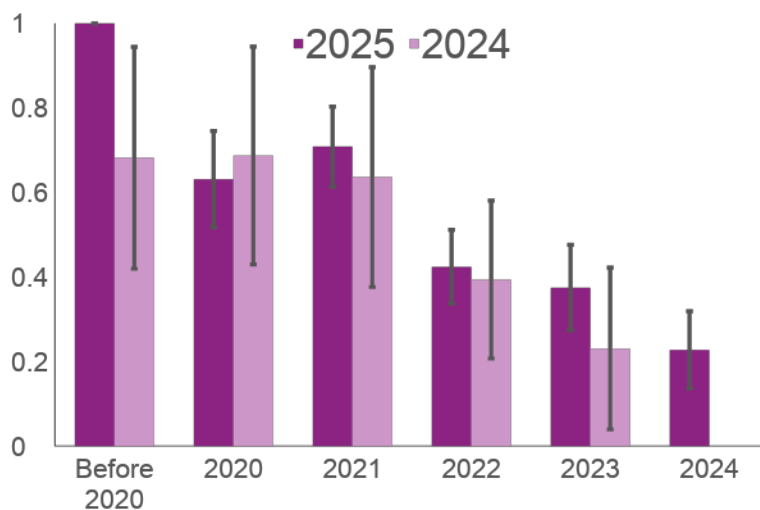
I feel there is adequate mental health support within Northwestern.

- 35% responded agree/strongly agree
- 15% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 24% responded A/SA, 35% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 29% responded A/SA, 40% responded D/SD



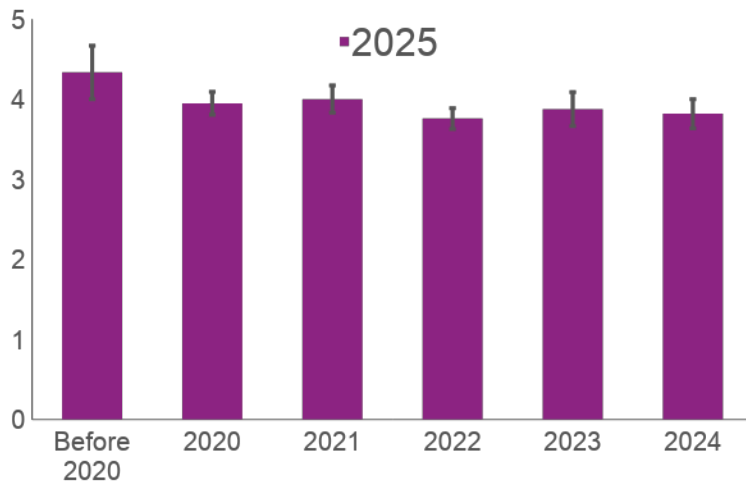
I have sought mental health support since beginning graduate school

- 48% responded yes
- 52% responded no
- **2023-2024:** 50% responded yes, 50% responded no
- **2022-2023:** 55% responded yes, 45% responded no



I am aware of and know how to access mental health support offered by the university.

- 75% responded agree/strongly agree
- 6% responded disagree/strongly disagree



Notable Quotes:

“I wish people talked about it openly more, especially faculty, because it seems like overall there's a sense of futility in bringing it up among the graduate students.”

“Even though I know my advisor is generally supportive with mental health stuff it can still feel challenging to bring it up, like its not "professional" to be discussing it even though it does impact my work”

“I have never had to use these resources (and am a bit unaware because of this), but I do not know much about available resources.”

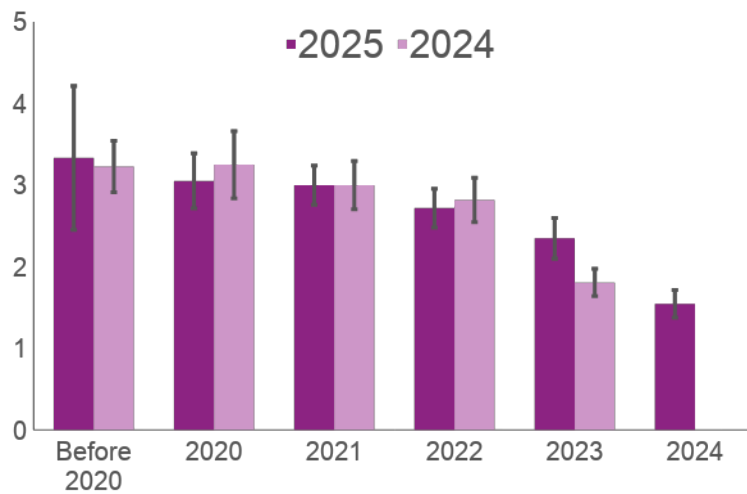
“To have work-life balance, it is necessary to set limits for time on campus/at work (ex: M-F 8am to 6:30pm), however TA, office hours, and class scheduling blocks make it difficult to have sufficient periods to conduct research, resulting in less than satisfactory productivity in the lab.”

VII. Concluding Questions

I have seriously considered leaving the program.

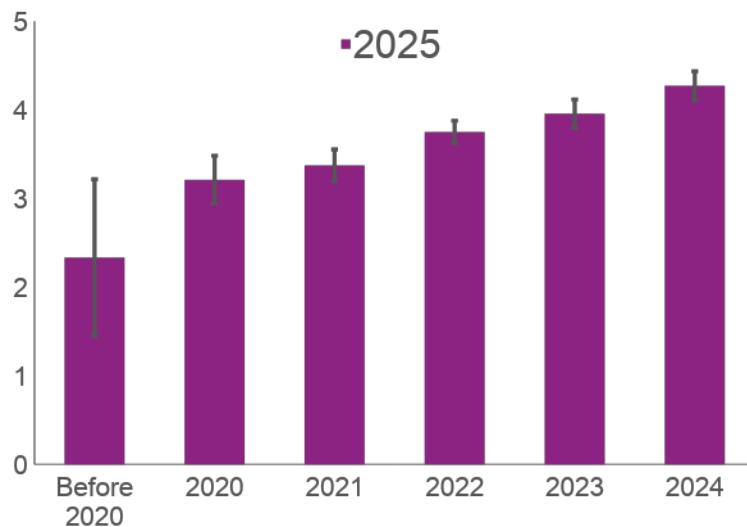
- 29% responded agree/strongly agree
- 56% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 35% responded A/SA, 53% responded D/SD

- **2022-2023:** 28% responded A/SA, 53% responded D/SD



I would recommend this program to prospective students.

- 61% responded agree/strongly agree
- 10% responded disagree/strongly disagree
- **2023-2024:** 60% responded A/SA, 17% responded D/SD
- **2022-2023:** 56% responded A/SA, 16% responded D/SD



VIII. Free Response Questions

What do you think are the strengths of the department?

1. Resources and infrastructure (45% of comments)
2. Research Faculty/ Interdisciplinary research (19% of comments)
3. Sense of community (34% of comments)
4. Graduate Program office

Notable Quotes:

“Incredible science, talented and hardworking graduate students to interact with, fantastic facilities, competitive pay.”

“The principal investigators are what make northwestern chemistry a good place. The funding comes because the names we have which is also another factor for why this is a good place.”

“Community among graduate students has felt very supportive.”

“The department has many resources and access to high quality equipment. The collaborative nature of science really thrives here with many collaborative projects always occurring. In general the graduate student community is great and supportive.”

How can the department address any concerns and potential issues that you have noticed?

1. More community building (22% of comments)
 - Suggestions: more events, more support for students
2. Holding faculty accountable (48% of comments)
 - Suggestions: have more mental health trainings for faculty, be more understanding of mental health struggles
3. More surveys to understand student feelings (7% of comments)
4. Make expectations more clear (14% of comments)
 - Standardize graduation requirements

Notable Quotes:

“The department is seriously lacking in diversity and in dedication to embracing a cohesive, supportive community.”

“Put more conscious effort into community building, whether that's through events or otherwise”

“I think that faculty should receive more management training (or be expected to) and I think that DEI training could have more to do with the realities of management and not be superficial”

“hold faculty members accountable when they don't allow students to graduate or when they mistreat students.”

“Listening to students more and introducing more faculty training.”

“Forms like this are a good start. I think most things are advisor dependent, but the department does a good job of applying feedback and supporting its students.”

“Standardize graduation requirements in some way. Advisors are too subjective. It's infuriating to watch others set a graduation date in advance without a single first author paper in sight. I'm aware that what constitutes a publication is field-dependent, but it's quite easy to see that some students get unreasonably held back by their advisors thanks to this subjectivity. There are students taking 6 years to graduate that would have graduated in 5 had they joined a different group, and this happens even without advisors shifting the goalposts!”

“Increased organization and expectations of requirements.”

What question do you wish the GLC asked on this survey but that we did not ask?

“The weaknesses of the department. Like 5 quarters of teaching seems a lot, and many professors in other departments are surprised by this requirement”

“What events/community building things would be considered valuable to grad students?”

“What is one thing the department did this year that you wish to continue to see?”

IX. Events & Initiatives Managed by the GLC

1. Faculty-Student Lunch Seminars

Description: Professional development-oriented discussion between students and faculty over lunch.

Purpose:

- a. Promote interaction between the faculty and student body on a smaller, more personal scale.
- b. Provide professional development for graduate students on topics participating faculty are passionate about

2. Faculty Research Colloquium

Description: Northwestern faculty present their research to the Department.

Purpose:

- a. Allow for members of Northwestern chemistry to learn about research being conducted by our own professors
- b. Bring the Department together & introduce new avenues of collaboration
- c. Opportunity for students to get to know the faculty better

3. CHEMUnity Mentorship Program & Social Events

Description: Mentorship pairing between first-year students and senior graduate students

Purpose:

- a. Provide point-of-contact for incoming students to ease the transition into graduate school
- b. Provided opportunities for students in the Department to meet and socialize outside of their respective groups
- c. Strengthen social and professional networks

4. Cohort Connect

Description: Allow first-years, second-years, third-years, fourth-years, fifth-years, and sixth-years and above to meet with their fellow cohort members

Purpose:

- a. Facilitate yearly connections for each
- b. Provide information regarding the PhD milestone for the cohort that needs to be complete during that year

5. QE Handbook & Advice Panels

Description: Guidance for pre-QE second year students

Purpose:

- a. Handbook – A compendium of advice from post-QE graduate students and faculty on how to successfully navigate the QE process
- b. Panel – Small group discussions with senior graduate students on preparing for and delivering the QE

6. Annual Graduate Student Survey

Description: Survey for graduate students to fill out their progress in the program and gather feedback from their PIs

Purpose:

- a. Understand the graduate student experience
- b. Evaluate how we can best improve the culture and environment within the Department

7. Annual Graduate Student Town Hall

Description: A town hall for students to attend and talk to GLC members about the survey results, the annual grad affairs committee meeting and any of their concerns

Purpose:

- a. Inform students of the work being done by GLC and the faculty
- b. Share the survey results with the students
- c. Allow students to voice their concerns/bring up any areas they would like us to focus on