

COMPLETING GRADUATE DEGREES ON TIME

Report based on the 2019 UCSC Graduate Student Survey

REASONS FOR SLOWING GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRESS

In the 2019 UCSC Graduate Student Survey, students answered a question about whether they expected to graduate on time, more quickly than expected, or later than expected, with an “I don’t know” option also available. In Table 1, Master’s students and doctoral students are shown in separate columns.

Table 1. Students’ expected time of graduation, UCSC Graduate Student Survey 2019

	MA/MS/MFA students (N=217)	PhD/DMA Students (N=617)
Do you feel you will graduate... on time?	77%	64%
more quickly than you expected?	10%	5%
later than you expected?	10%	19%
I don't know	3%	11%

Overall, 30% of doctoral students and 13% of Master’s students felt that they would graduate later than expected, or that they did not know. They were asked about a series of potential obstacles that may have slowed their progress toward completing a degree. Respondents rated each obstacle as one of 3 options: “Did not slow me down”, “Somewhat slowed me down”, and “Slowed me down a great deal”, or indicated not experiencing this particular obstacle.

Doctoral and Master’s students reported that financial, personal/family-related, and academic reasons negatively affected their academic progress. In Table 2, the rows show the percentage of students who indicated that particular obstacles slowed down their progress toward completing a degree either a lot or to some extent.

Table 2. Reasons slowing progress toward a graduate degree

Type	Reasons	MA/MS/MFA students (N=27-28)	PhD/DMA Students (N=169-177)
Financial	Struggled financially and had to find additional means of support (e.g., outside job)	39%	43%
Personal/ family	Other personal/family related events (e.g., illness)	37%	45%
	Child (children) born/adopted while in the program	15%	13%
	Difficult time choosing a dissertation topic	30%	36%
Academic	Difficulty collecting data for my dissertation research (e.g., participant recruitment, collecting samples)	30%	38%
	Difficult time finding a primary advisor or had to change primary advisor	18%	21%
	Re-take a qualifying exam/resubmit a qualifying paper	18%	9%
	Re-take one of the required classes	18%	4%
	Had to change my primary advisor during my dissertation research	n/a	0%

Survey question: “To what extent has any of the following slowed down your progress towards completing your degree?”

Major findings for doctoral students (in Table 3) include:

- About 4 in 10 (43%) doctoral students had financial struggles slow down their progress, with 20% reporting that this slowed progress a lot.
- Almost half (45%) of doctoral students had personal or family related events, such as illness, during their time as graduate students end up slowing progress to a degree. 20% of doctoral students reported that personal or family events slowed down progress a lot.
- Over one-third (36%) of doctoral students reported that progress was slowed by having a difficult time choosing a dissertation topic.
- No students who were unsure about graduating on time reported having to change a primary advisor during dissertation research.

Major findings for Master’s students (also in Table 3) include:

- About 4 in 10 (39%) Master’s students reported that financial struggles slowed down their progress, with 21% reporting that this slowed progress a lot.
- Over one-third of Master’s (37%) students had personal or family related events, such as illness, during their time as graduate students end up slowing progress to a degree. Only 7% of Master’s students, however, reported that personal or family events slowed down progress a lot.
- Almost one-third (30%) of Master’s students reported that progress was slowed by having a difficult time choosing a dissertation topic.

Table 3. Detailed reasons slowing progress toward graduate degrees

	MA/MS/MFA students (N=27-28)	PhD/DMA Students (N=169-177)
Struggled financially and had to find additional means of support (e.g., outside job)	39%	43%
Slowed down a lot	21%	20%
Somewhat slowed down	18%	23%
Other personal/family related events (e.g., illness)	37%	45%
Slowed down a lot	7%	20%
Somewhat slowed down	30%	25%
Difficulty collecting data for my dissertation research (e.g., participant recruitment, collecting samples)	30%	38%
Slowed down a lot	19%	11%
Somewhat slowed down	11%	27%

Difficult time choosing a dissertation topic	30%	36%
Slowed down a lot	15%	12%
Somewhat slowed down	15%	24%
Difficult time finding a primary advisor or had to change primary advisor	18%	21%
Slowed down a lot	11%	12%
Somewhat slowed down	7%	9%
Re-take a qualifying exam/resubmit a qualifying paper	18%	9%
Slowed down a lot	11%	3%
Somewhat slowed down	7%	6%
Re-take one of the required classes	18%	4%
Slowed down a lot	11%	1%
Somewhat slowed down	7%	3%
Child (children) born/adopted while in the program	15%	13%
Slowed down a lot	4%	6%
Somewhat slowed down	11%	7%
Had to change my primary advisor during my dissertation research	n/a	0%

Survey question: "To what extent has any of the following slowed down your progress towards completing your degree?"