

## **May 2020 Graduate Future Plans Survey**

### **Introduction, Research Methods, and Response Rates**

This series of reports presents findings from the May 2020 Graduate Future Plans Survey (GFPS). This survey is designed to collect specific information on the plans of master's and doctoral students at NC State University following graduation, including detailed information on employment, participation in career-preparation activities while at NC State, and further graduate/professional school being pursued. This introductory report provides a background of the Graduate Future Plans Survey and an overview of the research design. Additional reports can be found on the [ISA website](#).

### **Survey Background**

Historically, the Career Development Center (CDC) and the college career service offices independently collected information from NC State's students on their 'future plans' at the time of their graduation. While these diverse strategies provided useful information for some units, centralizing the project in the Institutional Strategy and Analysis (ISA) office presented a more efficient and cost-effective mechanism for systematically collecting information from NC State graduates as a whole and providing reports on the results.

To accomplish these objectives, ISA developed and administered the pilot Undergraduate Future Plans Survey (UFPS) to graduating seniors in December 2010, working with the CDC and the college career service offices to develop an overall research design and questionnaire. The UFPS has been administered semiannually to graduating seniors since then, and the results have been used by senior leadership, academic departments, career service offices, and other units across campus to support accreditation, assessment, and planning activities, as well as to provide information to employers and students on the job search process and employment details of NC State graduates.

Out of a growing need to collect information on the future plans of NC State's master's and doctoral graduates, with input from graduate students, the CDC, college career service offices, The Graduate School, directors of graduate programs, and associate deans for graduate programs, ISA developed and administered the pilot Graduate Future Plans Survey in May 2018. In May 2020, following discussions with The Graduate School, several questions were added and the survey underwent moderate revisions.

### **Research Design**

The Graduate Future Plans Survey is administered semiannually, coinciding with December and May graduation. In addition, December/May survey respondents who said at the time they completed the survey that they were seeking or planning to seek full-time employment and/or were planning to pursue another graduate/professional degree but had not yet confirmed whether or not they would be enrolled or the school they would be attending are invited to take a follow-up survey in September. December and May graduate students who did not participate in the Graduate Future Plans Survey when first invited to do so, or who graduated in the summer of 2020, are also invited to take this survey.

ISA is solely responsible for preparing the survey for online administration, identifying the survey population and sending email invitations and reminders about the survey to graduate students as appropriate, collecting and analyzing the data, and preparing and distributing reports on results.

Historically, all graduate students who have applied to graduate as of the day prior to graduation day are asked to participate in the GFPS<sup>1</sup>. The online survey goes live about two weeks prior to graduation day, and is scheduled to close two to four weeks after graduation. However, there was no May graduation ceremony in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the survey was in the field from April 28, 2020, through May 27, 2020. This month-long time span mimics the traditional timing of the survey, but the language in the invitation and follow-up emails was altered to remove references to “graduation day” and “commencement day” and to refer more generally to the end of finals (see Appendix A).

On April 28, which was the second day of the final exam period, all doctoral and master’s students who as of that day had applied to graduate were sent an email from their college Dean or equivalent, inviting them to participate in the survey. The first follow-up reminder email was sent to non-respondents from their college Associate Dean or equivalent on May 4. On May 7, the second reminder email for graduate students in a college without its own career services office came from the Executive Director of the Career Development Center. If their college did have such an office, the second reminder came from the director of the student’s college career services office. The final three reminders came on May 18, May 21, and May 27 from the Director for Survey Research. On each of the days that reminders were sent to non-respondents, invitations were emailed to those who had applied to graduate during the intervening period. Drafts of the invitation and five follow-up emails are available in Appendix A. In addition to the emails sent by ISA, ISA encouraged administrators in the colleges and departments (e.g., Associate Deans, College and Department Coordinators for Advising) to contact their students directly. Some students, therefore, might have received additional requests to participate in the survey.

Incentives were offered to encourage participation in the survey. Two respondents who completed the survey by the May 27 deadline were randomly selected to each receive a \$50 Amazon eGift Card.

## **Response Rates**

The final May 2020 GFPS population consists of the 1,776 master’s students (n=1,584) and doctoral students (n=192) who had applied to graduate and were conferred degrees as of May 27. Of these students, 1,228 participated in the Graduate Future Plans Survey for an overall response rate of 69.1 percent. Participation in the survey was slightly lower among master’s students (68.3%) compared to doctoral students (76.0%).

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<sup>1</sup> Doctoral and master’s degree recipients only. DVM students are not included in the GFPS survey population.

**Table 1: Response Rate, by Degree Received**

Degree	May 2020 Graduating Class	Percent of Population	Survey Respondents	Percent of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
Doctoral	192	10.8%	146	11.9%	76.0%
Masters	1,584	89.2%	1,082	88.1%	68.3%
Total	1,776	100.0%	1,228	100.0%	69.1%

Participation in the survey varied widely by college/school. All three CVM doctoral graduates participated in the survey; the Institute for Advanced Analytics also had an exceptionally high response rate at 96 percent. The College of Agriculture & Life Sciences and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences have the lowest response rates, at 54 and 60 percent, respectively.

**Table 2: Response Rate, by College (All respondents)**

College/School	May 2020 Graduating Class	Percent of Population	Survey Respondents	Percent of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
Institute for Advanced Analytics	119	6.7%	114	9.3%	95.8%
College of Agriculture & Life Sciences	151	8.5%	81	6.6%	53.6%
College of Design	55	3.1%	36	2.9%	65.5%
College of Education	226	12.7%	175	14.3%	77.4%
College of Engineering	576	32.4%	395	32.2%	68.6%
College of Natural Resources	56	3.2%	44	3.6%	78.6%
College of Humanities & Social Sciences	226	12.7%	135	11.0%	59.7%
College of Sciences	102	5.7%	72	5.9%	70.6%
Wilson College of Textiles	43	2.4%	33	2.7%	76.7%
College of Veterinary Medicine	3	0.2%	3	0.2%	100.0%
Poole College of Management	219	12.3%	140	11.4%	63.9%
Total	1,776	100.0%	1,228	100.0%	69.1%

\*Doctoral and master's degree recipients only. DVM students are not included in the GFPS survey population.

**Table 3: Response Rate, by College (Doctoral Degree Recipients)**

College/School	May 2020 Graduating Class	Percent of Population	Survey Respondents	Percent of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
College of Agriculture & Life Sciences	27	14.1%	18	12.3%	66.7%
College of Design	2	1.0%	1	0.7%	50.0%
College of Education	31	16.1%	27	18.5%	87.1%
College of Engineering	68	35.4%	52	35.6%	76.5%
College of Natural Resources	5	2.6%	4	2.7%	80.0%
College of Humanities & Social Sciences	14	7.3%	10	6.8%	71.4%
College of Sciences	26	13.5%	21	14.4%	80.8%
Wilson College of Textiles	14	7.3%	9	6.2%	64.3%
College of Veterinary Medicine	3	1.6%	3	2.1%	100.0%
Poole College of Management	2	1.0%	1	0.7%	50.0%
Total	192	100.0%	146	100.0%	76.0%

**Table 4: Response Rate, by College (Master's Degree Recipients)**

College/School	May 2020 Graduating Class	Percent of Population	Survey Respondents	Percent of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
Institute for Advanced Analytics	119	7.5%	114	10.5%	95.8%
College of Agriculture & Life Sciences	124	7.8%	63	5.8%	50.8%
College of Design	53	3.3%	35	3.2%	66.0%
College of Education	195	12.3%	148	13.7%	75.9%
College of Engineering	508	32.1%	343	31.7%	67.5%
College of Natural Resources	51	3.2%	40	3.7%	78.4%
College of Humanities & Social Sciences	212	13.4%	125	11.6%	59.0%
College of Sciences	76	4.8%	51	4.7%	67.1%
Wilson College of Textiles	29	1.8%	24	2.2%	82.8%
Poole College of Management	217	13.7%	139	12.8%	64.1%
Total	1,584	100.0%	1,082	100.0%	68.3%

**Prepared by:** Hannah McQueen

**For more information about the Graduate Future Plans Survey, contact:**

Institutional Strategy and Analysis

Box 7002

NC State University

Phone: (919) 515-6438

Email: [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu)

## May 2020 Graduate Future Plans Survey Appendix A: Email Invitation and Follow-Up Reminders

### Email Invitation (April 28, 2020)

To: All May 2020 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form  
From: "NCSU [College]" <studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject line: "Future Plans Survey – What's next?"

Dear [title] [last name],

I recognize that this semester's graduates face unprecedented challenges due the disruptions and difficulties caused by COVID-19. Based on the application for degree process, however, you are still on track to finish your degree requirements in May. Congratulations!

I understand that this semester has been like no other, perhaps particularly in making concrete plans for what you will be doing after your complete your degree. However, as I have done with graduates in past semesters, as Dean of the [College], I am reaching out to learn what is next in store for you. Perhaps you have accepted a new job, already have one, or are currently searching. Maybe you are continuing in graduate or professional school to pursue another degree, or maybe you are following other dreams. Whatever your plans may be, we would like to hear about them. Note that there will be a question at the end of the survey where you can share your experiences and tell us how your future plans may have been impacted by circumstances related to COVID-19.

Please take 10-20 minutes of your time to complete the Graduate Future Plans Survey. You can access it online at:

[go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans](https://go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans)

(If the link does not work, please copy and paste it into your browser.)

As a show of our appreciation for your time, two respondents who complete the survey by May 27, 2020 will be randomly selected to each win a \$50 Amazon eGift Card.

Your participation is voluntary, but we sincerely hope to hear from you. Systematically collecting this information through this brief survey is the best way we have to learn what our graduate students will be doing after earning their degree. The aggregate-level information from the survey is helpful to share with prospective NC State graduate students, with current graduate students who are planning their future paths, and even with employers when making salary offers to our graduate students. *Be assured that your responses are confidential - - it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent in reports of results.*

Remember, as an NC State alumnus/alumna, the Career Development Center will continue to provide services to you for one year after graduation. Please visit [careers.dasa.ncsu.edu/](https://careers.dasa.ncsu.edu/) for more information.

Thank you again for your help with this important effort to learn more about the activities of our recent graduates. If you have any questions about this survey, please call the Institutional Strategy and Analysis office at (919) 515-6438 or email [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu).

Sincerely,  
[Title] [Dean]  
[College]  
NC State University

## First Follow-Up Email (May 4, 2020)

To: All May 2020 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form not yet responding to the survey  
From: "NCSU [College]" <studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject line: "Future Plans Survey – Share your experiences!"

Dear [title] [last name],

About a week ago, the Dean e-mailed to ask you to take just a few minutes of your time to let us know about your plans following the completion of your graduate degree. As [Assistant Dean] of the [College], I am interested in knowing what is next in store for you. Your responses to this survey enable us to help current and future graduate students and give us the opportunity to showcase the myriad of activities in which our graduates engage.

I know that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented changes and challenges for this year's graduates. There will be a question at the end of the survey where you can share your experiences and tell us how your future plans may have been impacted by circumstances related to COVID-19.

As of 9:00 A.M. today, we have not yet heard from you. We ask that you please take 10-20 minutes of your time now to complete the Graduate Future Plans Survey, available at:

<https://go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans>

**(If the link does not work, please copy and paste it into your browser.)**

As an incentive, two students who complete the survey by Wednesday, May 27, will be randomly selected to each receive a \$50 Amazon eGift Card.

Your participation is voluntary, but we sincerely hope to hear from you. Asking you to participate in this brief survey and provide the requested information is the best way we have of learning what NC State graduate students are doing after earning their degree. The information from the survey is helpful to share with prospective NC State graduate students, current graduate students who are planning their future paths, employers when making salary offers, and of course with others in our department and college so that they know how our new graduates are doing. *Be assured that your responses are confidential - it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent in reports of results.*

Thank you again for your help with this important effort to learn more about the future plans of our graduate students. If you have any questions about this survey, please call the Institutional Strategy and Analysis office at (919) 515-6438 or email [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu).

Sincerely,  
[Assistant Dean]  
[College]  
NC State University

## Second Follow-Up Email (May 7, 2020)

To: All May 2020 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form not yet responding to the survey  
From: "Dr. Arnold Bell, Career Development Center" (or corresponding career center director)  
<studenttsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject line: "Please complete the Graduate Future Plans Survey"

Dear [title] [last name]:

Given the unprecedented challenges faced by students this semester due to the coronavirus, I want to take a moment to congratulate you in advance for successfully finishing up your degree requirements. You've shown incredible perseverance, and I applaud you.

According to our latest information, you have not yet completed the Graduate Future Plans Survey. Whether you have already accepted a job, are searching for employment, pursuing another degree, raising a family, or don't yet know, we would like you to tell us about it in the Graduate Future Plans Survey. There will be a question at the end of the survey where you can share how your future plans may have been impacted by circumstances related to COVID-19.

Please take just 10-20 minutes to complete the survey, available online at:

<https://go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans>

(If the link does not work, please copy and paste it into your browser.)

As a show of our appreciation for your time, two students who complete the survey by May 27 will be randomly selected to each receive a \$50 Amazon eGift Card.

Your participation is voluntary, but we sincerely hope to hear from you. Knowing what our students are doing after earning their degree is an essential measure of how well the University is preparing you to meet your goals. In addition, the aggregate-level information from the survey is helpful to share with prospective NC State graduate students, with current graduate students who are planning their future paths, and even with employers. *Be assured that your responses are confidential - it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent in reports of results.*

Remember, as an NC State alumnus/alumna, the Career Development Center will continue to provide services to you for one year after graduation. Please visit <https://careers.dasa.ncsu.edu/> for more information.

Thank you again for your help with this important effort to learn more about the future plans of our graduate students. If you have any questions about this survey, please call the Institutional Strategy and Analysis office at (919) 515-6438 or email [studenttsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studenttsurveys@ncsu.edu).

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title]

[Office]

NC State University

### Third Follow-Up Email (May 18, 2020)

To: All May 220 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form not yet responding to the survey  
From: "Dr. Nancy Whelchel" <studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject line: "Please take the Graduate Future Plans Survey"

Dear [title] [last name]:

Congratulations on recently earning your degree from NC State! On behalf of your department, college, and the University, I, as the Director for Survey Research at NC State, am emailing you this reminder about the Graduate Future Plans Survey and asking you to take just 10-20 minutes to let us know what you're doing now as a new NC State alumni. The survey closes on Wednesday, May 27 - - please don't miss this opportunity to share your experiences with us!

I understand that the COVID-19 pandemic might very well have impacted your plans for the future. However, whether you have accepted a new job or are continuing your career, are seeking a job or pursuing another degree, or have put plans on hold for now, please give us an update in our online survey at:

<http://go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans>

(If the link does not work, please copy and paste it into your browser.)

As an added incentive, two respondents who complete the survey by May 27, 2020 will be randomly selected to each win a \$50 Amazon eGift Card.

Your participation is voluntary, but we sincerely hope to hear from you. Systematically collecting this information through this brief survey is the best way we have to learn what our students will be doing after earning their degree. In addition, the aggregate-level information from the survey is helpful to share with prospective NC State graduate students, with current students who are planning their future paths, and even with employers when making salary offers to our graduate students. *Your responses are confidential - - it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent in the information we provide to these groups.*

Thank you again for your help with this important effort to learn more about the future plans of our graduate students. If you have any questions about this survey, please call the Institutional Strategy and Analysis office at (919) 515-6438 or email [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu).

Sincerely,  
Nancy Whelchel, Ph.D.  
Director for Survey Research  
Institutional Strategy and Analysis  
NC State University

#### **Fourth Follow-Up Email (May 21, 2020)**

To: All May 2020 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form not yet responding to the survey  
From: "Dr. Nancy Whelchel" <studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject Line: "Please take the Graduate Future Plans Survey"

Dear [title] [last name],

Congratulations on recently earning your degree from NC State! Please take just 10-20 minutes of your time to let us know what you will be doing next. You can access the Graduate Future Plans Survey online at:

<http://go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans>

**(If the link does not work, please copy and paste it into your browser.)**

The deadline for completing the survey is May 27. Two respondents who complete the survey by 11:59pm on the 27<sup>th</sup> will be randomly selected to each win a \$50 Amazon eGift Card.

Your participation is very important! Leaders across NC State will rely on results from this survey for making decisions about the programs and services offered at NC State. Summarized results will be shared with departments across campus, with NC State graduate students, and with prospective employers.

Please don't miss this opportunity to share your experiences and help NC State, your college, and department not only celebrate the successes of their graduate students but, very importantly, learn where NC State needs to make improvements to better prepare current and future students.

Thank you again for your help with this important effort to learn more about the future plans of our graduate students. If you have any questions about this survey, please call the Institutional Strategy and Analysis office at (919) 515-6438 or email [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu).

Sincerely,  
Nancy Whelchel, Ph.D.  
Director for Survey Research  
Institutional Strategy and Analysis  
NC State University

**Fifth Follow-Up Email (May 27, 2020)**

To: All May 2020 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form not yet responding to the survey  
From: "Dr. Nancy Whelchel" <studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject Line: "Please take the Graduate Future Plans Survey"

Dear [Title] [Name],

Our records indicate that as of about 9:00 AM this morning, you have not yet completed the Graduate Future Plans Survey, an annual survey administered to all students completing a graduate degree at NC State. This email is a final reminder that the survey **closes at 11:59 PM tonight**.

Click the link below to begin the brief survey or continue where you left off:

<http://go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans>

Remember, by completing the survey today, **you will also be entered into a random drawing for a chance to win a \$50 Amazon eGift Card!**

Don't miss this opportunity to share your experiences and help NC State, your college, and department not only celebrate the successes of their graduate students, but also learn where NC State needs to make improvements to better prepare current and future students and its new alumni.

Thank you for your participation in this project. If you have questions about this survey, please contact the Institutional Strategy and Analysis office at 919-515-6438 or email [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu).

Sincerely,  
Dr. Nancy Whelchel  
Director for Survey Research  
Institutional Strategy and Analysis  
NC State University