Attracting excellent graduate students: lessons from the 2015 Applicant Survey

Graduate Studies Information Exchange
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# Characteristics of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Respondents</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Study</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>19.4 %</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters (thesis)</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters (course/prof.)</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Characteristics of the respondents

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<tr>
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<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other offer besides Queen’s</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen or permanent resident</td>
<td>78.9%</td>
<td>77.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous degree from Queen’s</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted Queen’s offer</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why apply to Queen’s?

Relative ranking (in %) of the importance of specific program related factors.

VI = Very important; SI = somewhat important; N = not at all important; NA = not applicable
How do applicants learn about graduate programs?

Most important:
- Research through the department/Program website
- SGS website
- Faculty member in the program
- Recruitment event (open house, campus visit, webinar)

Less important:
- Social media
- Print brochures
- Other people: friends, alumni etc.
Top three important elements on program website

Thesis-based programs (Master’s and PhD):
- Research interests and activities of professors
- Admission requirements
- How to apply

Course-based programs (Master’s and Graduate Diploma)
- Admission requirements
- Details on course offerings
- Descriptions of career opportunities after graduation
What factors influence decision making?

- Researching the graduate program (e.g. through the program website)
- Meeting with a professor
- Receiving the financial offer from Queen’s
- Visiting Queen’s
- Talking to current students in the program
- Communication: applicants like to feel “wanted”
What factors influence decision making?

Reasons for declining the Queen’s offer:

- “Graduate program at other university would prepare me better for a career”
- “Queen’s wasn’t my first choice”
- “I was offered a more attractive financial package at another university”
What factors influence decision making?

Relative comparison (in %) of the amount, components and distribution of financial offer with respect to offers from other universities

SL/ML = slightly lower/much lower; S = same; MB/SB = much better, slightly better
Main Findings

- Decision to apply: web-based research
- Academic factors for applying: alignment of the program and research with applicants’ interests, and the program’s reputation
- Decision to accept: again, web-based research
- Direct, personal communication (email, phone, or skype) is highly valued. Applicants appreciate clarity in the offer made (e.g. funding package) and like to feel “wanted”
Tips and best practices

✓ Make sure that web content is current
  → Include “how to” info (applying, milestones of the program)
  → Include “what’s in it for me” info (career paths, showcase of past graduates, funding)
  → Include info on research – showcase of faculty accomplishments

✓ Identify the unique features and opportunities associated with program (e.g. experiential learning/internships, interdisciplinary course offerings, special awards/scholarships, opportunities for accelerated route to PhD studies, etc.)

✓ Provide opportunities for applicants to engage with prospective supervisors, graduate students, and graduate alumni (campus visits, webinars)

✓ Communicate regularly and as early as possible upon acceptance of the student