CUNY PSM Student Survey Summary

CUNY’s Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research conducted an online survey of undergraduate students at five CUNY senior colleges (Brooklyn, Hunter, City, Lehman, and Queens). These schools will launch PSM (Professional Science Master’s) programs in the fall of 2012.

The students took the survey between April 19th and June 13th 2011. There were 1,361 respondents and 1,123 completed surveys. The majority of respondents (76.4%) were juniors and seniors, the population most likely to be considering postgraduate education.

The survey showed that over 90% of respondents intend to pursue a higher degree. Almost half are looking to complete Master’s degrees, while 45% intend to undertake either research or professional doctorates.

![Figure 1. What is the highest degree you intend to achieve?](chart)

The survey found that 35% of respondents intend to enter graduate school immediately after obtaining their Bachelor’s degree. A further 24% will begin graduate study after one year in the workforce. 12.7% plan to start their careers immediately, and 7% will work for more than a year but intend to return to graduate school at some point in the future.

Over 75% of respondents indicated that tuition costs are an impediment to pursuing an advanced degree. Comments made by numerous students in the final open-ended narrative section reinforce this finding. Several undergraduates talked about the need to take time off after graduation in order to work and save money for graduate school. One student indicated, *tuition is one of the reasons that is making me delay obtaining a Master’s degree...I would have to work*
and be a part time student. Another stated, *the cost will determine whether I attend graduate school full time or part time.*

This finding almost certainly reflects the demographics of CUNY. At the schools surveyed, 32% of students originate from households with an income of less that $20,000.\(^1\) Given this statistic, a student’s ability to establish a working relationship with a potential employer, while enrolled in the PSM program, could have a significant impact on her retention and eventual success.

Questions that detailed the proposed PSM programs at CUNY yielded encouraging results. Over 30% of respondents stated that they would consider enrolling in a PSM degree. Given that the PSM presents an entirely new opportunity for many of our students, we view this finding as a very positive starting point from which to introduce our programs. However, we also found that 50% of students would not enroll in a PSM because of the relative newness of the program and uncertainty about how effective it might be in helping them advance their careers. There is a clear need to promote the unique strengths of PSM programs and their capacity for career placement and development.

The table below (Figure 2) shows the likelihood of enrollment in specific programs. Students demonstrated interest in both Risk Management and the Applied Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology), which each account for over a third of the responses.

Figure 2.

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According to student responses, the three most important aspects of PSMs are: career placement after graduation (60%), internships with industry that might lead to a job offer (55%), and having a professional mentor who can provide career advice and networking opportunities (52%).

**Conclusion**

Overall, the responses to the survey are both promising and speak well of CUNY students. The number of students interested in pursuing postgraduate degrees is higher than the national average. Students are receptive to the creation of professionally oriented Master’s degrees and there is a demonstrated interest in the programs that are currently under development at CUNY.

In the comments section numerous responses supported the applied training aspect of the PSM programs. Two representative comments reflect this: *most academic work is too abstract and it would be lovely to have a program that grounds what you are learning in real world situations.* Another student asserted, *I would definitely be more inclined to join a Master’s program that encourages real world experience as well as incorporates different fields that will diversify one’s interests.*

Several students expressed concern about the utility of getting a professional Master’s degree because of the newness of the program. Job placement was an important factor in this: *What's the point of getting a Master’s if nobody is interested in you. My classmates go for their PhDs because there are no jobs out there. We need more connections for jobs.* A couple of respondents also indicated an interest in having entrepreneurship included in the curriculum. At this early stage of developing a new Master’s program which is still in the process of establishing itself nationally, some students questioned how PSMs would differ from more established Master’s programs, and whether or not employers would recognize the unique merits of the degree. One such response: *I would be interested in knowing more about how widely accepted this degree would be.*

A number of respondents requested that the program be amenable to students trying to balance their education with their developing careers. One respondent wrote, *I would very much like to see a program designed with the working person in mind.* Several respondents requested that evening classes be made available. This level of response strongly supports our intention to make courses available online and in hybrid form (particularly the plus courses).

Encouragingly, a couple of respondents specifically praised programs that we will be offering in our first round of PSM programs: *GIS training (being developed by Lehman College) would be amazing for the Urban Studies program to make it more competitive and established in quantitative skills.* Several students, who have already embarked on Hunter’s Biotech program—which is preparing to launch as a PSM in the Fall of 2012—were very enthusiastic about the potential of professionally oriented programs. For example: *I can’t stress how much I loved Hunter College's MA program in biology with a specialization in biotechnology. It really focused on workforce preparation—including internships. Programs like this (which resemble PSM programs) and the new PSM programs being proposed will really benefit future generations of students.* Students also reacted positively to the idea that the PSM programs will be University-wide, one wrote, *the PSM programs should utilize the strengths of each of the CUNY schools.*