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Nicholas PhD
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NPAC Strategic Planning Submission: Background

Introduction:

In fall, 2015, NPAC was given the opportunity to make a submission of our vision for the Nicholas PhD to the Nicholas Strategic Planning Committee.

In order to develop a representative response, the NPAC Sub-committee surveyed NPAC constituents - PhD students in the 6 Nicholas School PhD programs - in October, 2015. Sixty eight students responded.

A summary of key findings are presented in this document. These findings were used to generate our vision for PhD programming at the Nicholas School.

Key findings are summarized in 4 parts:

(1) Overall satisfaction ratings
(2) Relative preferences for change (based on quantitative survey options)
(3) Summary of priority themes (based on open-ended survey questions)
(4) Specific opportunities and initiatives for change

In a final section we provide an explanation of the NPAC vision, drawing on these findings.

Part 1: Summary of overall satisfaction across 4 key elements of Nicholas PhD student life

Survey Results

Number of Responses: 68
Scale: 0 (very dissatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied)

Score		Topic
	Best	
4.26		Finance
4.06		Administration
3.20		Community
2.56		Career Services
	Worst	

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Part 2: Relative preference ranking of suggested hypothetical initiatives

Table presents the mean score from a choice from 1 (most preferred) to 5 (least preferred). Darker color indicates those proposed initiatives considered to be of greater priority by students.

Finance	Added Research Support (i.e. small grants) *1.73*	Added Travel and Conference Funding *2.1*	Increased Financial Support for 6th Year Students *2.84*	Added Financial Support for Student Run Organizations *3.75*
Administration	A central site that hosts logistical information (i.e. handbook, travel forms) *2.07*	Increased Support for DGSAs *2.2*	Increased DGS Involvement (i.e. increased social events, meetings) *2.69*	Added support for conflict resolution (training on resources, etc.) *3.43*
Community	Increased Program Integration *1.78*	Increased Interaction with Marine Sciences *2.41*	Increased Faculty Involvement in Student Events *2.92*	Increased Activity with MEMs (both social and professional) *3.33*
Careers	PhD Specific Career Counselor *1.81*	Alternate Career Paths Programming *2.06*	Job Application Materials Review and Training *2.65*	More RCR PhD Career Training Options *3.9*

Increasing Priority

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Part 3: Summary of identified priority areas

PhD students' suggestions could be broadly categorized into three priority areas: community integration, administrative support, and career development. Specifically:

1. Many students believed there were opportunities for **greater integration across Nicholas programs**. PhD students would like to see:
    a. Increased integration with MEM students
    b. Increased integration among the six PhD programs
    c. Increased integration and accessibility of Durham campus facilities and amenities to students located at the Marine Laboratory campus.

2. There is an opportunity to improve knowledge/understanding (among students) of procedures or expectations of PhD students through increased **administrative support.** Specific examples students brought up included:
    a. Information regarding taxation (particularly with regard to research reimbursement)
    b. Availability of degree requirements, expectations and timelines for all PhD programs (i.e. formalized handbooks for all programs)

3. Students see opportunities for increased, diverse **career planning services** tailored to PhD students. Specifically, students are enthusiastic about:
    a. Extra-curricular training opportunities (e.g. management/budgeting, stats/programming/math "camp")
    b. More focus specifically on PhD careers from the career center
    c. Greater information regarding non-academic jobs

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Part 4: Specific Initiatives Proposed by PhD students

Based on student responses, we outline some specific suggestions for the future of Nicholas PhD programming, arranged by the priority areas above, and with the addition of diversity as a fourth 'fundamental' priority area. We note that some initiatives could be pursued using a reconfiguration of existing resources (marked in blue), while others would require new resources (marked in green).

	Themes	Short-term proposals (<2 years)	Longer term proposals (5-10 years)
COMMUNITY	Integration with MEMs		• Align PhD programs and MEM concentrations • Allow PhD students to propose and co-supervise MEM projects
	Integration across PhD programs	• Encourage/fund PhD-PhD student collaborations and side-projects	• Support a PhD-focused cross-program symposium or conference (similar to MEM project day)
	Integration with the Marine Lab	• Easier parking for Marine Lab students	• Move towards a goal of 'telepresence as default' (all relevant rooms, all school or public events, all classes)
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	Academic Requirements	• Develop comprehensive, standardized handbooks for all programs, which would be 'required reading' for all students.	• Long term investment in administrative (DGSA) support.
	Taxation		• Provide research funding through pay-codes rather than personal bank accounts.
CAREERS		• Build the PhD alumni network and integrate with the MEM alumni network • Provide flexibility in conference funding (carry-over funding arrangements)	• Develop leadership, internship or management type training opportunities • Develop programming for non-academic careers • Make career office central to PhD career preparation
DIVERSITY		• Require RCR credits on diversity	• Promote diversity through hiring practices • Increase emphasis on environmental justice

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Part 5: Summary

How does this translate to our vision?

We have attempted to capture the essence of student responses in a single vision statement (see vision statement document). This vision describes the Nicholas PhD graduate as someone who augments their technical depth with strategically chosen non-academic, and in the context of a PhD, non-traditional skill sets.

We selected three broad skill sets informed by common survey response themes: Integrative Understanding, Collaboration, and Leadership.

We believe that that these skill sets can be used by graduates to leverage their core training. This is our metaphor for the PhD: Our technical depth can *lift much greater weight* when other skills provide leverage. Technical depth remains at the heart of the Nicholas PhD, but it is strategically complemented by these additional skill sets.

- We defined **integrative understanding** as an ability to understand and synthesize various dimensions of complex concepts and problems. We believe this will be provided by the well-recognized interdisciplinary focus at Duke University and the Nicholas School.
- We defined **collaborative ability** as an understanding of, and ability to work successfully within, teams of people of different disciplines, interests, and backgrounds. We believe this is and can be further achieved through (increased) integration of the Nicholas School community: between PhD programs, and between PhD-MEM-Undergraduate levels. Many PhD students already work with people across disciplinary and interest lines, but we see the opportunity to build a yet more-cohesive community.
- We defined **leadership ability** as an understanding of, and ability to successfully lead, teams of people of different disciplines, interests, and backgrounds. We believe leadership can be promoted through specific career development programming, and is fostered implicitly through a collaborative, integrated, and diverse school environment.

We believe these skill sets are built through focus on four **priority areas:** Community, administrative support, career guidance and diversity.

- The strength of our community instills integrative understanding
- Administrative support maintains the quality of our core technical training
- Career guidance and specific career programming supports the development of leadership and collaborative ability
- Diversity creates a positive, inclusive school environment. We also believe that diversity contributes to the development of PhD graduates who make effective collaborators within diverse teams, and more effective leaders of diverse organizations