

## May 2021 Graduate Future Plans Survey

### Introduction, Research Methods, and Response Rates

This report provides an overview of the research methods and response rates for the Graduate Future Plans Survey (GFPS) at NC State University. The GFPS is designed to collect specific information on students' plans following graduation, including detailed information on employment, further graduate/professional school attendance, and participation in career-preparation activities while at NC State. Results from the survey 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.

### Research Design

The Graduate Future Plans Survey is administered semiannually, coinciding with December and May graduation. In addition, ISA administers a modified version of the survey early in the fall semester as a follow-up to the December and May surveys for the previous academic year. Specifically, this follow-up survey, the Survey of Recent Graduates for master's and doctoral graduates (GSRG), is geared toward December/May survey respondents who said they were intending on finding full-time employment but had not done so by the time they completed the survey and/or who said they were planning to attend graduate/professional school but had not yet confirmed whether or not or where they would be attending, as well as to those who said they were uncertain of their post-graduation plans. Those who did not

participate in the December/May Graduate Future Plans Survey, or who graduated in the summer, are also invited to participate in the GSRG.

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.

All graduate students who have applied to graduate as of the day prior to commencement are asked to participate in the GFPS<sup>1</sup>. The online survey goes live about two weeks prior to commencement and is scheduled to close two to four weeks after graduation. The May 2021 GFPS was in the field from May 4, 2021, through June 2, 2021, with commencement being held on May 15.

On May 4, 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 10. On May 13, 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 from the Director for Survey Research on May 24, May 27, and June 2. 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 invitation and follow-up emails, ISA engaged in other promotional activities to boost response rates. Various administrators in the colleges and departments (e.g., Associate Deans for Graduate Programs, College and Department Coordinators for Advising) were encouraged to contact their students directly. A flyer and QR code were distributed to survey contacts in each department, who were encouraged to incorporate them into communications with their graduating master's and doctoral students. Some students, therefore, might have received additional requests to participate in the survey via email, flyer, and/or QR code in graduation-related communications.

Students were offered incentives in order to encourage participation in the survey. Two respondents who submitted the survey by the final deadline of June 2 were randomly selected to each receive a \$50 Amazon eGift Card.

### *May 2021 "Branded Email" Experiment*

The May 2021 GFPS included an experiment designed to test whether "NC State brand" emails led to higher response rates. The standard invitations are plain-text and are devoid of logos or images. "NC State brand" invitations included a border, logo, graduation-themed image, a title, and an added "take the survey now" button on the bottom of the page. The actual text and wording in the body of the email remained the same. Students were randomly

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

assigned into two groups using a random number generator and sent either the standard or branded survey invitation.

The final response rate of the students who received the branded email was 49.57 percent, and the response rate of the students who received the standard email was 50.04 percent<sup>2</sup>. There was no statistically significant difference in response rates across the two groups.

Both invitation emails can be found in Appendix A.

## Response Rates

The final May 2021 GFPS population consists of the 1,931 master’s students (n=1,732) and doctoral students (n=199) who had applied to graduate and were conferred degrees as of June 2. Of these students, 1,256 participated in the Graduate Future Plans Survey for an overall response rate of 65 percent. Participation in the survey was slightly lower among master’s students (64.5%) compared to doctoral students (69.8%).

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

Degree	May 2021 Graduating Class	Percent of Population	Survey Respondents	Percent of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
Doctoral	199	10.3%	139	11.1%	69.8%
Masters	1,732	89.7%	1,117	88.9%	64.5%
Total	1,931	100.0%	1,256	100.0%	65.0%

Participation in the survey varied by college/school, but most colleges had an average response rate of about 60 percent for masters and doctoral graduates combined. The Institute for Advanced Analytics had the highest overall response rate at 97 percent (96.6%). The College of Veterinary Medicine had the lowest rate of response, with three of eight graduates completing the GFPS (37.5%). The remaining colleges all had response rates that fell between 57 and 67 percent.

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<sup>2</sup> The response rates for the initial invitations are lower than the final response rate because some respondents did not end up in the final population of degree earners and because some people applied to graduate and completed the survey after the initial invitations were sent.

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

College/School	May 2021 Graduating Class	Percent of Population	Survey Respondents	Percent of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
Institute for Advanced Analytics	118	6.1%	114	9.1%	96.6%
College of Agriculture & Life Sciences	142	7.4%	85	6.8%	59.9%
College of Design	62	3.2%	36	2.9%	58.1%
College of Education	238	12.3%	152	12.1%	63.9%
College of Engineering	664	34.4%	434	34.6%	65.4%
College of Natural Resources	64	3.3%	38	3.0%	59.4%
College of Humanities & Social Sciences	263	13.6%	159	12.7%	60.5%
College of Sciences	125	6.5%	83	6.6%	66.4%
Wilson College of Textiles	38	2.0%	22	1.8%	57.9%
College of Veterinary Medicine	8	0.4%	3	0.2%	37.5%
Poole College of Management	209	10.8%	130	10.4%	62.2%
Total	1,931	100.0%	1,256	100.0%	65.0%

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

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

College/School	May 2021 Graduating Class	Percent of Population	Survey Respondents	Percent of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
College of Agriculture & Life Sciences	27	13.6%	17	12.2%	63.0%
College of Design	3	1.5%	1	0.7%	33.3%
College of Education	27	13.6%	21	15.1%	77.8%
College of Engineering	72	36.2%	50	36.0%	69.4%
College of Natural Resources	4	2.0%	3	2.2%	75.0%
College of Humanities & Social Sciences	18	9.0%	14	10.1%	77.8%
College of Sciences	27	13.6%	20	14.4%	74.1%
Wilson College of Textiles	15	7.5%	9	6.5%	60.0%
College of Veterinary Medicine	5	2.5%	3	2.2%	60.0%
Poole College of Management	1	0.5%	1	0.7%	100.0%
Total	199	100.0%	139	100.0%	69.8%

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

College/School	May 2021 Graduating Class	Percent of Population	Survey Respondents	Percent of Survey Respondents	Response Rate
Institute for Advanced Analytics	118	6.8%	114	10.2%	96.6%
College of Agriculture & Life Sciences	115	6.6%	68	6.1%	59.1%
College of Design	59	3.4%	35	3.1%	59.3%
College of Education	211	12.2%	131	11.7%	62.1%
College of Engineering	592	34.2%	384	34.4%	64.9%
College of Natural Resources	60	3.5%	35	3.1%	58.3%
College of Humanities & Social Sciences	245	14.1%	145	13.0%	59.2%
College of Sciences	98	5.7%	63	5.6%	64.3%
Wilson College of Textiles	23	1.3%	13	1.2%	56.5%
College of Veterinary Medicine	3	0.2%	.	.	.
Poole College of Management	208	12.0%	129	11.5%	62.0%
Total	1,732	100.0%	1,117	100.0%	64.5%

**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 2021 Graduate Future Plans Survey Appendix A: Email Invitation and Follow-Up Reminders

### Email Invitation (May 4, 2021)

#### Regular Version

To: All May 2021 graduate students who have submitted the online application for degree form  
From: "NC State [College]" <studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject: "Graduate Future Plans Survey – What's next?"

Dear [title] [last name],

Congratulations on your upcoming graduation from NC State! As [Dean] of the [College], I am interested in knowing 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.

Please take 10-15 minutes of your time to complete the Graduate Future Plans Survey. You can access it online at:

[go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans](http://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 the June 2 deadline 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.*

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 email Institutional Strategy and Analysis at [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu) or call (919) 515-6438.

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

May 2021

Graduate Future Plans Survey – What's next?



Dear [title] [last name],

Congratulations on your upcoming graduation from NC State! As [Dean] of the [College], I am interested in knowing 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.

Please take 10-15 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 the June 2 deadline 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.*

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 email Institutional Strategy and Analysis at [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu) or call (919) 515-6438.

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

[Take the Survey Now »](#)



## First Follow-Up Email (May 10, 2021)

To: All May 2021 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form not yet responding to the survey  
From: "NC State [College]" <studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject: "Graduate Future Plans Survey – Share your experiences!"

Dear [first name],

About a week ago, the Dean emailed 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 [ADAA title] 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.

As of about 9:30 A.M. today, we have not yet heard from you. We ask that you please take 10-15 minutes of your time now to complete the Graduate Future Plans Survey, available at: [go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans](http://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 the June 2 deadline 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.*

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 email Institutional Strategy and Analysis at [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu) or call (919) 515-6438.

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

## Second Follow-Up Email (May 13, 2021)

To: All May 2021 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: "Please complete the Graduate Future Plans Survey"

Dear [first name],

Congratulations on your upcoming graduation from NC State! According to our records, 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.

Please take just ten minutes to complete the survey, available online at:  
[go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans](http://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 Wednesday, June 2 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.*

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 contact Institutional Strategy and Analysis at [studenttsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studenttsurveys@ncsu.edu) or call (919) 515-6438.

Sincerely,  
[Career Rep. Name]  
[Career Rep. Title]  
[Career Office]  
NC State University

### Third Follow-Up Email (May 24, 2021)

To: All May 2021 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form not yet responding to the survey  
From: "Dr. Nancy Whelchel, Institutional Strategy and Analysis"  
<studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject: "Please complete the Graduate Future Plans Survey"

Dear [first 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 10-15 minutes to let us know what you are doing now as a new NC State alumni. The survey closes on Wednesday, June 2 - please don't miss this opportunity to share your experiences with us!

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:

[go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans](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 the June 2 deadline 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 contact the Institutional Strategy and Analysis office at [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu) or call (919) 515-6438.

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

## Fourth Follow-Up Email (May 27, 2021)

To: All May 2021 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form not yet responding to the survey  
From: "Dr. Nancy Whelchel, Institutional Strategy and Analysis"  
<studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject: "Please complete the Graduate Future Plans Survey!"

Dear [first name],

Congratulations on recently earning your degree from NC State! Our records show that, as of 9AM, you have not yet completed the Graduate Future Plans Survey. Please take just 10-15 minutes of your time to let us know what you will be doing next.

You can access the Graduate Future Plans Survey online at:  
[go.ncsu.edu/grad.future.plans](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 Wednesday, June 2. Two respondents who complete the survey by the deadline 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 contact Institutional Strategy and Analysis at [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu) or call (919) 515-6438.

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

## Fifth Follow-Up Email (June 2, 2021)

To: All May 2021 graduate students submitting the online application for degree form not yet responding to the survey  
From: "Dr. Nancy Whelchel, Institutional Strategy and Analysis"  
<studentsurveys@ncsu.edu>  
Subject: "Last chance to complete the Graduate Future Plans Survey"

Dear [first 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:

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

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

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

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 Institutional Strategy and Analysis at [studentsurveys@ncsu.edu](mailto:studentsurveys@ncsu.edu) or call 919-515-6438.

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