Executive Summary
The faculty of Rensselaer were surveyed on their attitudes toward the Office of Graduate Education (OGE) in November/December 2016, and the results of that survey are summarized here. The goal of the survey was to provide feedback on OGE so that the faculty and OGE can work more effectively together to improve research and graduate education at Rensselaer.

The primary findings of the survey are
- Faculty who interact more frequently with OGE have a more favorable attitude towards OGE, and HASS respondents who interact frequently with OGE have much more favorable attitudes than other groups.
- On average, faculty have a negative attitude toward OGE, but faculty who interact frequently with OGE have a more neutral attitude.
- Faculty have a strong negative attitude towards OGE with regard to recruitment and admissions and would like to have greater control in the decision process.
- Faculty have a more positive attitude about student services provided by OGE.
- Faculty attitude regarding policies and procedures are generally negative, but faculty who interact frequently with OGE have a more neutral attitude.
- Faculty who do not interact frequently with OGE are often unaware of services offered to students through OGE, and are unaware of the rationale for policies and procedures.
- Faculty feel they are not able to implement admissions priorities that will best serve their departmental graduate programs because of rigid rules set by the institute.
- Faculty feel their concerns are not considered when setting policy with regard to graduate students.
- Faculty feel that the quality of graduate students is declining.

Based on these findings, the Faculty Senate recommends
- Improved communication between the OGE and faculty with OGE being transparent, explaining rationale for policies, and OGE considering faculty input when setting policy.
- Faculty should be included in the decision process when defining graduate student policy.
- Schools should have greater autonomy and flexibility in controlling their admissions.
- More meaningful metrics should be tracked to define quality of the graduate students, such as: publications per graduate student, external funding success based on prior work, and how many graduate students fail or must re-take departmental qualifying exams.

Summary by Faculty Senate ad hoc committee: Antoinette Maniatty, Joel Giedt, and Tamar Gordon.
Approved by Faculty Senate on September 13, 2017.
**Background**

Faculty must regularly interact with several offices and departments on campus, but are not formally solicited for feedback. Feedback on offices and departments could be used to improve policies and structures to help the faculty work more effectively to achieve the research and education goals of Rensselaer. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee in 2016, in discussions with the Provost, decided that this is a role the Faculty Senate could take on. The mechanism for collecting feedback the FSEC decided upon is to conduct periodic surveys. The first of these surveys would be on the Office of Graduate Education (OGE), and the results would be provided to the Provost. A draft survey was generated by Antoinette Maniatty, Chair of the Faculty Senate, in consultation with the FSEC, and was distributed and discussed at the September Faculty Senate meeting. The survey was also shared with the Graduate Student Council. Based on feedback, the survey was further revised. A link to the survey was sent out the to the faculty on Nov. 22, 2016 and the faculty had until Dec. 6, 2016 to take the survey.

**Survey and Results**

A screen shot of the survey header is shown below in Figure 1.

![Survey Header](Image)

*Figure 1. Survey header. Survey conducted using Survey Monkey on-line tool.*

**Demographics of Respondents**

There were 113 faculty members who took the survey. This is out of a total of approximately 350 tenure/tenure track faculty (TTF), and thus, represents a response rate of about 32%. The following two questions were asked to identify the school and level of interaction respondents had with OGE. The results are shown in Figure 2.

1. Which school are you predominantly affiliated with? (choose one)
   - Architecture
   - Engineering
   - HASS
   - Management
   - Science

2. How frequently do you interact with the OGE or respond to matters associated with OGE?
   - multiple times a week
   - a few times a month
   - a few times a year
   - once a year or less
Figure 2. Demographics of respondents. Left: school. Right: frequency of interactions with OGE.

The response rate was highest from Engineering (39% of the TTF in Engineering) and lowest from Management (15% of the TTF in Management). The majority of Faculty who responded (53%) interact with OGE a few times a year. The respondents from HASS interacted with OGE considerably more (44% a few times a month or more) than the respondents from the other schools (27% a few times a month or more).

Survey questions about OGE functions and response categories

Seven questions were asked that inquired about Faculty attitudes towards specific functions of OGE. Each of the questions had a choice of responses: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree, or no opinion, and allowed the respondent to comment on their selection. The questions can be loosely categorized as follows:

- Recruitment and admissions (Questions 3 and 4)
  3. OGE has enhanced graduate student recruitment helping to create a stronger and more diverse pool of applicants.
  4. The admissions waiver system administered by OGE is run effectively ensuring quality candidates are admitted in a timely manner to allow faculty to recruit strong students for their research.

- Graduate student services (Questions 5, 6, and 7)
  5. The Graduate Ombudsman is effective in handling student issues that may arise during their graduate studies.
  6. OGE runs innovative programs that enhance professional development for graduate students.
  7. OGE has a strong student services orientation providing support for our students.

- Policies and procedures (Questions 8 and 9)
  8. OGE creates and oversees institute policies in graduate education that help to improve the quality and success of our students.
  9. OGE demonstrates that they understand the distinct needs of my school with policies and procedures to support those needs.

Lastly, respondents were given the opportunity to provide any additional comments.

10. Do you have any other comments or experiences with respect to the Office of Graduate Education that you would like to relay to the Faculty Senate?

Respondents and responses were grouped using the following terminology.
Respondents who interacted with OGE a few times a month or multiple times a week are referred to as those with frequent interactions. Strongly disagree and disagree are grouped as negative responses. Strongly agree and agree are grouped as positive responses. Neither agree nor disagree and no opinion are grouped as neutral responses.

Summary of Responses

A complete list of positive and negative responses by question, category, and by frequency of interaction with OGE is given in Table 1. Responses were generally more positive (31%) than negative (27%) with regard to graduate student services, strongly negative (60% negative, 13% positive) with regard to recruitment and admissions, and generally negative with regard to policies and procedures (59% negative, 22% positive). The Faculty with frequent interactions with OGE were generally less negative than Faculty with less frequent interactions (38% vs. 45%) and substantially more positive (41% vs. 24%). Of the Faculty who interacted more frequently with OGE, HASS respondents were considerably more positive (69% positive, 8% negative) than Faculty from other schools (33% positive, 47% negative).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
<th>Frequent interaction respondents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; Admissions</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
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<td>Admissions waivers</td>
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<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student services</td>
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<td>26.6%</td>
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<td>Ombuds</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
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<td>Professional development</td>
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<td>25.7%</td>
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<td>Student service orientation</td>
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<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies and Procedures</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and oversee</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinct needs of schools</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Positive and negative responses by question and category.*
Responses by Question

In this section, the responses to each question are shown and the responses are broken out by Faculty who interact frequently with OGE and all respondents.

3. OGE has enhanced graduate student recruitment helping to create a stronger and more diverse pool of applicants.

Figure 3. Left: Question 3 responses from Faculty who interact frequently with OGE. Right: Question 3 responses from all respondents.

Summary of comments (Question 3)
There were 46 comments. The main points of these comments are:
- There are fewer applicants, and we do not see the diversity of international applicants that we did in the past.
- Pool of applicants seems weaker.
- Current policies (related to Question 4) are hindering RPI’s ability to attract strong applicants.
- Departments and Faculty are better suited to recruit than OGE and should be engaged in the effort.
- Departments need more autonomy in setting recruitment and admissions policies that match the needs and characteristics of their programs.

4. The admissions waiver system administered by OGE is run effectively ensuring quality candidates are admitted in a timely manner to allow faculty to recruit strong students for their research.

Figure 4. Left: Question 4 responses from Faculty who interact frequently with OGE. Right: Question 4 responses from all respondents.
Summary of comments (Question 4)
There were 44 comments. The main points of these comments are:

- Too many students require a waiver (nearly all international students), slowing down the admissions process, and ultimately reducing the chances students will choose RPI.
- The response time is too slow causing us to lose the best candidates.
- There is something wrong when so many of the students we admit (maybe the majority) require a waiver.
- Admissions decisions should be left to the departments and schools, who understand their own needs and who are ultimately supporting these students.
- The waiver system adds a significant burden on Faculty time, and too often, after significant effort by faculty trying to recruit a student, the student is rejected by OGE.
- The uncertainty makes it nearly impossible for Faculty to recruit because even if a Faculty member wants a student and encourages the student to come to RPI, that student may still be rejected by OGE.
- The research track record and potential, as identified by Faculty, should outweigh test scores.
- There does not appear to be any correlation between students who do or don’t need a waiver and their success in our graduate program.

5. The Graduate Ombudsman is effective in handling student issues that may arise during their graduate studies.

![Pie chart image]

Figure 5. Left: Question 5 responses from Faculty who interact frequently with OGE. Right: Question 5 responses from all respondents.

Summary of comments (Question 5)
There were 23 comments. The main points of these comments are:

- Many Faculty are not aware that we have a graduate Ombudsman.
- Effective, caring support for students.
- The Graduate Ombudsman is thoughtful, helpful, and professional.
- Graduate Ombudsman should be independent of OGE. There is a conflict of interest because the current Graduate Ombudsman reports to the director of OGE.
6. OGE runs innovative programs that enhance professional development for graduate students.

Figure 6. Left: Question 6 responses from Faculty who interact frequently with OGE. Right: Question 6 responses from all respondents.

Summary of comments (Question 6)
There were 22 comments. The main points of these comments are:
- Many Faculty commented that they were not aware of these programs.
- The programs and the people who run them are very good.
- Getting some outside expertise would enhance some of the programs.
- Maybe not innovative, but good.

7. OGE has a strong student services orientation providing support for our students.

Figure 7. Left: Question 7 responses from Faculty who interact frequently with OGE. Right: Question 7 responses from all respondents.

Summary of comments (Question 7)
There were 25 comments. The main points of these comments are:
- Too much focus on policy compliance and punitive actions for non-compliance rather than providing service to help students succeed.
- It would be nice to have a first year experience for graduate students similar to that for first year undergraduate students.
- OGE is short of staff and resources, as are most offices on campus, which hinders their ability to provide the services they would like to provide.
8. OGE creates and oversees institute policies in graduate education that help to improve the quality and success of our students.

![Pie Chart 1](image1.png)

**Figure 8.** Left: Question 8 responses from Faculty who interact frequently with OGE. Right: Question 8 responses from all respondents.

Summary of comments (Question 8)
There were 32 comments. The main points of these comments are:

- Policies are onerous and counterproductive. It is the “one single office that seems to do everything possible to make life hard for our graduate students and faculty.”
- OGE is just carrying out the policies imposed by the President.
- Policies hinder our ability to attract and get high quality students.
- Micromanaging.
- Many time consuming processes at the expense of services that could improve quality and success.
- Focus on creating and enforcing rules (such as required GRE scores) rather than looking at the bigger picture (e.g. how to identify and recruit applicants that are creative problem solvers).
- Doesn’t appear to make use of research or data to define policies and procedures.

9. OGE demonstrates that they understand the distinct needs of my school with policies and procedures to support those needs.

![Pie Chart 2](image2.png)

**Figure 9.** Left: Question 9 responses from Faculty who interact frequently with OGE. Right: Question 9 responses from all respondents.
Summary of comments (Question 9)
There were 30 comments. The main points of these comments are:

- OGE should put more trust in the graduate program directors, who understand what would most benefit their programs.
- OGE does not understand nor care about the needs of my school.
- The OGE applies a one-size-fits-all policies.
- HAASS Fellowship program is essential to Schools of HASS and Architecture.
- We should be able to set policies and procedures that are flexible and that give greater autonomy to schools and departments so that they can each define for themselves the best way to attain overall goals for their programs.

10. Do you have any other comments or experiences with respect to the Office of Graduate Education that you would like to relay to the Faculty Senate?
Summary of comments (Question 10)
There were 49 comments. The main points of these comments are:

- OGE is hamstrung by stringent Institute policies they must adhere to and lack of resources
- The resources for students available through OGE are not well-known to all faculty.
- OGE helps our students find fellowships and become supported by fellowships.
- OGE has high standards and is motivated to make the programs of high quality. They care about the students.
- While OGE may have the best interest of the institute at heart, they should trust the faculty, who also have the best interest of the institute in mind and know what they need to maintain a successful, funded research program.
- Current OGE practices and policies hurt our graduate program. They need to support our programs rather than micromanage, slowing things down and creating barriers.
- Increasing rules and number of things that need approval from OGE is out of control. OGE demonstrates a complete lack of trust in the faculty, departments, schools, and every other office on campus. They treat the faculty and departments as adversaries. They seem to believe that they are the only ones on campus that will uphold standards. This not only creates a huge, wasteful bureaucracy, but also is demoralizing.
- The fact that neither students nor faculty may have direct contact with the director of OGE is not in line with the culture of RPI. There is no other administrator on campus who will not talk directly to students and faculty. This policy does not serve the office well.
- Communication from OGE is often terse, unfriendly, and bureaucratic. Students and faculty have come to expect that dealing with OGE will be unpleasant.
- OGE needs to look at the big picture and stop focusing on the small things.