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Comparing Student and Faculty Perceptions of Graduate Admissions¹

GEOFF POTVIN, Florida International University

Students' perceptions of graduate admissions may significantly influence their choices towards graduate school (including possibly not even applying because of perceived barriers) especially for students who have been traditionally marginalized from physics. For students who nonetheless apply to graduate school, decisions about which graduate school to choose may be influenced by socio-economic concerns, career expectations and interests, and prior academic and research experiences. On the other hand, faculty have a strong and direct influence over which students are given the opportunity to pursue graduate studies, which also have implications for the diversity of the physics community. In this talk, I present the combined results of the Post-Graduation Career Intentions (PGCI) and the earlier survey on graduate admissions practices of faculty. The PGCI survey captured data from over 1000 U.S.-based physics majors in the academic year 2016-2017 while the graduate admissions survey received responses from faculty representing over 75% of PhD-granting physics departments in 2013-2014. We find that prospective students and faculty agree on the importance of certain factors in admissions decisions (including GRE scores and letters of recommendation) but differ on others (including prior research experiences and publications). Further, we find that a significant number of departments report using GRE scores as a cutoff in admissions, despite longstanding recommendations against the use of this practice. The implications of these findings for the future diversification of the physics community will be discussed.

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