

GSA Mini-Survey on Involvement and Inclusion

The board of the Graduate Student Association (GSA)

Doktorandsektionens styrelse

June 2019

Introduction

Graduate students at KAU have two roles: one is being a student of research, and the other is being a member of (teaching) staff. An inclusive and welcoming work environment is vital for graduate students' personal and professional growth at Karlstad University. The GSA works to promote a positive work and study environment for graduate students at Karlstad University. Issues with the social work environment and exclusion has been brought to the board's attention in comments sections of previous surveys and through meetings with graduate students. This mini-survey was therefore designed to investigate how prevalent different types of exclusion are at different levels within the university. The mini-survey, created in Survey & Report, was sent to all graduate students registered on the mailing lists dokt.hs@lists.kau.se and dokthnt@lists.kau.se on 24 April 2019. A reminder email was sent on 30 April. The survey was open for submissions between 24 April and 8 May (15 days), and a total of 51 people responded.

Confidentiality

The survey was sent out with the following statement about confidentiality: "We want to assure you that we handle your responses with the outmost care and confidentiality. We will not trace back your responses. No personally identifiable information will be reported. Your comments and answers will not be combined with the personal information you offer. Additionally, your responses are combined with those of many others and summarized in a report to further protect your anonymity. GDPR only applies to personal data. While this survey is anonymous, a combination of certain responses might allow to trace respondents. Apart from the assurances described above, we therefore also guarantee to delete all data after we published the corresponding report." The respondents had to agree to these terms to do the survey.

Questions

1. Which department do you belong to? (Choose one from the list)

- Karlstad Business School
- Department of Artistic Studies
- Department of Political, Historical, Religious and Cultural Studies
- Department of Social and Psychological Studies
- Department of Language, Literature and Intercultural Studies
- Department of Geography, Media and Communication
- Department of Educational Studies
- Department of Environmental and Life Sciences
- Department of Health Sciences
- Department of Engineering and Chemical Sciences
- Department of Engineering and Physics
- Department of Mathematics and Computer Science

2. What gender do you belong to? (Choose one from the list)

- Prefer not to say
- Female
- Male
- Other

3. Which of the following activities would you like to be involved in at your department?

(Possible to choose several and to add free text answer)

- Administrative (e.g. departmental meetings)
- Research-related (e.g. seminars/colloquiums)
- Teaching
- Social events
- None
- Other (free text answer)

4. Which of the following activities have you felt excluded from at your department? (Possible to choose several and to add free text answer)

- Administrative (e.g. departmental meetings)
- Research-related (e.g. seminars/colloquiums)
- Teaching
- Social events
- None
- Other (free text answer)

5. Which of the following activities would you like to be involved in on a faculty/university level?

(Possible to choose several and to add free text answer)

- Administrative (e.g. faculty meetings/meeting with the Vice-chancellor (Rektor))
- Research-related (e.g. seminars/defenses)
- Teaching events
- Social events
- None
- Other (free text)

6. Which of the following activities have you felt excluded from on a faculty/university level?

(Possible to choose several and to add free text answer)

- Administrative (e.g. faculty meetings/meeting with the Vice-chancellor (Rektor))
- Research-related (e.g. seminars/defenses)
- Teaching events
- Social events
- None
- Other (free text)

7. Which of the following reasons do you think you are being excluded for? (Possible to choose several and to add free text answer)

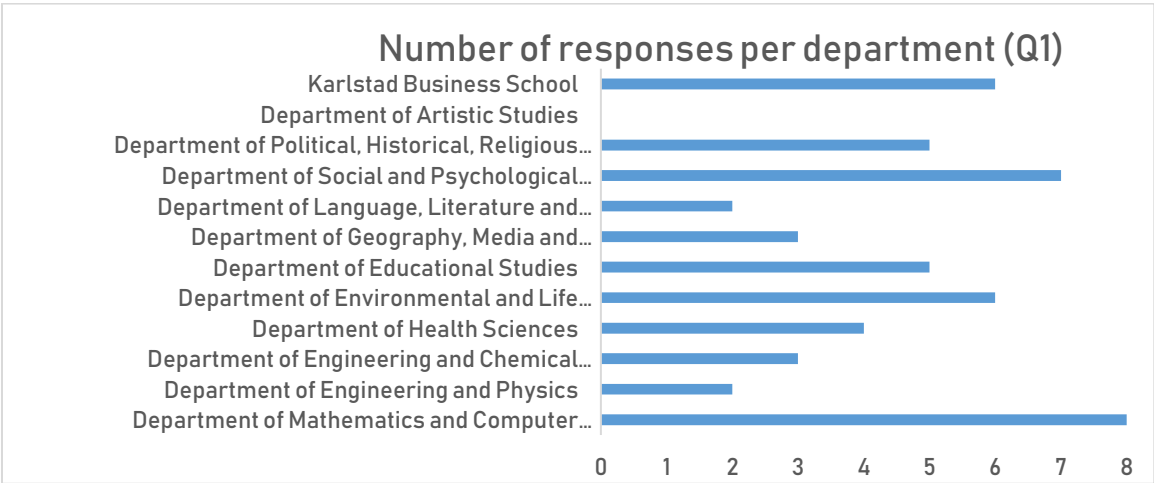
- Being a PhD student
- Not speaking Swedish
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- None
- Other (free text)

8. If you have any concerns or ideas related to the topic of this survey not reflected in the questions, or if you want to elaborate more on your answers feel free to share them with us (Free text answer).

Findings

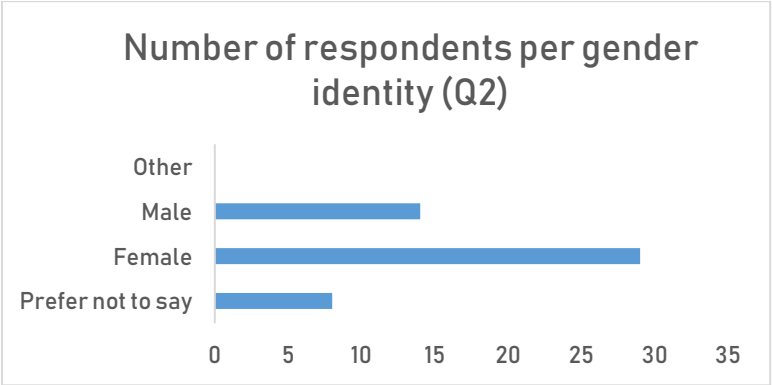
Q1 – Survey participants I

Graduate students at eleven (out of twelve) departments responded to the survey:



Q2 – Survey participants II

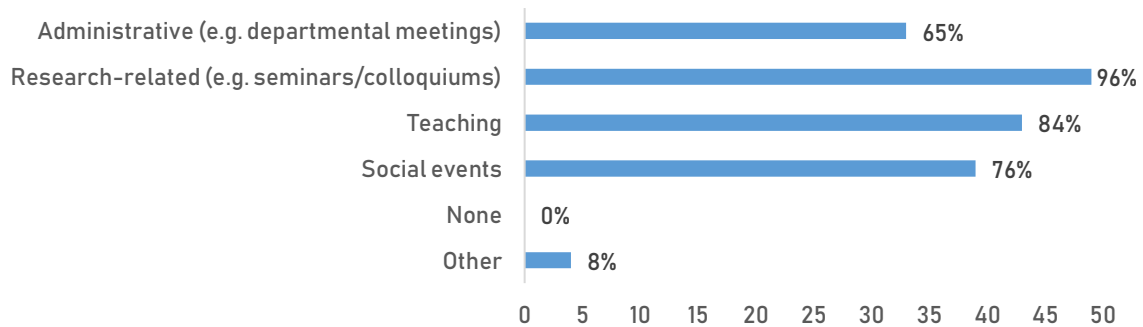
Among the number of respondents choosing to disclose gender, fourteen were male, twenty-nine female. Eight respondents chose not to disclose gender identity.



Q3 – Involvement at department-level

The respondents showed high interest in being involved in various activities in their respective departments. This was especially true for research-related activities, in which 96% of all respondents answered that they would like to be involved. No respondents indicated that they **did not** want to be involved in any activity at their department. The free text option (Other), answered by four persons, clarified that a few people had ticked off for administrative activities despite not having a genuine wish to participate in those activities, as they perceived it more like a duty. Grants applications was highlighted as a specific activity one of the respondents would like to be involved in.

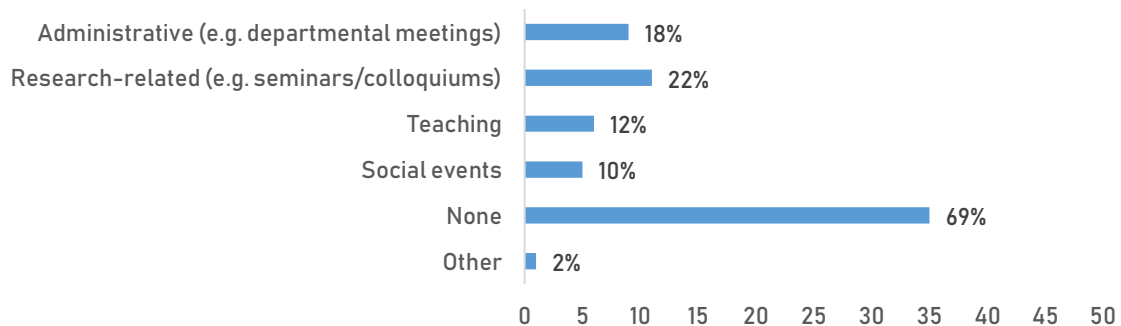
Which of the following activities would you like to be involved in at your department? (Q3)



Q4- Exclusion at department-level

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents stated that they have felt excluded from **none** of the activities. This means that the remaining 31% must have ticked off that they have felt excluded from one or several of the suggested activities. In the free text option, one respondent expressed feelings of exclusion from department communication as it was all in Swedish.

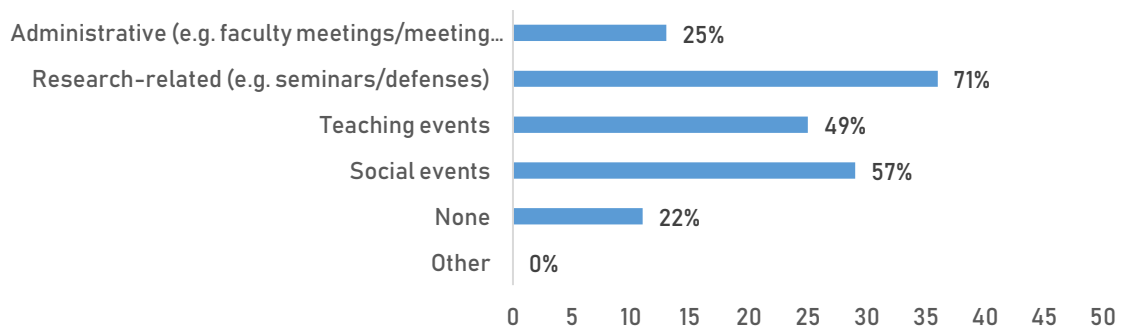
Which of the following activities have you felt excluded from at your department? (Q4)



Q5- Involvement at faculty- and university level

The respondents' wish to be included was lower for faculty- and university-level activities than for departmental activities. Still, research-related events was the most sought-after also on the faculty and/or university level.

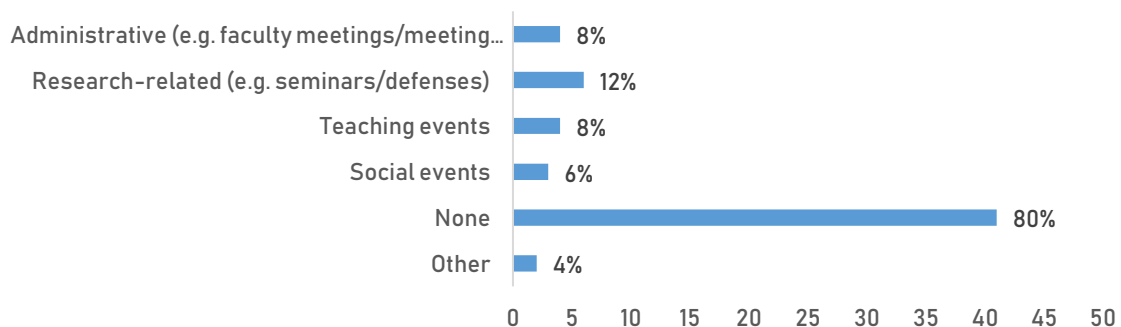
Which of the following activities would you like to be involved in on a faculty/university level? (Q5)



Q6- Exclusion at faculty- or university level

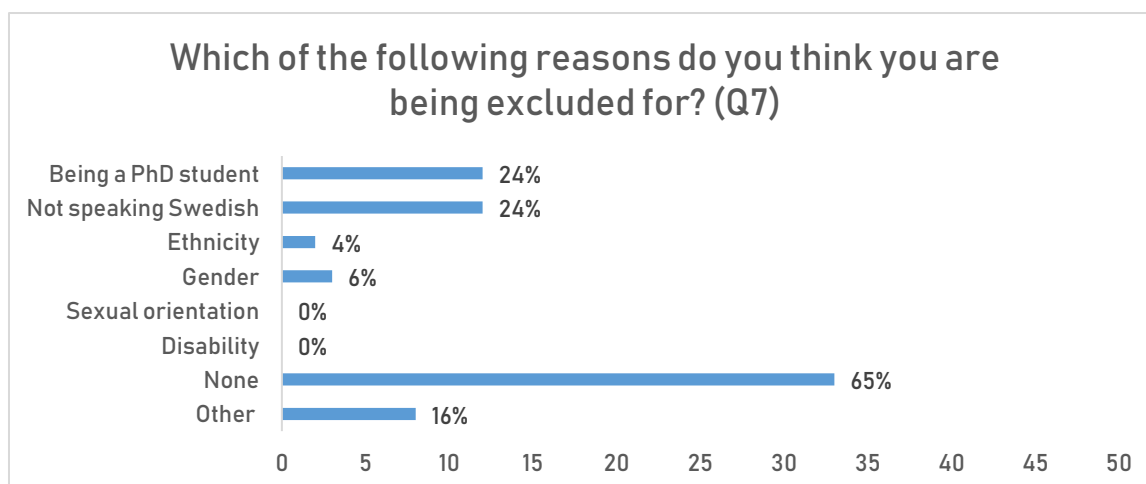
Eighty percent of the respondents stated that they had felt excluded from **none** of the listed activities on faculty- and/or university-level, meaning that twenty percent reported having felt excluded. One of the two free text answers addressed issues with the calendar at Inslaget and poor communication across the university about open seminars and defenses that could be of interest to people in other parts of the university.

Which of the following activities have you felt excluded from on a faculty/university level? (Q6)



Q7- Perceived reasons for exclusion

Sixty-five percent of the respondents answered "none" to the question of perceived reasons for exclusion. Not speaking Swedish and being a PhD student was the most common reasons for respondents' perceived exclusion. Eight respondents filled out the free text option, either clarifying that they had never felt excluded (three respondents), or that they had felt excluded because of: not producing enough scientific output, bad communication lines, age, and not being a native speaker of Swedish.



Q8- Additional comments

Some of the additional comments lost context as they were lumped together and not seen in relation to the individuals' previous answers. Two respondents further elaborated on the language issue, and how hard it is to know what is going on outside your sphere when events are announced and held in Swedish. The lack of a filter function in the calendar on Inslaget was also perceived as a problem. Other respondents stated that PhD students are treated as second order staff with no influence or involvement in future research, that PhD students are excluded from beneficial networking events, and that supervisors have taken on the role of "spokespersons" for their PhD students' research despite the students wanting to present the results themselves.

Discussion

In order to maintain confidentiality of the respondents the results were exported from S&R as lump summaries for each question. This means that we were not able to follow individuals' answers to each question or combine information about individuals' gender and departmental belonging. In earlier surveys, we have had feedback on it being possible to identify individual respondents based on subject and gender, so we decided to focus on department level and allow for non-disclosure of gender. The downside is that the information we get out of such a survey is very coarse. For future surveys, we should clarify this, so that we avoid answers in which respondents refer to previous answers.

We got feedback in the free text field that several of the questions were a bit ambiguous. In hindsight we see that some formulations could have been rephrased. For instance in question four, 35 replied "None". One interpretation can be that this means 35/51 (69%) have **never** felt excluded in any form at their departments. Another interpretation can be that they have never felt excluded from **any of the stated activities**. Due to the question requiring at least one answer we know that the rest (31%) of the respondents must have ticked off having felt excluded from one or several of the activities. Regarding exclusion on the faculty and/or university level, 80% responded having felt excluded from none of the activities. This discrepancy between levels can suggest that (some) departments struggle with inclusion. It can also reflect upon another thing we saw: that graduate students wants to be more included in what happens on department level than on higher levels.

Several commented that question 7 was problematic because the phrasing assumed that the respondent had been excluded, and it did not have an answer option in the lines of: "I have never felt excluded at KAU". We will take this into consideration in future survey design.

“Would like to be involved” was meant to reflect the wish to be included in those activities. We think that to feel excluded you must have a wish to be involved in the first place. “Feeling excluded” was used to reflect the subjective feeling of not being included. The subtle feeling of being excluded can be just as bad for the social working environment as being openly excluded.

Conclusions

Fifty-one graduate students, from eleven out of twelve of Karlstad University’s departments, answered this GSA mini-survey. Three out of ten graduate students have at some point felt excluded from administrative duties, teaching, research or social events at their departments. Two out of ten have felt excluded from one or more of the mentioned activities on faculty- and/or university level. The role of being a PhD student as well as language issues was the main reasons for exclusion among the respondents.

GSA Action points

The GSA would have liked to see 100% responding that they had not felt excluded, from either level. The GSA will continue to work for a good social and working environment for graduate students at KAU, specifically we will:

- inform about the outcomes of this survey
- continue to raise issues of language use and lack of translation at the University
- use these results in planning of GSA activities for the upcoming academic year
- check with the communications department if the calendar at Inslaget can be made more user-friendly

If you feel excluded or in other ways unrightfully treated, we urge you to contact the PhD Ombud phdombud@kau.se for a confidential consultation.

“A good, inclusive work environment strengthens the university”
-Karlstad University Vision 2030