

A Graduate Student First-Year Experience Program: GT6000 at Georgia Tech

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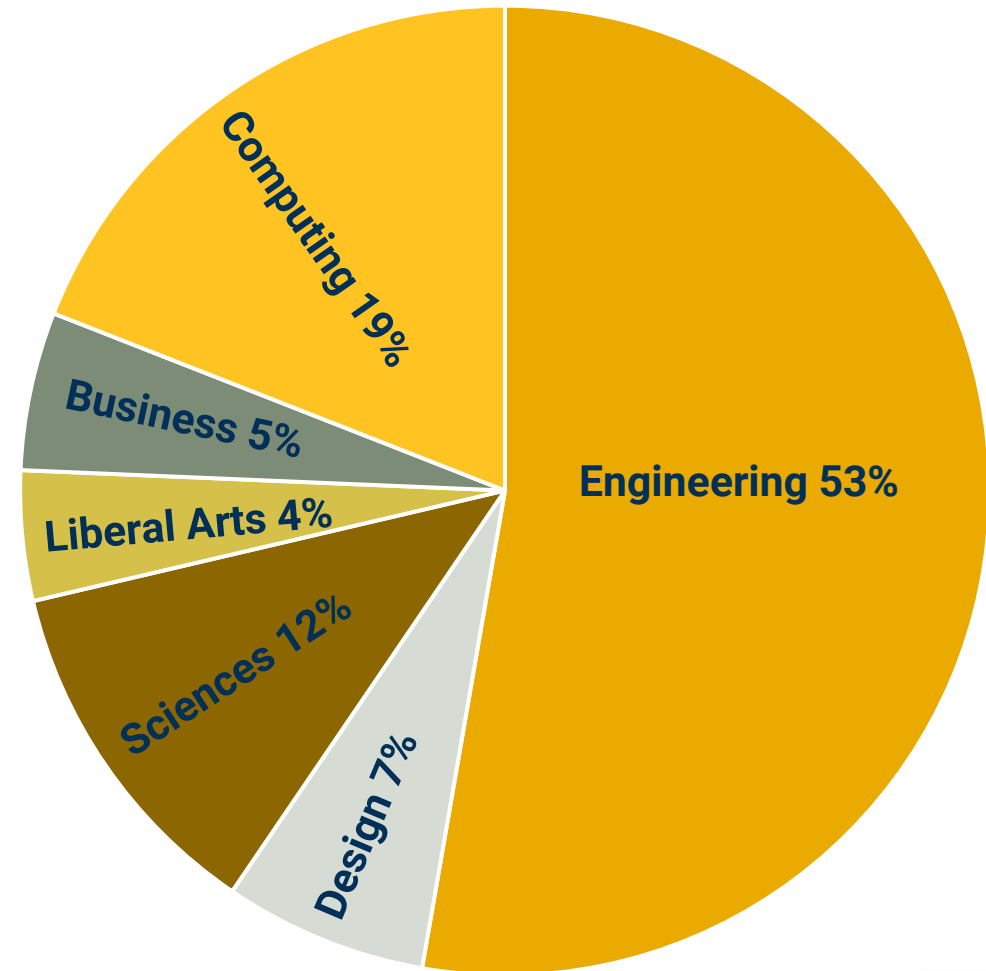
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Graduate Education at Georgia Tech: Atlanta Campus

- Doctoral University – Very High Research Activity (R1)
- AAU Member
- STEM dominant
- Over 100 graduate degree programs and certificates
- 7,833 Atlanta-campus graduate students (fall 2023)
- Roughly 50-50 PhD and MS
- Roughly 50-50 domestic and international students



Overview and Session Objectives

Overview:

- Motivations
- GT6000 Program Details
- Assessment Strategy and Outcomes
- Testimonials

Session Objectives:

- Understand the design strategy and scope of the GT6000 program
- Demonstrate the added value to the student experience
- Enable you to replicate a program like ours tailored for your campus

Graduate students have it all figured out... right?

- What challenges do students face at the beginning of their graduate programs?
 - What challenges do they face beyond that?
-
- imposter syndrome
 - advisor matching
 - academic rigor
 - time management
 - stress mitigation
 - hidden curriculum
 - awareness of campus resources
 - career exploration
 - peer support to overcome challenges
 - “mid-life” crisis
 - academic milestones (quals, proposal, etc.)

Literature

- New graduate students experience a double socialization process – into the role of a graduate student and into a profession or discipline (Golde 1998).
- Student preferences of department vs campus-wide delivery of orientation activities (Poock 2002)
 - Campus: health insurance, healthcare, public transportation, tour of campus, on-campus activities, off-campus activities, clubs/organizations, student government
 - “Non-white respondents put significantly more weight on the campus-wide orientation with regard to feeling welcomed”
- “Many graduate students when first entering their respective programs are just as confused and anxious as they were as new undergraduates.” (Rosenblatt and Christensen 1993)
- Well documented positive impact of first-year experience programs on retention for undergraduates

Program Objectives

1. Enhance the social connectivity of graduate students across disciplines and degree programs
2. Facilitate the peer mentorship of new graduate students by more senior graduate students
3. Improve the awareness of campus resources among new graduate students

GT6000

Community | Mentorship | Support

GT6000 Program Design Strategies

- Peer-led: reduces power differential and creates safe spaces
- 1-credit, pass-fail course: just enough accountability to encourage engagement
- 14 students per group: balance between capacity and maintaining a small group feel for discussion and conversation
- Hybrid format with synchronous in-person and asynchronous virtual delivery modes: flexibility for students and standardizes course content across sections
- Compressed, 8-week schedule: program ends as stress peaks mid-semester
- Not aligned with academic programs or research areas: facilitates connections with a broader student population
- Special interest sections for women and students returning to school after time in industry

What Would You Include in an Eight-Week Extended Orientation Course?

- Curriculum
- Workshops
- Community Engagement Events



GT6000 Students with the Ramblin' Wreck

Curriculum: 8 Weeks – 8 Topics

- Building Community
- Mentor/Advising Relationships
- Professional Development
- Stress/Time Management
- Resilience
- Inclusion and Belonging
- Leadership Development
- Maintaining Community



Group Leader Promoting GT6000 at the annual Grad Expo

Learning Objectives

- Identify, explore, and prepare for stressors typical of graduate students
- Develop plans for a successful and timely completion of your academic program
- Review key concepts related to and plan for professional development and a "whole-person" education

Four Engagement Formats



Group Meeting Attendance (40%)



Online Modules (26%)



Program Workshops (17%)



Course Deliverables (17%)

Workshops

- Used to encourage students to explore various topics in detail from experts on campus
- Various campus partners are requested to host workshops specifically for GT6000 students (they really want to get in front of our students)
- Additionally promote workshops happening around campus that relate to our curriculum topics
- To encourage community building, students are provided opportunities to attend social events as well

Online Canvas Modules – Content Examples

- Mentor / Advising Relationships (Week 2)
 - YouTube Video (4 minutes) on Failure and the Importance of Mentors
 - Video Interview (2 minutes) with GT Graduate Student on Selecting their Advisor
 - Article "How to Pick a Graduate Advisor"
 - Article "How to Be a Graduate Advisee"
 - Article "Your Career Needs Many Mentors, Not Just One"
- Resilience (Week 5)
 - YouTube Video (8 minutes) Engineering Resilience
 - Video Interview (5 minutes) from Counseling Center on Imposter Syndrome / You're Not Alone
 - Foundations of Self-Care
- Sprinkled throughout the Canvas Modules are comic strips from [PhD Comics](#), written and drawn by Georgia Tech alumnus Jorge Cham

Online Canvas Modules – Content Examples



JORGE CHAM ©THE STANFORD DAILY

Course Deliverables

- Grad School "Bucket List"
- Professional Goals and Resume
- Academic Program Plan
- Leadership Style Reflection
- GT6000 Summary Reflection



Stone Mountain

Group Leader Role

- Seasoned graduate student
 - Open to all graduate students whether they took GT6000 or not
- Approximately 40 hours of work from June to October
- Facilitate eight group meetings, groups are about 14 students
- May plan social event(s) with their groups or in collaboration with other Group Leaders
- Are encouraged to observe other Group Leader sessions to gain ideas and provide feedback to their peers
- New Group Leaders receive a \$1000 stipend at end of semester while returners receive a \$1250 stipend
- 45 Group Leaders in fall 2023

Community Engagement Leader Role

- After gaining feedback that GT6000 students desired large-scale social events to meet students from other sections, the Community Engagement Leader role was created
 - Position was originally called Social Group Leader
- Four student leaders that plan events, instead of leading their own group, for all GT6000 students throughout the semester
- Supplements small-scale events that individual Group Leaders hold with their own group
- Approximately 40 hours of work from June to October
- New Community Engagement Leaders receive a \$1000 stipend at end of semester while returners receive a \$1250 stipend

Student Leader Selection and Training

- Student Leaders apply (cover letter, resume) in March and selected in April
- Top candidates are invited for 30-minute interviews
- Three, 2-hour trainings are held in the summer in June and July
 - Training # 1 – building community
 - Training # 2 – course content and classroom policies
 - Training # 3 – enhancing confidence in classroom facilitation
- Due to some Group Leaders being outside Atlanta in the summer, trainings are held in two different formats: in-person and virtual
 - Challenging leading one training simultaneously with some participants in-person and some virtual

Community Engagement Events

- GT6000 Kickoff at the Tech Rec
 - Free billiards, bowling, pizza
- Grocery Shuttles to H Mart, Buford Highway Farmers Market, & Patel Brothers Plaza
- Hikes to Stone Mountain and Sweetwater Creek
- Bicycling the Atlanta Beltline
- End of Semester Sendoff



Centennial Olympic Park



Patel Brothers Plaza

Measuring Success

- GT6000 Enrollment
- Primary measurable objectives:
 - Achieve learning objectives
 - Improve awareness of campus resources
 - Build social network and connectedness
- Pre-course and post-course assessments were utilized to capture a snapshot of curriculum efficacy, thoughts, and perspectives.
 - Subject-matter questions
 - Awareness of campus resources
 - Feelings of connectedness
 - Program feedback

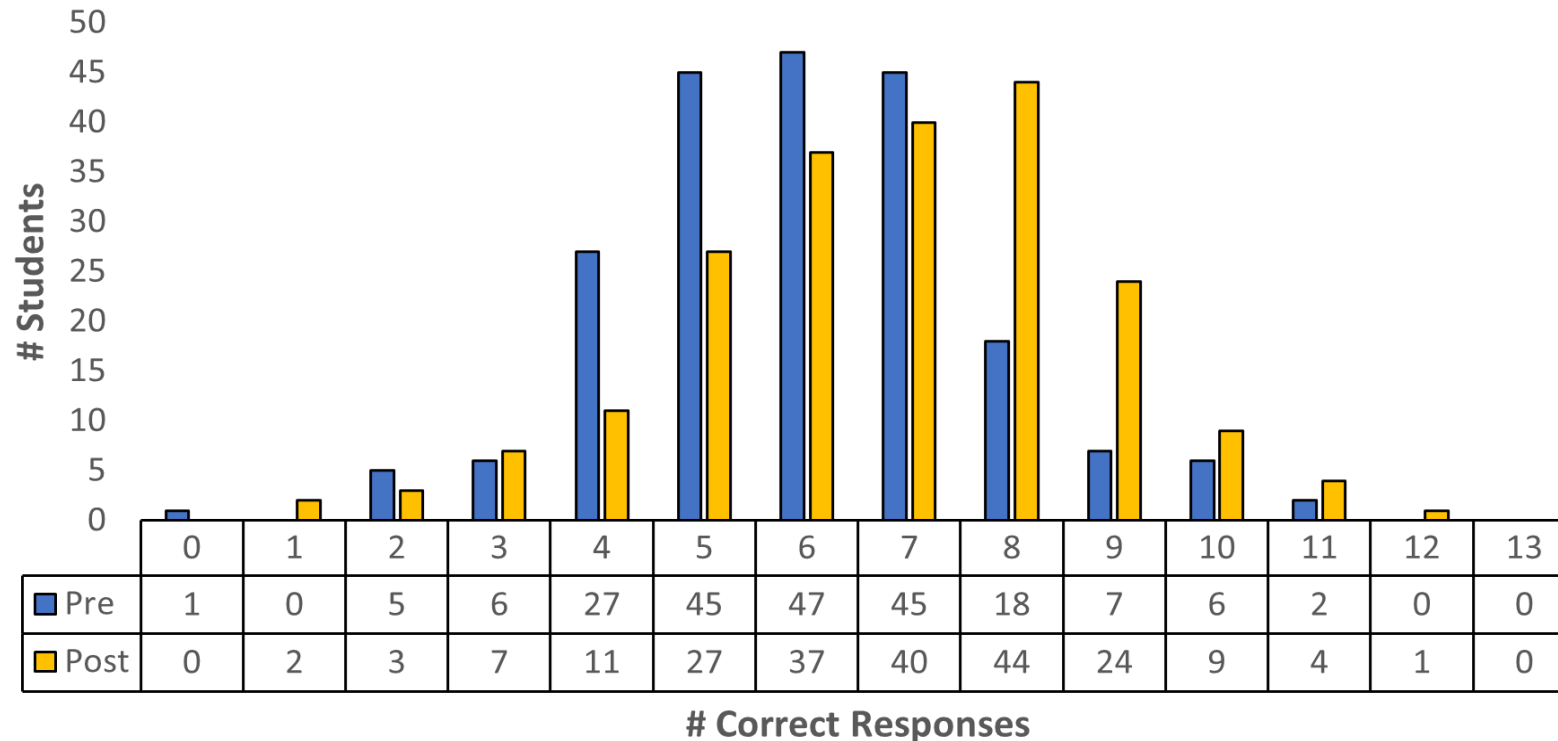
Enrollment History

	Semester	Participants	New Students	Participation Rate	Notes
Standalone Program	Fall 2014	40	1980	2%	Grad Groups pilot
	Fall 2015	80	1818	4%	Grad Groups launch
	Fall 2016	144	2113	7%	Grad Groups
	Fall 2017	250	2041	12%	Grad Groups
Course Development	Fall 2018	190	2143	9%	GT8801 (hybrid)
	Fall 2019	232	2175	11%	GT8801 (hybrid)
Current Course	Fall 2020*	250	1661	15%	GT6000 (fully online)
	Fall 2021	437	2534	17%	GT6000 (hybrid)
	Fall 2022	491	2396	20%	GT6000 (hybrid)
	Fall 2023	482	2700	18%	GT6000 (hybrid)

Assessment: Subject-Matter Questions

Students were asked 13 identical questions related to the course content and learning objectives on a pre- and post-course survey.

Student Performance



N = 209
Average pre-score: 5.97
Average post-score: 6.81
Increase: 0.84

Assessment: Awareness of Campus Resources

Please rate your familiarity with the following Georgia Tech resources.

1 = I have not heard of this resource.

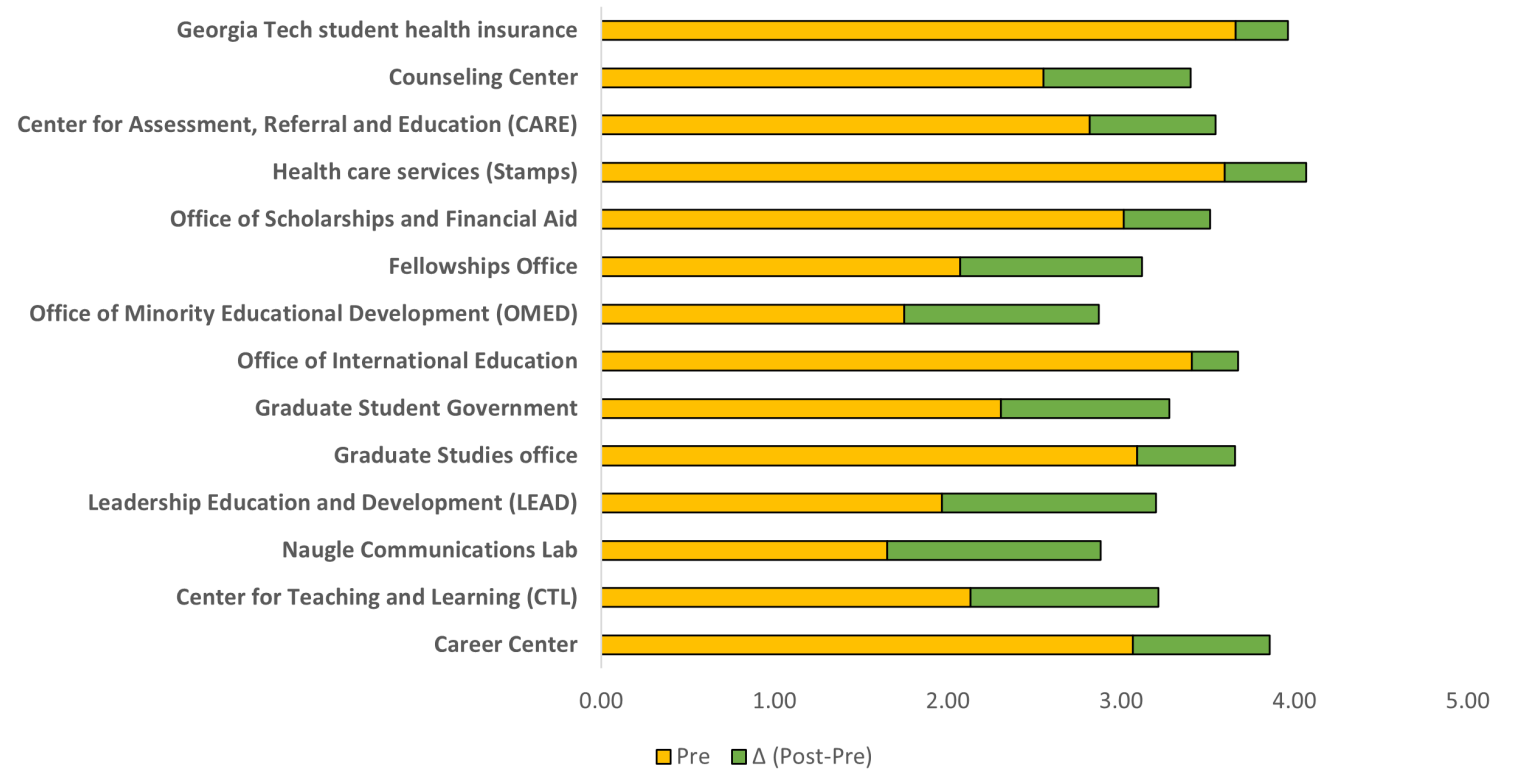
2 = I have heard of this resource, but don't know what they do.

3 = I have heard of this resource and know what they do, but haven't used it.

4 = I am familiar with this resource and would like to use it, but haven't yet.

5 = I am familiar with this resource and have used it.

Awareness of Campus Resources



N = 209
Average pre-score: 2.7
Average post-score: 3.5
Increase: 0.8

Assessment: Feelings of Connectedness

How connected do you feel to the Georgia Tech community?

1 = I feel isolated and not connected to anyone at Georgia Tech.

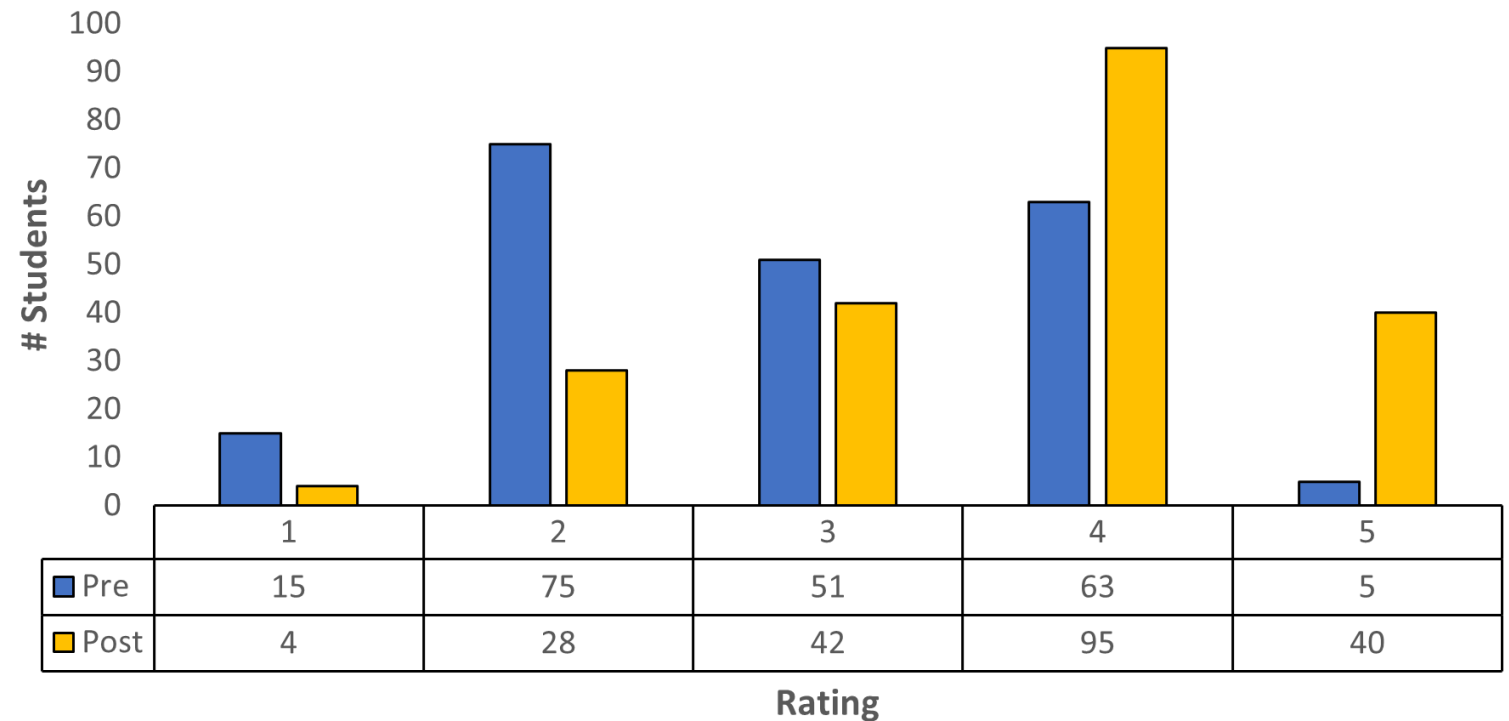
2 = I feel isolated and connected to only a couple of people at Georgia Tech.

3 = I feel connected to people in my program, but am not connected to anyone else at Georgia Tech.

4 = I feel connected to people in my program, and connected to only a couple of other people at Georgia Tech.

5 = I feel connected to people in my program as well as the larger Georgia Tech community.

Feelings of Connectedness

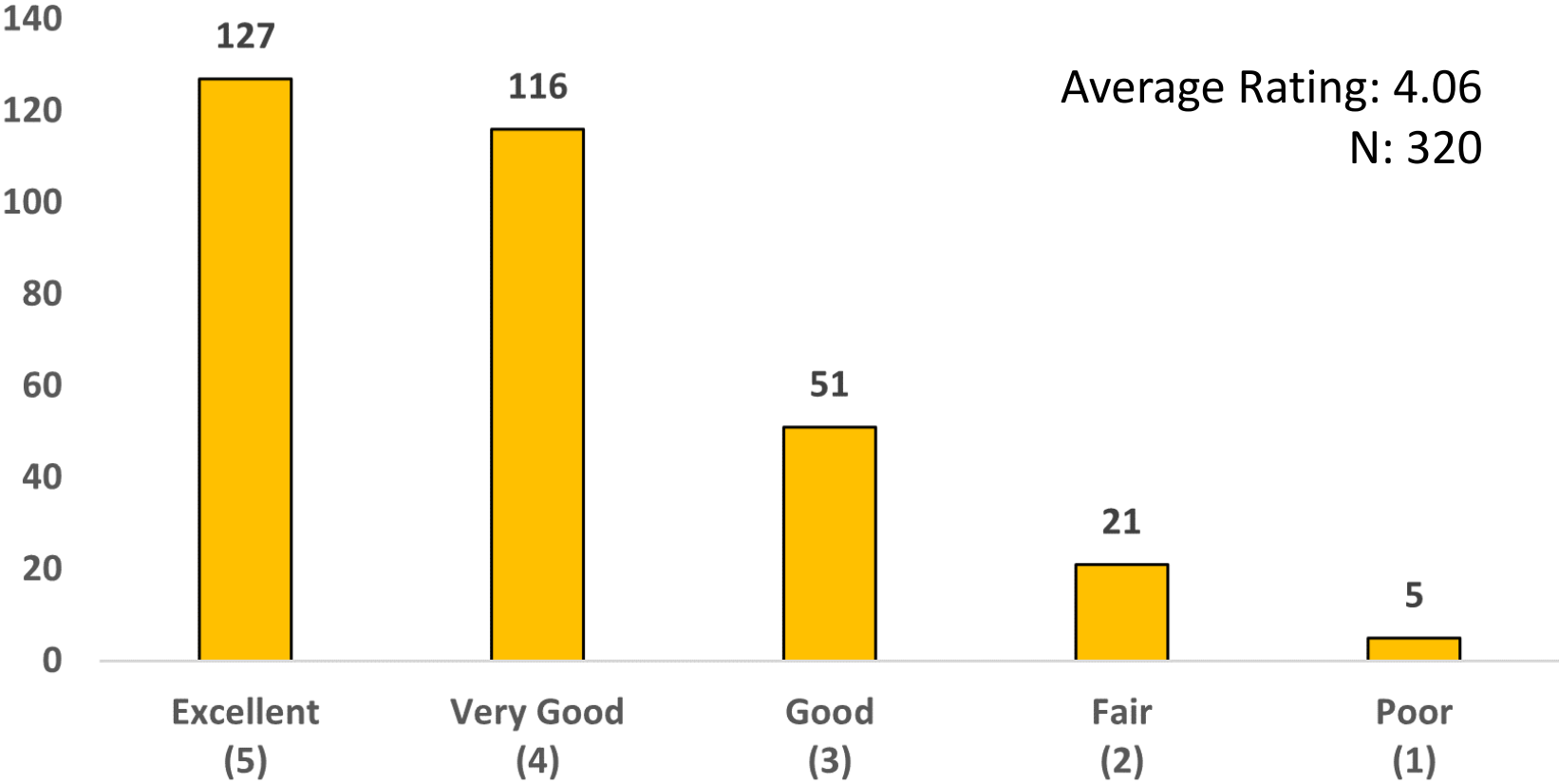


N = 209
Average pre-rating: 2.85
Average post-rating: 3.67
Increase: 0.82

Student Feedback

All things considered, how would you rate the GT6000 program?

Student Satisfaction Rating



Student Feedback

Would you recommend the GT6000 program to other new graduate students?

Response	Percentage (N = 320)
Yes, definitely.	77%
Not sure, maybe.	18%
Probably not.	5%

Graduate Student Experience Survey Results

- Georgia Tech runs a longitudinal Graduate Student Experience Survey every few years to inform investments to improve student experiences (2016, 2019, 2023)
- Data was analyzed to compare responses of students that took GT6000 with those that didn't
- Significant differences found in year 2+ MS students in the mentorship and advising space in areas related to GT6000 curriculum
 - Satisfied with degree of access/interaction with project/thesis advisor
 - Comfortable sharing professional goals with project/thesis advisor
 - Know where to get help in addressing issues with advisor

Retention Data (From Year 1 to 2)

Category	Detail	GT6000 Status		Difference	P-Value
		Did Not Enroll	Enrolled		
Level at Admission	Doctorate	96.03%	97.31%	1.28%	0.14
	Masters	97.19%	98.22%	1.03%	0.04
Prior Graduate Experience	First Time Graduate Student	97.30%	97.79%	0.49%	0.21
	Prior Graduate Studies/Non-GT	94.10%	97.24%	3.13%	0.01
Sex	Female	96.66%	96.79%	0.14%	0.89
	Male	96.66%	97.30%	0.65%	0.00

*aggregated across the history of the program

Advisory Board

GT6000 Advisory Board was launched in January 2023

- Meet monthly during the fall/spring semester; lunch is provided
- Four current Group Leaders and eight fall 2023 program participants serve on the board
- Pipeline for Group Leader recruitment and ambassadors for GT6000 program around campus
- Suggestions on program improvements given in spring 2023 include:
 - **Development of identity-based social activities through GT6000**
 - **Modification of the excused absence / make up class session process**
 - **Development of timeline of GT6000 Student Leader application process**
 - **GT6000 "SWAG" ideas**

Student Feedback – Fall 2023 Enrolled Students

"I find myself grateful not just for the academic credit or the final deliverable but for the incredible opportunity it offered to connect with individuals I would never have met if not for GT6000."

"Before GT6000, I felt lost and overwhelmed. But thanks to this program, I now have a better understanding of my surroundings and where to go for help when I need it. GT6000 made my first semester at Georgia Tech more memorable and enjoyable."

"It's one thing to be academically accomplished, but it's another to have a supportive circle of friends to share the journey with. Thanks to GT6000, I found both."

Wondering If You Can Do This At Your Campus?

- Yes, you can!
- Start with a pilot (with little or no funding)
- Partner with your Graduate SGA or Grad Student Association
- Don't try to do this all at once – we've been at it for ten years
- Utilize an iterative approach, gather feedback from the start
- Once you have a proof of concept, ask for resources
 1. Pay your Group Leaders
 2. Event funding
 3. Graduate Teaching Assistant
- Transition to a course
 - Meeting space
 - Registration
 - Student accountability

Contact Us

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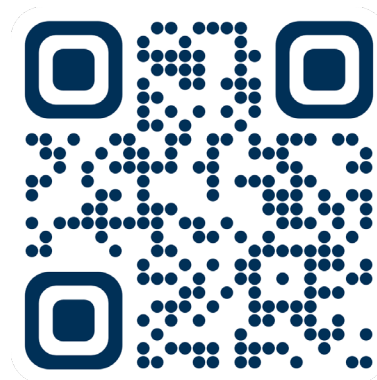
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<https://grad.gatech.edu/gt6000>



Marc with Student Leaders

References

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