

Action Plan for the Graduate College – Feb. 2012 Western Michigan University

Introduction

The working premises of this plan are that graduate education at WMU is integral to the identity and mission of the institution as a public, learner-centered, discovery driven university; that nationally recognized graduate programs serve to define, distinguish, and elevate Western among its peers; and that a strong and collaborative Graduate College will provide the leadership needed to maintain the vitality of graduate education and research at WMU in the 21st Century.

The mission of the Graduate College is embodied in the following three components.

1. The Graduate College is responsible for the integrity and quality of all WMU graduate programs, as governed by the Graduate Catalog and related Faculty Senate policies and procedures, in collaboration with Western's graduate faculty.
2. The Graduate College provides effective service and support to all students, faculty, and staff involved in graduate education at WMU.
3. The Graduate College advocates at all levels for strong graduate programs at WMU, for the central role of graduate education and graduate research within the institution, and for resources allocated in alignment with that role.

Key Areas of Focus

The following are identified as eleven key areas of focus for the Graduate College.

1. **Strategic Growth in Graduate Enrollment.** The Academic Affairs Strategic Plan includes the following two strategies for graduate education:
 - a. Establish a robust graduate enrollment management plan that defines, shapes and retains the student body and is consistent with a public, student-centered research university.
 - b. Manage graduate enrollment capacity by determining the capacity of each program, matching enrollment to capacity or, as appropriate, increasing or decreasing capacity to ensure quality education and to maximize resource utilization.

The Graduate College will work with the Vice-Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management, the University SEM Committee, college deans, and academic units to identify graduate programs targeted for strategic growth. For each program identified, a comprehensive plan will be adopted which takes into account student demand for the program, demand for program graduates, resources and facilities needed to accommodate growth, and the overall benefits of this growth

to the program, the university, and the economy of the state. In addition, the Graduate College will work with Extended University Programs to explore opportunities to expand the role of graduate education at regional campuses, as well as ways in which electronic resources and capacities can be used to more effectively deliver quality programs. The Graduate College will also take the lead, in conjunction with colleges and their academic units, to explore opportunities for the creation of new programs in evolving areas of high demand which align with current strengths within the university. In addition, the Graduate College will work with the Provost and academic units to set program-by-program targets for production of master's degrees and doctoral degrees, based on determined capacity.

The measures of success are growth in graduate enrollment commensurate with the available capacity in the unit, and the continued growth in the quality of our graduate students.

- 2. Graduate Admissions.** Graduate admissions at Western will consistently offer applicants and faculty the highest level of professional service, providing all users with convenient and timely access to information and resources, while insuring compliance with university standards for decision, notification, and reporting. The graduate admissions process will be moved to one which is fully web-based. Decisions for admission to graduate programs will remain with program faculty, subject to current admission requirements. The Graduate College will work with academic units, the Office of Admissions, and the Haenicke Institute for Global Education to establish mutually agreed to time lines and procedures to best serve all users. Some of these standards will be common to all applications, while others will be tailored to the needs and practices of the given discipline. In addition, the Graduate College will work with these offices to insure smooth functioning of the graduate admissions process in coordination with academic units.

The measure of success will be admissions processes that meet the needs of the applicants, as well as the faculty in the units making the admissions decisions.

- 3. Graduate Recruiting.** The Graduate College will work as a partner with academic units to strategically recruit and yield the best graduate students for their programs, maintaining a strong, diverse graduate student population at Western. Currently, graduate student recruiting is done primarily by the academic units or not at all. Some recruiting is done centrally by the Graduate College, mainly focusing on diverse populations of students. The Graduate College will take a more active role in coordinating graduate student recruiting, including web site development, brochure development, graduate program fairs, as well as international student recruiting.

The measure of success is to increase the number of highly qualified applicants to WMU graduate programs.

4. Diversity in Graduate Education. The Graduate College will work with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to provide leadership and cross-campus coordination to achieve inclusiveness and enhance diversity in Western's graduate programs. The following strategy is laid out in the University Strategic Plan.

Review, improve, and develop policies, procedures, and practices to remove barriers for the recruitment, retention, and participation of diverse groups and individuals.

In almost every graduate discipline or group of disciplines, certain populations remain underrepresented, whether one measures by gender, race, disability, or other distinguishing characteristic. Recruitment, mentoring, and retention of graduate students are thus key areas of involvement for the Graduate College in this effort. The Graduate College will compile and disseminate to the university community discipline-specific data regarding national trends in graduate student populations, as well as trends in Western's programs. Such data will guide decision-making in regard to strategies and new resources designed to strengthen diversity in Western's graduate programs.

The measure of success is to graduate a diverse population that exceeds the current diversity found in specific graduate disciplines.

5. Assessment of Graduate Programs. Graduate assessment at WMU is the systematic collection of data related to student learning and the use of those data to improve graduate programs. Moreover, assessment of graduate education insures that programs have defined student learning outcomes and a process for tracking them, and that program decisions are informed by assessment data. The Graduate College will work with the Associate Provost for Assessment and Undergraduate Programs, as well as academic units, to formulate a comprehensive Assessment Plan for WMU Graduate Programs. The recommendations of the Higher Learning Commission regarding graduate assessment activities at WMU will be an important guide in formulating and implementing plans for expanded graduate assessment. This plan will aim to identify institutional measures (e.g., time to degree completion) used to assess graduate education at the institutional level, and incorporate data from unit-level assessment activities. To this end, the Graduate College will survey current assessment activities for graduate courses and programs within academic units, assist those units in which graduate assessment can be strengthened, and integrate graduate assessment activities across the institution.

The measure of success is continued improvement in our graduate programs based on regular, systemic assessment.

6. Leadership in Graduate Education. The Graduate College will:

- a. Advocate at all levels for stronggraduate programs at WMU, for the central role of graduate education and graduate research within the institution, and for resources allocated in alignment with that role.
- b. Strive for continuous improvement in the quality of graduate education and graduate research at WMU.
- c. Undertake relevant studies regarding WMU graduate activities; know data and practices at peer institutions, and understand how WMU compares; report results of these studies to the university community.
- d. Engage and collaborate with other graduate institutions in Michigan to offer activities for graduate student professional growth.
- e. Actively participate as a member of the Council of Graduate Schools, Midwest Association of Graduate Schools, and other professional organizations.
- f. Insure that the College web site is engaging, relevant, and optimally effective, and that it serves to represent the breadth and depth of Western and its graduate programs to the world.
- g. Undertake initiatives spanning multiple graduate disciplines, such as increasing graduate activity in STEM fields at Western, working with the WMU Center for the Humanities to support graduate research in the humanities, and promoting interdisciplinary research.
- h. Assist academic units to modernize their graduate curricula, programs, and operations; work with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to understand accreditation requirements, and gain or maintain accreditation for professionally accredited programs.
- i. Promote a positive, collaborative, and professional relationship with Western's graduate student population and with the Graduate Student Advisory Committee; insure that graduate students are connected to Western, and are informed about the role of the Graduate College in their education.

The measure of success is the recognition by the colleges and units that the Graduate College adds value to their graduate programs.

7. Policies and Procedures. The Graduate College will:

- a. Work with the Graduate Studies Council to insure consistency of policies and practices in graduate education, as well as shared governance of graduate programs, and will regularly review the Graduate Catalog and Graduate Handbook relative to policies adopted by the Faculty Senate and individual programs.
- b. Effectively communicate regarding policies and practices to faculty and students, with particular attention to changes in policies or practices; conduct regular meetings with chairs and graduate directors as a line of communication; and insure that new chairs and graduate directors are appropriately informed regarding graduate policies and procedures.
- c. Use the web to streamline processes to reduce the time and effort currently spent on duplicated, unnecessary, or out-of-date procedures and forms.

- d. Move to exclusively electronic submission of theses and dissertations, and of awards administered by the Graduate College; work with academic units to create document templates, which will remove much of the editorial burden now felt by students, and likewise remove much of the clerical burden now felt by the College in processing documents (for example, reviewing and returning a dissertation multiple times for formatting issues).
- e. Undertake comprehensive review of the policies and processes for appointment of the Graduate Faculty.

The measure of success is a set of policies and procedures that are efficient, effective, and ever improving.

8. External Funding and Graduate Research. A primary goal of the graduate enterprise at Western is to produce the next generation of researchers and scholars. Moreover, graduate education is an inseparable part of the university's research mission. It is therefore imperative that the Graduate College support both the training of graduate students as researchers, as well as the research that they themselves produce.

- a. Through its staff, the Graduate College provides significant and critical support to those who write and receive grants involving graduate students. Thus, allocations from the facilities and administration monies collected by WMU may constitute one source of funding to support graduate research.
- b. The Graduate College will identify new ways to recognize and reward excellence in research by graduate students, *and* excellence by faculty engaged in graduate education and mentoring.
- c. The Graduate College will actively monitor and pursue the full range of external funding opportunities to support graduate education, research, and graduate student professional development at Western. Such funding will provide major annual financial resources for these activities, including funding for graduate assistantships (tuition and stipends), professional development activities, research, and travel. This initiative is in alignment with strategies outlined in the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan, in particular:
 - Increase external funding from grants and contracts, as well as from gift funds, to support graduate students during their entire program of study, including graduate assistantships, fellowships, project support, and conference attendance.
 - Extramural research funding totaling \$60 million annually.

Enormous opportunities for external funding exist across a host of federal, state, and foundation programs. The Graduate College will work in collaboration with the Office of the Vice President for Research, with academic units, and with partner institutions to strategically identify programs of high interest where funding priorities align with Western's goals for its graduate students and programs. The Graduate College can serve as

the home for grants which span multiple disciplines within Western, or which ally with other graduate schools in the region to support graduate student professional development activities. In addition, the Graduate College will work to insure that, where appropriate and customary, units include graduate student support in their proposals for external funding.

The measure of success is the university moving towards the goal of \$60 million in external research expenditures.

- 9. Monitoring and Insuring Student Progress.** The Graduate College will be closely involved in the progression of Western's graduate students through its programs, from recruitment and admission, to graduation and post-graduate tracking. In particular, the Graduate College will:
- a. Insure that policies intended to monitor student progress and assist students in future planning are being followed by academic units, and that all students receive quality advising at appropriate intervals of time. One example of such a policy is Annual Review of Graduate Students. In order to better serve our students, the Graduate College will create a web-based template to be used by graduate advisors to record a student's Plan of Study, dates and results for comprehensive exams, and the like. This will serve not only as an advising tool, but will also provide the Graduate College with current information on a student's status within their program.
 - b. Establish the means to closely monitor students in academic difficulty, and assist such students and their departments to restore academic good standing.
 - c. Track graduates by program as one measure of program success, and as one important way to stay in touch with recent alumni. The information collected in this way is basic data which is commonly collected by institutions, and which should be available to our constituents. Statistics regarding post-graduate placement are frequently requested or required in external reporting, for example, to federal granting agencies, yet Western currently has no mechanism in place to reliably gather or report such information. In particular, the Council of Graduate Schools states:

For graduates of master's and professional programs we assume that we know much more about career trajectories. But the truth is that, apart from professional master's programs, career outcomes for much of master's education is also unexplored territory.

Better tracking of our graduates will provide the College with valuable data to be used in recruitment, program planning, and assessment.

- d. Continue to work with the Office of Career Services and the Graduate Student Advisory Committee to expand career education and placement opportunities for Western's graduate students.

The measures of success are students graduating in a timely manner and placement of our graduate students in positions.

10. Academic and Professional Support Services. The Graduate College will make available to *all* WMU graduate students a range of activities and services intended to enhance their research and professional growth.

- a. Currently, graduate students at regional campuses, as well as those enrolled in online courses, might not have available to them the same level of service offered by the Graduate College as that offered to students on the main campus. To some extent, this is also the case for part-time graduate students, who presently constitute 43% of the WMU graduate population. The Graduate College will explore ways to better integrate these students into the university community, and make available to them all services of the College. Similarly, the Graduate College will explore ways to better support international graduate students, who often face financial constraints which do not apply to domestic students. Where appropriate, online delivery of programming for graduate students will be used to make such programming more accessible to them. The Graduate College will work with academic units, colleges, and Extended University Programs to identify areas of need in order to design and revise programming on a regular basis. Services currently offered include writing and statistics consulting, dissertation writing support, grants workshops, and research ethics training.
- b. Through its graduate programs, WMU prepares future faculty, and graduate students play an important role in Western's teaching mission. The Graduate College will continue to provide orientation for all of Western's graduate assistants. For those whose appointments involve instructional duties, the Graduate College will work closely with academic units, colleges, and the Office for Faculty Development to provide ongoing training and mentoring for them in their instructional roles. Where appropriate, the Graduate College will construct and implement training modules with online delivery, in order to reach more students. The Graduate College recognizes excellence in teaching through its annual graduate teaching awards program.

The measure of success is to provide needed services to all graduate students.

11. Alumni Relations and Development. The Graduate College will:

- a. Work with the Office of Alumni Relations to actively reach out to Western's graduate alumni, communicating with them on a regular basis, giving them opportunities for feedback and engagement, fostering a sense of community among our graduates, and effectively telling our story. That story includes a 60-year history of graduate education at Western, thousands of alumni making a difference in the world, a vibrant graduate student body of 5,000, and a wealth of ongoing research and creative activity. The dean, working with the academic colleges, will be the face of the Graduate College to its alumni and to the community, and will lead the effort to connect and engage with graduate alumni, thereby raising public awareness of Western as an

- institution of choice for graduate education. This initiative aligns with the University Strategic Plan, which enjoins us to “Effectively engage alumni as advocates for the university.”
- b. Engage in significant and ongoing development activities in collaboration with the Office of University Development, guided by a comprehensive development plan in keeping with the size, scope, and stature of Western’s graduate offerings. The college’s endowed resources will provide significant annual opportunities for support to Western’s graduate students. In order to realize this vision, the Graduate College must grow its endowed resources, since this is one important way in which the college can increase its base of support for graduate students. The dean will identify areas of need within the college mission, with emphasis on providing more fellowships for graduate students. The dean will work with the Office of University Development to formulate a plan for strategic growth in existing endowments in order to support targeted numbers of doctoral completion fellowships, in addition to new master’s-level support, and will explore opportunities for new endowments, or for other direct support of college initiatives. The Graduate College will communicate with alumni and other constituents about the range and the quality of graduate activities at Western, and will inform them about ways to support our mission.

The measure of success is the total funds available to assist current graduate students.

Summary

These eleven key areas are the focus of concentration for the Graduate College. As the Graduate College evolves these areas will change and new areas of focus will be added. Together they will compose a plan for a highly effective Graduate College. The overall measure of success is the robustness of all graduate programs as measured by the total graduate student enrollment.