



The University of Georgia

Teaching Academy®

Date: March 29, 2015

To: Dr. Pamela Whitten
Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

From: Graduate Student Recruitment & Retention Break-out Group: Valerie Babb, Marsha Black, Mary Caplan, Laura Crawley, Michelle Garfield-Cook, Mark Harrison, Ann Hollifield (Facilitator), Mark Huber, Denise Lewis, Peggy Ozias-Akins, Miriam Perryman, Jarred Williams and Meihua Zhai

Re: Findings and Recommendations for Graduate Student Recruitment and Retention

Dear Dr. Whitten,

Thank you for your support of the 2015 UGA Academic Affairs Faculty Symposium. We are pleased to be able to provide the following recommendations and observations for your consideration.

Our charge was to consider the challenges and opportunities affecting graduate student recruitment and retention at the University of Georgia. Although there clearly are some discipline-specific factors in these processes, our discussions identified a number of university-wide structural challenges affecting graduate-student recruitment and retention. We realize you are aware of many of these, but we feel the need to emphasize again that, in our judgment, addressing these key issues are a critical and *necessary* first-step toward improving both the quality and quantity of students seeking graduate degrees from UGA. We also, however, wish to offer ideas that we believe will improve UGA graduate recruitment apart from the structural issues we face as a university.

The philosophy guiding our discussions during the symposium was this: Strong recruitment leads to improved retention. High retention -- through reputation and peer-to-peer communication -- leads to more successful recruitment of higher-quality students. It is a positive cycle UGA must actively and consciously work to create.

The critical structural challenges to graduate student recruitment and retention we identified were as follows:

Structural Challenges and Suggestions:

1. Find funds to make UGA graduate stipends competitive;
2. Provide small grants for research that will immediately engage incoming grad students outside the classroom similar to the undergraduate CURO grants.
3. Hire one or two PR people to work solely on marketing grad programs and provide a significant budget for graduate-programs marketing. Successful graduate student recruitment and retention is dependent on raising the overall visibility of the University's graduate programs.
4. Simplify the application process through such moves as reducing multiple applications and eliminating boiler-plate recommendation letters for students already at UGA, etc.
5. Review requirements such as the GRE and GMAT and develop appropriate policies for waivers. For example, programs should be permitted to waive the GRE requirement for individuals who have substantial years of professional experience in the field of study.
6. Recognize that faculty morale is a key element of graduate student recruitment and retention. Ensure faculty are given work-load credit for advising and mentoring graduate students.
7. Incentivize Graduate Programs to explore ways to transform themselves so as to optimize use of university resources, innovate in program structure and curriculum delivery, and increase interdisciplinarity, educational quality, research productivity, and intellectual innovation.

Key Recommendations beyond the Structural Challenges.

Guiding the group's discussions were the data provided on the current and projected graduate-student demographics at UGA and across the U.S. Our recommendations are informed by the conviction that UGA departments and faculty must address the reality that, going forward, the majority of graduate students will no longer be 20-something white males who can attend graduate school full-time. The graduate-student population we will be trying to recruit and retain will be diverse in terms of race, age, professional experience, and socioeconomic status and will include a large proportion of young women in their child-bearing years. Recruiting and retaining a more diverse population will require a greater effort by UGA and its respective departments to identify and support the social and personal needs of graduate students, as well as their intellectual and professional needs. To that end, we recommend:

8. Create a Stronger Sense of Graduate-Student Community Campus-wide.
 - a. Build a Graduate Student Union. This would be a place for graduate students to socialize and find services and support specific to their needs. It should not be an office building or the home of the Graduate School, although it should host resources for grad-student support. It also should have a childcare facility and a

limited number of rooms where economically distressed students could find temporary emergency housing until better arrangements could be made for them.

- b. Offer graduate-student learning communities modeled on the faculty-learning communities
- c. Continue to push for construction of the Brain Train to help Atlantans come to Athens for grad school; faculty go to UGA's extended campuses to teach; and both faculty and students to travel back and forth for research collaborations with Atlanta institutions.
- d. Expand programs to inform grad students about non-academic applications of their graduate degrees in their respective fields and consider building out, as appropriate, emphasis on industry-applications of research and graduate work.
- e. Push individual Colleges to create spaces and support mechanisms for graduate-student parents (nursing rooms, child play rooms, etc.)
- f. Create an easily accessible, up-to-date, searchable online faculty-research database.
- g. Build an app for the faculty-research database, a graduate student-community communication app, and increase the use of social media to build community across the UGA graduate student population. These tools would support interdisciplinarity and increased awareness of current research among faculty and graduate students.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations on improving UGA's recruitment and retention of graduate students. We appreciate your attention and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Ann Hollifield