



The University of Georgia

Teaching Academy®

Date: March 28, 2015

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

From: Organizational Structures and Policies Break-out Group: Eddie Watson and Brock Tessman (*Facilitators*), Malcolm Adams, Mike Azain, Barbara Biesecker, Danielle Bray, Ron Cervero, Julie Luft, Nancy Manley, Erik Ness and Bill Vencill

Re: Recommendations for Graduate Program Organizational Structures and Policies

Dear Provost Whitten,

The Organizational Structures and Policies Break-Out Group at the 2015 Academic Affairs Faculty Symposium enjoyed a vibrant conversation focused on innovative and meaningful adjustments to the University of Georgia's structures and policies designed to increase the quality and quantity of graduate education at the University. Specifically, we sought to identify and remove barriers to innovation and develop new ideas for policies that could facilitate and incentivize faculty and department efforts in this area. As we developed our recommendations, we found that they fell into two distinct types: First, we present in some detail a set of larger-scale problems each followed by a proposed solution, and second, a list of smaller-scale action items.

Problem 1- Interdisciplinary challenges: A current barrier to the generation of new interdisciplinary and integrative graduate programs is the lack of clear mechanisms for their rapid generation and approval, coupled with the requirement that they be housed within a department or institute. As a result, each new programmatic idea requires "buy-in" from an existing department or institute, which may view it as in competition with existing disciplinary programs. In the absence of an appropriate existing unit, generation of a new institute is required to develop the program, in addition to the time and effort required to get new programs approved through the entire university structure. Such programs can then become "edifices" in their own rights, proliferating administrative structures that cannot easily respond to new directions in graduate training, research, and education.

Solution 1: One approach to this problem is the generation of a broad-based degree program in Integrative or Interdisciplinary Research, under which new training programs could be developed, run, and evaluated in a much more fluid manner. Such an organizational structure could provide a more nimble mechanism for creation and execution of graduate training programs that cross units, colleges, and disciplines, as well as a centralized mechanism for the provision of funding and administrative support. It is critical in such a model that credit for the students devolve to the existing unit in which the faculty mentors serve. This policy would make such programs “value-added” for, rather than competitive with, existing disciplinary programs and encourage cross-disciplinary ideas that work in partnership with existing disciplinary programs.

Problem 2 - Anticipation of Emerging Areas: UGA lacks the ability to anticipate when it comes to launching new programs, especially interdisciplinary ones, and establishing new structures to support cross-disciplinary research.

Solution 2: We propose the creation of a “Big Ideas Think Tank” (BITT) to support the development of cutting edge graduate programs and research at UGA. The BITT will facilitate strategic thinking about emerging trends in higher education and identify specific opportunities for the University to leap ahead of peer and aspirational universities and become a leader in areas of increasing or predicted importance.

Problem 3- Alignment of Graduate Programs with Learning Objectives: The current system of graduate program requirements often mandates specific numbers or types of courses, and is largely focusing on traditional instruction models. This system thus does not readily align with the knowledge with which students enter graduate school, nor does it provide graduate faculty flexibility to tailor their instructional methods to graduate student learning. This type of approach views graduate students as similar, not unique individuals.

Solution 3: We propose that greater flexibility be introduced to graduate student programming, enabling programs to incorporate emerging/effective models like competency-based education. In this type of program, graduate students are evaluated on what they know and how they progress. In such a program, graduate students would receive recognition for their prior learning experiences or would engage in supplemental graduate course work. Ultimately, the graduate program could be tailored to the graduate student.

Problem 4 - Reward System for Mentoring: Mentoring graduate students is an important part of faculty responsibility in both research and teaching. However, the mechanism for giving faculty credit for mentoring duties is unclear.

Solution 4: Models should be considered in which graduate student mentoring, including “research hours” and “directed reading hours,” counts for part of the faculty teaching load. Similarly, the credit hour funding formula could be further adjusted to increase incentives for offering graduate student courses. Since enrollment in graduate courses is often a small fraction of the enrollment in undergraduate courses, the present differential in credit hour

funding for graduate hours is not enough to equalize revenue from a typical graduate class with a typical undergraduate class.

In addition to these key larger-scale recommendations, we recommend:

1. Redirecting funds currently allocated through the Graduate School Assistantship awards to departments instead of individual students to provide greater flexibility for the recruitment of outstanding graduate students, as well as grant them an idea earlier in the admissions process of what funds they have available to recruit the very best students. The departmental allocation could be based on broader strategic objectives as determined by the Provost's Office, the VP Office of Research, and the Graduate School.
2. Re-evaluating the Graduate School policy requirements regarding credit hours as follows: (a) reconsidering the policy that PhD students who have previously earned a Master's Degree enroll for 16 additional credit hours of 8000-level course work, as these students may be better served by a different configuration of effort; and (b) re-evaluating the policy limiting graduate students to transferring 6 graduate credit hours, which can hinder efforts to recruit to UGA faculty who wish to move graduate students from their current institutions.
3. Discontinuing the Graduate School designation of "graduate faculty."

We would be happy to provide further explanation on any of these opportunities to support the faculty. Thank you for allowing us to collaborate on this important aspect of UGA's success.