

## Best Practices in Graduate Student Recruitment & Retention

### I. General Considerations in Recruitment

- **Establish a formal recruiting and retention strategy** and set realistic goals. Examine program strengths and weakness, barriers and opportunities, collect data on student outcomes. Collect student (past & present) testimonials. Identify competitors, comparators and programs you aspire be to emulate. Periodically evaluate progress with special attention to outputs rather than inputs.
- **Recognize that effective recruiting and retention** requires continual aggressive action and a collective, department-wide effort.
- **Maintain an appealing, functional and substantive webpage** that includes separate links to each faculty web page. Be sure the link is easy to navigate. Use bullets rather than excessive verbiage (critical!), provide reasons for selecting your program, data on program successes. Minimize bandwidth requirements by avoiding excessive graphics, videos etc. Consider including graduate student web pages. Provide a special link for international students that is welcoming and informative (see <http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/INTSTUDY/default.htm> for an example). Also link with the Graduate school web site that contains relevant information for prospective and current graduate students. Including current news, graduate bulletin and policies, curriculum descriptions, student achievements, upcoming events, admissions inquiries, online applications, International Student Services, etc. (see <http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/UWGrad/>).
- **Showcase your program.** Identify strengths and weakness, collect data on outcomes. Include student (past & present) testimonials. Who are your major competitors and how do you realistically compare?
- **Maintain Alumni contacts.** Keep current lists with career outcomes, develop long term relationships, request help with recruitment.
- **Provide graduate student accomplishments to Grad School** (email to [msamp@uwyo.edu](mailto:msamp@uwyo.edu)). These are put on the main Grad School web site.
- **Maintain accurate outcomes data** for graduate students (time-to-degree, attrition, achievements, careers 5yr post-graduation).
- **Participate in Award competitions.** The Graduate School sponsors the Outstanding Masters Thesis Awards, the Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Awards, The Outstanding Teaching Assistant Awards and the Distinguished Faculty Mentor Awards. Also annually the Graduate School requests nominations for national thesis/dissertation awards
- **Respond rapidly & personally to applicants.** Immediately follow up all inquires. Numerous studies clearly demonstrate that applicants generally choose the first institution to respond positively and personally to their inquiry/application.
- **Consider a “rolling admissions” policy.** Instead of application “deadlines” consider wording such as “applications for fall 2008 admissions will be evaluated until March 1, 2008. However, early applications are encouraged and will be reviewed immediately.” It is especially vital that decisions for international applicants are made as early as possible due to visa issues. Departments will gain a significant competitive advantage by evaluating

applications immediately upon receipt and responding, at least to the best applicants, on their status regarding funding, acceptance etc.

- **Identify target schools, areas, and populations** etc. for prospective students; contact faculty at “feeder” institutions, visit with students and faculty. Use every faculty/student trip as a recruiting opportunity.
- **Develop a listserv of potential applicants** and mass mail a letter of invitation to students. Often a student may not think of applying to graduate school or to a particular school until solicited to do so. Each department can develop a specific list based upon various parameters such as: membership in national or regional professional organizations, targeted schools, GRE’s, GMAT’s, referrals from faculty/alumni etc.
- **Establish effective networks**; engage alumni and current students as recruiters.
- **Provide cost sharing for campus visits** by prospective students. Consider a departmental recruiting weekend where prospective students (or the best 2 or 3) are brought in to meet with faculty and students. Use these opportunities effectively - have a defined interview process including questions designed to gauge motivation, persistence, creativity, problem-solving ability, etc. Include current grad students in the process.
- **Provide program costs** - tuition, fees, health insurance and Graduate Assistantship specifics, relative cost of living. FYI: a significant number of graduate schools do not provide fees and health insurance with a GA.

## II. General Considerations in Retention

- Set realistic goals, articulate competencies and expectations for graduate student success & assessment procedures. The lack of transparent expectations and understanding by students is the major contributing factor to attrition.
- Recognize & support faculty, graduate student efforts in recruiting and mentoring.
- Participate in Award competitions. The Graduate School sponsors the Outstanding Masters Thesis Awards, the Outstanding Doctoral Dissertation Awards, The Outstanding Teaching Assistant Awards and the Distinguished Faculty Mentor Awards. Publicize when members of your department receive these prestigious awards.
- Develop a formal orientation program. Realistically discuss program requirements, expectations, what’s necessary for teaching/research success, transitioning from undergraduate to graduate studies.
- Establish a quality (and early) mentoring association between students and faculty as soon as possible following enrollment.
- Understand that quality mentoring is a departmental responsibility.

- Attrition is minimized by careful admissions screening and explicit, Often in the best interest of student to terminate but must be done early and for the right reasons.

### **III. Principles of Effective Mentoring**

- A corporate responsibility and obligation
- Establish early interactions
- Commitment to high standards of teaching and research
- Periodic meetings & progress reports
- Student involvement in curricula issues
- Retreats-social activities
- Orientations
- Teaching training
- Programs to mentor new faculty
- Create a supportive, collegial environment
- Encourage grad student professional development
- Exit surveys

### **IV. Responsibilities of Mentors**

- Ease the undergraduate-to-graduate transition
- COMMUNICATE
- Demystify the graduate process
- Be aware of student concerns
- Meet with students regularly & often
- Establish a realistic academic program
- Assure that processes/policies are transparent
- Give constructive criticism
- Promote skills/competencies in students
- Devote time, resources & energy to student
- Help integrate student into the professional society
- Guide professional development
- Focus on outcomes necessary for success
- Be interested in and care about student success

### **V. Factors minimizing “bad” (=late in program) attrition**

- Transparent graduate management processes
- High level, dedicated mentoring
- Financial support
- Excellent program environment & resources
- Attention and commitment to a rigorous, scholarly research & teaching culture
- Mandatory progress tracking of students signed off by all parties
- Current Graduate student handbook
- Established deadlines for various milestones in program