

Transforming the University

**Final Recommendations of the
Task Force on Graduate Reform: Student Support**

Submitted on behalf of the Task Force by:

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I. Executive Summary

Mission

To create a strategic plan for identifying, recruiting, retaining, mentoring, advising, and timely graduating world-class graduate and professional students.

Deliverables

- Recommendations regarding best practices for identifying, recruiting, retaining, supporting, mentoring, advising, and timely graduating the very best intellectually curious, motivated graduate and professional students.
- Recommendations regarding ways to improve the infrastructure and culture of graduate and professional education.
- Recommendations regarding how to better integrate graduate student related policies at both the University and the collegiate levels.
- Recommendations regarding how best to convey and develop graduate and professional education at the University as a public, and not solely a private, good.
- Recommendations regarding the improvement of services, quality, efficiency, timeliness, etc., and the streamlining of processes to improve the reach and impact of graduate programs, especially programs for working adults.
- Recommendations regarding the streamlining of administrative processes, including better alignment with Enterprise systems serving undergraduate students.

Task Force Members

Patricia Jones Whyte, Director, Graduate School Diversity Office

Andrew Warta, Graduate Student, Chemical Engineering, Vice President (Finance) of the Council of Graduate Students

Diane Tedick, Director of Graduate Studies, Curriculum & Instruction

Edward Schiappa, Department Chair & Former DGS, Communication Studies

Faith Loven, Director of Graduate Studies, Communication Sciences and Disorders, Duluth

Edward Goetz, Associate Dean for Academics, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

Timothy Ebner, Department Head and former DGS, Neuroscience

Brenda Child, Former Director of Graduate Studies, American Studies

Karen Buhr, Graduate Student, Natural Resources Science and Management & President of the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly

Gary Balas, Co-Director and Director of Graduate Studies, Control Science and Dynamical Systems, Aerospace Engineering & Mechanics

Amelious Whyte (Staff to the Task Force), Chief of Staff to Vice Provost, Office for Student Affairs.

Major Recommendations

Recommendation 1: To reach the goal of having a top three world-class research institution, substantial new investment in graduate education at the University of Minnesota is required, particularly in the area of graduate student financial support.

Recommendation 2: The University of Minnesota's Graduate and Professional Schools must aggressively identify and implement the best practices in graduate student recruitment, retention, mentoring, advising, and degree completion.

Recommendation 3: The Graduate School should aggressively pursue the goal of timely degree completion for M.A. and Ph.D. students.

Recommendation 4: The Compact of each academic unit must include specific goals and proposed actions for improving graduate and professional education.

Recommendation 5: The University and collegiate units need to track carefully the possible negative effects that the new University budget model may have on graduate education.

Recommendation 6: The Graduate School's criteria and process for making funding decisions should be more precise and explicit, especially with respect to allocating Fellowship nominations and Block Grant funds. We recommend that Block Grants be made for a period of time longer than the current two-year periods.

Recommendation 7: We recommend that the allocation of new student Graduate School Fellowships should be done in a more flexible manner.

Recommendation 8: All University and College administrative units, including the Graduate School, must work to develop deeper understandings of, become more attuned to, and better serve programs with professional and working adult students. We suggest regular assessment (which might include surveys or focus groups) of programs serving this particular student population.

Recommendation 9: Graduate and professional programs must ensure that their students receive educational experiences of the highest quality and must work to improve curriculum, advising, services, and community for their working adult students.

Themes Outside of the Scope of Task Force Inquiry

In addition to producing professors and researchers, the University's graduate programs produce lawyers, doctors, nurses, public administrators, scientists, architects, artists, pharmacists, engineers, therapists, educators, business leaders, and more. Graduate education plays a vital role in training future leaders in almost every sector of public life. However, we spent less time focusing on professional and terminal M.A. programs, such as the Medical School, the Law School, the Humphrey Institute, and the Carlson School of Business, as we did programs under the auspices of the Graduate School. This was due to a lack of sufficiently broad expertise, the distinctive attributes of such programs, and the fact that another Task Force is charged with recommendations for small colleges. As a result, there may be some issues and concerns of such professional and unfunded terminal M.A. students that we have overlooked in this report.

We also began to engage issues of concern to international students, only to find the subject to be too complex for us to engage meaningfully. Because we feel that such issues are important, we provide Appendix M to begin to identify policies of special concern to international students.

II. Introduction

Because graduate education is at the heart of any successful research university, the University of Minnesota can only reach the goal of being one of the top public research universities in the United States by making graduate education one of its very highest priorities.

In the fall of 2003, more than 1.4 million individuals enrolled in graduate institutions across the United States, with nearly a million in public institutions.¹ The University of Minnesota has one of the largest populations of graduate students in the nation: In the fall semester of 2005, over 19,000 students are enrolled in graduate education at the U, about 20% of whom are international students. Students come from all 50 states and 140 countries to study here.² The University also ranks in the top ten in the nation in total advanced degrees granted.³

The Twin Cities and Duluth campuses offer over 160 graduate degree-granting programs and 31 freestanding Minors. In the last National Research Council study of doctorate programs in the United States, only two public universities had more programs included in the study.⁴ Though exact numbers are hard to determine, we believe if one counts all graduate degree-granting programs, the University has as many or more graduate degree programs as any other U.S. university. Though the sheer number of programs has taxed resources and strategic reduction is necessary, such breadth is to be expected given that the University plays a role in the state of Minnesota unlike any other major state university, functioning as the major research institution in the state and providing advanced degrees in law, medicine, public policy, business, education, engineering, humanities, design, and the social and natural sciences.

Furthermore, many graduate programs at the University of Minnesota are ranked among the best in the nation. *Fifty-three different programs are ranked among the top twenty public university graduate or professional programs in the United States, 40 of which rank in the top ten.*⁵

We believe that the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota deserves a good deal of praise for its efficient and effective administration of admissions, student progress, and fellowship programs, as well as its leadership with respect to such issues as “Ethics and Responsible Conduct of Research,” program reviews, and the training of new Directors of Graduate Studies. Despite limited resources, the Graduate School has steadily expanded its range of services, from the creation of the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs to the collection and dissemination of important data concerning graduate programs.

¹ P. Syverseon & H. Brown, *Graduate Enrollment and Degrees: 1986-2003* (Wash., D.C.: Council of Graduate Schools, 2004).

² All data concerning the University of Minnesota graduate programs are from the Graduate School’s database.

³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. See: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pas>.

⁴ National Research Council, *Research-Doctorate Programs in the United States: Continuity and Change* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1995), Appendix E.

⁵ We focused primarily on National Research Council rankings, but included rankings published by various disciplinary organizations as well as those by *U.S. News & World Report*. For a complete list of rankings and sources, see Appendix C.