

An Analysis of Western Michigan University's Graduate College Roles, Functions, and Structure

Committee Appointment and Charge: On July 22, 2010 the Graduate College Review Committee was appointed by the Provost to provide a “*preliminary analysis of the role and structure of the Graduate College, highlighting issues that the faculty should consider, and the pros and cons associated with each issue.*”

Committee Composition and Affiliation:

James Gilchrist, Vice Provost and CIO, Graduate College Review Committee Chairperson
Louann Bierlein Palmer, Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology,
Graduate Studies Council Chairperson
Tony Dennis, Director of Recruitment and Retention, Graduate College
Kieran Fogarty, Department of Occupational Therapy, Interdisciplinary Health Science PhD.
Program
Leigh Ford, Director, School of Communication, Graduate Studies Council Member
Dawn Gaymer, Associate Provost for Extended University Programs
Michelle McWilliams, Graduate Student Advisory Committee Vice Chair
Pat Munley, Chair, Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Koorosh Naghshineh, Department of Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering
Jack Ruhl, Associate Dean, Haworth College of Business
Sue Stapleton, Associate Dean, College of Arts & Sciences
Mark Wheeler, Department of Economics, Graduate Studies Council Member

Synopsis: The committee undertook the work from a perspective that placed a high value on graduate education. As such the goals and structure laid out in the March 2005 Graduate College Review report remain accurate and valid. This is well-reflected in a statement of graduate education that was prepared by the graduate studies council during the Spring 2010 semester:

The primary mission of graduate education at WMU is to prepare the next generation of professional, scholarly, and educational leaders for our stakeholders, including citizens of the region, state, nation, and world. Graduate education at WMU contributes to intellectual expansion, professional preparation, pedagogical innovation, economic development, and quality of life advancement for our students, faculty and stakeholders.

Graduate education at WMU is central to the University's identity and mission as a student centered research university. A focus on graduate education distinguishes WMU from undergraduate-intensive universities in the State of Michigan. WMU's Carnegie Foundation Research University (high research activity) classification is a result of its strong graduate programs, and as such, graduate programming is a vital asset to the University as a whole.

The committee identified and considered 13 specific questions. For each question, the committee first described the current role of the graduate college, along with the roles of other involved offices. In most cases, the committee then proposed an alternative method of doing business. The

committee also identified advantages and disadvantages for the current practices and possible alternatives. These questions and the responses appear in the body of this report.

Emerging Themes: The committee identified the following seven themes that emerged from its work.

1. The highest priority of the graduate college, and its leadership, should be to collaboratively lead the development of a vision and strategic plan for graduate education at the University. The strategic plan should be linked to resource allocation decisions in the Office of Academic Affairs. This strategic plan should:
 - include how graduate education should fit into the University's overall strategic plan and the Academic Affairs strategic plan;
 - describe how the University will sustain and advance quality in graduate education;
 - state a target for graduate enrollment, both in the total number of graduate students and the size of the graduate student body relative to the undergraduate student body; and
 - include enrollment targets for graduate programs, which would require identifying those that are to increase in size.
2. The committee reaffirms the March 2005 recommendation that *"it is important to the mission of the University that the role and stature of the Graduate College be strong, prominent and visible,"* as reflected in the individual questions considered by the committee. The committee believes that the graduate college should be a leader in assessment of graduate education and should play a more significant role in academic program planning and program accreditation. The Graduate College should have a role in the allocation of graduate assistantship funds to the academic colleges. The Graduate College should collaboratively lead the development of best practices for the operation of graduate programs, monitor compliance with those standards, and work with deans to address issues of non-compliance.
3. The graduate programs of the University include research oriented and professional oriented programs; full-time and part-time students; and main campus, regional site and EUP programs. All of these programs are vital to the mission of graduate education. The distinctions of site and delivery method should not be considered distinctions of quality. All graduate programs should meet high quality standards.
4. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) accreditation criteria provide guidance for appointment of professionally qualified and traditional academically qualified graduate faculty. The committee affirms the HLC criteria and university policy for determining graduate faculty. Additional criteria set by specific disciplines, however, should also continue be taken into account for admission to graduate faculty.
5. Graduate policies, procedures, and standards should be based on best practices. Examples of such standards can be found:

- *“Principles and Practices for Assessing the Quality of (Post)-Graduate Education and Research Training.”* This document was produced by the Council of Graduate Studies and the Group of Eight (an Australian organization).
 - Practices of Carnegie Foundation Peer Institutions
6. The committee recommends renewed attention to the operational aspects of graduate education in order to address apparent confusion, ambiguity, and inefficiencies. The committee recommends that the Graduate College, in consultation with the academic college graduate directors and the Graduate Studies Council, review the procedures and policies of the Graduate College. The formation of a graduate director’s advisory council is proposed for this purpose as well as for ongoing review of policy changes, in addition to the Graduate Studies Council. All policies and procedures should be consistent with the graduate catalog, demonstrably contribute to the quality of graduate education, and be administered effectively and efficiently. Policies and procedures must take into account the limited resources in the academic departments and in the Graduate College. The committee recommends that first priority be given to examining the admissions procedures, which are generally considered to be overly complex and inconsistently followed. The committee also recommends that the Graduate College have a prominent role in ensuring that policies are fully implemented, including the annual review of graduate students, requirements that departments provide a graduate student manual and teaching assistant training.
7. The committee recommends that the Graduate College start an initiative for student professional development. As stated in the March 2005 report, the Graduate College *“should monitor and/or provide services that address the diverse academic and non-academic concerns of graduate students including counseling students about a range of personal, financial, and academic matters...how to interview, career development strategies, vita writing, etc.”*

Review Questions: The following are the 13 specific issues considered by the committee in its review of the roles and functions of the graduate college:

1. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **developing and communicating the vision and strategy of graduate education at WMU?**

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Office of Academic Affairs: Shared role with each area. One part of the Academic Affairs strategic plan addresses Graduate Education.
- b. Graduate College: Shared role with each area.
- c. Academic Colleges: Shared role with each area.
- d. Departments: Shared role with each area.

Advantage: Provides a private definition of accountability within the limits of resources, such that departments and colleges can set their individual goals.

Disadvantage: With obligations widely shared, there currently isn’t a vision and strategic planning document for the Graduate College.

ALTERNATIVE: Charge the Graduate College with leading the development of a vision and strategic plan that would include the elements listed earlier in this report. This would be developed collaboratively with graduate directors, the Graduate Studies Council, deans, chairs, directors, and the provost's office.

Advantage: Provide a better use of limited resources while advancing quality and providing transparency. Connect policies and resources to actions. Since the higher education environment is constantly changing, a strategic plan will help bridge the changes.

Disadvantage: Possibility for conflict in development of the plan and integration with the Academic Affairs strategic plan.

2. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **quality control over graduate full/associate faculty membership?**

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Faculty Senate, via the Graduate Studies Council: Recommends policy.
- b. Department: Nominates faculty. The Chair approves/denies nominations. If the department does not have a statement of criteria regarding approval they are bound to the AAUP contract language with consultation of the Academic Bargaining Director.
- c. Academic College: The Dean approves/denies nominations.
- d. Graduate College: The Dean approves/denies membership.
- e. Office of Academic Affairs: No role.

Advantage: Provides the opportunity for consistency, with all nominations reviewed at each level.

Disadvantage: There is no formal appeal process. Administrators may choose to act in a manner that is inconsistent with university policy, since there is no appeal of a decision to deny graduate faculty status.

ALTERNATIVE 1:

- a. Associate members would be nominated by the Department. The Department Chair and the College Dean would approve/deny the membership.
- b. Full graduate faculty member would be nominated by the Department. The Department Chair, College Dean, and Graduate College would approve/deny the membership.
- c. All nominations must be according to existing policy with requirement for the Department Chair to document how faculty members nominated meet the department and university criteria.
- d. Where applicable, all policies need to take into account the accreditation standards for each accredited professional program.

Advantage: Creates consistency with existing policy on criteria for membership and provides review at all levels for full membership.

Disadvantage: Offers significant room for interpretation of policy at the level of associate membership.

ALTERNATIVE 2:

- a. Graduate faculty eligible only to teach graduate level courses would be nominated by the Department. The Department Chair and the College Dean would approve/deny the membership.
- b. Graduate faculty eligible to serve on dissertation and thesis committees would be nominated by the Department. The Department Chair, College Dean, and Graduate College would approve/deny the membership.

Advantage: Creates accountability at department and college levels for teaching courses, with higher level of accountability for thesis and dissertation committees.

Disadvantage: Creates a chance for greater inconsistencies and would require policy changes.

3. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **graduate enrollment management, including recruiting and student diversity?**

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Graduate College: Provides leadership role in diversity efforts. Leads and facilitates recruitment efforts with support of Departments.
- b. Departments: Leads their program recruitment and retention.
- c. Haenicke Institute: Recruits international students.
- d. EUP: Recruits with support of Departments.
- e. Academic Colleges: No role.
- f. Office of Academic Affairs: No role.

Advantage: Departments have the primary role for recruitment for their programs.

Disadvantage: Disjointed (or lack thereof) recruitment strategy across all colleges and departments. Very little centralized financial support for recruiting.

ALTERNATIVE: Establish centralized funding and support for graduate student recruitment. The budget would be distributed from the Graduate College to the Departments. This would require the development of a plan for the growth of graduate programs at the University.

Advantage: Creates a strategic approach to recruiting and graduate program planning.

Disadvantage: Demand placed on limited resources.

4. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **graduate admissions processing?**

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Domestic:
 - i. Admissions Office: Accepts student applications. Advises students on application completion. Distributes applications to Departments. Once the

Department has approved/denied the student, the Admissions Office processes the admission documentation and notifies the student, including entry into Banner.

- ii. Departments: Approves/denies admission and notifies the student and the Admissions Office. Departments access documents through the ImageNow system.
 - iii. Graduate College: No role.
 - iv. Office of Academic Affairs: No role.
 - v. Academic Colleges: No role.
- b. International:
- i. Haenicke Institute: Accepts student applications. Evaluates credentials. Distributes applications to the Departments. Once the Department has approved/denied the student, the department notifies the Haenicke Institute, which processes the admission documentation and notifies the student, including entry into Banner.
 - ii. Departments: Approves/denies admission.
 - iii. Admissions Office: No role.
 - iv. Graduate College: No role.
 - v. Office of Academic Affairs: No role.
 - vi. Academic Colleges: No role.

Advantage: Departments have the primary role for admissions decisions for their programs.

Disadvantage: Confusion by departments about processing has resulted in variations in processing procedures. Admission decisions are often made too late. Un-known funding may be contributing to decision delays. Often, departments do not send paperwork to the Admissions Office until after the student has accepted/rejected the department offer letter, resulting in official reports that don't accurately reflect those decisions. Delays in process in any office can lead to losing students and to confusion about where an application is in process.

ALTERNATIVE 1: Perform a review of the Graduate College and admissions offices procedures. Charge the Graduate College Interim Dean to review the admission processes and paperwork in collaboration with the Vice Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management, Dean of the Haenicke Institute, and the Director of Admissions, with additional input from the Departments. The review should pay attention to simplifying and streamlining the processes and create a focus on customer service. New processes should be standardized, provide necessary flexibility, and be well documented.

Advantage: Provides clarification of the process while improving efficiency and customer service. The improved processes will provide better information on graduate recruitment.

Disadvantage: It is not an immediate solution.

ALTERNATIVE 2: Require all admissions materials to be sent to the Admissions office for scanning. This would include written material required by the individual departments. The

Admissions office would be responsible for distributing materials to the Graduate College and the Departments electronically.

Advantage: Allows for faster and more efficient processing/sharing of admission materials. Prospective students would send all of their admissions materials to the same office.

Disadvantage: Increased resources and time. This could create a possibility of collecting materials that are not needed. There is limited storage space for the materials.

5. What is the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **student financial support including allocation of financial aid and GA/DA funds?**

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Grant Based Funding
 - i. Grants and Contracts Office: Approves/denies hire according to allocation of the grant. Informs the Graduate College of new hires.
 - ii. Department: Processes hiring documents. Supplies copies to the Grants and Contracts Office and the Graduate College.
 - iii. Graduate College: Tracks the hiring process.
 - iv. Office of Academic Affairs: No role.
 - v. Academic Colleges: No role.
- b. Graduate College Funded Awards (i.e. Doctoral Fellowships, Thurgood Marshal, GSAC, etc.)
 - i. Graduate College: Accepts student applications. Convenes review committees per award type. The committees, which are made up of faculty, approve/deny student applications.
 - ii. GSAC: Accepts student applications from current GSAC members. Convenes review committee comprised of the GSAC leadership, the Graduate College Dean, SALP advisor, RSO financial advisor, and GSAC members at large. The committee interviews the candidates and makes nominations. A majority vote of the GSAC membership elects the Chair and Vice Chair, thus awarding them both GA positions.
- c. Provost Funded:
 - i. Office of Academic Affairs: Provides lump sum budget to the academic colleges.
 - ii. Academic College: The Dean distributes funding to the departments and tracks financial distribution.
 - iii. Department: Recommends hire to Graduate College. Once approved by the Graduate College, the Department makes offer and processes hiring documents.
 - iv. Graduate College: Approves/denies hire.

Advantage: Funding allocation within the colleges is in close proximity to the programs and offers flexibility within colleges. The deans have the maximum influence in the allocations.

Disadvantage: No role for Graduate College in allocations among programs.

ALTERNATIVE 1: For provost-funded GA/DA's the office of Academic Affairs provides lump sum budget to the Graduate College Dean who distributes it to the Departments.

Advantage: Creates a centralized knowledge of resource needs and an advocacy role for the Graduate College.

Disadvantage: Removes Academic College level input/participation.

ALTERNATIVE 2: For provost-funded GA/DA's, the office of Academic Affairs provides partial lump sum budget to the Graduate College Dean and a partial lump sum budget to the Academic College Dean. Both deans distribute it to the Departments separately.

Advantage: Creates an advocacy role for the Graduate College.

Disadvantage: Graduate College and the academic colleges could be working at cross purposes.

Note: A problem underlying all funding procedures is the sense that funds are generally inadequate both as to the number of students supported and the amount of support available. This limits the size of graduate programs and makes recruiting the top applicants difficult. A significant problem is the differential between resident and non-resident tuition.

6. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **professional development (e.g. statistical, teaching, writing, etc.) assistance to students while enrolled, including regional sites?**

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Departments: Faculty assist their students. Departments have a role in terms of traditional classes, mentoring of students, thesis and dissertation committees. Some Departments offer courses on statistics, teaching, and research. Requirement that departments offer TA training seems to have not been fully implemented.
- b. Graduate College: Offers statistical assistance for doctoral students, either by workshop or one-on-one session. Reviews proposals and offers feedback on structure, but not for writing. Provides SPSS workshops.
- c. Writing Center: Assists students when referred by faculty, but mostly undergraduate students.
- d. Academic Colleges: Provide teaching orientation each semester for new TAs in some colleges.
- e. Statistics Department: Operates a statistics lab which is available to all faculty and students.
- f. Office of Information Technology: Offers reduced pricing of SPSS.
- g. Graduate Student Association: Has offered a workshop on research.
- h. Office of Academic Affairs: No role.

Advantage: Help at the department level is discipline-specific.

Disadvantage: Inconsistent support from departments. Services are not all available to regional sites. There isn't an organized teacher training program across departmental and college units. TAO contract limits training prior to semester start due to work start dates.

ALTERNATIVE 1: All student services available on main campus will also be available at regional sites. This would not require full-time staffing for all services at the regional sites, but rather part-time staffing hours scheduled for those services at the regional sites.

Advantage: Bring WMU in compliance with HLC. Offer the same quality of services for all graduate students regardless of location.

Disadvantage: Increased cost. Possibly impose an obligation for those offices that provide the defined services.

ALTERNATIVE 2: Create a Graduate College sponsored course in teacher training for those areas that do not already offer training via practicum or other course, to be managed by the Graduate College in conjunction with the Academic Deans. The possibly exists for this to be an on-line course. A role for the Office of Faculty Development in this endeavor should be considered.

Advantage: Produce better trained TAs and offer better teaching. Create better prepared students for the job market. Better use of existing resources.

Disadvantage: Would require curriculum changes. May require change to TAO contract if to be offered prior to the start of semester. There are limitations from current staffing shortage.

7. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **administrative review, oversight and enforcement, of graduate education policy?**

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Graduate College: Serves as the authority. Provides a leadership role when setting policy. Participates when there is a conflict.
- b. Faculty Senate, via Grad Studies Council: Recommends policy and reviews changes in policy.
- c. Department: Recommends and follows University policy.
- d. Academic Colleges: Follow policy. Participates when there is a conflict.
- e. Office of Academic Affairs: Approves policy and policy changes.

Advantage: Provides local control.

Disadvantage: The Graduate College has no authority to enforce policies if departments do not comply. Graduate College does not control any resources of the departments and does not have any authority over the departments.

ALTERNATIVE: Create a Graduate College advisory council made up of the academic college graduate directors. The graduate directors' advisory council would work to consistently implement policy and make policy recommendations to the Graduate Studies

Council, as well as review changes to policy and share best practices, in order to better serve graduate students.

Advantage: Enhanced communication.

Disadvantage: Additional level of bureaucracy.

8. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **program and/or student learning outcome assessment, including time to degree completion?**

CURRENT PRACTICES:

a. Program assessment:

- i. Departments: With use of TracDat, they develop student objectives, create and revise assessment plans, and conduct assessment on a continual basis (most often by departments which are professionally accredited).
- ii. Office of Academic Affairs: Office of Institutional Effectiveness provides support as needed. University Assessment Steering Committee reviews and provides feedback on departmental assessment plans. Provost requests and responds to the Dean's Annual Assessment Reports.
- iii. Academic Colleges: Varies, depending on program accreditation.
- iv. Graduate College: No role.

b. Time to degree completion monitoring:

- i. Graduate College: Tracks some data through student surveys and conducted the NRC survey.
- ii. Departments: Many doctoral programs participated in NRC survey. This was a one-time event, without follow-up or reported data.
- iii. Office of Academic Affairs: No role.
- iv. Academic Colleges: No role.

Advantage: None.

Disadvantage: There is not a consistent business practice/procedure for tracking the time to degree completion data, so critical events are not reliably recorded in Banner. No central support. Available data are not consistent from year to year.

ALTERNATIVE 1: Graduate College to take a leadership role in assessment of graduate programs, including the setting of assessment standards.

Advantage: Creates an advocacy role for the Graduate College in relation to assessment resources. Provides the ability to recognize and analyze assessment patterns across programs.

Disadvantage: Possibly creates an additional level of bureaucracy. Additional resources required.

ALTERNATIVE 2: Graduate College to lead efforts to standardize reporting mechanisms and associated business practices in managing graduate student admission and enrollment.

Advantage: Creates a recruitment tool. Will allow for better data to be collected and used for assessing graduate education and reporting grant allocations.

Disadvantage: Could create a need for additional staffing at various levels.

9. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **academic program review**?

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Office of Academic Affairs: Office of Institutional Effectiveness oversees process and provides funding for outside reviewers. Provost provides resource allocation letter following review.
- b. Academic Colleges: Provide support to departments as needed. Associate Dean assigned. College reviews report and provides feedback.
- c. Departments: Conducts review on scheduled basis.
- d. Graduate College: Dean reviews and provides comments.
- e. Office of Institutional Research: Provides departmental data.
- f. Haenicke Institute: No role.
- g. EUP: No role.

Advantage: Departments have primary responsibility for reviews.

Disadvantage: Little engagement of Graduate College until the end of the process.

ALTERNATIVE 1: Academic Deans/Chairs collaborate with the Graduate College at the beginning of the academic program planning process to identify what assistance the Graduate College could provide. Create a role for EUP and Haenicke Institute in the process.

Advantage: The Graduate College can provide a comparative analysis of graduate programs across the University to the external reviewer. The Graduate College gains knowledge about each graduate program and can provide input in the academic program planning process.

Disadvantage: Additional time requirement for the Graduate College. Questionable if the Graduate College involvement will add an advantage in each departmental case.

10. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **professional accreditation of the department/program**?

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Departments: Provide leadership in accreditation of discipline.
- b. Office of Academic Affairs: Office of Institutional Effectiveness provides support as needed, including funding of annual accreditation fees.
- c. Academic Colleges: Provide support in college-wide accreditation as well as individual department accreditation.
- d. Graduate College: No role.

Advantage: Departments have primary responsibility for accreditation compliance.

Disadvantage: Possibility that the Graduate College develops a limited understanding/awareness of accreditation, including how accreditation might affect eligible teachers for graduate courses and applicable curriculum.

ALTERNATIVE: Create a method for clear communication regarding accreditation across campus. Require the Graduate College to have an understanding, and to support, accreditation requirements for all professionally accredited programs.

Advantage: Graduate faculty appointments will meet accreditation requirements. The Graduate College gains a greater knowledge of program accreditation.

Disadvantage: Increased workload for the Graduate College.

11. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **quality control over theses and dissertations**?

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Departments: The advisor and committee provide a leadership role in quality review.
- b. Graduate College: Once successfully defended the Graduate College reviews for regulatory compliance (e.g., HSIRB) and formatting.
- c. Office of Student Judiciary: Participates if plagiarism is charged.
- d. Office of Academic Affairs: No role.
- e. Academic Colleges: No role.

Advantage: Primary responsibility at the department level.

Disadvantage: Uneven quality control across departments and colleges.

ALTERNATIVE: Include an electronic scan for plagiarism as part of the Graduate College review process. This will require electronic submission of student work.

Advantage: Creates a level of authority for the Graduate College.

Disadvantage: The current software used for this function is considered controversial. This alternative would require changes to policy. Consideration would have to be given to copyright and patent issues that might arise from such scanning.

12. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **faculty research support/development (via support of graduate students), and advocating for grants and funding**?

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Academic Colleges: Set expectations for departments, tenure review, promotion review, matching support of faculty time and/or monies. Associate Dean assigned.
- b. Graduate College: Provides fellowships for student workers in some labs. Provides grant writing training for graduate students. Provides support for student travel and research projects in conjunction with faculty research.
- c. Vice President of Research: Provides research development awards to faculty. Provides training on ethics, HSIRB, grant writing, and other research topics.

- d. Departments: Endowments for research in some department.
- e. Office of Academic Affairs: No role.
- f. Development office: No on-going role.

NO ALTERNATIVE PROPOSED

13. What should be the role and responsibility of the following offices regarding **resolution of student concerns (when the student feels they are being treated unfairly)**?

CURRENT PRACTICES:

- a. Departments: First in line for reporting.
- b. Academic Colleges: Second in line for reporting.
- c. Graduate College: Final dispute resolution.
- d. Office of Academic Affairs: Participates when students have initiated complaints.
- e. Ombudsman Office: Participates when students have initiated complaints.

Advantage: Allows for exceptions to be made in circumstances where warranted.

Disadvantage: Policies are sometimes not followed and involve multiple rounds of appeals. Multiple policy documents exist, which are not always consistent. The approval process for updating policy is unclear.

ALTERNATIVE:

- a. Policies that apply to requirements for students should always be explicit in the graduate catalog and any additional policies should be consistent with that document, as is done with the undergraduate catalog.
- b. Practices regarding grade disputes and program dismissals should follow the catalog, including the stipulation that the decisions of the Grade and Program Dismissals Appeals Committee are final, which does not provide for further review of those decisions.

Advantage: Consistency in policies across departments and colleges.

Disadvantage: None.