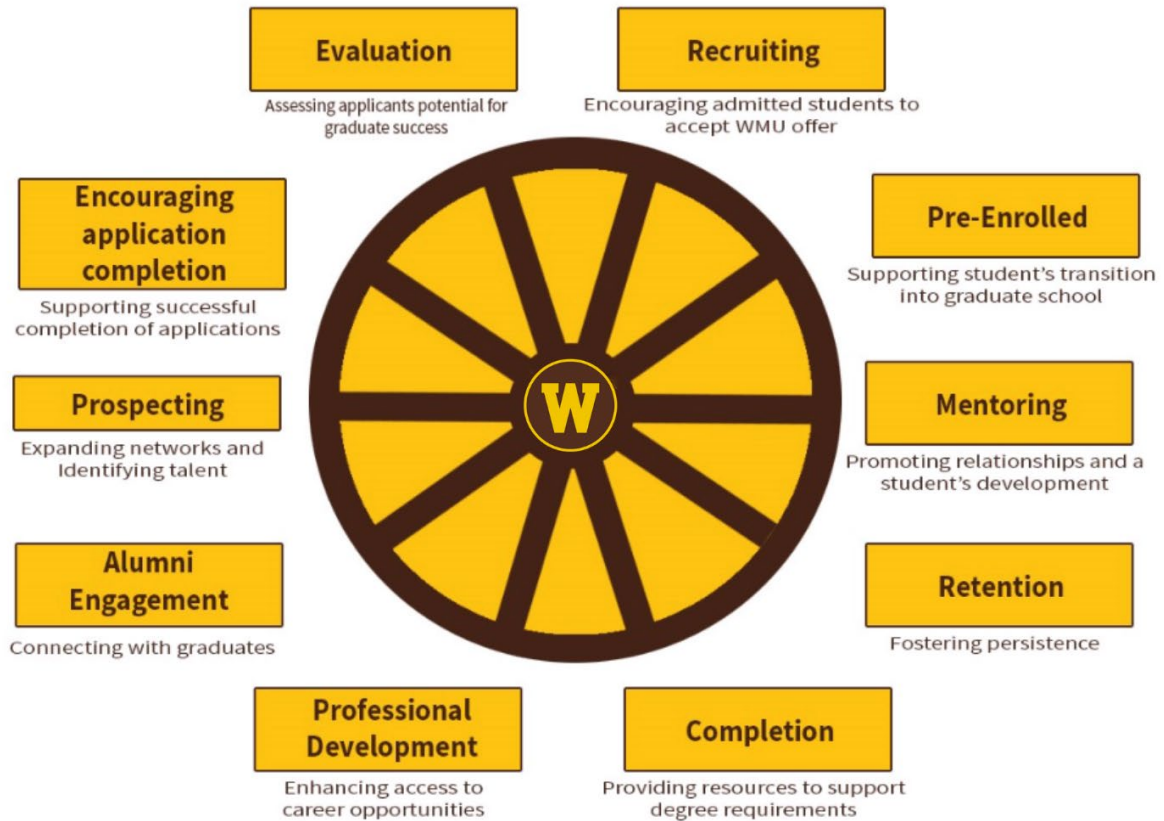


Western Michigan University

Toolkit of Best Graduate Student Recruitment, Admission and Retention Practices



How to Use the Toolkit

This toolkit is modified from the original documents from the University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School and University of California – Berkley diversity initiative. Recognizing that our portfolio of graduate programs is unique, we value the differences in the way that applicants are evaluated. The purpose of the toolkit is to provide departments with helpful guides and best practices to strengthen their graduate recruitment and admission strategies and support their retention initiatives at Western Michigan University (WMU). By using the toolkit, we hope to attract excellent graduate students who will contribute to WMU’s standard of being learner centered, discovery driven and globally engaged through a culture of inclusivity.

Key Features of Graduate Education

Course Delivery Options

While more than 90% of institutions offer traditional semester programs, three out of four graduate students prefer term options besides traditional semesters. For institutions that offer more flexibility, highlighting that can offer a key benefit. For those that do not, consider incorporating shorter terms to attract students.

As with term offerings, graduate students desire flexibility and choice in how programs are offered. Online learning in particular is in demand by graduate students who may be balancing professional and personal commitments that make it difficult to take classes in person. Nearly half, 43%, of post-traditional graduate students prefer partially online/hybrid courses compared to 29% who preferred fully traditional classroom courses.

Responsiveness

In today’s instant age, students expect responses quicker than ever. Requiring a prospective student to wait more than 24 hours before a follow-up with an enrollment representative is no longer acceptable. Students expect institutions to respond quickly.

Timely enrollment decisions are critical in graduate recruitment. More than 80% of graduate students enroll at the institution that admits them first. Institutions with long admissions decision cycles stand to allow competitors to enroll students that would have otherwise selected them.

1. Outreach/Recruitment

- Identify individuals who should be in the applicant pool. Be sure that you are expanding your network of prospective students and be aware of the places where talented students from diverse backgrounds are being developed. Let’s include some examples of these places, like when giving talks or attending conferences.
- Use different strategies to assist in connecting with students who should be in the applicant pool (e.g. social media, LinkedIn, other online platforms).
- Identify graduate admissions committee members includes faculty who are committed to diversity and equal educational opportunities in graduate education.
- Include accurate and up-to-date information on the program website. This is often the first point of contact for prospective students and encourages them to reach out personally with questions and/or apply.

- Consult with current students in the program about what attracted them to the program/institution and how the program can improve upon their marketing strategies.
- Encourage applicants to ask questions and get answers.
- Utilize the Graduate College's Graduate Ambassador program as a resource for prospective graduate students to get a student perspective to questions and/or concerns about graduate education at Western Michigan University.
- Develop a communications plan from prospect to enrolled (a note from the Dean, alumni, current graduate students, registration, etc.)
- Invite prospective and admitted students to campus
- Send out up to date information on housing on campus and the local community
- Inform students of all resources, including resources outside of WMU (NSF, NIH, GEM, Woodrow Wilson).
- Follow-up with prospects who submitted GRE scores, but have not yet applied

2. Selection

- Take a holistic review approach to evaluating applications. Consider admitting students on the basis of promise and potential than solely traditional indicators.
- Be aware of unconscious bias in the selection and evaluation of applicants.
- Consider diversity in prospective students' backgrounds in creating cohorts of students with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences that will enrich the current student community.
- Be actively recruiting admitted students. Enlist faculty, staff, and graduate student to maintain communication with the list of admitted students.
- Invite students to participate in campus departmental activities.
- Notify the Graduate College of any students who are admitted but decline their seat.

3. Mentorship

- Understand that quality mentoring is a program-level responsibility. Encourage students to choose a mentor within the program/university.
- Provide students with guidelines for a successful relationship with mentor(s).
- Encourage faculty to take part in mentoring relationships with current students. Faculty and students should work together to develop plans that allows for assessing the students' progress to learning and professional goals.

4. Retention

- Provide a thorough orientation for the program including requirements, expectations, guidelines and resources for success. Offer a contact person within the department who is available for questions and/or concerns from students.
- Provide students with resources to be successful during each stage of the academic program.
- Encourage students' attendance at graduate student events/activities university-wide initiatives to allow them to connect with others at the institution.

- Hold annual reviews with students to discuss their academic progress and professional development. Annual review forms for master's and doctoral students are available at wmich.edu/grad/forms.
- Recognize success and reward the achievements of the program and individuals within the program.

5. Professional Development

- Encourage students to take part in professional development opportunities at the institution
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- Advise students apply for funding opportunities that can assist with travel costs, fees for professional development, including the [Graduate Student Travel Grant](#) and the [Graduate Student Association Conference Grant](#)
- Highlight the benefits and engagement opportunities students have at the program level as well as at the institution (e.g. program specific student organizations, the Graduate Student Association)

6. Alumni Engagement

- Create an alumni component in your recruitment strategy to help alumni get involved in the recruitment process.
- Connect with alumni through different outlets to inform them about upcoming recruitment activities and events as well as special campus events (e.g. newsletters, social media, etc.)
- Create a diverse alumni board presenting your field and engage them with current students.
- Encourage alumni to take on a mentorship role with current students.

Resources

- The Graduate College website wmich.edu/grad
- The Graduate College Admission and Enrollment Resources wmich.edu/grad/faculty-staff/admission-resources
- The Council of Graduate Schools Holistic Review of Graduate Admissions cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/CGS_HolisticReview_final_web.pdf
- 2020 Marketing and Recruitment Practices for Graduate Students Report ruffalonl.com/papers-research-higher-education-fundraising/graduate-student-recruitment-report/
- Best Practices in Graduate Student Recruitment hanoverresearch.com/reports-and-briefs/research-brief-best-practices-in-graduate-student-recruitment/