



TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY®

GRADUATE SCHOOL TASK FORCE REPORT

Texas A&M University

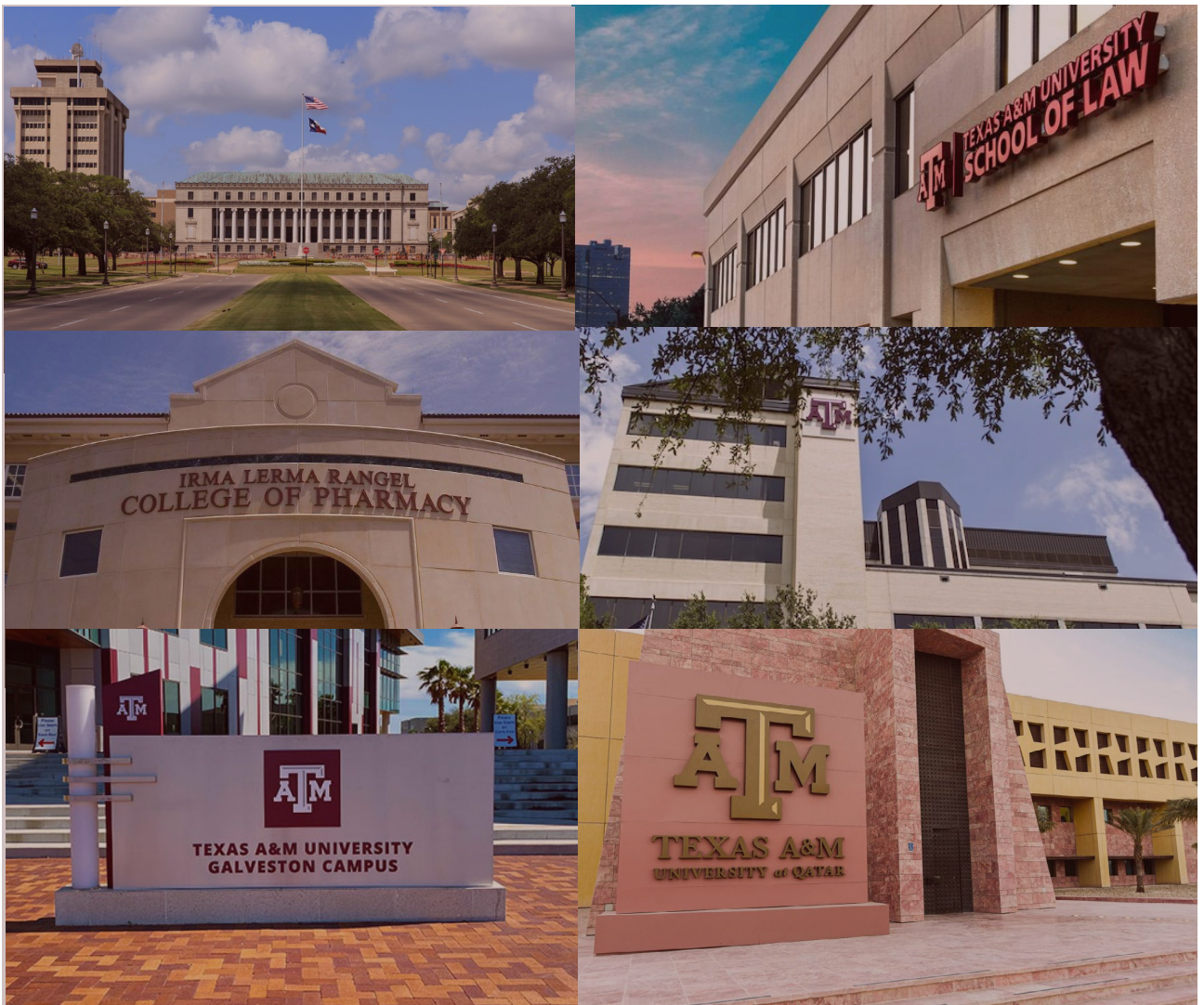


Table of Contents

Cover Memo to Provost	3
Graduate School Task Force Charge	5
Summary of Task Force Spring-Summer 2020 Efforts and Outcomes.....	6
Task Force Fall 2020-Spring 2021 Efforts	8
Summary of Subcommittee Recommendations	10
Task Force Open Forum Overview	12
Task Force High Priority Recommendations	13
Concluding Remarks	17
Appendices	
1. Task Force Membership	18
2. Subcommittees Membership	20
3. Master’s Subcommittee Report	21
4. Doctoral Subcommittee Report	38
5. First Professional Doctoral Subcommittee Report	45
6. Subcommittee Recommendation Table	50
7. TAMU Strategic Plan 2020-2025 -- Grad & Prof Education.....	56
8. Graduate and Professional Education KPIs	57
9. Open Forum Presentation	58

Memo to the Provost

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES



Karen Butler-Purry, Ph.D., P.E.
Associate Provost and Dean
Graduate and Professional School

April 21, 2021
MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Mark H. Weichold
Interim Provost and Executive Vice President

From: Dr. Karen Butler-Purry
Associate Provost and Dean
Graduate and Professional School

Subject: Graduate School Task Force Report

Texas A&M University “seeks to assume a place of preeminence among public universities” – a mission that will be realized through “transformational education, ground-breaking research, and a university community unfettered by discipline boundaries but focused on society’s vital challenges.”¹ Graduate and professional education plays a pivotal role in helping the university achieve these aims.

To that end, a Graduate School Task Force convened in 2020 to gather input and provide recommendations on the structure, scope, and activities of a new graduate school. In the subsequent report,² the Task Force recommended that the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies transition to the Graduate and Professional School.³ Provost Fierke and President Young accepted this proposal, and the change occurred on January 1, 2021.

The Graduate School Task Force also identified a number of activities to undertake during FY21, including: (1) gathering broad input to address the comments, suggestions for improvement, and issues identified during their stakeholder meetings; (2) identifying changes needed to achieve the graduate and professional studies goals in the 2020-2025 University Strategic Plan,⁴ and (3) providing recommendations to be addressed at the university level.

¹ Decade of Excellence: The vision 2020-2030. https://provost.tamu.edu/Provost_v19/media/Media/Assets/pdfs-strategicplan/Vision2020-2030.pdf

² Graduate School Task Force Report #1: <https://grad.tamu.edu>

³ Graduate School Formation: <https://grad.tamu.edu>

⁴ Decade of Excellence: Strategic plan 2020-2025. https://provost.tamu.edu/Provost_v19/media/Media/Assets/pdfs-strategicplan/StrategicPlan2020-2025.pdf

To achieve these aims, the Task Force formed three subcommittees, focusing on master's, doctoral, and first professional doctorate education, respectively. Over the course of several months, the subcommittees collected data, held town hall meetings, met with constituent groups, and interviewed stakeholders, among other activities. Each subcommittee submitted a report in February 2021.

After aggregating the subcommittee recommendations, the Graduate School Task Force drafted seven (7) priority actions which were refined with stakeholder input at an Open Forum:

1. Recruitment and expanded graduate student funding.
2. Enhance professional development for faculty, staff, and students.
3. Promote applicability and make services widely available for graduate and professional students.
4. Support campuses outside Bryan/College Station and the first professional programs.
5. Improve and streamline administrative processes.
6. Improve marketing and communications.
7. Enhance mentoring, advising, and community building.

This report outlines the specific priorities in greater depth and prescribes specific action steps.

The seven priorities align with and advance goals of the 2020-2025 University Strategic Plan and have therefore been assigned high priority status. The Task Force envisions these selected recommendations as directly contributing to the Strategic Plan Key Performance Indicators and will measure them accordingly.

Finally, the Graduate School Task Force recommends that the university collectively prioritize these actions. That is, it is through the combined efforts of the Graduate and Professional School, academic programs, departments, colleges, and university offices that meaningful change in graduate and professional education can be achieved.

Graduate School Task Force Charge

As outlined in its Report #1, the charge of the Graduate School Task Force was to:

- During the 2020 spring and summer semesters, focus on gathering input from stakeholders [e.g. faculty senate, council of deans, GOC Deans, URC Deans, graduate students, CPI, etc.] on the establishment of a Graduate School and its scope.
- Continue into the next academic year (2020-2021) with a charge to provide recommendations on changes needed to achieve the graduate and professional education goals in the 2020-2025 University strategic plan.

Summary of Task Force Spring – Summer 2020 Efforts and Outcomes

The Graduate School Task Force convened in February 2020 to develop a proposal and gather input from graduate and professional education stakeholders. Task Force members included 13 faculty members, 5 department administrators, 4 college administrators, 1 degree program chair, 2 staff members, 3 graduate students, and 8 executive committee members representing university administrative units (see Appendix 1 for a complete listing).

The Task Force engaged with stakeholders across the campus community, including deans, associate deans, department heads, faculty members, and graduate and professional students. Presentations were made by Dr. Karen Butler-Purry. Members of the Task Force attended the presentations to provide support and emphasize the importance of broad input from a variety of stakeholder groups. The schedule of campus presentations and meetings is shown in Exhibit 1.

Date	Activity
February 26, 2020	Task Force Meeting 1
March 17, 2020	Presentation made to Graduate and Professional Student Government Senate
April 1, 2020	Presentation made to Council of Deans
April 7, 2020	Presentation made to Department Head Steering Committee
April 8, 2020	Presentation made to Council of Principal Investigators
May 4, 2020	Presentation made to Graduate Operations Committee deans
May 13, 2020	Presentation made to University Research Council deans
June 15, 2020	Presentation made to Faculty Senate
June 22, 2020	Task Force Meeting 2
July 2020	Task Force Report #1 submitted to Provost Fierke

In the first report, the Task Force made the following recommendations for graduate and professional education stakeholder groups

- Graduate Unit: Work currently overseen by the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies will be transformed into work of the Graduate and Professional School.
- Graduate Faculty: Faculty members currently hold graduate committee faculty appointment affiliation with academic department(s) or college(s) and the university. With the change,

faculty members will also have an appointment/affiliation with the Graduate and Professional School. Nominations for graduate committee faculty will continue to originate with faculty in academic department(s) or college(s).

- Graduate Council: (1) The Associate Provost and Dean will remain a non-voting member and become chair of the Graduate Council. (2) Three new subcommittees will be formed: master's and doctoral curricular review, first professional doctorate curricular review, and graduate and professional policies and procedures.
- Graduate and Professional Program Leadership: (1) The Graduate and Professional School will work with the Graduate Council to define a minimum set of functional roles and responsibilities for the individual(s) providing graduate and professional program leadership in departments and colleges (for college level graduate and professional programs). The title for these individuals will vary based on the practice of each academic unit. Some examples of titles used for these individuals include: graduate program director, department head, associate department head, and graduate coordinator. (2) The Graduate and Professional School will hold regular meetings with the graduate and professional program leaders to identify opportunities for improvement in graduate program policies, procedures, and operations, and provide opportunities for leaders to share best practices. (3) The Graduate and Professional School will provide regular professional development for program leaders so that they can utilize best practices in graduate education and meet the diverse needs of their students. The professional development structure will also allow for expedient onboarding of new graduate program leaders.
- Marketing and Student Engagement: (1) The Graduate and Professional School will initiate a unified university-level marketing and communication plan to promote Texas A&M Graduate and Professional Studies globally. (2) Invest in tools to strengthen engagement at university, college, department, and program levels with prospective students, current students, and former students.
- Interdisciplinary Degree Programs (IDP): To address concerns particular among faculty in doctoral IDP programs, (1) the Graduate and Professional School will assume responsibility for convening an annual meeting of the Advisory and Evaluation Committee of participating department heads and the IDP Executive Committee for each IDP doctoral program to ensure that regular interactions occur to support the success of the IDP programs; and (2) the IDP chair or a designee for each IDP program will serve on the College Committees of Graduate Instruction (GIC) of their administrative college to keep IDP faculty apprised of policy and procedural changes.

On December 3, President Young and Provost Fierke approved a proposal to transition the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies into a Graduate and Professional School, effective January 1, 2021.

Task Force Fall 2020-Spring 2021 Efforts

Subcommittee Charge and Membership

In Fall 2020, the Task Force formed three subcommittees, focusing on master's, doctoral, and first professional doctoral programs, respectively. A list of the subcommittee members is available in Appendix 2.

Each subcommittee was instructed to:

- Review current practices and programs related to the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, with specific focus on graduate and professional education strategic priorities; form recommendations to move the institution towards becoming a globally-recognized leader in graduate and professional education
- Gather input from faculty, staff, administrators and students;
- Provide recommendations, including role of Graduate and Professional school and other university-level units.

Subcommittee Timeline

The subcommittees adhered to the following time:

1. October 2020: Subcommittees convene
2. November 2020: Subcommittees host open forums to gather input
3. February 1, 2021: Subcommittee recommendations submitted
4. March 8, 2021: Task Force meeting to discuss subcommittee reports
5. March 23, 2021: Subcommittee reports presented at Open Forum
6. April 21, 2021: Final Task Force recommendations submitted to Provost

Overview of Subcommittee Efforts

Master's Subcommittee

The Master's Subcommittee met several times in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, engaged with members of the academic community, and reviewed relevant reports and data to inform their tasks. From this work, the subcommittee curated general best practices for master's programs and program level recommendations to consider. Recommendations for best practices and future activities centered around the following themes: value and diversity; access to resources; career development; streamline dual programs; student feedback; monitor data; mentoring; teaching effectiveness; Ombud services; access to advising tools; mental health resources; adloc funding; focused orientation; and enhanced communication.

Doctoral Subcommittee

The Doctoral Subcommittee held a series of meetings in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 to discuss opportunities and challenges related to doctoral education. The full subcommittee held meetings with graduate program staff administrators, faculty directors, directors of interdisciplinary programs, and leaders of graduate student organizations. Subcommittee co-chairs addressed the Executive Committees of the Faculty Senate and Council of Principal Investigators (CPI), as well as the body of the CPI. The subcommittee's recommendations are wide-ranging, but focus on developing robust support for programs and faculty seeking external funding, enhancing the recruiting and retention of URM graduate students, and establishing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff engaged in doctoral education.

First Professional Doctoral Subcommittee

The First Professional Subcommittee held meetings in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. Data and feedback were gathered in various ways, including: open forums for students, staff, faculty, and administrators; documents from the Council of Graduate Schools; audits of the schools' current services and practices; and feedback via emails and web portals. The subcommittee's recommendations coalesced around the following themes: convening an interdisciplinary committee on professionalism and leadership training; better providing counseling and psychological services for students; ensuring requirements of the professional schools reflect their uniqueness relative to the graduate programs; and advocating for the needs and concerns of professional schools and their students.

Summary of Subcommittee Recommendations

In February 2020, each subcommittee submitted recommendations to the Task Force (see Appendices 3-5). Three of the subcommittee co-chairs engaged in an iterative process to identify larger themes under which the specific recommendations were subsumed. Appendix 6 offers a detailed overview.

As a complex research institution, there are many stakeholders who help facilitate and promote excellence in graduate and professional education. Thus, the recommendations are for Texas A&M University, as a whole.

1. Recruitment and Expanded Graduate Student Funding.

Texas A&M University should (1) engage in focused recruiting and retention of underrepresented minoritized students; and (2) help facilitate research development as a way to enhance fellowships, training grants, and other external funding opportunities.

2. Enhance Professional Development for Faculty, Staff, and Students.

Texas A&M University should (1) create new, and expand existing, professional development programs for faculty, staff, and students; (2) facilitate collaboration among units to deliver professionalism and leadership training; and (3) work with units on campus to help improve the effectiveness of graduate teaching assistants.

3. Makes Student Services Widely Available for Graduate and Professional Students and Promote Those Services.

Texas A&M University should (1) advocate for and coordinate student services pertaining to (i) counseling and psychological services, (ii) career services, (iii) ombuds resources, and (iv) disability services. In doing so, the University should (2) ensure the services are available for students on all campuses, including telehealth and other web-based options. Finally, given the unique needs and experiences of master's students, the university should (3) ensure these students have (i) tailored career services and (ii) ombuds services available to them.

4. Support Heterogeneity of Programs.

Texas A&M University should (1) accommodate and support the unique needs of professional schools; and (2) ensure that university-wide services are delivered in ways that reflect the heterogeneity of graduate and professional education and are student-centered. In doing so, the University should (3) develop working groups or committees whose members are charged with articulating and advocating for varied programs across campus.

5. Improve Administrative Processes.

Texas A&M University should improve administrative processes and delivery in the following areas: (1) combined and dual degree programs; (2) collection of data from graduate and professional students; (3) monitoring and use of institutional data for evidence-based decision making; and (4) reducing barriers for interdisciplinarity by adlocing students to colleges instead of agencies. In doing so, the University should have the dual focus of (5) providing programs with the autonomy needed to effectively deliver their curriculum within a given set of constraints (e.g., accreditation standards); and (6) coordinating the processes and activities across campuses, academic programs, and research units outside of College Station.

6. Improve Marketing, Communications, and Development.

Texas A&M University should improve marketing and communications. Doing so entails (1) tailoring communications for the intended audience; (2) marketing the University to prospective graduate and professional students; and (3) articulating the unique contributions of master's programs and students. The University should improve the accessibility of information on websites and other electronic communications. Finally, the University should (4) develop a visible and robust development strategy to support graduate and professional education.

7. Enhance Mentoring, Advising, and Community Building.

Texas A&M University should (1) improve advising capabilities by ensuring faculty and staff have the needed resources and access to University programs; (2) elevate mentoring through a robust mentoring agenda that considers the varied needs of students across campus; and (3) build community among students across campuses.

Task Force Open Forum Overview

Each subcommittee offered several recommendations for promoting graduate and professional education at Texas A&M University. Whereas each recommendation warrants consideration, the Task Force sees value in prioritizing certain high-need activities that can result in immediate, meaningful transformation. The Graduate and Professional School made these recommendations public. Then, on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, the Graduate School Task Force hosted a virtual open forum to present these high-priority recommendations and gather feedback from the campus community.

Broad advertising through email and social media platforms to students, faculty and staff generated interest from 125 registrants, each of whom were sent a link to the Task Force Recommendations for review prior to the event.

Dr. Karen Butler-Purry began the open forum by presenting an overview of the Task Force activities to date and the seven high-priority recommendations (see Appendix 9). Participants were then given ground rules stipulating that the open forum presented an opportunity for them to share their ideas and input on the recommendations and were sent to Zoom breakout rooms facilitated by Task Force members. Note takers were also assigned to each room to record participant feedback.

Nine breakout rooms were created, with 12-13 participants assigned to each room. Participants spent 20-40 minutes discussing the recommendations. Feedback collected from the breakout rooms was categorized based on recommendation area and is listed as follows:

1. Enhance recruitment/retention and funding;
2. Access to professional development and specific recommendations for professional development;
3. Coordinate resources and expand resource access;
4. Branch campus issues and the value of professional programs;
5. Concern for bureaucracy, excitement for change, and specific administrative issues;
6. Communication and marketing/branding;
7. Building community and setting expectations.

Feedback from the open forum was incorporated into the Task Force Recommendations final draft report for review by the Task Force members prior to final submission to the Provost.

Task Force High-Priority Recommendations

After gathering and incorporating input from the Open Forum, the Task Force finalized the high-priority recommendations listed below.

1. Recruitment and Expanded Graduate Student Funding

- a. The Graduate and Professional School should establish integrated, university- wide initiatives to recruit and retain graduate students who are from under-represented minority groups (URM students). The Graduate and Professional School should play an active role in bringing URM students to campus for summer mentoring programs, coordinated recruiting visits, and related activities. In doing so, it should work with departments to share best practices and establish partnerships or organized pipeline programs with Minority Serving Institutions.
- b. Working in partnership with the Division of Academic Affairs Development Office, the Graduate and Professional School should create a visible and robust development strategy focused on enhancing fellowships, training grants, and other external funding opportunities.

2. Enhance Professional Development for Faculty, Staff, and Students

- a. The Graduate and Professional School should establish organizations for faculty directors of graduate programs and staff graduate advisors, respectively. The aim of each should be to support onboarding, promote professional development, and share best practices.
 - i. The faculty director group may include a representative from each department with a graduate program and each graduate interdisciplinary program. Meetings should address topics such as professional development for directors, identification of best practices, and input on needed systemic changes.
 - ii. The staff advisor group should be organized as a council of staff graduate advisors, with representation from each college and from university offices supporting graduate and professional education, such as Counseling and Psychological Services, the Career Center, Student Business Services, International Student Services, and Admissions. The group should facilitate regular training, peer mentoring, and meetings, acting as a central node of communication for best graduate administrative practices across the institution.

- b. Enhance professional development opportunities for graduate and professional students, including the addition of equity-focused professional development and more systematic efforts in teaching assistant feedback and evaluation.
 - i. In accord with the recommendations of the Commission on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, provide professional development programming focused on racial literacy and racial equity problem-solving skills to ensure effectiveness in addressing and confronting practices, cultural norms, and policies that undermine racial equity.
 - ii. In partnership with the Center for Teaching Excellence, improve the efficacy of graduate student teaching through purposeful feedback and evaluation for graduate teaching assistants to meet the goals of the Teaching Assistant Training and Evaluation Program (TATEP).

3. Ensure Student Services are Widely Available to Graduate and Professional Students and Promote Those Services

- a. Though the Graduate and Professional School does not offer many of the following services, it should endeavor to ensure that Student Services offices have the capacity to serve—and do serve—the needs of all graduate and professional students, including distance students and working professionals (including individuals who are full-time TAMU staff and graduate students). These collaborative efforts should focus on:
 - i. Improving the organization and communication of access to important resources, including Counseling and Psychological Services, the Career Center, International Student Services, and the Graduate Ombuds Office.
 - ii. Working with the Career Center to ensure that career counseling and development services are available for master's students in professional schools.
 - iii. Providing student-centered orientation activities tailored to all graduate and professional students.
 - iv. Create a Coordinated Care Network across offices, including those focused on financial aid, international student services, career advising, academic support, and student health and counseling.

4. Support Campuses outside Bryan/College Station and the First Professional Programs

- a. Form a Professional School Working Group to serve as advocates and liaisons for professional schools and their students, highlighting needs and concerns. Areas of focus may include:
 - i. University-wide communications, professional development, student services, faculty and program requirements (e.g., minimum syllabus requirements, new courses and programs), and university calendars.
 - ii. Ensuring that compliance with University-wide standards, like SACSCOC, is carried out in ways that do not duplicate or add to the reporting requirements that already exist in professional schools. Specific attention should be paid to how collected data can be most efficiently and effectively used for multiple reporting purposes.
- b. Enhance the capacity of and access to Counseling and Psychological Services. Explore and prioritize the hiring of one or more licensed counselors who would split time among various university professional programs located outside of Bryan/College Station. Such actions will ensure that each professional program would have a licensed counselor on campus multiple days every week.
- c. The Graduate and Professional School should establish a standing committee, to meet annually, for the purpose of supporting graduate and professional students, faculty, and staff outside the Texas A&M Bryan/College Station campus. These include:
 - i. Rules, policies, and practices.
 - ii. Challenges in parking when conducting business on main campus, differential access to student services (particularly counseling services) that may not be available at all units, the need for multiple email addresses to manage different university processes, and the structure of fees for graduate and professional students.
- d. Charge the Graduate and Professional Council's First Professional subcommittee with identifying opportunities for collaboration in professionalism and leadership training required by accrediting bodies.

5. Improve and Streamline Administrative Processes

- a. The Graduate and Professional School should work with colleges and agencies to reduce funding barriers to interdisciplinarity and to ensure consistency of graduate assistant policies by making ad loc appointments to colleges for graduate assistants funded from agency sources.

- b. Streamline processes for 3+2, 4+1, and other combined degree programs to ensure these students receive appropriate academic and financial aid advisement, communications, and related services.
- c. Work with faculty to remove barriers and facilitate best practices in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary educational efforts.

6. Improve Marketing and Communications

- a. Articulate to internal and external stakeholders the unique contributions and value of master's programs and students, as well as the variety of our master's program offerings, both research and professionally focused, and online or face-to-face.
- b. The Graduate and Professional School should focus on positioning itself as a student-centered hub for graduate and professional students. In doing so, it should improve marketing and communications efforts regarding TAMU graduate and professional education to prospective and current students through its website, targeted communications, and social media.

7. Enhance Mentoring, Advising, and Community Building

- a. To decrease time to degree and improve the graduate student climate, the Graduate and Professional School should enhance mentoring and advising programs and engage in activities designed to foster a sense of community among all Texas A&M University graduate and professional students, irrespective of their degree program or location.
 - i. In partnership with colleges, departments, the Center for Teaching Excellence, and International Student Services, create a comprehensive plan and implement programming for graduate student mentoring and advising that follows best practices.
 - ii. Identify and disseminate best practices for addressing the unique mentoring and advising needs of master's students, as well as the advising, networking, and cohort-building needs of distance students.
 - iii. Facilitate social and networking opportunities for graduate and professional students, with a focus on promoting retention, a sense of belonging, and social support.
 - iv. Create a Coordinated Care Network across offices, including those focused on financial aid, international student services, career advising, academic support, and student health and counseling.

Concluding Remarks

In this report and a subsequent report, the Graduate School Task Force argued that graduate and professional education play a key role in helping the University achieve its mission and vision. The 2020-2025 Strategic Plan reaffirms this position. Additionally, the Graduate School Task Force has articulated seven (7) priority actions based on input from stakeholders which align with and advance goals of the 2020-2025 University Strategic Plan. While the Graduate and Professional School will lead and coordinate efforts, the Task Force expects that the implementation and facilitation of the actions prescribed in these recommendations will require collaboration between the Graduate and Professional School and colleges, departments, programs and offices across the University.

In FY20, the University designated new resources to prioritize and support excellence in graduate and professional student education. Thus, actions based on these recommendations may be undertaken without an influx of new resources. Future growth and innovations, however, may require additional resources.

Finally, the following Task Force recommendations align with and advance goals of the 2020-2025 University Strategic Plan and have therefore been assigned high priority status. The Task Force envisions these selected recommendations as directly contributing to the Strategic Plan Key Performance Indicators and will measure them accordingly. Finally given (1) the importance of graduate and professional education and (2) the value of continuous improvement, the Graduate School Task Force recommends:

1. An annual evaluation of the Task Force priority recommendations by the Graduate and Professional School.
2. A midpoint assessment of the Strategic Plan KPIs in 2023, with an accompanying analysis of how the priority recommendations contribute to meeting the KPIs.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Task Force Membership

Graduate Operations Committee Representatives

Maria Escobar-Lemmon, Associate Dean & Professor, College of Liberal Arts
Mark Zoran, Executive Associate Dean & Professor, College of Science

University Research Council Representative

Antoinetta Quigg, Associate Vice President & Head, Texas A&M University at Galveston

ABOC Representative

Michelle Mitchell, Assistant Dean of Finance, College of Engineering

Interdisciplinary Degree Program Representative

Ivan Rusyn, Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

Faculty Representatives

Debjyoti Banerjee, Faculty Senate, Professor, College of Engineering
Jay Ramadoss, Council of Principal Investigators, Associate Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences
Paul Hernandez, Associate Professor, College of Education and Human Development
Idia Thurston, Associate Professor, College of Liberal Arts; School of Public Health
Ashley Ross, Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University Galveston
Narendra Kumar, Associate Professor, Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy
Dennis Gorman, Professor, School of Public Health
Stacy Drake, Associate Professor, College of Nursing
Hope Rising, Assistant Professor, College of Architecture
Richard Malak, Associate Professor, College of Engineering
Christian Hiltly, Professor, College of Science
Bruno Ruest, Associate Professor, College of Dentistry
David Threadgill, Distinguished Professor, College of Medicine

Department Head Representative

Lori Taylor, Professor & Head, Bush School of Government and Public Service

Graduate Program Director Representatives

Charlotte Ku, Associate Dean and Professor, School of Law

Hagen Kim, Associate Professor, Mays Business School

Istvan Szunyogh, Professor, College of Geoscience

Wayne Smith, Associate Dept Head & Professor, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Staff Representatives

Ashley Seabury, Program Manager, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

Kara Bond, Academic Advisor III, College of Education and Human Development

Graduate Student Representatives

Uthej Vattipalli, GPSG President, College of Engineering

Chante Anderson, BGSA Past President, College of Liberal Arts

Smit Prashant Mehta, IGSA Officer, College of Science

Executive Committee

Karen Butler-Purry, Associate Provost and Dean, Graduate and Professional School

Gerianne Alexander, Professor and Associate Vice President, Division of Research

George Cunningham, Senior Associate Dean, Graduate and Professional School

Julie Harlin, Associate Dean, Graduate and Professional School

Joe Pettibon, Vice President, Division of Enrollment and Academic Services

Antoinetta Quigg, Associate Vice President & Head, Texas A&M University at Galveston

Anne Reber, Dean of Student Life, Division of Student Affairs

Adam Seipp, Associate Dean, Graduate and Professional School Shannon Walton,

Shannon Walton, Assistant Dean, Graduate and Professional School

Jocelyn Widmer, Assistant Provost, Academic Innovation & Online

Appendix 2: Subcommittee Membership

Master's Subcommittee

Co-Chairs: Julie Harlin (Graduate and Professional School) and Maria Escobar-Lemmon (Liberal Arts)

Members: Stacy Drake (Nursing), Hope Rising (Architecture), Lori Taylor (Bush), Deb Banerjee (Engineering), Paul Hernandez (Education), Michelle Mitchell (Engineering), Uthej Vattipalli (Graduate and Professional Student Government), Terri Helge (Law), Ashley Ross (Galveston), and Anne Reber (Student Affairs)

Doctoral Subcommittee

Co-Chairs: Adam Seipp (Graduate and Professional School) and Mark Zoran (Science)

Members: Antoinetta Quigg (TAMU-G), Jay Ramadoss (Vet Med), Idia Thurston (Liberal Arts), Narendra Kumar (Pharmacy), Richard Malak (Engineering), Christian Hilty (Science), David Threadgill (Medicine), Istvan Szunyogh (Geoscience), Wayne Smith (AGLS), Ashley Seabury (Vet Med), Kara Bond (Education), Chante Anderson (Black Graduate Student Association), Mohit Kurana (Indian Graduate Student Association), Shannon Walton (Graduate and Professional Studies), Gerianne Alexander (Research)

First Professional Doctoral Subcommittee

Co-Chairs: George Cunningham (Graduate and Professional School) and Charlotte Ku (Law)

Members: Bruno Ruest (Dentistry), Sarah Allen Parker (Dentistry), Amanda Cervantes (Law), Aric K Short (Law), Terri Helge (Law), Brett Mitchell (Medicine), Katherine Brakora (Medicine), Nadia El Hamdi (Medicine), Adam Brown (Pharmacy), Fadi Khasawneh (Pharmacy), Ivan Rusyn (Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences), and Kristin Chaney (Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences).

Appendix 3: Master's Subcommittee Report

Master's Subcommittee Final Report Graduate School Task Force February 1, 2021--Revised February 3, 2021 OVERVIEW

Members: Stacy Drake (Nursing), Hope Rising (Architecture), Lori Taylor (Bush), Deb Banerjee (Engineering), Paul R. Hernandez (Education), Michelle Mitchell (Engineering), Uthej Vattipalli (GPSG), Terri Helge (LAW), Ashley Ross (Galveston), Anne Reber (Student Affairs) Co-Chairs: Maria Escobar-Lemmon (Liberal Arts) and Julie Harlin (Graduate School)

Charge: Review our current practices and programs related to the graduate school guiding principles and 2020-2025 university graduate and professional education strategic priorities and form recommendations to move our institution towards becoming a globally-recognized leader in graduate and professional education. The specific charge of our sub-committee was to review and make recommendations related to master's programs.

Summary of Subcommittee Activities: The subcommittee met six times between October 2020 and January 2021. We hosted four open forums for faculty and staff (November 17 and 18, with about 70 in attendance) and students (November 20 and January 27, with about 10 in attendance). Each forum began with a presentation on the background of the Graduate and Professional School and common terminology then moved to an open discussion, focused on the guiding principles shown below. We also engaged with members of the Executive Committees of the Faculty Senate (January 4) and the Council of Principal Investigators (CPI) (January 6) as well as the full membership of Council of Principal Investigators (January 13). Additionally, we made available an online feedback form to faculty, staff, and students. We reviewed this feedback in addition to existing numerical data as well reports from culture and climate surveys, graduation exit surveys and reports from the Council of Graduate Schools, EAB Insights, and Hanover Reports.

The following guiding principles were used to frame our work:

SERVICE AND EXCELLENCE – the school exists to serve students, faculty, and graduate programs and advance excellence in graduate and professional education
A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH – The school should be leading the implementation of student centered, optimal approaches for student success and well-being across programs.
FACULTY GOVERNANCE – Faculty should retain a critical role in collective decision-making for graduate education.
PROGRAM DIVERSITY – TAMU administers a wide variety of graduate programs, from professional and research programs to STEM and Humanities programs. Respect for differences of disciplines in best practices will guide implementation of the school’s strategies.
BUDGETING – The core of the school’s budget should consist of funds currently allocated to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. Additional funding should come from new investments. For this work, assume no additional funds.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our work resulted in a summary of the context of master’s programs, including data related to the diversity of our student population as well as the identification of themes and related recommendations. These themes included: value of master’s programs and students, value of diversity, value of student centered approach, value to funding, access to resources, academic support, mentoring and advising, improved communication, engagement and networking, effective teaching, career focus, and benefits of virtual.

We also curated general best practices for master’s programs and program level recommendations to consider. Recommendations for best practices and future activities centered around the following themes: value and diversity, access to resources, career development, streamline dual programs, student feedback, monitor data, mentoring, teaching effectiveness, Ombuds services, access to advising tools, mental health resources, adloc funding, focused orientation, and

enhanced communication.

Immediate actionable recommendations included:

- Ensure that students are served through our university services by adlocing them to colleges and not agencies;
- Review awards offered through the Graduate and Professional School to ensure that master's students are appropriately valued for their unique contributions to our institution and where practicable are eligible
- Where appropriate, offer separate orientation activities for master's students; and
- Provide the Howdy Advisor Tab to faculty and staff members who need access to these resources.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Context: Our institution has great breadth and depth of Master's programming that varies by college and department. In Fall 2020, we had 7,307 students enrolled in 162 master's degree programs across 17 colleges and schools (taken from (<http://accountability.tamu.edu/All-Metrics/Mixed-Metrics/Student-Demographics>)). Our institution strives to meet the unique needs of students, boasting 10 interdisciplinary programs and 34 distance approved programs offered at the master's level. Master's programs are offered on four campuses: Texas A&M University (6,646 students, comprising, 90.9% of the total master's student population), Health Science Center (505 students, 6.9%), Galveston (121 students, 1.6%), and Qatar (35 students, 0.005%). Of those, 2,283 students (31.2%) were enrolled in a distance education program. We also had 4,921 (63.7%) in-state students, 979 (13.3%) out-of-state students, and 1,425 (19.5%) international students enrolled at the master's level. (It should be noted that due to COVID complications, our master's international student population declined by 31.4% (651 students) in 2020 compared to 2019.) In terms of ethnicity of our master's students, 3,617 (49.5%) are White, 981 (13.4%) are Hispanic, 360 (4.9%) are Black, and 453 (6.2%) are Asian with 1425 (19.5%) International. In terms of gender, 3,965 (54.2%) are male and 3,342 (45.7%) are female. In terms of attendance, 4,707 (64.4%) of our master's students are full-time and 2,600 (35.5%) part-time. In terms of thesis versus non-thesis programs, 1,315 (17.9%) of students were enrolled in an on-campus non-thesis program, 1,778 (24.3%) were enrolled in a distance education non-thesis program, and 573 (7.8%) enrolled in a thesis program with only three of these students enrolled in a distance education thesis program.

Themes: The following themes emerged from our subcommittee discussions, open forums, and other activities. Subcommittee recommendations follow the summary of findings for each theme.

- **VALUE of MASTER’S PROGRAMS and STUDENTS:** With large undergraduate numbers, it is no wonder that the primary focus of our institution is on undergraduate students. As an AAU Tier I Research university, we also have a strong focus on doctoral education. This sometimes results in master’s students and programs falling through the cracks in terms of value. The committee felt strongly that master’s programs and students are an integral and important part of graduate education and should be valued as such. About half of our graduate numbers are from master’s students. Although master’s students frequently feed into robust doctoral programs, many master’s students at TAMU are here for a terminal master’s degree. The numbers do not support the misperception held by some that master’s degrees are only for those who opt out of doctoral programs. Indeed there are far, far more students who come to TAMU specifically to earn a terminal master’s degree.
 - **Recommendation:** Raise awareness among faculty, staff, and students about the value of terminal master’s degree programs including their utility and value in and of themselves not as gateways to doctoral programs. Dispel misconceptions that master’s students are failed or future doctoral students.
- **VALUE of DIVERSITY:** We should continue to work to value all types of diversity among our students - including race and ethnicity, age, and gender identity - and our programs-including campus and online, thesis and non-thesis, and research and professional programs. The diversity of programs should also be valued and highlighted for impact.
 - **Recommendation:** Highlight programs across the university to celebrate the diversity of programs and the contributions of diverse students.
- **VALUE of a STUDENT CENTERED APPROACH:** It is the goal of the institution to help students reach their goals. Our programming should focus on best meeting the needs of our students. This may mean changing our practices in order to prioritize the needs of our students. One example is the recommendation that all funded students should be ad-lo’ed to the colleges and not to extension or research funding (this issue is specific to particular colleges, but has presented unnecessary hurdles for students). Another recommendation is to make sure that targeted resources (e.g. mental health and support resources) are not only available to students but are housed in a way that will be user friendly to graduate students.
 - **Recommendation:** Continue to explore possible changes to practices and organization that streamline student resources.
- **VALUE to FUNDING:** The committee investigated the funding model at our institution in

order to determine the role of master's student funding in the scope of educational funding. The funding model used by our institution is quite complex and relies heavily upon historical data. There are no differences between master's students within a program (e.g. thesis, non-thesis, etc.) in terms of funding received. The value assigned by faculty is a result of individual perceptions by field, not any actual numerical data. Again, the value of diversity and meeting student needs were determined to be the important functions of value in the truest sense.

- Recommendation: Emphasize that funding of master's students is discipline-specific and should be left to colleges and departments to determine. Additionally, the relative value of thesis versus non-thesis options should be based on the utility and service to students..
- ACCESS to RESOURCES: Given the size of our institution, it is difficult for everyone to know and have what they need when they need it. Targeting resources (both monetary and informational) to those who need them at the right time was suggested. Creating lists of specific resources for distance students was also suggested.
 - Recommendations: Raise awareness that student services are available for master's students, not only undergraduate students, and improve organization and communication of access to these resources. This may include investment in better indexing of services so that they are more easily located and used by master's students. This could also involve the creation of a graduate student success center within the Graduate and Professional School, akin to the Aggie Success Center but focused on resources for graduate students.
 - Recommendation: Promote a broad understanding among student services offices that student access of services are constrained by location - not all students are local, the pandemic, and the diversity of their needs (i.e., distance education students). Therefore, student services offices should strive to offer services in a way that meets these needs and is sensitive to the needs of master's students.
 - Recommendation: Facilitate travel resources for master's students presenting their research at conferences. Departments need to be aware of the impact that their choices about what and who to fund have on the ability of students to complete the research and disseminate their findings. Additionally, the Graduate and Professional School should review policies and practices related to it's award requirements. If there are ways to include master's students in these in more robust ways, the Graduate and Professional School should consider revising those requirements in order to avoid the perception that doctoral students are more highly valued than master's students.
- ACADEMIC SUPPORT: There was some expressed need for assistance in specific course content since tutoring is not traditionally made available to graduate students, particularly in

the area of statistics and some of the natural sciences.

- Recommendation: Emphasize to colleges and departments the need to provide academic support to master's students for some courses and curriculum.
- Recommendation: Disseminate information on and examples of successful refresher courses for master's students especially those not entering directly from undergraduate programs.
- MENTORING and ADVISING: We must support students through active mentoring and appropriate advising. We should continue to explore best practices with Individualized Development Plans (IDP) and structured advising at the departmental/college level to ensure students have the support they need throughout the program. It should be clear to students that the primary responsibility for advising and mentoring (with regard to completion of program milestones and research) rests with their department or program.
 - Recommendation: Encourage colleges and departments to review, consider, develop, and pursue best practices in mentoring and advising, such as: publishing future schedules or rotation of classes so students can make informed choices about class scheduling; connecting students with those who can answer advising questions; and ensuring those tasked with advising can help students with course and degree plan decisions.
- IMPROVED COMMUNICATION: We heard various issues that are failures of clear communication. This is everything from improved ability to find resources, to knowing what resources are available, to programs communicating with students about requirements and opportunities.
 - Recommendation: Invest in ways to better organize and communicate resources centrally with the Graduate and Professional School. This may involve better indexing so students can more easily find and use services or the creation of a center of success within the School to centrally house and/or connect graduate students to resources.
 - Recommendation: Emphasize to colleges and departments the need to: review their communication practices with graduate students; centralize and consolidate communication where possible so graduate students are not overwhelmed with information; and consistently, clearly, and frequently communicate program requirements and opportunities.
- ENGAGE and NETWORK: Some students expressed a desire to be more engaged and connected to people (faculty and other students) and resources. It was suggested that we create a platform and schedule time for students to network in a virtual environment for a coffee hour, etc. Cohort building, community building, introductions to program, etc. This will continue to be an issue as we expand online offerings and our new normal of remote learning.
 - Recommendation: Explore possible venues to connect master's students. The

- creation of a graduate student success center may offer a hub for such connections.
 - Recommendations: Explore and disseminate best practices on networking and cohort building among on-line students.
- EFFECTIVE TEACHING: Students value faculty who work to engage them in course work, provide resources for enrichment and remediation, and connect the coursework to real world applications and careers. Graduate teaching assistants also make a tremendous impact on undergraduate students and programs through their teaching.
 - Recommendation: Efforts to help our graduate teaching assistants improve and document their contributions should be highlighted.
- CAREER FOCUS: Students are very interested in career opportunities beyond higher education and have an expectation that faculty will be knowledgeable in helping students make those connections.
 - Recommendation: Emphasize to students, staff, and faculty the career resources available. This may entail consolidating information on these resources and communicate this to program coordinators.
 - Recommendation: Assess the utility of the career center offerings for graduate students to determine if they are meeting needs and adjust as appropriate.
- BENEFITS of VIRTUAL: Many of the changes made for remote instruction during covid are generally good for graduate programs and should be continued. This includes offering support services outside of regular work hours in order to accommodate students who are not full time graduate students and virtual graduation ceremonies. Continuing virtual instruction, service access, and celebrations allows distance students and those unable to be physically present an opportunity to be fully engaged.
 - Recommendation: Graduate programs and student service offices should review changes made to their practices and services to accommodate virtual students and continue to offer these where feasible.
 - Recommendation: Several master's programs have been recognized by US News as top-10 on-line programs. Successful strategies used by those programs should be shared with other programs.

General Best Practices: Though not an exhaustive list, there were several best practices for master's education that emerged from our work. It is important to note that this is an iterative process and that a collection of best practices will need to continue to be curated across programs and from lessons learned from peer institutions. These practices should be reviewed and pursued where relevant at all levels of graduate education, from the Graduate and Professional School to individual programs.

1. Interdisciplinary education and research benefits students, but presents challenges for

programs and departments that are organized by discipline. Having an outlined and well-communicated plan related to committee membership, courses, and projects/internships facilitates interdisciplinary student learning and research and enhances their experience in ways that best prepares them for the world of work outside of academia.

2. Providing proactive mentoring that includes mentor and mentee compacts as well as Individualized Development Plans (IDP) help master's students understand the connections and relationships between mentoring, professional development, and academic coursework.
3. Providing distance education program master's students the opportunity to connect with others in their program as a cohort, with structured schedules of classes to ensure there is a sense of belonging and community fosters community. Programs that have an orientation for all new distance master's students as well as regular cohort building opportunities provide value added to students and help students succeed and be more satisfied.
4. Providing career development opportunities and career counseling throughout the program, particularly for those who are in terminal or professional master's programs.
5. Encouraging students to complete certificate programs through the Center for Teaching Excellence or GRAD Aggies to strategically enhance their academic experience.
6. Organizing writing groups for students at different stages of the proposal development and thesis writing process to provide support for writing, not discipline specific feedback or advice.
7. Facilitating a feedback loop in teaching assistant evaluations that includes self-reflection, peer, and student feedback to improve teaching and learning.

Program Level Recommendations: Given the diversity of the master's programs at TAMU, much of what can be done to improve graduate education is up to program decision-makers, faculty, and staff. Though not all inclusive and some overlap with the general best practices outlined above, the following are some suggestions for programs to consider implementing specific to master's students.

- Creating explicit expectations and transparent policies that are consistent with TAMU policies.
- Enabling graduate students to make timely progress in their degree programs by ensuring that required courses and examinations are scheduled in a timely manner.
- Creating opportunities for networking and expanding career and professional development (e.g., organizing speaker series, colloquia, and other formal and informal events).
- Creating opportunities for graduate students to become familiar with the various forms of scholarship in the field.
- Sharing responsibility with guidance committees and faculty advisors for fostering the professional and career development of graduate students (e.g., providing venues for honing professional writing and presentation skills, grants writing, publishing).

- Ensuring that regular progress checks are provided for students.
- Providing education in research ethics and integrity.
- Recognizing and rewarding excellence in mentoring, and identifying opportunities for professional development so that faculty can improve their mentoring skills and abilities.
- Connecting faculty to a broader community of support by sharing information about resources that can support them in mentoring graduate students.
- Consider implementing near peer mentoring or student ambassador programs to ensure students have access to information at the appropriate time.
- Consider implementing “graduation coaches” who can help students navigate issues with program requirements, course challenges, and other issues.

Recommendations for Practice and Future Activities: As previously mentioned, the work to effectively move from the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies to the Graduate and Professional School is an iterative process. As such, the work necessary to continue to move our institution towards becoming a globally-recognized leader in graduate and professional education will be ongoing. Below are suggestions for future activities to continue to inform our processes and programs for the future:

- **VALUE and DIVERSITY:** Perhaps one of the most notable recommendations from our work is that there is a great deal of value inherent in master’s programs and the diversity of our master’s program offerings. Whether they be research or professionally focused, online or face-to-face, master’s students make up about half of our graduate numbers, overall, and many serve in very important roles as teaching assistants in undergraduate courses. Their impact beyond our institution is vast and important. While undergraduate and doctoral education tend to be the focus of many initiatives, we believe that articulating the unique contributions of master’s programs and students is important in our work as a Graduate and Professional School.
- **ACCESS to RESOURCES:** Access to resources was a recurring theme throughout our work. Often the issue is lack of knowledge about resources available rather than the absence of a particular resource. This is a function of the size and complexity of navigating our institutional resources. It is recommended that we work to improve the search feature of our grad.tamu.edu websites to ensure items are tagged in layman’s terms and consider other ways to centrally promote resources through the Graduate and Professional School.
- **CAREER DEVELOPMENT:** Though our institution has robust offerings in career planning and development, there was a suggestion that interdisciplinary career fairs and events that allow many different types of students and programs to capitalize on their skills across colleges be highlighted. These interdisciplinary career fairs should be welcoming and useful to master’s students, not only undergraduate students. It is also important to consider the best

ways to communicate those opportunities that already do exist.

- **STREAMLINE DUAL PROGRAMS:** We also propose an initiative to streamline 3+2, 4+1, and dual degree program students into the graduate program so that they are considered full-time students, are considered part of both degrees, and receive appropriate advisement and communication at the right time. Connecting these efforts to interdisciplinary programs may be most appropriate to ensure that students are best supported. We should also explore software programs that allow program administrators the flexibility to see all aspects of students and determine how best to administer these types of programs. Perhaps a template for future program proposals would ensure consistency across the institution in how these programs are structured. Related to this issue is that some programs exist in different systems (EnLaw and EnMed for example) and advisors only have access to one system. This creates a barrier in providing timely advice to students. Consideration of when 3+2 and 4+1 students move to G7 status would be important in making sure that they receive communications targeted at master's students that are relevant to them.
- **STUDENT FEEDBACK:** Though the committee considered creating and distributing a survey to current students, the decision was made to rely upon the GradSeru survey for this purpose as a standardized tool to inform the work in the future. This ensures consistency over the years, allows us to benchmark data points, and reduces survey fatigue of students.
- **MONITOR DATA:** Continue to monitor data. The evolution of our data tools is ongoing. From recruitment, admissions, current student, and exit data, we should be making data informed decisions that are student centered and move us towards becoming a globally-recognized leader in graduate and professional education.
- **MENTORING:** Work to improve mentoring impacts across colleges and departments through specific engagement with faculty and graduate students and the creation of an articulated plan for graduate student mentoring. We should ensure that mentoring is specific for master's students who may have different needs (in person versus online, research versus professional, etc.)
- **TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS:** Work to improve the effectiveness of graduate student teaching through more purposeful interactions in teaching assistant feedback and evaluation in partnership with ongoing Center for Teaching Excellence activities and programs.
- **OMBUDS SERVICES:** Because of the unique issues related to master's students, we may want to consider offering specific Ombuds services for master's students
- **ACCESS to ADVISING TOOLS:** Through our work, we discovered that some faculty and staff who should have access to the Howdy Advisor Tab do not have access and must rely on others to look up and send information. We recommend that those who need access to the advisor tab in Howdy should be allowed access. There is no institutional benefit to keeping faculty and staff who need access from having access.
- **MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES:** Leverage centralized activities in the area of student mental health and disability services to ensure students and faculty are aware of opportunities and activities when they need services. This may be as simple as highlighting available resources for students who are on campus, at a distance, or at one of our other campus

locations (Dallas, Fort Worth, Galveston, Kingsville, Qatar).

- **ADLOC FUNDING:** Reduce barriers to interdisciplinary degrees and programs particularly as it relates to funding of students. Faculty and students spend an inordinate amount of time and resources navigating changes in funding for interdisciplinary programs and in navigating issues related to agency adlocs. One specific recommendation is that students should be adlocated to the college and not other agencies.
- **FOCUSED ORIENTATION:** It was suggested that our orientation activities should be more tailored and student-centered. It was recommended that, when possible, master's students should receive an orientation separate from doctoral students. Additionally, examples of resources should include not just research resources, but also include resources for students in professional programs, such as internship and career information.
- **ENHANCED COMMUNICATION:** Seek to communicate more effectively. One specific suggestion was a monthly blast from the graduate and professional school with deadlines upcoming in the next several months. We should also explore tools such as SLATE that allow users to indicate the type and timing of communications.

Of these, our subcommittee recommends the following as immediate action items:

- Ensure that students are served through our university services by adlocating them to colleges and not agencies;
- Review awards offered through the Graduate and Professional School to ensure that master's students are appropriately valued for their unique contributions to our institution and where practicable are eligible
- Where appropriate, offer separate orientation activities for master's students; and
- Provide the Howdy Advisor Tab to faculty and staff members who need access to these resources.

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APPENDICES

The subcommittee reviewed a number of reports from a variety of entities in order to gain insight on issues and best practices from our peers. These included the Council of Graduate Schools, EAB Insights, and Hanover Reports. Highlights of the reports included:

- A survey of more than 100 campus leaders of all job titles and across all function areas prioritized identifying their unique brand and strategies to stand out in a competitive and saturated graduate education market. The author found that it is important to set clear goals—and then quantifying results and return on investment— to advocate for the resources needed to recruit adult learners (Murchison, 2020).
- A series of surveys of adult learners indicated that about 1-in-4 prefer an online program and another 1-in-4 do not want to pursue an online program. Preference for online programs is associated with age - older adult learners prefer online programs - and deem them essential to their ability to obtain a graduate degree - while younger learners prefer in-person instruction (Lamb, 2020).
- To identify which academic programs have the greatest potential for growth, it is important to evaluate internal and external factors, including: enrollment and conferral - total enrollment, student credit hours taught, degrees conferred; pipeline - average number of inquiries, conversion rate from inquiry to application, average number of applications and growth in applications, and yield rate from acceptance to enrollment; labor market opportunities - historic employer demand, both in relevant job postings' volume and growth as well as as projected employment for typical job outcomes; competitive opportunities - historic student completions, both in volume and growth and the number of other programs as well as the change in competitors over time. It is also important to consider how students' program preferences are evolving as high school students' attitudes towards majors can help anticipate future trends (Edmonds, 2020).
- Once graduate programs with the most growth potential are identified, it is critical to equip them for growth by: 1) align programs to market needs - emphasize in-demand coursework and preparation for valuable careers; 2) optimize curricular maps and faculty resources for growth - evaluate if the faculty resources and course sequencing enable student completion as well as offer the flexibility adult students need; and 3) develop and implement a robust adult learner recruitment strategy - ensure prospective students know about your program and its value (Edmonds, 2020).
- Milder (2020) offered the following strategies to help students and recent graduates succeed in today's restricted economy and competitive job market:

- Improve technical competencies
 - Offer a post-graduate intensive that complements a liberal arts major with a deep dive into the essentials of business and entrepreneurship; example: Certificate in Entrepreneurship | College of the Holy Cross
 - Consider developing soft skills for technical degree holders (i.e., engineers) that focuses on leadership, communication, and critical thinking
- Build seamless pathways to graduate education
 - Offer master's degrees in 4+1 or 3+2 formats
 - Offer tuition discounts to alumni
 - Ensure students' access high-quality work experiences by requiring an internship for students entering the master's program on a 4+1 or 3+2 path - and provide staff support to find internships; this ensures students can reflect and engage with program peers who bring years of professional experience to the program (Milder, 2020).
- Bailey (2020) summarized the three major takeaways from nearly 700 adult learner administrators at a Council of Graduate School's Annual meeting:
 - Improve student support to accommodate graduate students - make advising, counseling, tutoring, writing, and math centers available at non-traditional hours and offer programs applicable to adult learners with work and family commitments
 - Marketing to be responsive to needs - respond quickly to communication and inquiries, post FAQ page that consolidates key program information in one place, and minimize application barriers
 - Design programs to help students juggle work and family commitments - online programs, multiple points of registration throughout the year, and easy to calculate tuition and fees (Bailey, 2020).
- While the proportion of racial and ethnic minority students going to college has substantially increased (about 1.5 times) in the past two decades, minority students have lower completion rates, higher student debt, and less propensity to pursue STEM degrees (EAB, 2019).
- EAB (n.d.) also offers the following as best practices to improve diversity of graduate programs:
 - Provide equity-focused professional development focused on racial literacy and racial equity problem-solving skills to ensure the ability to address and confront practices, cultural norms, and policies that undermine racial equity.
 - Conduct campus climate assessments to understand student, faculty, and staff perceptions and experiences, identify strengths and areas for improvement.
 - Make student care a coordinated effort by creating a Coordinated Care Network across offices (i.e., financial aid, career advising, academic support, and student health and counseling centers) to facilitate coordination and collaboration for student support.
 - Foster student belongingness by evaluating best practices and developing support and response plans to ensure that all students, especially those from underserved

backgrounds, feel supported and valued by their community.

- Leverage technology for proactive advising by using student success technology platforms (EAB, n.d.).

CGE ADVICE TO FACULTY ADMINISTRATION

- Common Standards and Practices
 - “The master’s degree is awarded to students who demonstrate a level of academic accomplishment and subject mastery substantially beyond that required for the baccalaureate degree.” pg. 21
 - “Master’s programs usually require a capstone or culminating experience that indicates the ability to synthesize material from course work and to apply information and knowledge to a specific issue or problem, although some programs may require only completion of course work.” pg. 21
- Institutional Environment
 - “When institutions place a strong emphasis upon the baccalaureate or the doctoral degree, master’s education is sometimes shortchanged in decisions about allocating institutional resources and faculty time, attention, and effort.” pg. 22
 - “Some institutions adhere to an earlier CGS recommendation to retain the Master of Science (MS) and Master of Arts (MA) titles for degrees that require a thesis based upon research or scholarship and to indicate disciplinary or interdisciplinary major on transcripts, while adopting the common practice of using titles and more specific designations for applied and career-focused master’s programs. This practice preserves the historical reputation of the MS and MA degrees and reflects, with proper transcript notation, the nature of contemporary master’s programs and the work that students in those programs accomplish.” Pg. 23
- General Nature of Programs
 - “Each program and the graduate office should monitor progress of all graduate students to ensure that satisfactory progress is being made and to be alert to instances where students may need encouragement or support along the way.” pg. 46
 - “In some cases, a statement to the graduate school by the student’s adviser that satisfactory progress is (or is not) being made suffices, although a regularly scheduled review by the advisory committee is strongly recommended.” pg. 46-47
- Program Degree Requirements
 - Capstone Experience
 - “The inclusion of a culminating or capstone experience in all master’s programs is strongly recommended. The master’s program is often the first academic experience in which a student is expected to integrate prior learning.” pg. 51

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO COMPLETION AND ATTRITION

- Program Structure and Faculty, pg. 94
 - Among Masters graduates, the following were ranked as the most important factors contributing to their completion of the program:
 - Quality of Teaching and Supportive Faculty
 - Program structure, requirements, sequencing, delivery, and availability of courses.
 - Advising
 - Among Masters students Stopout/Dropouts, the following were ranked as the most important factors contributing to their failure to complete the program:
 - Program structure
 - Lack of support from faculty
 - Lack of institutional supports
- Financial Supports
 - Graduates
 - Financial support
 - Access to loans
 - Stopout/Dropout
 - Lack of financial support
- Community
 - Graduates
 - Peer support
 - Stopout/Dropout
 - Lack of peer support

Identify promising practices to help improve outcomes, pg. 101

- Establish and maintain Student Tracking Systems and Data
 - Centralizing data warehouses where student-level data (e.g., enrollment, course and grade, leave of absence, and graduation data) are collected, integrated, and maintained.
- Program Review
 - Implementing periodic program reviews and supporting ongoing program assessments (often including enrollment, graduation, post-graduation employment, satisfaction, among other measures), which may include surveys of current and former students.
- Advising and Mentoring

- Hosting faculty mentoring workshops that are required of faculty members before they are appointed to the graduate faculty.
- Academic and Non-Academic Supports
 - Providing a range of non-academic supports, such as health services, social events for students, social networks, graduate student lounge, housing referrals, and fully or partially subsidized health insurance.
- Supporting Students Underrepresented
- Supporting underrepresented student associations on campus (including black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian student associations) that offered social events and support for their members.
- Professional Development
 - Offering career-oriented workshops on resume writing, marketing job skills, and mock interviews specific to graduate students, and holding career fairs where potential employers are invited to meet with students.

CONCLUSION

- “For graduate schools, the implication of this conclusion is that a strong sense of community within programs is more likely to promote completion.” pg. 105

Highlights from the reports from Hanover include:

- Market place is changing - innovation to attract students is necessary
- International students: resources/decreasing tuition
- Micro Credentialing programs - workplace skills
- Competency based curriculum (nursing education at national level is moving toward this model)
- Experiential learning (College-Employer partnerships)
- Academic coaches/Peer mentors/diversity in faculty
- Diversify use of campus - rent space; multipurpose space
- Engage alumni
- Clearly establish a “brand” and market as such
- GRADUATE
- Social media expansion
- Run admission office in fashion of business model: recruitment models; being strategic
- Use of technology
- Communication, early with applicants, those not completing applications, reaching out to support those having difficulties with maintaining grades
- Collaborate with departments : academic affairs, financial departments, students, alumni, marketing,
- Provide programs that serve a gap and the market needs

Appendix 4: Doctoral Subcommittee Report

TO: Graduate and Professional School Task Force Executive Committee

FROM: Doctoral Subcommittee, Graduate and Professional School Task Force

RE: Doctoral Subcommittee Report

The Doctoral Subcommittee of the Graduate School Task Force is comprised of Adam Seipp (Co-Chair, Graduate and Professional School), Mark Zoran (Co-Chair, Science), Antoinetta Quigg (TAMU-G), Jay Ramadoss (Vet Med), Idia Thurston (Liberal Arts), Narendra Kumar (Pharmacy), Bruno Ruest (Dentistry), Richard Malak (Engineering), Christian Hilty (Science), David Threadgill (Medicine), Istvan Szunyogh (Geoscience), Wayne Smith (AGLS), Ashley Seabury (Vet Med), Kara Bond (Education), Chante Anderson (Black Graduate Student Association), Mohit Kurana (Indian Graduate Student Association), Shannon Walton (Graduate and Professional School), and Gerianne Alexander (Research). The subcommittee has been tasked to “Review our current practices and programs related to the graduate school guiding principles and 2020-2025 university graduate and professional education strategic priorities and form recommendations to move our institution towards becoming a globally-recognized leader in graduate and professional education.”

The Subcommittee held an organizational meeting on October 29 to plan our activities for the Fall and Spring. After discussion, we decided to convene a series of forums with key stakeholders across the university community who are engaged in doctoral education. We elected not to hold “open” forums, but rather to invite functional groups to participate in order to enhance the focus of our discussions. All meetings were held via Zoom. On November 11, we met with faculty directors of doctoral programs (23 attendees). On November 12, we met with staff administrators of doctoral programs (22 attendees). On December 7, the subcommittee met with leaders of graduate student organizations, a session organized in conjunction with Graduate and Professional Student Government President Uthej Vatiapalli (19 attendees). On December 3, we met with directors and representatives of Interdisciplinary Programs (21 attendees). In addition, one or both subcommittee co-chairs met with the Executive Committees of the Faculty Senate and Council of Principal Investigators and addressed the monthly meeting of the Council of Principal Investigators on January 13.

In addition to the feedback gathered at the forums, the subcommittee drew upon a variety of other data sources, including the Graduate Unit Benchmarking Report (hereafter, “Benchmarking”) prepared by Hanover Research, the Council of Graduate Schools report *The Organization and Administration of Graduate Education* (hereafter “Organization”), registration reports from professional development workshops, and the newly-available Fully-Funded Doctoral Student report.

The subcommittee's recommendations are guided in large part by the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) presented in our charging document. The subcommittee believes that the KPIs present an opportunity to generate a road map toward the creation of a dynamic, forward- thinking, and fair structure of doctoral education, one that can “play a critical role in elevating the quality and impact of individual graduate programs” (Organization). The Graduate and Professional School, in the eyes of this subcommittee, should act as a hub for doctoral programs, faculty, and students. The Graduate and Professional School should be a node that can disseminate best practices through professional development, serve as a facilitator for partnerships across institutions, and advocate for doctoral students in all parts of the university community. The subcommittee was also guided by the call in the charging document to be student-centered. As one doctoral program administrator expressed in our forum, “our shared goal is student success.”

While the subcommittee's forums and meeting discussions ranged widely, we have identified seven key areas where we believe the Graduate and Professional School can act to the benefit of doctoral education at Texas A&M.

1. **Build a research development unit focused on enhancing fellowships, training grants and other external funding opportunities.** The Graduate and Professional School should create an office dedicated to “promot[ing] research culture that encourages submission of competitive grant proposals by faculty and graduate students” (Organization). This office would have several key functions. First, it would operate as a university-wide incubator for students and faculty members seeking to develop external research proposals with a doctoral training component. Such proposals might include NSF GRFP, Fulbright, or Ford Foundation fellowships. Activities could include holding workshops on grant writing and training for department and program staff on helping students with external funding applications. This has been successfully implemented at the University of California – Berkeley Graduate Division (Benchmarking). This office would coordinate with other proposal development units across the university to ensure continuity of effort.

Second, this unit would be responsible for facilitating large and complex grant applications. These include NIH T32 awards that directly facilitate the recruiting and retention of highly qualified doctoral students. Some of this work is already underway, through an emerging partnership between the Graduate and Professional School and Research Development Services. The creation of a Research Development Unit will likely require additional staffing.

2. **Establish integrated, university-wide initiatives to recruit and retain URM doctoral students.** The Graduate and Professional School should position itself at the heart of the effort to substantially enhance the diversity of the student population at Texas A&M University. While many initiatives, including the Avilés-Johnson Fellowship and Pathways to the Doctorate, have achieved notable success, there is considerable room for growth. Participants frequently

observed that current efforts to recruit URM students take place at the department level. This has several drawbacks, including duplication of effort, placing a disproportionate load on URM faculty, and inhibiting the emergence of a whole-of-university response to this challenge.

The Graduate and Professional School should play a central role in bringing URM students to campus for coordinated recruiting visits, working with departments to disseminate best practices, and establishing partnerships or organized pipeline programs with Minority Serving Institutions. Since the goal is both recruiting and retention of URM students, attention should be paid to facilitating social and networking opportunities, which “promote retention by providing social support” (Organization). This may require additional staffing for the Graduate and Professional School.

While Texas A&M University continues to build partnerships with Prairie View A&M, the subcommittee urges the Graduate and Professional School to work aggressively to leverage our considerable assets toward developing formal pipeline arrangements. The Fisk-Vanderbilt Masters-to-PhD Bridge Program is a particularly compelling model. Between 2004 and 2018, 29 URM PhDs graduated with degrees with Physics, Astronomy, and Materials Science (<https://www.fisk-vanderbilt-bridge.org/>). A similar program, expanded to include social sciences and humanities, would position Texas A&M as a national and global leader in innovative doctoral education. A pipeline program with Prairie View A&M might be named in honor of Matthew Gaines. It would contribute to addressing the underrepresentation of Black and African-American graduate students highlighted in the recent report by the Texas A&M Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Additionally, the Graduate and Professional School should work toward establishing and maintaining partnerships with industry and national laboratories with the goal of enhancing research and career opportunities for URM students.

3. **Create new, and expand existing, professional development programs for faculty, staff, and students.** The Graduate and Professional School should establish a program of professional development that makes distinctions between the needs of various stakeholders in our doctoral programs. Regular meetings should be held for faculty directors of doctoral programs and, separately, for administrators (generally staff) who perform key organizational functions for graduate programs.

The need for professional development is particularly acute among program administrators, who report a “baptism by fire” with little of the networking and support that undergraduate program administrators have through venues like University Advisors and Counselors (UAC). The Graduate and Professional School should establish a council of graduate advisors, with representation from each college, and should facilitate regular training and meetings.

This council should be a central node of communication for best graduate administration practices across the institution. The Graduate Coordinator Network at the University of Texas at Austin may serve as a useful model here (<https://wikis.utexas.edu/display/GCN/Graduate+Coordinator+Network>).

Professional development opportunities for students appear to be robust and popular. In FY20, the last time that pre-pandemic data is available, the G.R.A.D. Aggies Professional Development Program held 133 events with an average attendance of 26.8 students per event. Doctoral students at our forum who participated in these professional development events expressed enthusiasm for those that exist and a desire for more opportunities.

4. **Develop a standing committee to coordinate activities with branch campuses, academic programs and research units outside of College Station.** The Graduate and Professional School should establish a standing committee for the support of programmatic faculty, staff and students outside of the Texas A&M College Station campus. During our meetings and forums, we received considerable feedback from individuals at these other unit sites that more effort was needed to harmonize programs, rules, and support systems. Many of the friction points identified in our discussions were beyond the immediate control of the Graduate and Professional School. These include challenges in parking when conducting business on main campus, differential access to student services (particularly counseling services) that may not be available at all units, the need for multiple email addresses to manage different university processes, and the structure of fees for graduate and professional students. The Graduate and Professional School may be well-positioned to identify and, when possible, ameliorate concerns about what one participant called the “College Station centered-ness” of Texas A&M University.
5. **Advocate for and coordinate student services on behalf of graduate students.** One of the most important themes that emerged from our conversations with faculty and students was the widespread perception that student services at Texas A&M are primarily focused on the needs of undergraduates, to the exclusion of graduate and professional students. While the Graduate and Professional School does not offer many of these services itself, more attention should be paid to ensuring that student services explicitly serve the needs of graduate and professional students. The development of articulated partnership agreements among units may be fruitful where practicable.

Several examples came up frequently, particularly Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). While CAPS offers programming for graduate students, that programming is relatively limited. Career Services likewise appears largely undergraduate-focused, although efforts are currently underway to expand graduate services. This problem appears particularly acute for students at sites outside of College Station. In some cases, notably graduate Ombuds services, there appears to be a lack of awareness among graduate students about the range and function of available services.

6. **Develop a visible and robust development strategy in partnership with the Division of Academic Affairs Development Office.** Forum participants stressed the need to pursue development opportunities to enhance the overall quality of doctoral research and education. Priorities might include a naming gift for the Graduate and Professional School and funds to enhance the retention of students from underrepresented groups. These efforts should begin with establishing what one forum called “a footprint in the foundation.” This may also be an opportunity to form a philanthropy or external advisory and development board as an initial step toward “creating a network of friends of graduate education” (Organization).
7. **Reimagine marketing and communications related to doctoral education.** Communication from the Graduate and Professional School should reflect the school’s student-centered approach. While the subcommittee acknowledged the fact that the pre-existing OGAPS website is undergoing substantial revision, we still discussed opportunities for meaningful change. Participants in these discussions pointed to a number of small and large changes that would help to better communicate the school’s mission. Student participants requested clear language outlining the rights and responsibilities of graduate students in what one participant called the “grey zone” between their roles as student, instructors, and employees. Graduate advisors expressed a desire to be consulted regarding the presentation of information for student consumption, and emphasized that clearer language on university-level requirements will help resolve problems that sometimes cause delays in earning degrees.

There was also discussion of the relationship between the Graduate and Professional School and the marketing of doctoral opportunities at Texas A&M. The Graduate and Professional School should seek out opportunities to coordinate with the Marketing and Communications teams at component colleges and schools in order to present a more harmonized message to external consumers.

A number of significant challenges remain outside the scope of this subcommittee’s charge. Our charge specified that we should not assume substantial budget increases, the question of funding for doctoral education emerged repeatedly. The subcommittee identified and discussed extensively the problem of uneven support for doctoral students across the university and urges the Task Force to make sure that this issue remains at the forefront of conversations about doctoral education moving forward. In Spring 2019, according to the OGAPS Fully-Funded Doctoral Student report, 76.5% of doctoral students were fully funded, but this figure is highly differentiated across colleges and units. Some colleges, including Business (97%) and Science (90.6%) fully fund almost all doctoral students. Others, like Public Health (57.1%) and Education (43%) have far lower funding rates. One forum participant pointed out that existing internal funding programs like the Doctoral Merit Fellowship are structured around the financing model of departments that have substantial

access to external funding. The subcommittee agrees that the Graduate and Professional School should not attempt to mandate levels of funding, but that more attention should be paid to ensuring that programs have access to resources to provide high-quality funding packages for doctoral students.

There are also substantial disparities in the level of funding. In Spring 2020, the median monthly assistantship stipend for a doctoral Graduate Assistant Teaching (GAT) position was \$2,000. Again, there is a significant range between, and within, colleges. The average GAT stipend at Mays Business School is \$2,300, while in the College of Architecture it is \$1,350. The subcommittee recognizes that there are many reasons for these differential funding levels. It may be useful to gather data about assistantship funding levels at peer/aspirant institutions so that programs can focus on making their stipends competitive within their disciplines.

Nevertheless, the membership urges the Graduate and Professional School Task Force to consider ways that the university might address the problem of equity in doctoral funding. Subcommittee member discussions included a range of ideas in this regard, including expanding the number of years of eligibility for doctoral funding and using funds from IDC return to fund doctoral students.

In summary, our subcommittee heard input from over 100 stakeholders in doctoral graduate education at Texas A&M University, including students, faculty, staff and administrators. Although we recommend seven specific, student-centered initiatives that will move the institution's global recognition for doctoral training, a simple request emerged from our many forums: the new Graduate and Professional School should be leveraged to make Texas A&M a better place for doctoral students to pursue their studies, but also used to promote doctoral programs in determined and forceful ways. Our recommendations each support a central goal of creating a new hub for graduate and professional education. For doctoral students spending five or more years on their research studies, a graduate and professional school should become a space for engaging community, incubating ideas, integrating disciplines, and sharing experiences.

REFERENCES

Published:

Council of Graduate Schools. (2019). The Organization and Administration of Graduate Education. <https://cgsnet.org/organization-and-administration-graduate-education-0>
Texas A&M University. (2021) Stronger Together: A Report by the Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. <https://president.tamu.edu/committees-task-forces/commission-on-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/documents/CDEI-Final-Report-2021.pdf>

Unpublished:

Graduate and Professional School. (2021) Fully-Funded Doctoral Students
Hanover Research. (2018) Graduate Unit Benchmarking: Prepared for Texas A&M University
Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. (2020) G.R.A.D. Aggies Enrollment and Programming Report

Appendix 5: First Professional Doctoral Subcommittee Report

Members: George Cunningham (Graduate and Professional School, administrator, co-chair), Charlotte Ku (Law, faculty, co-chair), Bruno Ruest (Dentistry, faculty), Sarah Allen Parker (Dentistry, faculty), Amanda Cervantes (Law, student), Aric K Short (Law, faculty), Terri Helge (Law, administrator), Brett Mitchell (Medicine, faculty), Katherine Brakora (Medicine, faculty), Nadia El Hamdi (Medicine, student), Adam Brown (Pharmacy, faculty), Fadi Khasawneh (Pharmacy, faculty), Ivan Rusyn (Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, faculty), and Kristin Chaney (Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, faculty).

Charge: Review our current practices and programs related to the graduate school guiding principles and 2020-2025 university graduate and professional education strategic priorities and form recommendations to move our institution towards becoming a globally-recognized leader in graduate and professional education.

Graduate and Professional Strategic Priorities

- **Elevate.** Strategically enhance our graduate and professional programs and elevate their visibility and prominence, both nationally and internationally.
- **Recruit and Retain.** Attract, retain, develop, support, and graduate outstanding and diverse graduate and professional students.
- **Creative Funding.** Commit to providing multi-year competitive funding for all full-time doctoral (Ph.D.) students, including increasing individual and institutional graduate training grants and foundation support; provide suggestions for equitable funding models to improve monetary support of graduate students.
- **Innovative Programs.** Improve interdisciplinary graduate and professional education, reducing barriers and fostering collaborations; expand professional master's programs, including integrative bachelor's and master's programs; cultivate academic innovation in graduate and professional programs; address opportunities for graduate certificates and micro-credentials that are innovative and accessible.
- **Culture of Mentoring.** Build a culture of inclusive advising, mentoring, and professional development, providing mentor and mentee support and training that seeks to institutionalize the value of the mentor/mentee relationship; equip faculty and staff to better advise, mentor, and teach graduate and professional students and promote their professional growth.

- **Professional Development.** Expand our offerings of graduate student professional development programming to enhance career success; and deepen our engagement with graduate and professional alumni as life-long learners.
- **Culture and Climate.** Nurture a diverse, inclusive, and respectful environment between and among faculty, staff, and students; address climate and culture issues proactively; and improve transparency and accountability.
- **Career Guidance.** Improve career guidance and placement resources for graduate and professional students while articulating the value of diverse career pathways both in and outside of academia.
- **Transparent Data.** Provide greater transparency of graduate and professional student data and career outcomes to foster continuous improvement and innovation of programs.
- **Student Experience.** Develop infrastructure and learner support services to ensure a high-quality digital learning environment, foster graduate and professional student community, ensure teaching effectiveness in the discipline and appropriate evaluation and feedback practices, and propagate the “Aggie” experience for all students.
- **Professional Advancement.** Establish innovative credentialing opportunities for professional advancement and to meet emerging career opportunities for traditional students and adult learners; create an educational advancement program and policies to provide opportunities for employees to achieve their dreams through additional education.
- **Lifelong Learning.** Enhance professional and personal development programs for lifelong learners, including a focus on core values such as leadership while highlighting professional development opportunities that value the graduate student from a holistic perspective.

Graduate and Professional Key Performance Indicators

- Increase URM graduate and professional enrollment to 30% of domestic students, and degrees awarded to 25%.
- Decrease median time to degree to five years and increase five-year and 10-year completion rates to 50% and 80%, respectively, for Ph.D. students across all demographic groups.
- Increase the number of institutional external training grants by 100% [T32, NRT, GAANN, etc].
- Increase the percentage of graduate students participating in university graduate professional development experiences by 20% each year.
- Improve graduate student climate as indicated by GradSERU climate survey for the following two metrics: (i) I feel that I belong at Texas A&M University; (ii) I feel welcome at Texas A&M

University.

Summary of Subcommittee Activities: co-chair meetings (n = 2), committee meetings (n = 2), open forums (n = 2), data collection from individual schools, emails received, and website portal for feedback; and review of supporting documents and materials (see final section).

Highlights of Review of Data:

- Many stakeholders reported difficulty navigating university resources. The stakeholders interpreted the resources as only available for other parties, including College Station campus students, undergraduate students, or international students.
- Students reported a lack of disability support and psychological support services.
- Stakeholders reported an opportunity for the professional school programs to collaborate more closely with one another. The collaborations could take several forms, including professionalism and leadership training, events among students, and advocating together for topics that affect all professional programs.
- Students expressed a desire to receive messages and to find connections to campus that were relevant to their interests, stages in life, and needs.
- Faculty and administrators expressed concern about the lack of recognition of specific professional school standards and practices mandated by their own accrediting bodies. There was recognition for University-wide standards and practices, but that implementation should take into account where professional schools had existing standards and practices some of which could not change to fit University standards.
- Stakeholders urged university administrators not to assume that all units, and particularly professional schools, could comply with the same standards and practices that might have initially been developed for undergraduate education or academic degrees.

Recommendations to Task Force:

1. Convene an interdisciplinary committee on professionalism and leadership training in TAMU professional schools to explore opportunities for collaboration in teaching, scholarship, and service. This effort would recognize that each professional program might have discipline-specific requirements in this area imposed by accrediting bodies. There also may be opportunities, however, for joint work on topics of convergence, such as leadership, emotional intelligence, resilience, ethical decision-making, wellness, and others.
2. Anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges are widespread in professional education, and professional programs located outside of College Station should be supported in a manner similar to those in College Station. Explore and prioritize the hiring of one or

more licensed counselors who would split time among various TAMU professional programs located outside College Station so that on multiple days every week, each professional program would have a licensed counselor on campus.

3. Ensure that requirements pertaining to College Station students, faculty, and staff are altered, when necessary, to reflect the unique nature of the professional schools. Examples include:
 - a. Academic Calendar, as professional schools might have different start times and different semester lengths.
 - b. New Course and Program Requirements.
 - c. Minimum Syllabus Requirements, which contains alternatives for Galveston, Qatar, and Law, but not other professional schools.
4. Form a Professional School Working Group to serve as advocates for professional school student needs and concerns within TAMU graduate programs. Examples of where advocacy or awareness might be useful:
 - a. Flagging University-wide communications that may not be appropriate for the professional school community, such as those pertaining to academic calendars or minimum syllabus requirements as listed in (3) above.
 - b. Ensuring that University-wide services, such as wellness and career development programs, are developed to include professional school interests and needs.
 - c. Ensure that University-wide services, such as Education Abroad and International Student Services, are aware of any particular needs of professional schools in supporting exchange activities, field courses, and the like.
5. Develop appropriate representation from professional schools and engagement with the central administration to ensure that:
 - a. University-wide practices and policies do not intrude into or conflict with the autonomy needed by professional schools to comply with their accrediting bodies and standards;
 - b. Compliance with University-wide standards, like SACSCOC, is carried out in ways that do not duplicate or add to the reporting requirements that already exist in professional schools. This may include considering how data collected can be most efficiently and effectively used for multiple reporting purposes.

Recommendations for Other Subcommittees:

Though the focus of this sub-committee was on first professional programs, many of the schools also offer master's programs. As with other systems, the programs within the schools influence one another. Thus, the committee arrived at other recommendations applicable for other subcommittees.

1. Develop career counseling and development services and programs for master's students in professional schools who may not seek the formal accreditation of a J.D. or other professional degree, but who are pursuing a degree as part of general career development or acquisition of new skills.
2. Find ways to connect students enrolled in online or one-year degree programs with students

Supporting Sources and Documents

Council of Graduate Schools. (2018). *The organization and administration of graduate education; A guide for university leaders*. Washington, DC:

Council of Graduate Schools. (2005). *Task force report on the professional doctorate*. Washington, DC.

Texas A&M University Graduate Student Mental Health Sessions Summary Report.

Appendix 6: Subcommittee Recommendation Table

Recommendation	Code	Theme
Doctoral 2: Establish integrated, university-wide initiatives to recruit and retain URM doctoral students	URM Recruiting.	Recruitment and Expanded Graduate Student Funding. SC Represented: Doctoral.
Doctoral 1: Build a research development unit focused on enhancing fellowships, training grants, and other external funding opportunities	External Funding for Recruitment.	
Doctoral 3: Create new, and expand existing, professional development programs for faculty, staff, and students	Professional Development for Faculty, Staff, and Students.	Enhance Professional Development for Faculty, Staff, and Students.
First Professional 1: Convene an interdisciplinary committee on professionalism and leadership training in TAMU professional schools to explore opportunities for collaboration in teaching, scholarship, and service.	Coordinated Professional Development.	SC Represented: Master's, Doctoral, First Professional.
Master's 8: Work to improve the effectiveness of graduate student teaching through more purposeful interactions in teaching assistant feedback and evaluation in partnership with ongoing Center for Teaching Excellence activities and programs	Improve Effectiveness of Graduate Teaching Assistants.	

Doctoral 5: Advocate for and coordinate student services on behalf of graduate students, with a focus on counseling and psychological services, career services, Ombuds.	Student services	Promote Applicability and Make Student Services Widely Available for Graduate and Professional Students
First Professional 2: Explore and prioritize the hiring of one or more licensed counselors who would split time among various TAMU professional programs located outside College Station so that on multiple days every week, each professional program would have a licensed counselor on campus.	Access to Counseling and Psychological Services	in the Following Areas: Psychological Services, Career Services, Ombuds, Disability Services.
First professional, Other 1: Develop career counseling and development services and programs for master's students in professional schools	Career counseling services	SC Represented: Master's, Doctoral, and First Professional.
Master's 3: Interdisciplinary career fairs should be welcoming and useful to master's students. Communicate existing opportunities.	Career development	
Master's 9: Consider offering specific Ombuds services for master's students	Ombuds services	
Master's 11: Leverage centralized activities in the area of student mental health and disability services to ensure in-person and distance students and faculty at all campuses are aware of opportunities and activities when they need services.	Mental health and disability services	

First Professional 3: Ensure that requirements pertaining to College Station students, faculty, and staff are altered, when necessary, to reflect the unique nature of the professional schools.	Accommodate unique nature and needs of professional school.	Support Heterogeneity of Programs.
First Professional 4c: Ensure that University-wide services, such as Education Abroad and International Student Services, are aware of any particular needs of professional schools in supporting exchange activities, field courses, and the like.	Accommodate Unique Needs	SC Represented: Master's, First Professional.
First Professional 4: Form a Professional School Working Group to serve as advocates for professional school/student needs and concerns within TAMU graduate program.	Advocacy among first professional programs for unique needs.	
Master's 13: Orientation activities should be more tailored and student-centered; when possible, master's students should receive an orientation separate from doctoral students	Tailored services.	
Master's 1: Articulate the unique contributions of master's programs and students.	Differences among and unique value of master's programs	

Master's 4: We also propose an initiative to streamline 3+2, 4+1, and dual degree program students into the graduate program so that they are considered full-time students, are considered part of both degrees, and receive appropriate advisement and communication at the right time	Streamline degree programs.	Improve Administrative Processes.
First Professional 5: Ensure that University-wide practices and policies do not intrude into or conflict with needed autonomy, and collect data efficiently and effectively to be used for multiple reporting purposes.	Administrative Policies and Practices	SC Represented: Master's, Doctoral, First Professional.
Master's 5: Continually collect GradSERU data to ensure consistency and to allow for benchmarking of student feedback.	Data-informed decisions.	
Doctoral 4: Develop a standing university committee to coordinate activities with branch campuses, academic programs and research units outside of College Station	Harmonize Programs, Rules, and Support Systems	
Master's 6: Monitor and use institutional data for evidence-based decision making.	Data-informed decisions.	
Master's 12: Reduce funding barriers to interdisciplinarity by adlocing students to the college instead of the agencies.	Reduce administrative barriers.	

First Professional 4a: Flag communications not relevant to professional schools	Tailored communications.	Improve Marketing, Communications and Development. SC Represented: Master's, Doctoral, and First Professional.
Master's 14: Seek to communicate more effectively.	Communication Effectiveness.	
Doctoral 7: Reimagine marketing and communications related to doctoral education.	Doctoral Marketing and Communications to Prospective and Current Students.	
Master's 1: Articulate the unique contributions of master's programs and students is important to the work of the Graduate and Professional School.	Communication of the Unique value of Master's Programs.	
Doctoral 6: Develop a visible and robust development strategy in partnership the Division of Academic Affairs Development Office.	Increase development Efforts.	
Master's 2: Work to improve the search feature of our grad.tamu.edu websites to ensure items are tagged in lay terms and consider other ways to centrally promote resources through the Graduate and Professional School.	Accessible Information.	

Master's 10: Provide the Howdy Advisor Tab to faculty and staff members who need access to these resources	Advising Access.	Enhance Mentoring, Advising, and Community Building. SC Represented: Master's, First Professional.
Master's 7: Improve mentoring impacts across colleges and departments through specific engagement with faculty and graduate students and the creation of an articulated plan for graduate student mentoring. Ensure that mentoring is specific for master's students who may have different needs (e.g., research or professional; in-person or distance).	Mentoring.	
First Professional 2: Find ways to connect students enrolled in online or one-year degree programs with students in similar programs and to the wider Aggie community	Build Community	

Appendix 7: TAMU Strategic Plan 2020-2025 – Graduate and Professional Education

Graduate and Professional Education Strategic Priorities

- Develop a Globally-Recognized Graduate & Professional School
- Build a Culture of Inclusive Advising, Mentoring, & Professional Development
- Cultivate Academic Innovation in Graduate & Professional Programs

Appendix 8: TAMU Strategic Plan 2020-2025- Graduate and Professional Education KPIs

Graduate and Professional -- Key Performance Indicators

1. Increase URM graduate and professional enrollment to 30% of domestic students, and degrees awarded to 25%.
2. Decrease median time to degree to five years, and increase five-year and 10-year completion rates to 50% and 80%, respectively, for Ph.D. students across all demographic groups.
3. Increase number of institutional external training grants (e.g., T32, NRT, GAANN) by 100%
4. Increase percentage of graduate students participating in university graduate professional development experiences by 20% each year.
5. Improve graduate student climate as indicated by GradSERU climate survey for the following two metrics: (i) I feel that I belong at Texas A&M University; (ii) I feel welcome at Texas A&M University.


Appendix 9: Open Forum Presentation

 | TEXAS A&M
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Graduate School Task Force Forum

March 23, 2021

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES1

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Open Forum Format

- **Goal:** Gather feedback on Task Force recommendations
- Present Overview and Task Force Recommendations
- Registrants move to breakout rooms
- One Facilitator and One Notetaker assigned to each breakout room
- Facilitators gather input on recommendations in breakouts

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES2

Graduate School Task Force Timeline

- September 2020 – Task Force reconvenes
- October 2020 – Subcommittees begin work
- November 2020 – Subcommittees host open forums to gather input
- February 1, 2021 -- Subcommittee reports submitted to Executive Committee of Task Force
- March 8, 2021 -- Task Force meeting to discuss subcommittee reports
- March 23, 2021 – Task Force Recommendations presented at Open Forum
- April 7, 2021 -- Final Task Force recommendations submitted to Provost

Subcommittees' Charge

- Three subcommittees: master's, doctoral, first professional doctorate
- Subcommittees' Charge
 - i. Identify issues/barriers and changes needed to address Graduate and Professional education priorities in university strategic plan
 - ii. Gather input from faculty, staff, administrators and students
 - iii. Provide recommendations to address item (i), including role of Graduate and Professional School and other university-level units
- Three Subcommittees – membership and reports including recommendations available on Task Force webpages

Draft Task Force Recommendations

- The subcommittees articulated many recommendations for promoting graduate and professional education at Texas A&M University.
- The Task Force recommends prioritizing the following high-need recommendations that can result in immediate, meaningful transformation.
- Adopting many of these recommendations will not require an influx of new resources. Future growth and innovations, however, may require additional resources

Draft Task Force Recommendations

1. Recruitment and Expanded Graduate Student Funding

- Establish integrated, university-wide initiatives to recruit and retain graduate students who are from underrepresented, minoritized groups (URM students).
- Develop a visible and robust development strategy focused on enhancing fellowships, training grants, and other external funding opportunities.

2. Enhance Professional Development for Faculty, Staff, and Students

- a. Establish organizations for faculty directors of graduate programs and staff graduate advisors, respectively. The aim of each should be to support onboarding, promote professional development, and share best practices
- b. Enhance professional development opportunities for graduate and professional students, including the addition of equity-focused professional development and more systematic efforts in teaching assistant feedback and evaluation

3. Promote Applicability and Make Services Widely Available for Graduate and Professional Students

- a. More attention should be paid to ensuring that Student Services offices have the capacity and explicitly serve the needs of all graduate and professional student levels, including distance students

4. Support Campuses outside Bryan/College Station and the First Professional Programs

- a. Form a Professional School Working Group to serve as advocates and liaisons for professional schools and their students, highlighting needs and concerns
- b. Enhance capacity of and access to Counseling and Psychological Services.
- c. establish a standing committee which meets annually for the support of graduate and professional students, faculty, and staff outside of the Texas A&M Bryan/College Station campus

5. Improve Administrative Processes

- a. Work with colleges and agencies to reduce funding barriers to interdisciplinarity and to improve consistency of graduate assistant policies by adlocing graduate assistants to colleges instead of the agencies.
- b. Streamline processes for 3+2, 4+1, and other combined degree programs to ensure these students receive appropriate academic and financial aid advisement, communications, and related services

6. Improve Marketing and Communications

- a. Articulate to internal and external stakeholders the unique contributions and value of master's programs and students and the variety of our master's program offerings, research or professionally focused, online or face-to-face.
- b. The Graduate and Professional School should focus on positioning itself as a student-centered hub for graduate and professional students.

7. Enhance Mentoring, Advising, and Community Building

- a. The Graduate and Professional School should enhance mentoring and advising activities, and engage in activities designed to foster a sense of community among all Texas A&M University graduate and professional students, irrespective of their degree program or location

Breakout Instructions

- Your feedback is important. We want to hear your perspective and understand your point of view on the recommendations from the task force.
- Please mute unless you are speaking.
- Breakout facilitators are tasked with keeping the ground rules and ensuring everyone has an opportunity to speak. Please try to keep responses brief. We want everyone to express their thoughts in the limited time we have together. We can circle back if time allows.
- The intent of our session is to listen and record input and reactions on the recommendations from the task force.
- Your specific comments will not be attributed to you, your name, your position, etc. We have assigned a note taker to each session so that we can be sure we record the thoughts expressed.
- We welcome your feedback if you think of something later or prefer not to share in your breakout room: <http://ogaps.tamu.edu/About/Graduate-School/Task-Force-Feedback>
- When everyone in your room is done sharing, you may leave the meeting. We will not be bringing you back into the main room. You will have approximately 40 minutes in the breakout room to share your feedback.
- We very much appreciate you taking the time to join us today to share your feedback on the task force recommendations.

Move to Breakout