Task Force Recommendations

The subcommittees articulated many recommendations for promoting graduate and professional education at Texas A&M University. The Task Force advises the Graduate and Professional School and other university offices to review, consider, and adopt these recommendations, where applicable.

Whereas each recommendation warrants consideration, the Task Force also sees value in prioritizing certain, high-need activities that can result in immediate, meaningful transformation. Following analysis of the subcommittee reports and subsequent themes, the Task Force recommends prioritizing the following recommendations.

In FY20, the University designated new resources to prioritize and support excellence in graduate and professional student education. Thus, adopting many of these recommendations will not require an influx of new resources. Future growth and innovations, however, may require additional resources.

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 underrepresented, minoritized 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 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. 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 should include a representative from each department and intercollegiate faculty with a graduate 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 facilitate regular training and meetings. This council should be a central node of communication for best graduate administrative practices across the institution.

b. In line with the Commission on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion's [recommendations](), 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. 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.

    ii. Improve the effectiveness of graduate student teaching through purposeful teaching assistant feedback and evaluation in partnership with ongoing Center for Teaching Excellence activities and programs

3. **Promote Applicability and Make Services Widely Available for Graduate and Professional Students**
   a. Whereas the Graduate and Professional School does not offer many of these services itself, 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. These collaborative efforts should focus on:

    i. Improving the organization and communication of access to important resources, including counseling and psychological services, career services, and ombuds services.

    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 tailored and student-centered orientation activities.

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. The 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 data collected can be most efficiently and effectively used for multiple reporting purposes.

b. Enhance 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 College Station. Such actions will ensure that on multiple days every week, each professional program would have a licensed counselor on campus.

c. The Graduate and Professional School should 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. 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 among accrediting bodies.

5. **Improve Administrative Processes**
   a. The Graduate and Professional School should 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 insteadof 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 studentsand 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. In doing so, it should improve marketing and communications efforts to prospective and current students through its website, targeted communications, and social media.

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.

i. In partnership with colleges, departments, and the Center for Teaching Excellence, create a comprehensive plan for graduate student mentoring which builds on best practices.

ii. Identify and disseminate best practices which address the unique mentoring and advising needs of master's students, and 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, career advising, academic support, and student health and counseling centers, to facilitate coordination and collaboration for student support.