

Ideas for Departmental Actions in the AAU PhD Education Initiative

In the fall of 2020, the [AAU PhD Education Initiative](#) hosted four virtual forums open to faculty (2 sessions) and students (2 sessions) from all 8 universities and 32 departments participating in the project. In small groups, participants were able to share and generate ideas to meet the challenges and shortcomings that they perceived that their departments faced in meeting their goals for student-centered doctoral education for all students.

This document captures the ideas that were generated in those sessions. Our effort was to focus on those ideas that were actionable and within the domain of the department. We have paraphrased and combined similar items. This list is intended to be a generative input of fresh ideas into departmental planning. Some of the ideas may spring from the particular circumstances of a discipline or a department, but there are many useful nuggets here.

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Student Recruitment and retention

- More BIPOC students need to be admitted the program, especially Black students, so that such students are able to actually form communities with each other
- Marginalized students shouldn't be used as bait during recruitment events, especially when the program is mostly white, cisgender, heterosexual, and male
- Initiate more discussions about economic disparities among students
- Reward service, as service in the department is usually done by a few students, especially women of color
- Create a plan for how to deal with discrimination when it occurs and communicate the plan

We have created a new committee on diversity and pedagogy which will report annually

Funding-related

- Increase the pay for graduate students. Improve funding during the year and during the summer.
- Find a way to make graduate students feel financially secure independent of the vagaries of grant funding.
- Make sure we avoid the [problem recently highlighted in *Chemistry & Engineering News*](#) of graduate students not having accident costs paid for.
- Create ample opportunities for work outside of teaching.

Develop mechanisms that allow graduate students to be able to take on paid internships as part of their graduate program.

- Treat internship like a TA assignment, and get tuition remission and health insurance.
- Use an elective course for internships
- Encourage internships during the summer
- Use university funding to pay for internships
- Secure cooperation from local companies and organizations to host interns

Incorporate professional skill development into the program.

- Institute a Professional Development course for those who have passed their qualifying exam
- Offer workshops and certificates in transferrable skills
- Require key skills into the first year curriculum

What kind of professional skills do students need and want?

- Allow students to construct and teach courses to get teaching experience
- How to write resumes, not just CVs
- The nuts & bolts of grant writing
- Public-facing writing
- Programming as a basic skill for all STEM programs
- More computational training to help make more industry careers accessible

Allow students to construct courses to get teaching experience

Faculty training in the basics of career diversity especially. I am the PI of a Mellon grant called [Humanities Without Walls](#), where we do this work in a 16-partner consortium

Work with the career center and post-PhD career counselors to facilitate career strategies for students.

- We need more counselors in the career center
- Graduate student focused career fair
- There is a wonderful new program at UT aimed at familiarizing graduate students with diverse career options--the [Career Engagement Office](#) led by Annie Maxfield, creator of [Imagine PhD](#). I would like our program to formalize a relationship with this center.

Start the conversations about careers much earlier in the program.

- Ask questions about careers, and signal openness to diverse career paths as part of the application and admissions process.
- Incorporate discussion about careers early in the program.
- Encourage students to reach out to career counselors and connect to the career center early in their program
- Beginning career conversations from day 1

Implement a virtual jobs site to match industry employers with students

Make detailed placement data available on website.

Create a database/directory with alumni outcomes, paths they took to get to their current position, and contact info to facilitate informational interviews.

Develop an exit survey for graduating students to gather information re: what alumni are doing post graduation

Ask all seminar speakers to include a section in their presentation about their career trajectories

Select more diverse speakers in our seminar series, to expose students to more diverse career choices.

Actively connect with alumni and incorporate them into the doctoral program, departmental events, and connect them with students

- Survey alumni
- Create an alumni network for the dept. and invite them to events
- Bring in more non-academic alumni to speak to students about life outside of the academy and share advice about career paths
- Create alumni mentorship opportunities

Develop a peer mentor program for students that starts before they arrive to town

Create peer mentoring program between stages: young grad students with older grad students, especially across research groups

Stop using "alt-act" terminology as it conveys to student that non-academic jobs are a Plan B

Greater transparency of processes

- Up to date and accurate policy handbooks and websites.
- Provide info about advisors including # students, what careers they are willing to mentor, etc.
- Explicit info about how to approach a faculty member to join their lab, and list of which faculty are taking students
- Improve transparency by sharing expectations with students

Make the receiving the master's degree along the way to the PhD normal and routine, to reduce the stigma

Change policy disincentives for an off-ramp master's degree

Have more check-ins and better checkpoints on the way to degree and during the dissertation process

Improve the qualifying examination procedures:

- Create qualifying exam procedures with clear, identifiable goals (even within our department, the process is very unclear)
- More consistency across departmental exam requirements
- Unify the qualifying exam process across dept. subdivisions
- Streamline requirements - find ways for qual tasks, etc. to be built into or supported by course work or other program requirements.
- Preliminary exams should be restructured so that they are useful without being unnecessarily grueling and stressful

Hire people outside of the academy to be part of the department/ offer at least one course a year

Use courses for professional development

- Incorporate diverse career paths into orientation/introductory coursework
- Have career exploration course in year 3 of doctoral program
- Professionalization courses for jobs outside the academy
- We've added a 1-credit required professionalization course (but it's still too focused on professoriate)
- Create a professionally-oriented grad certificate that would include arts management, grant & forms of professional writing.
- We've added a requirement that students take one course in any number of areas--digital humanities, higher ed administration, etc.

Better training for faculty to build skill building into their classes

Help students navigate out-of-department courses

Multiple advisors -- coach advisor and advisor for phd/research. (See the advising offered through the [Versatile Humanist project](#) run by Maria LaMonaca Wisdom at Duke University.)

Creating a system for the already in-place mandatory advisory committee meetings to facilitate career path conversations. (Some departments require an annual conversation about the students' Individual Development Plan, see [myIDP](#) for a sciences example of Individual Development Planning.)

Clearer expectations on advisor-student relationships such as lab contracts and handbooks

Departmental, anonymous reporting systems for students to report difficulties with faculty mentors without fear of backlash

Hold more forums within each department on open discussion of students' aspirations

Include student input and involvement in the planning and maintenance of plans.

Teach students how the university works, so that they can participate better in decision making. Make reasonable requests.

How can we not make this work additive (for students and faculty)?