

Themes from Year 1 Annual Report Reflections

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Goal Areas and Strategies

1. Mentoring and Advising

- Transform advising/mentoring practices and provide more support and resources for faculty advisors/mentors
 - Reform formal advising/mentoring practices and requirements to have more structure (i.e., integrate use of program-based Individualized Development Plans (IDPs), have expectations for annual advisement meetings to include professional development discussions)
 - Develop training and resources for faculty mentors/advisors so they can better support students' career development for multiple, diverse PhD career pathways
 - Equip faculty to assist graduate students in navigating existing on-campus and off-campus resources and opportunities
 - Create formal or informal opportunities for students to build relationships and have multiple mentors, including faculty mentors, peer mentors, and professional mentors
 - Create integrated hubs of mentorship for students that are comprised of faculty knowledge, program and campus resources and staff, information on career outcomes, and other reliable supports/resources
 - Recognize and reward mentorship work of faculty and make it a higher priority in hiring and promotion decisions
 - Note how current students preparing to become faculty members will advise and mentor future students

2. Alumni Engagement

- Engage alumni and PhDs in a wide array of careers to share with students and faculty about their current work and its impacts, as well as their career pathways and experiences
 - Feature them in career related panels, workshops, and events
 - Invite them as speakers in departmental seminars and colloquia
 - Showcase them in websites and newsletters
 - Engage them to provide (video recorded) informational interviews, internship/experiential learning opportunities, or to serve as mentors to students
 - Use alumni knowledge and feedback to inform program elements and create resources for students
 - Create or strengthen LinkedIn/social media groups for alumni and current students to connect

3. PhD Program Curriculum & Structure

- Review program elements through the lens of supporting flexibility for multiple career pathways and identify areas for improvement, restructuring, and streamlining
 - Graduate student orientation components – structure, and information and resources provided
 - Curricula – Content and structures of core and elective courses; opportunities to collaborate with other units to expand course offerings

- Program milestones (i.e., qualifying/preliminary exam tasks, thesis proposals, dissertation work, and thesis defenses) – Formats, structures, and supports for students to each milestones
- Professional socialization seminars and opportunities
- Other program requirements and constraints – policies on “outside” committee members, time and funding restrictions

4. Internships & Experiential Learning

- Increase opportunities for internships and experiential learning
 - Create funded internships, programs, assistantships, and experiences
 - Leverage existing or propose new training grants that integrate internships for funding
 - Create less time-intensive project-based learning experiences and micro-internships

5. Fostering Diverse and Inclusive Communities within the PhD Program

- Become a more diverse and inclusive department/program that fosters a strong sense of community and belonging for all students, faculty, and staff
 - Be more intentional in hiring, recruitment, and community building practices
 - Identify and address issues related to unwelcoming department climate including unjust biases, and microaggressions, including having clear reporting/grievance processes
 - Identify struggling students, especially in their first year, and provide outreach/support to them
 - Review curricula, policies, and processes with an inclusion lens
 - Value, support, and provide resources for mental health and wellbeing
 - Create or strengthen the department-based committee that focuses on anti-racism/diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues
 - Map commitment to DEI onto department/program support for student professionalization in diverse/flexible career pathways
 - Engage students directly in department/program improvement and decision making
 - Not requiring GREs for admission

6. Intra-university Collaborations to Advance Doctoral Education

- Develop mutually beneficial partnerships across programs/departments and with college/university-level units
 - Create interdisciplinary joint programs, such as certificate programs, minors, specialization areas, master’s degrees, etc.
 - Engage or create program/department/university-level committees, working groups, or task forces that include graduate students in these formal bodies and meetings
 - Create a “coalition of the willing” to begin efforts and grow momentum/engagement of others over time

7. Communication: Language & Transparency about the PhD Program

- Improve communications and transparency around the PhD program
 - Increase transparency in PhD program requirements and rationales, decision making and evaluation processes, admissions decisions/processes, tracking of student progress, assignment of graduate assistantships, and policies and expectations around faculty

advisement, mentorship practices, and student fellowship work – this helps to create trust and guidance

- Examine the discourse around career diversity and professionalization found in written materials and on websites
- Ensure accuracy in the representation of the variety of PhD graduates’ career pathways
- Refine language to show value for all career pathways – eliminate terms such as “Alternative careers” or “Alt-ac”

8. Information: Gathering, Sharing, and Using

- Gather, maintain, organize, and share useful information to advance efforts and help stakeholders
 - Create and maintain informational databases on individuals/organizations (e.g., program alumni, employers who hire PhD program graduates, internship and experiential learning opportunities, cross-university DGSs, etc.) that can be used in various ways to promote knowledge and communications, and advance efforts
 - Provide PhD program and career outcomes data/dashboards on website for current and prospective students, and internally to department/program leadership and faculty to inform discussions and decision making

Identified Challenges and Barriers

- Decentralization, large size of the university, and other structures/practices that create silos (e.g., an RCM funding model, lack of centralized policies such as on advising, lack of standard definitions such as for student assistantship categories, lack of shared vision for graduate education)
 - Faculty and students are often not aware of the full array of campus resources and services
 - Scattered resources and efforts lend themselves to missed opportunities for synergies, and duplications of efforts/resources
 - Often, decentralization creates dispersed lines of responsibility for graduate education that are overlapping but not hierarchical
 - Different programmatic needs and cultures make it difficult to find one-size-fits-all solutions
 - It is often difficult to coordinate efforts and share best practices/lessons learned across departments/units
 - Some department/units have cultures that are resistive to top-down directives (view them as evaluative)
 - Remote operations can also hinder connections, and relationship and community building
- Historically established norms, values, and funding structures of PhD education
 - Some ranking systems of programs are based upon PhD graduates’ careers
 - Some faculty lack familiarity with issues around career diversity or wider professional development and often believe that engagement with those issues should rest with others
 - Lack of recognition and reward for faculty advising/mentoring work

- Traditional one-on-one advising/mentoring model limits students' exposure to multiple mentors
 - In grant-funded fields, demands of research productivity and publication output are tied to graduate student funding
 - Large teaching loads are tied to some graduate student funding structures
 - Traditional TA/RA funding opportunities limit students' exposure to other career pathways and opportunities, and some do not provide funding in the summer months
- Tightening budgets and constrained fiscal realities of universities, colleges, departments, and programs
 - Some programs have paused or decreased new cohort admissions in order to support current students
 - Funding not available to implement new activities
- Capacity/bandwidth and stressors - Faculty members, professional staff, and graduate students are stretched very thin, especially under current conditions and recent events
 - Lack of time and creative energy
 - Mental health, wellness, exhaustion, and burnout are pressing concerns
 - Changes to or delays of research and student progress to the degree – some programs have extended progress timelines
 - Reluctance to invest in risky or new opportunities at a time marked by overall low sense of security
 - Students have anxiety about job prospects and concerns about the role, applicability, and utility of the PhD
 - Some students, faculty, staff and their families have recently experienced significant traumas and financial hardships
- Students who strongly want to pursue tenure-track faculty careers at research universities often are upset/discouraged by discussions about preparation for diverse career pathways so early on in their graduate school experience, and they can be reluctant to learn more in this area
- Some faculty feel that the hyper-competitive job market requires even greater specialization and research output
- Contact information for alumni is not easily accessible and it can be difficult to identify and connect with employers of PhDs in non-academic sectors
- Lack of targeted central services/supports/offices for supporting graduate students (often, they tend to focus on supporting undergraduate students)
- Zero-summing problem - How to not increase time to degree, yet add meaningful professional training to the program?

Assets and Levers

- Individuals, groups, networks, and relationships
 - Directors of Graduate Studies (DGSs), Program Coordinators, Deans, AVPs, and other graduate education administrators
 - Alumni networks
 - Industrial and employer networks
 - Disciplinary societies and associations
 - Faculty with diverse professional connections and experiences
 - Department-based and cross-university graduate student organizations
- Interdisciplinary and university centers, units, programs, and resources (e.g., interdisciplinary research institutes, career center, alumni relations, employer/industry relations, development, graduate college, offices/resources for international students and scholars, provost's office, university DEI office/director, center for teaching and learning, university counseling center, disability services, writing center)
- Other departments/programs that have similar goals, or overlap in knowledge/skill areas, or can offer their expertise (e.g., workshops offered through the school of leadership or business)
- Existing structures, such as colloquia, proseminars, and courses that can be adapted/modified or widened
- Participation in other national initiatives/projects/associations with similar aims (e.g., Council of Graduate Schools Pathways Project, Coalition for Next Gen Life Sciences, Sloan UCEM mentorship training program, disciplinary association efforts like the American Historical Association Career Diversity Initiative, the Graduate Career Consortium, etc.)
- Incorporation of professional development programming and activities in training grant proposals and existing projects

Needs

- Funding (for internships, experiential learning, summer programming, summer support for graduate students, an additional year of funding for advanced students, different types of graduate student fellowships, compensation to graduate students for assisting with program improvement efforts, course releases for faculty assisting with program improvement efforts, graduate student travel awards, application fee waivers for prospective students, new professional staff lines, speaker honorariums, community building events, workshops/trainings, membership organization dues, etc.)
- Support for fundraising through philanthropy and (training) grant proposal submissions
- Professional staff positions based in the department or at the college/university level with expertise in PhD career counseling and professional development
- University-wide coordination in targeted areas, such as mentoring/advising training or toolkits for faculty, professional development training/resources for graduate students, and university-wide learning outcomes for PhDs related to flexible/nimble career preparation

- Assistance in identifying alumni; (sponsored) internship and experiential learning opportunities for doctoral students; professional mentors for doctoral students; and potential employers of PhDs
- Advocacy and support from central administrators, department leaders, faculty, and students
- Structures for cross-unit, and even cross-institutional conversations and idea/resource sharing

Avenues for Communication and Idea Gathering

- Email listservs to campus groups (i.e., graduate students, faculty, DGSs, Department Chairs)
- Regularly sent newsletters to targeted groups
- Town halls, listening sessions, and focus groups
- Surveys of students, faculty, and alumni
- Meetings and retreats that engage both faculty and students
- Community events, such as “brown bags,” colloquia, as well as informal, and social events
- Websites, blogs, social media platforms, and slack channels