Identifying and Supporting Graduate Program Directors

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Graduate Education at MSU

• Over 3600 Graduate Students
  • Business 26%
  • Health-Human Services 22%
  • Education 20%
  • Agriculture, Arts/Letters, Humanities, Sciences, Interdisc 25%

• 47% Full-Time

• Graduate Credentials
  • 6 Professional Doctorates (2 in partnership)
  • 3 Specialists
  • 55 Master’s
  • 60+ Certificates
Statement of Need

• Assumed position in 2015
• Faculty perspective and now dean perspective: GPD role is not well defined, consistently administered effectively, adequately supported, etc.
• Former Director of Admissions
  • Took initiative to develop Grads Dashboard
  • Publish a quarterly newsletter
  • Host GPD meetings once/semester
• Orientation for new GPD
  • GC staff basics on using Grads Dashboard, Degree Works
• During interview… one area of emphasis
• There is a SCIENCE behind this.
  • We understand about science, so I engaged a consultant with expertise (PhD in org psych, professional consultant to businesses, non-profits)
Method

• Interviews: Deans, Department Heads, Graduate Program Directors
  • Semi-structured 40-60 minute face-to-face interviews
  • Topics of discussion
    • Selection & onboarding
    • Role definitions: essential duties, responsibilities, expectations
    • Examples of outstanding & inadequate GPD performances; Underlying traits
    • Inclusion of GPD role as part of performance evaluation

• Surveys: Hosted online & delivered to all graduate program directors
  • Task inventory: 4 major role responsibilities; 54 unique task statements
  • Criticality of task & ratings of frequency performed (1-3 Likert-type scale)
  • Demographic, program, selection, compensation, significant challenges
What Drives Performance?

Abilities × Motivation × Org. Support = Performance

Defining Performance

- Enrollment
- Retention
- Completion
- Minor sport metric
  - Don’t cause me any trouble
- What else?
  - Research productivity (during and after)
  - Alumni engagement, including donor support
Golden List

- Recruitment
- Admissions
- Advising
- Administration
Recruitment

- Organize and coordinate on-campus and off-campus recruitment/marketing initiatives into traditional (and accelerated if applicable) tracts for the program
- Follow up with students who request information
- Return phone calls/emails/texts from prospective students in a timely manner
- Be available to meet with students who visit campus
- Maintain and update graduate program information on websites, brochures, etc.
Admissions

• Manage the application life-cycle
• Communicate with applicants in a timely manner regarding application status
• Make admission decisions and inform Graduate College Admissions in a timely manner
• Coordinate the ranking and selection of the program’s graduate assistants; communicate with students and submit names to department/college office to initiate the hiring paperwork
Advisement

• Coordinate initial advisement to all incoming students on required course work for first semester
• Ensure that an advisor is assigned to each student, and that the student is notified of this.
• Monitor semester progress for each student in classes, research, assistantship performance.
• Ensure appropriate progress toward completion for each student (consistent enrollment in necessary coursework, research milestones)
• Contact and develop solutions for students requiring attention or accommodation
• Motivate appropriate completion and submission of time-sensitive forms and requirements (e.g., Program of Study; Comprehensive exam requirements; Intent to graduate)
• Monitor and submit completion-related tasks (e.g., Comprehensive exam requirements/results; Seminar reports)
Administration

• Work with department administrator to assure a course rotation that allows degree completion over a known time; ensure advisement of students regarding this rotation
• Coordinate with department administrator and/or departmental/college curriculum committee to ensure curricular changes related to the graduate program are done expeditiously and accurately
• Assist with compiling information for annual reports, program assessment, program reviews, and accreditation documents (if applicable)
• Maintain accurate and ongoing records of all graduate students, and provide information as requested to Heads, Deans, etc.
• Ensure program adheres to any accreditation (program review) requirements
• Serve as informational lynchpin between program (including graduate faculty and students) and broader groups (e.g., department, college, graduate college, university, professional bodies)
Organizational Support

• Major Findings
  • Limited GPD time for synchronous training
  • Diversity of GPD work limits training content applicability
  • Multiple models of GPs, information in silos

• Recommendations
  • Asynchronous training & on-demand resources
  • Single-stop for GPD-relevant information & resources
  • Use existing professional development to deliver critical training
MSU Org Support

- Professional Development Offerings
  - Infrequent
  - Relevant/Useful
  - Credit-Bearing (Master Advisor)
  - Networking/No Agenda

- Graduate Ed Toolkit
  - One-stop shopping
  - Anywhere, Anytime, Just In Time
  - Affordable
  - Blackboard GET Community

- Admissions Support (WebADMIT)
  - Scheduled
  - Drop-Ins (including Zoom)
Prof Develop: GPD Meetings

- Topics for 2018-2019
  - Networking Breakfast and Lunch
  - Grad College Policies
  - Admissions System (GradCAS)
    - Also have weekly labs (virtual or F2F)
  - Supporting Mental Health in Grad Students
  - Configuration of 2020 GradCAS
- Topics for 2019-2020
  - Networking Breakfast and Lunch
  - Overview of GET
  - Admissions System (GradCAS)
  - Marketing/Recruitment (EMP)
    - Enrollment is President’s Focus for 19-20
  - Increasing Access to Graduate Education
Grad Ed Toolkit: One-Stop Shopping on Bb
Motivation

• Major Findings
  • Traditional methods (the carrot and the stick) present challenges
    • Stick: No one will do it; why punish/threaten a willing faculty member?
    • Carrot: Limited $$; limited course release time; doesn’t benefit tenure/promotion
  • Uncertain performance expectations
    • Provide challenges
    • Hard to hit a moving/unknown target
  • Other rewards offer promise…

• Recommendations
  • Humans’ intrinsic needs for Autonomy, Competence, Purpose
  • Low-cost, sustainable methods
    • Autonomy
      – Micromanagement quashes performance
      – Establish clear expectations, provide support as needed, let them excel
      – Frequent, informal collegial dialogue with DH
    • Competence
      – Provide relevant challenges and developmental performance feedback
      – Becomes more than just “holding down the fort”/“minding the shop”
    • Purpose
      – True concern for students’ success (we change lives!)
      – Meaningful, lifelong social connections
      – Student success and transformation
Abilities

- Can be changed in two major ways
  - Selection/Hiring: Put someone else in the role
  - Training: Instill/develop level of relevant abilities

- Major Findings
  - Hard to be choosy (limited pool of willing candidates)
  - Limited time/resources for new GPDs to ‘learn the ropes’ before beginning
  - Major GPD need = more TIME

- Recommendations
  - Identify abilities most relevant to goals/outcomes (e.g., student recruitment vs. completion)
  - Choose GPDs with greatest level of relevant abilities
    - Recruitment: Charisma, sourcing networks vs. Completion: Selflessness, proactive intervention w/ students
    - Common trait: Concern for students
  - Transition (train) new GPDs over semester in mentor model
  - Tailor expectations to traits of available faculty member
  - Consider and use collective talents of all program faculty