How to Be an Effective Consultant in Graduate Education

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Common Themes In requests for CGS Consultation

• Improving quality of graduate programs
• Evaluating the policies of the graduate school
  a) Outcome based assessment
  b) Faculty credentialing process
  c) Admission requirements and application process
  d) Program enrollment and completion
  e) Creation of new programs.
• Marketing; recruitment; communication & web presence
• Administrative structure and graduate governance (most common)
• Potential Expansion of graduate programs (used to be)
Themes contd.

• Graduate school at a turning point/transition – Q. “How does a university remain a high quality teaching university & conduct the scholarship associated with graduate education?”

• SWOT analysis

• Graduate student services/international students

• Development of appropriate metrics
The Process

CGS request the following information from the institution:

a) The goals of the consultation (in writing)
b) The desired time frame for the consultants to visit the institution
c) The number of consultants
d) Preferences for the types of universities/colleges the consultants represent
e) Preferences for the academic discipline(s) of the consultant
• CGS provides the institution with a list of names and brief bios of several graduate deans that have the experience and expertise in graduate education to address the issues of interest to the institution.
• The institution is asked to identify individuals from the list that would be acceptable for the consultation, and rank them in order of preference.
• CGS contacts the individuals to ascertain interest and availability.
• Once team is identified, the institution works directly with the team on schedule, agenda for the visit & provides the team with the background information for the visit.
• Institution provides additional specific information as requested.
• The institution works directly with team on travel arrangements
• The institution prepares a detailed agenda for the team’s campus visit and provides it to consultants several days in advance.
• The team visits the campus and prepares a written report of the findings and recommendations. The report is typically submitted to the institution within 2-4 weeks of the campus visit.
• Upon receipt and approval of the written report the institution notifies CGS that the consultation is completed. (CGS requests a copy of the report for its file.)
• CGS pays the consultants their fees (see web site for updated fee schedule) and any travel expenses not paid directly by the institution.
Benefits of Consultation

• An Independent Analysis provides an untainted and objective analysis
  • Provides ideas for new directions
• Majority of recommendations may have been already considered
  • Gains Support or validates an existing perspective
  • Gains credibility of direction from support of an external source
  • Reduces internal opposition
• Gives authorization to move forward
• Overcomes political implications
• Allows benchmarking against other institutions
• Adds knowledge from consultant’s experience
• Provides help when not enough personnel or time to consider the issues
Guiding Principles

• Be Prepared for surprises and be flexible
• Know your boundaries and defer to the Graduate Dean
• Respect the hard work already done by the organization
• Have a close working relationship with the Graduate Dean
• Provide the deliverables according to the pre-arranged schedule
• Maintain a professional demeanor – respectful and not overbearing
• Accept only a consultancy in areas of expertise
• Conclude services after the consultation is over
• Maintain confidentiality of the organization and the Graduate Dean
Consultants as Experts

- Experts with specialized knowledge
  - Dean has knowledge of structure from a number of universities
  - Dean has access to others who can provide unique perspectives
- Concerns when using experts
  - May not understand the nature of the university
  - Politics or culture may have an impact on best recommendations
  - Needs a strong inside champion
Consultants as Facilitators

• Facilitators to help client go through necessary steps to solve problems
  • Assists client to define problem
  • Client involved in analyzing the problem
  • Client involved in deciding on a plan of action
  • Leads to commitment and ownership of action

• Concerns when using facilitators
  • Decision makers at university may not be sure of direction for organization
  • Dean may not have authority to make the necessary decision
Preparation for Consulting

• Who requested the consultation?
• What does the university say needs to be addressed and why?
• What specific outcomes are desired?
• What does the university want the consultant to do?
• What units need to be involved in the process?
• What documents exist that reflect upon the issues?
• What is the overall timeline?
• What is the final product to be?
• Is there an approval process?
Homework for the Visit

- Mission and Vision of the University
- Values of the University
- Graduate School Mission
- Structure of the Graduate School
- Governance at the University
- Governance for graduate studies
  - Committees
  - Subcommittees
  - Graduate Faculty
  - Faculty Senate
Documents Needed

- Annual report
- Organizational chart
- Graduate Catalog
- Noel-Levitz
- Exit surveys
- Delaware study
- Website
- PR Publications
- NSSE report
Preliminary Questions to be Asked

• What are specific examples of the problems
• How long have the problems been going on?
• Who is affected by the problem?
• How has it affected the organization?
Consulting Strategy

• What is the problem that needs exploration?
• Is the problem identified the real problem?
• What is the culture of the university and of graduate studies?
• What information is needed to understand the problem and make recommendations?
• Where is the information located?
• Who are the key individuals that impact the problem? (Formal and informal)
• What conclusion can be drawn based upon the information learned and best practices?
• In the case of reorganization, what is the motivation?
Interviewing Strategies

- Interview key players & committees to understand the scope of the problem
- All interviews must have a purpose even if it is exploring
- Explain purpose of interview
- Prepare questions in advance
- Plan for the time available
- Keep the interview focused
- Be ready for surprises – be flexible
- Conduct with a bias-free and neutral stance
- Ask one question at a time
- Let the interviewees talk and have low talk time yourself
- Ask open ended questions
- Ask follow up questions when answer are unclear or more information is needed
- Encourage interviewees to provide additional details and examples
- Don’t be afraid to ask tough questions
- Summarize key points and ask about accuracy
- Ask for anything forgotten
- Document by taking notes during the interview for use in the report
Listening Skills

• “The most valuable characteristic that a consultant has besides intelligence and experience for judging issues is ears to listen and hear how people describe what they are doing in their jobs and how they’re functioning.”
• “You have to have people who naturally can approach people in an organization without threatening them and ask the appropriate questions in a way that leads people to talk about the answers to the questions.”

Paulstein in Singer, 2008
Resistance by the Universities

• Anxiety caused by the consultation
  • Potential losses
    • Job loss
    • Job restructuring
    • Loss of power
    • Loss of privileges

• Reduction of Anxiety
  • Increased communication
    • Sensitivity
    • Facilitate communication of feelings
    • Reach out to variety of groups
The Deliverables

• Use data from documents and information from interviews
• Bring the Dean and Provost along through the process
  • Involve them in discussing the issues
  • Involve them in reviewing the recommendations
  • Be willing to make changes that are appropriate for the university
The Report

• Identify themes at the end of each day
• Prior to leaving, agree on major themes, outline and who will write which sections
• There is no one way to organize, but include at least:
  • The charge/problems to be addressed
  • What was done to prepare (including documents reviewed)
  • With whom you met
  • Major themes
  • Recommendations
• Provide a draft to the dean or person requesting the consultation prior to submitting a final draft to ensure accuracy
Areas of Possible Consultation
Administration of Grad Education

- Organization and Administration of Graduate Education
- Enrollment Planning and Management
- Recruitment Strategies
- Graduate Admissions
- International Graduate Issues
- Electronic Admissions
- Graduate Record Keeping and Auditing
- Distribution and Administration of Assistantships and Fellowships
- Constructing and Using Databases for Graduate Administration
- Managing Multi-campus Graduate Programs
- Graduate Faculty Governance
- Graduate Faculty Status
- Resource Review and Budget Management
- Electronic Theses and Dissertations
Student Services

- Graduate Student Organizations
- Preparing Future Faculty Programs
- Student Life Issues
- Support Services for Graduate Students
- Health Insurance
- Student Grievances
- Mentorship Programs
Ancillary Services

- Advertising and Marketing
- Fundraising for Graduate Schools
- Building an Inclusive Graduate Community
- Developing Productive Synergies and Collaborations
- Curricular Issues
Curricular Issues

• Curriculum Development
• Developing New Graduate Programs
• Graduate Certificate Programs
• Accelerated Bachelor’s/Master’s Degrees
• Interdisciplinary Programs
• Distance and On-line Graduate Programs
• Professional Science Master’s Programs
• Professional Doctorates
Evaluation

- Academic Program Reviews
- Merging or Discontinuing Graduate Programs
- Assessment of Graduate Student Learning Outcomes
Research Activities

• Integrating Research Administration and Graduate Education
• Grant and Contract Management
• Intellectual Property Issues
• Responsible Conduct of Research/Scholarship
Fundraising

- Setting a target
- Annual current use giving
- Establishing endowments
- Establishing development boards
Situational Consultations

- Personnel Issues
- Political crises
- Budget cuts
Resources