Program Review and Quality Assessment

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New Deans’ Institute, Council of Graduate Schools
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• Large public research-intensive University
• Graduate School responsible for 104 Ph.D. programs, 90 master’s programs in 17 schools and colleges
• ~8000 Rackham graduate students
• ~7500 Other graduate and professional students on campus
Why Should a Graduate Dean Measure Quality of Graduate Programs?

- To help to improve quality
  - Address poor quality in a systematic way
  - Encourage improvement
- To assess the validity of student concerns
- To ensure that campus priorities are taken seriously
- To respond to external raters and rankers
- To assure University leaders about quality
Measuring Quality is Harder than it Appears

• Graduate education is multidimensional
• Differences among degrees
• Differences among disciplines and fields of study
• Indicators are subject to distortion
Who Determines Quality?

• Faculty?
• Students?
• The “market”?
• Raters and rankers?
• University leaders?
Possible Measures of Quality

• Admissions
  – Selectivity / Yield
  – GRE and GPA scores
  – National fellowships/ traineeships
• Faculty quality
• Comparison to peers
  – Competing for new students
  – National rankings
• Career Success
  – Short run
  – Long run

• Quality of program
  – Mentoring practices
  – GPA of students
  – Diversity
  – Competitive for external funding
  – Honors and awards
  – Completion rate
  – Time to degree
  – Publications
  – Conference presentations
  – Professional development
Variation by Degree Level

Doctoral
• Emphasis on academic credentials
• Research experiences
• Engagement in discipline
• Often aimed at academic placement

Master’s
• Emphasis on prior preparation (both work and academic)
• Focus on placement
• Leadership in the profession
• Student satisfaction
Variation by Discipline

• Some quality measures widely shared across disciplines
  – Professional placement and success of graduates

• Some quality measures vary by disciplines
  – Publication in peer-reviewed journals while in graduate school
  – Admissions data: Number of applications, GRE scores, GPAs, yield
  – External awards received by current students: NSF Graduate Fellowships
Ask Faculty for their Measures

• You learn what is important in their program
• You give legitimacy to the process of quality measurement
• You avoid holding programs to inappropriate standards
Biological Chemistry

- Scientific productivity of students
- Success of faculty as mentors and instructors
- Receipt of fellowship and training grant support
- Progress of students through the program
- Participation of students in departmental scientific activities
- Long term career outcomes
Aerospace Engineering

- Reputation among peer institutions
- Selectivity / Yield
- GREs and GPAs of student who enroll
- Number of new students
- Competitive fellowships / traineeships
- Proportion of students who are supported by external funding
- Proportion of graduates with tenure-track positions
Urban & Regional Planning

- Placement in high-level research and government positions (outside academia)
- Securing grants and fellowships from outside sources
- Reputation of peer institutions with which we regularly compete for graduate students
- Research productivity while in doctoral studies, including publications and conference papers
- Completion rate
- Timely completion of requirements
Comparative Literature

- Reputation among peer institutions
- Diversity of race/ethnicity and gender in graduate students
- Quality of the intellectual engagement between faculty and students
- Honors and awards to students
- Proportion of graduates in academic/scholarly positions
Measuring Quality in the Context of Program Review

• If goal of program review is program improvement, then measures need to be customized to the program
• If goal of program review is resource allocation, then measures need to be standardized across programs
Institutional Process for Program Review

How centralized should this process be?

- Role of school/college deans
- Importance of Institutional Research capacity
- Role of external reviewers
- Connection between undergraduate and graduate education
- Frequency of review
Products of Program Review

- Report
- Conversation
- Action Plan
- Resource Allocation
- Communication to the constituent groups that care about quality
Strategies to Gain Acceptance for Recommendations

• Use quality measures endorsed by faculty
• Hold conversations about why the data look as they do, to give faculty a chance to explain patterns
• Invite school/college deans to participate in the conversation
• Include the voices of students
Program Review can Make you a Better Graduate Dean

• You learn about your graduate programs
• You have a context to interpret external ratings and rankings
• You can make better decisions about policies and services to the programs
• Working with other University leaders, you can allocate resources toward the greatest needs and the greatest opportunities to serve graduate education