Studying our graduate student program and support portfolio

Occasioned by the recent budget challenges, the Provost has called for a graduate student support (GSS) review that will provide the opportunity to undertake a deliberative, multi-perspective evaluation of our graduate “portfolio.” This review process is intended to be different from the individual program reviews undertaken by the departments in recent years (although it may well draw from those); rather, it is intended to look across the campus at the quality of our doctoral and masters programs, to update our knowledge about our areas of strength, and to consider from there how we can best invest in our graduate programs going forward, particularly in the context of difficult budget decisions ahead. The initial focus will be at the doctoral level, with subsequent expansion as needed to evaluating the support portfolio at the masters level.

TIMELINE and OVERALL PROCESS
GSS review to provide input review of areas of strength for investment in time for next recruitment cycle. Beginning with doc programs, complete as much as possible by Thanksgiving 2009 deadline
- Timeline:
  - Design Review Process in consultation with stakeholders
    - April—Learn from the 1997/98 doc review process, incl GAC, Senate Chair
    - April—Generate issues and dimensions for consideration in design process
    - April—soliciting names for review group (distinguished faculty with extensive experience in doctoral education) from Senate as part of formal consultation process;
    - April—Solicit input from COR on review design and process (4/22)
    - April—Solicit input from deans on review design and process (4/23)
    - April—Solicit input from UPPC on review design and process (4/24)
    - April—Solicit input from CAA on review design and process (4/27)
    - April—Solicit input from GAC on review design and process (4/27)
    - April—Formulate draft review panel
    - April/May—Solicit input from graduate program directors and chairs, including input on recommended panelists
  - Prepare Materials/Data
    - Early May—Convene review panel(s) for initial meeting, on review design and process; sketch out work plan; assign summer tasks
    - May—Generate profile of data needs for programs/depts. and for IR
    - June/July/August—IR data collection (prog/department also if available)
    - Late August/early Sept—program/department data collection and analysis
  - Conduct Review
    - Mid Sept through early Nov—review panel study and analysis
    - Mid Nov—program opportunity to respond to review findings
- Thanksgiving—review panel conclusions and recommendations forwarded to Provost
  - **Recommendations consultation**
    - Dec—review recommendations with CAA, GAC, COR, UPPC
  - **Final action**
    - Late Dec/early Jan—Provost/President review and decision
    - Late Dec/early Jan—final allocations to depts./programs for upcoming recruitment cycle

**DESIGN OF REVIEW**

*Learning from history:* The last doctoral program review was conducted in 1997. At that time, the committee considered several factors, if available, in evaluating each program:

1. **Background**
   -Brief description of program strength (provided by the department);
   - External measures of reputation, both NRC ranking and/or discipline-based evidence.

2. **Faculty Quality and Productivity**
   - Faculty size and size comparison with other programs nationally;
   - Faculty scholarly productivity, based both on numbers of publications and numbers of citations, as well as numbers of faculty receiving prestigious awards and titles;
   - Amount of external funding and percentage of faculty who received research support from federal and other sources (if relevant to the discipline).

3. **Student Quality**
   - Number of FTE doctoral students and comparison with other national programs;
   - Average GRE scores over a period of time, with national comparisons;
   - Student success in obtaining external funding (if relevant to the discipline);
   - Record of recent graduate placements.

4. **Conclusions**
   - Department’s identification of areas needing improvement (and resources needed to do so);
   - The Committee’s recommendations concerning whether or not selective investment in the program would help it achieve or maintain national visibility.

Programs were ranked 1, 2, or 3. Text of the committee’s recommendation would allow a close reader to tease out an additional set of rankings within group 2:

- Group 1 programs were identified as “among the strongest at UAlbany with clear national prominence”;
- Group 2 programs were “adequate program(s) with some areas of strength and national reputation, but also important areas of weakness. Additional resources would be needed to significantly improve the national reputation of the department”;

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• Group 3 programs had “serious problems related to size, faculty/program quality and/or student quality. Significant changes in program design, faculty composition and/or very significant increases in support would be necessary to raise the program to the level of those in category 2.”

Issues and Dimensions to be considered for 2009: These variables are those identified by faculty and deans for what might be considered in designing the 2009 GSS review. Additional suggestions and feedback are sought from relevant stakeholders, including various Senate Councils, the doctoral program directors and chairs, and Deans.

GENERAL ISSUES

1. EXTEND TO THIS DECADE: Any or all of the factors used for the 1997 review;

2. CONTRIBUTION TO UNIVERSITY MISSION: Consider the contributions of a particular program to the University’s mission, including the teaching of undergraduates; what evidence suggests that the program manages to contribute to mission;

3. PROGRAM MISSION: Recognize and honor differences between and among doctoral program missions (professional schools, humanities, sciences, social sciences).

4. TRAJECTORY/PRIOR INVESTMENT: Include evaluation of how recent hires/changes in faculty composition might lead to an improved prognosis in faculty scholarly/research productivity within the next 5 years;

FACULTY ISSUES

5. TAILORED ACADEMIC ANALYTICS: Use Academic Analytics data to construct a program-specific benchmark based on variables of the program’s choosing.

STUDENT ISSUES

6. GRE ISSUES: GRE scores could disaggregate domestic and international students, and might also show numbers of matriculated students who have taken the exam; some contextual consideration for departments that use only V or only Q measures in admitting students;

7. NON-GRE STUDENT QUALITY VARIABLES: Include other measures of student quality, as typical for the discipline—for example, the amount of prior relevant professional experience in the field matters and might be considered an element of student quality;

8. DIVERSITY: Diversity of a program’s students (both domestic/international mix and mix of underrepresented domestic) has been suggested for consideration;
9. **PART TIME/FULL TIME**: Consider the role of part-time doctoral students in certain programs and how they affect both program quality and other variables, such as time-to-degree;

**PROGRAM EFFICIENCY/PROCESS ISSUES**

10. **IN-PROCESS VARIABLES**: Median time-to-degree and third year/fifth semester retention are typical dimensions (available from IR); there might be other indicators of program operational criteria (e.g., one measure of success from the institution’s perspective); we might want to consider whether a possible correlation exists between stipend levels and a particular program’s retention data;

**PROGRAM OUTCOME ISSUES**

11. **STUDENT OUTCOME VARIABLES**: Strengthen focus on student outcome; for example, consider placements of students with regard to doctoral program’s mission—to what extent to graduate placements demonstrate a program’s ability to compete in the marketplace;

12. **GRADUATE ACHIEVEMENT VARIABLES**: Include information about research productivity and/or career achievements of graduates who have been graduated for x years;

In addition, some of the master’s program directors have asked us to consider a master’s program review. There may be different or additional factors to consider, if we were able to extend the review process to master’s programs, either during 2009 or at some subsequent period.

**DRAFT DIMENSIONS FOR REVIEW**

Include at least two dimensions in each area for ALL programs (to provide a common yardstick), AND ALSO to provide opportunities within each area to either (a) to provide context and/or perspective on the “common” dimension that would provide important context for reviewers to consider in evaluating the program and/or (b) suggest and provide evidence about one or more different dimension(s) more relevant to this particular program (this would entail providing some “benchmark” or “comparative” information).

**AREA**

Dimension

**FACULTY QUALITY**

NRC and/or AA productivity relative to discipline
External funding (where relevant)
Faculty awards/honors

**STUDENT QUALITY**

GPA
V, Q GRE
Other program-specific entering characteristics desired

PROGRAM EFFICIENCY/EFFECTIVENESS
Time to degree
3rd year retention
Graduation rate
(where possible, in relation to disciplinary “norms” or benchmarks)

PROGRAM OUTCOMES
Student placements (consistent with program goals)
Graduate achievements
Reputational metrics (US News, other 3rd party national standings)

DRAFT ISSUES FOR THE PROCESS OF REVIEW

As in 1997 review, each program would receive two independent reviews from two separate review panels.

Use more than a “3 point scale”, but keep the focus on (a) current strength, and (b) resources needed to sustain/increase strength.

Insure that programs have an opportunity to respond to review findings before they become final

Some of the issues identified for further consideration so far:

1. How to deal with the MFA?
2. How to deal with emerging programs—programs not currently in place, but working toward that
3. How to keep the preparation and data demands on programs/departments down to a minimum?
4. Confidential access to program reviews and external reviewer/accreditation reports?
5. How broadly will the results of this review process be disseminated?