

## Strategic Planning Task Force on Graduate and Postdoctoral Program Development

For Student Comment – 2-16-2011

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### Context

- Graduate students and postdoctoral scholars provide the intellectual input and activities essential for research
- The Concerns for NC State University **Graduate Programs** are as follows:
  - The overall average cumulative 10-year completion rate at NC State University is below optimal.
  - Financial resources (stipends) and mentoring are the top two reasons doctoral students complete or fail to complete their PhD. Resources must be directed to the most effective programs.
  - >90% of our graduate programs are department-based, leaving a void in interdisciplinary areas. In addition, new graduate programs are not based on academic planning at the institutional level, and the current process requires many years for approval.
  - Not all NC State University research-active faculty have access to training doctoral students.
- The Concerns for NC State University **Postdoctoral Scholars** are as follows:
  - Postdoctoral scholars are recruited by faculty with no institutional guidance or support.
  - We provide the first US experience for many international graduate students and postdoctoral scholars, and this can present cross-cultural communication issues that are not addressed well.
  - Postdoctoral scholars seek to develop the new skills necessary for success at the next level, but this training is generally not emphasized.

### Goals and Strategies

Our over-arching goals for the next 5 to 10 years are to enhance graduate student and postdoctoral scholar success. We can **attract and enroll stronger applicants** by offering more flexible and integrative graduate programs unimpeded by disciplinary barriers, by offering more competitive graduate student stipends, and by offering additional professional development opportunities for postdoctoral scholars. We can **decrease attrition** and generate stronger graduates and scholars by improving faculty **mentoring** of trainees. We can use resources more effectively by better **university-level academic planning**.

### Specific Recommendations

1. Increase **funding** for graduate education
  - By: a) increasing state funds directed to graduate education; b) increasing the proportion of NC State University funds directed to graduate education; c) increasing extramural support for graduate education
2. Use university-level academic planning to identify **focus areas** and facilitate **structural change** in graduate education
  - To: a) respond to changing societal needs, extramural opportunities, and applicant interests; b) respond to rigorous graduate program reviews; c) prioritize resource allocation and shape graduate enrollment; d) incentivize faculty and offer all research-active faculty access to doctoral students; e) encourage cross-disciplinary efforts
3. Enhance faculty **mentoring**
  - To: a) improve completion rates; b) generate strong graduates; c) attract stronger applicant pools
4. Enhance the **postdoctoral experience**, through additional efforts by the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
  - By: a) offering guidance to faculty for effective interview and selection processes for postdoctoral scholars; b) offering a program for international postdoctoral scholars relating to cross-cultural difference; c) expanding professional development programs for postdoctoral scholars; d) encouraging faculty to find creative ways to enhance the postdoctoral experience