Strategic Planning Task Force on Graduate and Postdoctoral Program Development
For Student Comment – 2-16-2011


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