

OGS Task Force Report

**to the
Provost**

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OGS TASK FORCE

REPORT

Executive Summary

The OGS Task Force, operating during the Fall 2005 semester, set out to assess the mission, function, responsibilities, structure and organization of UNM's Office of Graduate Studies. Our intent was to solicit as much information as possible regarding both current and ideal dimensions of that office, its leadership and staff. Our charge, goals and procedures are detailed in Appendix I.

The following report identifies major areas of concern or issues facing graduate education at UNM and offers recommendations for changes necessary to meet student needs and ensure quality graduate education. We conclude that it is important to retain an Office of Graduate Studies; however, we found that major changes in responsibilities, accountability, structure and goals must be implemented in order to create a viable, efficient, and energetic program for graduate students.

I. Areas of Investigation Identified by the Committee

The Task Force organized the areas to be investigated into three major categories: OGS mission and goals; structure, operations and responsibilities; and culture and image. We sought answers to the questions listed under each of these three categories.

A. The OGS Mission and Goals

- Does OGS help departments to articulate their visions and goals for graduate education?
- Does it provide university-wide oversight of graduate programs to ensure uniformity and quality?
- Does it equitably support graduate students in all programs?
- Does it encourage and enable students to finish their degrees in a timely fashion?
- Does it provide a clear voice for the importance of graduate education?
- Does it promote our graduate programs to the state and local community?
- Does it adequately represent UNM's graduate programs on a national and international level?
- Is it a vehicle for the promotion of new ideas and methods in graduate education?

B. OGS Structure, Operations and Responsibilities

- What is the relationship of the leadership of OGS with other campus units (colleges, offices and departments)?
- What are advantages or disadvantages of a centralized versus a more decentralized structure for graduate education on campus?
- Is the current structure one that can monitor policies, while also developing broader campus strategies and providing leadership and vision for graduate education at UNM?

- Who should be responsible for the following activities?
 1. Admissions/registration – paperwork and record keeping; there is universal agreement that the actual decisions on admission to a program reside with the departments or programs.
 2. Degree checks and matriculation
 3. Development of graduate curriculum, changes in degree requirements, and establishment of general university policies on graduate education
 4. Appeals and arbitration
 5. Monitoring of graduate assistantships, contracts, provision for health care and benefits
 6. Professionalization for graduate students – to include symposia, workshops on things like research methods, grant writing, etc.
 8. Providing service for those with special status, e.g. Non-Degree students, interdisciplinary programs and students wishing to move from one program to another
 9. Advisement
 10. Control over other financial aid resources
 11. Recruitment of graduate students
 12. Representing the interests of graduate students/education to the wider campus community, and maintaining and developing a national profile for UNM

C. The Culture and Image of OGS

What are the ways in which a culture of efficiency, transparency, accountability, accessibility, cooperation and service to students can be encouraged in OGS and in the relationships it has with individuals and other units involved in graduate education on campus?

II. Conclusions from Information Gathered

The following conclusions are based on the information gathered from our research and specifically the feedback we received from stake holders across campus (see Appendix II and III).

A. How UNM's Organization of Graduate Education Compares with National Models

The majority of universities have a centralized body that handles graduate students and programs. Generally, these schools have a dean leading a graduate college, graduate studies or graduate school unit. Other universities' graduate offices have differing degrees of authority and participation in development activities, policy formulation, administration of interdisciplinary programs, professionalization and student mentorship, and general advocacy for graduate education. The advantage of the centralized system is the ability for the graduate office to promote a university-wide graduate program.

A few universities that we surveyed have a more decentralized model where an associate dean or director manages a smaller subset of the administrative duties, and some oversight of graduate education is shifted to the college or department level. One

school with a decentralized model has departments interacting directly with various offices such as Admissions, Payroll, etc.

The fact that most universities have a model similar to UNM's suggests that the problems experienced at UNM do not rest in the model, but rather in its implementation.

B. OGS Mission and Goals

The general consensus is that OGS does not meet larger goals or create new initiatives. Its major emphasis has been on monitoring or policing departments and students, rather than on support and facilitation for students, cooperation with departments, and leadership of graduate education. The voice for graduate education on campus has been a weak one, and in many ways OGS is isolated, even protected, from direct engagement and larger discussions with its constituents.

C. OGS Structure, Administration and Operations

1. The larger view on campus is that we need a central office that is responsible for multiple dimensions of graduate education. However, given numerous failures in OGS, a mandate already exists for reform that stresses service to clients, efficiency, transparent processes and leadership.

Because the demands on the office and its Dean are considerable, some functions should be shifted to other offices on campus. OGS must also establish collaborative relationships with departments to clarify responsibilities and procedures on both sides, and to encourage cooperation.

2. OGS Leadership should be in the hands of a Dean who participates in higher level decision-making, can represent the interests of graduate students and graduate education on campus, and can strengthen UNM's national graduate education profile. The primary focus for the Dean should be on campus-wide initiatives and policies; her/his efforts should be directed outward and toward strategic thinking and planning.

Simultaneously, the office should have an associate or assistant dean who is responsible and held accountable for the day-to-day operations and overall office management. While this person may be drawn from the faculty, she/he should have substantial management experience and credentials.

3. One point made consistently in all feedback we received is that there needs to be a greater distribution of functions, tasks, and authority among administrative staff members. That is, tasks should not be assigned to a single individual. Several staff members should be trained in multiple tasks/functions so that they can provide assistance at critical times in the semester (e.g. processing contracts).

It is essential to emphasize service and cooperation within the office and in its relationships with the university community.

4. OGS should provide regular, periodic training of graduate staff in departments, and should assist departments in the development of clear procedures for graduate administration.

5. OGS should establish practices that prevent favoritism and promote fairness in opportunities and service for all graduate students on campus.

D. OGS Responsibilities

1. There was consensus that admissions processes and record keeping responsibilities should be shifted to the appropriate campus units. At the same time, **all** agree that the actual decisions about admissions (i.e. who is accepted into a graduate degree program) must remain in departments. Because these operations will be handled electronically, OGS would have access to the admissions process and student record information.

2. Other activities should continue to be shared by OGS and departments, i.e., degree checks, matriculation, professionalization, advisement, and recruitment.

3. Policy development, appeals and arbitration should continue to be initiated by students or faculty and shared by OGS and campus-wide bodies such as the Faculty Senate Graduate Committee and the Faculty Senate.

4. OGS should retain primary responsibility in activities/functions that involve student development and funding and university-wide procedures for degree completion. There was considerable support for the recent creation of the Dean's Advisory Council which works with the Interim Dean Wohlert on administrative policy, problem solving and new initiatives.

OGS should also retain responsibility in areas of graduate education leadership and services not available elsewhere on our campus (e.g. advising and supporting Non-Degree students and graduate students wishing to move from one program to another.

5. Finally, OGS leadership must address what many consider to be missed opportunities and long range strategies that involve fund-raising, community outreach, innovative recruitment of talented and diverse student populations, and development of creative programs for student professionalization. There is general agreement that this is crucial to strengthening and promoting graduate education on campus, and to improving our national profile.

E. The Culture and Image of OGS

Overwhelmingly the campus community believes that for some time OGS has failed to develop a culture of service, and to present a public image of positive leadership and support for graduate education. Changing these abstract dimensions of the operation of graduate studies on campus is a difficult problem, but efforts must be undertaken to shift the values and goals of the office from those of almost a bunker mentality of policing and monitoring, to one of openness, facilitation, accountability, cooperation, collaboration.

The campus consensus is that OGS must understand and act as a service unit. OGS personnel are there to facilitate the progress of graduate students, and they should not see themselves primarily as enforcers or "traffic cops." While OGS must maintain oversight of graduate administrative functions performed by departments and schools, this

oversight function, while necessary to ensure consistency in the treatment of students, must not intrude on the pedagogic authority of faculty or their departments.

III. Essential Recommendations

These recommendations encapsulate the key change elements needed for OGS to meet student needs and ensure quality graduate education. These essential recommendations are: resources and staffing; record keeping and customer service; outcomes assessment and personnel reviews; graduate funding and communication with departments, schools and colleges.

A. Resources and Staffing

1. Upgrade staff qualifications, and move beyond the skill levels in Grades 3-6 which predominate in OGS.
2. Broaden responsibilities so that staff members share authority, competencies and the skills to carry out key processes; contracts, progress to degree, student health insurance, thesis and manuscript approval, processing financial aid and awards, etc.
3. Redefined and broadened responsibilities mandate a comprehensive HR Desk Audit for the entire office.
4. Shift admissions processing and record keeping to the Office of Admissions and Office of the Registrar. Those offices will need an expanded staff which means a reallocation of resources.

B. Record Keeping and Customer Service

1. OGS must develop clear, accountable processes to track documents and information pertaining to each student. Written confirmation should be given or sent to individuals and departments upon receipt of important documents (e.g. contracts, Application for Candidacy, Proposed Graduation List).

In addition, an automated web-based tracking system would be useful. More than one staff member should have access to and proficiency in processing student information and have the ability to accurately check status of all documents (see Appendix IV).

2. Contracts (Assistantship Forms) must be processed in a timely manner, ensuring that students receive stipends, tuition waivers and health insurance coverage and that departments are able to meet their contractual obligations. The Dean will report the results of this process to the Provost on an academic term basis.

3. Student health care must be consistently managed with attention to both the individuals whose lives are affected and the service providers. This is an issue of accountability, liability and responsibility.

4. Above all, a rapid response system for complaints and problems must be created so that all “customers” are confident that their concerns are taken seriously and are being addressed.

5. OGS personnel should be accessibility throughout the entire working day for student and staff consultations. Consideration should be given to the specific needs of night and weekend students.

C. Outcomes Assessment and Personnel Reviews

1. The office needs to develop regular, thorough, internal reviews of its own processes. In addition OGS should create a system of semi-annual review by those who use its services. When problems are identified, OGS should dealt with in a timely fashion. The Provost has the ultimate responsibility to ensure office performance.

2. OGS should consider conducting exit interviews with graduating students to determine its service record and gain information about new needs and opportunities.

3. OGS should conduct regular personnel evaluations of both administrators and staff.

D. Graduate Funding

1. OGS should develop a regular calendar of due dates for graduate funding applications. This calendar should be made public.

2. OGS should use faculty committees to select recipients for competitive awards.

3. OGS should require that departments provide them with specific procedures for the awarding of graduate assistantships, fellowships, etc. These procedures could be stored electronically for easy reference purposes. OGS should periodically and randomly monitor those procedures to assure fair treatment for all graduate students.

4. The Dean must make an effort to expand funding for graduate education, both by assisting and encouraging departments to do this, and by identifying national sources available for graduate work. OGS should, in a timely manner, systematically encourage units and students to apply for same.

5. OGS should attempt to identify new sources of funding for university-wide competitive awards. It should develop strategies to increase alumni and corporate involvement in, and support for graduate education.

E. Communication with Departments, Schools and Colleges

1. The Dean should ensure training and provide quality control for departmental graduate administrators and advisors. Those responsible for giving curricular and program advice to students (i.e. department graduate administrators and faculty advisors) should be trained in University policy and receive concise materials to carry out their duties.

2. Departments must be notified of pertinent deadline and policy changes as they occur.
3. The Dean should work in cooperation with schools and colleges to make sure that departments have effective and fair graduate procedures.
4. The Dean should report to the Provost on an annual basis regarding campus-wide graduate student recruitment, enrollment, retention and graduation.

IV. Long Term and Contingent Recommendations

The long term recommendations listed here include those that the Task Force believes are important to the lasting and continuing success of OGS as well as graduate education on our campus. These recommendations recognize the fundamental need for vision, strategic planning, training and positive partnerships with other UNM offices.

1. The Office of Graduate Studies should provide visionary leadership in university-wide academic issues such as retention and diversity.
2. Interdisciplinary graduate programs could be housed in the Office of Graduate Studies at the request of colleges and departments involved. This could facilitate the creation and administration of interdisciplinary studies and help to smooth working with multiple disciplines or colleges.
3. OGS can partner with faculty and staff to successfully recruit a talented and diverse student population to the graduate programs.
4. OGS can provide templates for new student orientations and ensure that these take place in all departments and programs. An orientation that includes pertinent information is paramount to student success.
5. The Dean of the Office of Graduate Studies should pursue increased funding for the graduate school and graduate students.
6. The Dean should provide more aggressive job placement support in concert with departments and colleges. Specifically, OGS should lead a University-wide initiative to create a graduate placement service.
7. In cooperation with Career Services, OGS should maintain a website alerting departments about upcoming recruitment events or opportunities.
8. OGS should provide regular training workshops for student professionalization, including thesis proposal and dissertation writing and grant writing workshops.

V. Conclusions

These recommendations are intended to recognize the administrative and structural support needed for graduate education at UNM. We believe creative leadership grounded in academic knowledge must be coupled with strong and efficient management and administrative skills. We also believe that moving specific functions and processes (not decision-making or policy development) to existing service offices will enable OGS to focus on a specific set of tasks and responsibilities and do them well.

The Task Force believes that OGS functions should focus on the following: service responsibilities; providing support which enables students to complete their degrees quickly and smoothly; assisting and providing guidance for departments as they engage in recruiting, admitting, and training students in their disciplines; and creating a presence for a more philosophical and unified sense of the importance of graduate education on our campus, and in our community. Finally, OGS should carry the message of the successes and strengths of UNM's graduate education to national and international audiences.

Appendix I

Background and Procedures of Task Force

I. Introduction

In July of 2005, Provost Reed Dasenbrock appointed a Task Force to review and evaluate the Office of Graduate Studies on our campus. Buckner Creel, GPSA President, and Jane Slaughter Interim Associate of Dean of Arts and Sciences, were appointed Co-Chairs of the Task Force whose membership included: Holly Barnet-Sanchez, Erika Gerety, Kevin Malloy, Mary Jane McReynolds, Maryellen Missik-Tow, Martina Myers, Tom Niemczyk, Bruce Perlman, Robin Ryan, and Christopher Shank. The committee was charged with considering the following:

- is the current administrative structure of (OGS) the right one for us now?
- Does OGS have the right set of responsibilities and powers?
- Should they be increased? Decreased?
- What should be changed about how we handle graduate students at every point from admissions to graduation?

The Task Force met regularly from September to December in its efforts to provide answers to these questions.

II. Procedures

We began with efforts to identify and evaluate the mission, and structures and responsibilities of the OGS as they have existed or exist, and then began a process of talking with key individuals or groups that have a particularly important connection with that Office. We also decided we would try to assess how other universities and particularly our peer institutions organized graduate education. Throughout the semester we worked in smaller sub-groups that focused on particular problems, stake holders, and utilizing a variety of tools to gather information.

We began our work by meeting with the Amy Wohlert, Interim Dean of OGS, and she provided us with considerable documentation that described the OGS organization, missions and goals. Task Force members attended two meetings with the Senate Graduate Committee and met once with: OGS staff members, the Graduate Advisors Network (GAN), Arts and Sciences Chairs, the College of Engineering Chairs and Graduate Advisors, Council of Associate Deans, Diagnostic and Therapeutic Sciences (DTS) from the Health Sciences Center (HSC) and with Kathleen Sena, Registrar, and Terry Babbit, Director, Office of Admissions. The HSC academic departments that interact regularly with OGS provided feedback via email.

Early in our process we identified some basic questions which we hoped the individuals and groups could answer:

- What should be the overall mission of the Office of Graduate Studies?
- Who should administer OGS? What is the ideal structure and organization for OGS?
- What functions and responsibilities are the most important for OGS? What, if any functions and responsibilities might reside in some other unit?

In order to obtain as broad as possible a sense of campus-wide views of graduate education and organization, we also held two Open Forums; one was directed to faculty and staff and the second was for graduate students. An electronic survey was then distributed to the University Secretary's list of Deans, Directors, Department Chairs and other Administrators.

Over the course of the semester we received large quantities of information that enabled us to identify what were perceived issues and questions regarding the responsibilities, and structure of OGS, and whether or how these might be changed.