

CPI Subcommittee – Improving Research Personnel & Recruitment

Goals: Identify factors that affect effective recruitment and retention of preeminent graduate students to Texas A&M and determine solution(s) for promoting Texas A&M as an attractive place for graduate students to pursue their educational goals.

Limiting factors: We identified three major factors that are currently limiting recruitment: 1) There is a substantial shortage of definite, long-term financial support for graduate students. 2) Graduate programs are ineffectively organized/structured, as they lack uniformity and cohesiveness across departments, colleges, and programs. 3) We find the university lacks an effective marketing approach for targeting leading graduate student prospects and the university's graduate programs also lack a relevant multimedia presence to effectively reach out to and resonate with ideal graduate student candidates.

Solution 1: *Guarantee 5 funded years to PhD students.* It is strongly recommended that incoming graduate students should be universally guaranteed five years of financial support, and this package should include a guaranteed minimum stipend, tuition, student fees, and comprehensive health insurance coverage. This support should extend equally to both domestic and international students, as much as possible. A standardized pay scale that is on par with national standards (specific to the discipline) will allow students to fully commit to their research and scholarship endeavors.. This support will be conditional: it will be requisite for students to maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher and an annual evaluation letter from the primary advisor regarding satisfactory academic standing. Each graduate program should include teaching and research fellowships as appropriate. A new laptop should be provided by the academic advisor at the beginning of first academic year and an annual travel budget for national conferences. Top ranking admits can receive funding directly from the university, and another set of students can receive funds partly from the university, and the remainder from the department and college. If a college wishes to add funds to increase the number of stipends, it should be allowed to do so. This is standard procedure in many ivy league schools in the United States and is used as a competitive means to attract and retain preeminent graduate students. The university should establish an aggressive program to attract underrepresented domestic students from across the nation.

Solution 2: *Improve marketing and recruitment approaches.* Currently, the university lacks a presence across social media platforms that resonates with the potential graduate student target audience. Social media is excellent for connecting with prospective graduate students; however it is currently an underutilized tool for recruitment purposes. Graduate programs should take advantage of social media to promote their program culture (i.e. events, photos), network, professional development opportunities, etc., to highlight to prospective students what these programs at Texas A&M have to offer graduate students. An example of this is sharing experiences of current graduate students' and alumni's successes via blogs and hashtags, which presents university programs in a way that allows students to better understand the respective graduate environments at Texas A&M and gives recruits a better understanding of the opportunities available to graduate students. An effective social media presence among graduate programs should also be used as a way to connect with potential students and to engage in conversations with prospective graduate students to communicate efficiently about programs. An improved multimedia presence should include frequently updated websites with a streamlined user interface, search engine optimization, as well as strategic advertising campaigns. Recruitment within each discipline (i.e. life science, engineering etc.) should be consolidated, and the number of graduate students during each interview event should be maximized. Planned social events during interviews allow prospective students to interact with current successful graduate students, and are an excellent way to promote programs and advocate their resources to enhance the quality of graduate student recruits. Each department should be allowed to make their own outreach efforts and then preselect candidates.

Solution 3: *Establish a centralized graduate college.* A centralized graduate college with its own dean and administration that oversees academic processes and policies that ensure program integrity and uniformity recommended. This institution will manage admissions and recruitment university-wide, and will provide a spectrum of support services to graduate students. The graduate college should coordinate graduate student orientation, commencement, awards and recognition (in acknowledgement of graduate student accomplishments), social events (to promote meaningful interactions among students), and research symposia (to foster exchange of ideas across disciplines, augment networking, etc). The university should also consider granting full academic advising rights to the Graduate College so faculty members from different departments may advise students from any departments without the need for courtesy joint appointments.