

BENCHMARKING: BEST PRACTICES FOR STRENGTHENING GRADUATE PROGRAMS AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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Background

A white paper submitted by the Council of Principal Investigators (CPI) identified:

1. Factors that adversely affect recruitment and retention of qualified graduate students to Texas A&M
2. Solutions for promoting Texas A&M as a preeminent institution for graduate education. Three solutions were proposed:
 - A. guarantee that PhD students will have 5 years of funding;
 - B. improve marketing and recruitment approaches;
 - C. establish a centralized graduate college.





Goal: Ascertain and adapt best practices used by premier graduate schools across the United States for the purpose of elevating Texas A&M University's graduate program. The overall goal is to increase the diversity and quality of applicants and cultivate a program environment that optimizes graduate student success.



Advantages of graduate college:

1. systematize student recruitment and program marketing,
2. standardize long-term student financial support,
3. will ensure uniformity and cohesiveness across university.

Benchmarking:

Universities to be surveyed for metrics and for comparing and contrasting current graduate program practices at Texas A&M.

-selected by Dr. Karen Butler-Purry, Associate Provost of graduate studies

1. The University of Texas at Austin,
2. The University of Michigan at Ann Arbor,
3. The University of California at Los Angeles



The University of Texas at Austin

▶ *Graduate college Structure:*

- ▶ Established in 1910
- ▶ Provides administrative oversight of ALL aspects of graduate education

▶ *Strategy:*

- ▶ Conducts 19 graduate recruitment fairs annually (13 in Texas, 6 out of the state),
- ▶ ~ \$20 million in graduate fellowships annually
- ▶ National Science Foundation (NSF) grants exceeds ~\$4.5 million.
- ▶ ~\$300,000 in travel awards each year.
- ▶ Conduct external reviews at regular intervals.

▶ *Translational impact:*

- ▶ A complex structure that houses an extensive range of functions.
- ▶ Overall, it presents an emergent system that has grown by indiscriminately adding functional units over time to accommodate an evolving environment.
- ▶ Offers writing fellowships where recipients are awarded a stipend and residency on a 250-acre ranch which provides solitude



The University of Michigan at Ann Arbor

▶ *Graduate college Structure:*

- ▶ ~8,300 students in graduate programs
- ▶ Fractional funding from the mentor, department, college, and graduate school
- ▶ The annual operating cost: \$10.5 million,
- ▶ ~\$58 million as financial support to doctoral students

▶ *Strategy:*

- ▶ Student-centered, faculty-led, and graduate school-supported
- ▶ Stipend funding generally goes directly to graduate students
- ▶ Strategies to facilitate their career placement
- ▶ Outstanding initiatives on conflict resolution and promoting diversity.

▶ *Translational impact:*

- ▶ Student-centered practices geared towards career placement.
- ▶ More well-defined layout than UT-Austin.
- ▶ Increasing student diversity and professional development opportunities



The University of California at Los Angeles

▶ *Graduate college Structure:*

- ▶ A highly decentralized environment with considerable shared governance
- ▶ Roughly 8,000 graduate students are admitted out of 31,430 applicants
- ▶ Average time to graduate with a doctoral degree:
 - ▶ Humanities is 8-11 years, 6-7 years in the physical sciences, and 5.5-7 years in life sciences
- ▶ Faculty senate sets standards and graduate school implements policies



▶ *Strategy:*

- ▶ Doctoral students are continually funded
- ▶ The operational cost of the graduate school is about \$5 million,
- ▶ \$60 million provided as block grants to the departments



▶ *Translational impact:*

- ▶ Projects itself as highly research-centric.
- ▶ Graduate education dovetailed towards the goal of excellence in research
- ▶ An exceptional data analyses team in the graduate school

Summary

1. Texas A&M does not have to re-invent the wheel.
2. Learn from experiences:
 - ❑ what has worked for them and what has not
3. Implement those which align best with Texas A&M
 - ❑ Vision
 - ❑ Goals
 - ❑ Core values
4. Highly organized administration:
 - ❑ Work with faculty to formulate graduate program structures and policies
 - ❑ Prioritizes advancement of university-wide research initiatives
 - ❑ Student career success.

