Final Report (Senate Research Committee, subcommittee graduate studies)

The subcommittee for graduate studies was charged to provide a short SWOT analysis of graduate programs at UK, which follows here. Some facts of this report were used in Dr. Swanson's report to the UK senate (State-of-the-University, a faculty perspective).

SWOT analysis of graduate student programs and support.

Strengths:

The University of Kentucky has diverse graduate programs, overall 153. Fifty six of these are doctoral programs (PhD, EdD, DMA, DS), ninety four master degree programs and three specialist programs (e.g. EDS, higher than MS, but disappearing). In addition, there are at least three professional programs (MD, PharmD, DMD), but these are not overseen by the graduate school.

There are various ways to support the graduate students, mainly through TA- and RA-ships. About 40 training grants exist within UK.

Some of our graduate programs were recognized by the National Research Council to rank within top 50 of the Nation.

2,206 students were enrolled in a PhD program in fall 2010, and 2,536 in a master degree, 44 in a specialist degree, 21 in certificate programs, and 259 in post-doctorate degree programs, overall 5411 graduate enrollment, which is a 0.7% increase compared to 2009.

The costs of living in Lexington are among the lowest in the Nation, although Lexington ranges among the most desired places for living.

Weaknesses:

The UK graduate school recognizes everything ≥ $ 9,000 as graduate support. The disparity is big, the support stipends range from $ 9,000 to > 30,000 (e.g., NSF Igert).

Tuition support is only paid for out-of-state, not in-state students. The Colleges which hold the graduate programs are responsible for in-state students.

The National Research Council rankings are based on 8-year old data, thus irrelevant to analyze the current situation.

The graduate enrollment went down in 2005 (-8.33%), 2007 (-3.43%), 2008 (-0.65%), and 2009 (-2.96%), always compared to the year before. Only in the years 2006 (+3.93%) and 2010 (+0.7%) increases in enrollment were noted.

Opportunities:

Better advertisement of Lexington as a place to live and study.

If UK wins the 2011 NCAA National championship, that will help recruitment in future.

Creation of more and higher paid TA- and RA-ships.

Threats:

The great disparity in graduate funding causes problems for many programs, and for recruitment. For example Chemistry students are supported by ~ $ 15,500 per year in the Chemistry department, but ~ $ 20,000/a in Pharmaceutical Sciences.

The TA support budget remained the same in the last two decades, so that the real number of TA-ships is constantly sinking.

Low stipends will discourage students to apply for graduate programs. With dwindling funding, and less available training grants, the situation will get worse.

Another problem is gaps in funding (e.g., summer student support, disability support, see examples below).

Many graduate student applicants just look at the stipend, and do not take into consideration the low costs of living.

The budget may not allow a stipend increase.

<u>Other Committee issues:</u>

1) Student status for pre-qualifying exam Ph.D. students over the summer

The subcommittee of the Senate Research and Grants committee focused on TA/RA issues met on March 17th, 2011. One issue that was brought to our attention concerned availability of student status for pre-qualifying exam Ph.D. students over the summer. Currently, there is no mechanism for these students to hold full time status for their research over the summer. Post-qualifying exam students can

register for 749, a free zero-credit course during the summer to qualify as a full-time student, but that option is not available pre-qualifying. As a result, pre-qualifying exam students doing research over the summer do not get the benefits of full-time student status.

The subcommittee agreed that this is an important issue. It appears to result from an oversight in course creation and availability after a new system of courses for Ph.D. students was implemented in 2005. There may be a rationale for not having a course analogous to 749 for pre-qualifying exam students, but our subcommittee could not think of a viable reason.

Therefore, we recommend that a new course be created – perhaps 747 (there is an MA course, 748) – that serves the same purpose as 749, but for pre-qualifying exam students.

2) Short term disability support:

The subcommittee of the Senate Research and Grants committee focused on TA/RA issues met on March 17th, 2011. One issue that was brought to our attention concerned short-term disability for graduate students on RA. Currently, there is no mechanism to resolve the conflict between the University's fiduciary responsibilities to research sponsors that grant-funded students are doing the work and the University's moral responsibility to provide pay to students if they become unable to work. There is the related question of long-term disability, for example due to mental illness, but that is an even more difficult problem, and one that is above my pay grade.

The subcommittee agreed that this is an important issue. The subcommittee also agreed regarding how, on the surface, a conflict may exist between the University's two responsibilities. In our discussion, there was consensus that researchers will have difficulty maintaining funded laboratories if they pay graduate students funded on RA when those graduate students are not able to work due to short-term or long-term illness. The subcommittee suggested that the University consider developing a new policy to protect (a) the researchers who must maintain active laboratories to keep their funding and (b) graduate students who depend on their RA support even in the event that they experience an illness that prevents them from doing such work.

Recommendation: Establish a mechanism through which the University can bridge such funding gaps.