

University of Texas at San Antonio Graduate School Review Report August 2018

Overview

The primary purpose of a Graduate School is to define and support excellence in graduate education and the research/scholarly activities within it. As such, the Graduate School is largely responsible for (1) articulating a vision for excellence in graduate education; (2) establishing policies that define best practice for all graduate programs including developing standards for excellence in admissions and curriculum (through program review and graduate council curricular review); (3) ensuring that all students meet the minimum standards upon completion; (4) defining what work leads to a graduate degree; and (5) creating an environment where graduate students are well-prepared for future careers.

The University of Texas-San Antonio is currently classified as a Carnegie Doctoral University II, with institutional goals for achieving a NRUF/Carnegie R1 status. The Graduate School administratively oversees 24 doctoral degree programs, 69 master's degree programs, and 31 graduate certificates offered among seven academic colleges including the: School of Architecture, Construction & Planning, Business, Education & Human Development, Engineering, Liberal & Fine Arts, Public Policy and Sciences. During the fall 2017 semester, approximately 4,220 graduate students were enrolled in doctoral (3%) and master's (11%), within graduate programs offered on the main campus as well as the downtown campus (Colleges of Public Policy, ; Architecture, Construction & Planning; and Education & Human Development).

There have been a number of administrative/organizational changes within the University as well as the Graduate School over the past few years that have impacted graduate education. UTSA is embarking on a national search for their next Vice Provost of Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate School. This position is very important to UTSA, as high-quality graduate programs and expanding enrollment is critical to achieving President Eighmy's vision of a multicultural discovery enterprise that serves San Antonio, the nation, and the world. Furthermore, UTSA has an intensified focus on achieving Carnegie R1/NRUF status, and graduate program success is one sentinel criterion. To that end, the quality of the university's academic and research programs depends upon its ability to attract and retain outstanding students to its graduate programs.

An external review of the University of Texas- San Antonio (UTSA) Graduate School was conducted on August 6-7, 2018. The reviewer was charged with examining the UTSA's Graduate School operations, specifically the organizational structure (strategy & mission); its operational model (staffing, software systems, graduate school processes including recruitment and admissions, and student support programs); its funding model for graduate assistantships, scholarships/fellowships); and identifying markets and partnerships. The review involved consideration of previous reports and other materials relevant to graduate studies, and best/normative practices in graduate school operations, as well as in-person interviews with representatives from a wide range of units relevant to graduate education at UTSA, staff within the School, and graduate students.

Three major themes emerged in conversations over the two-day visit: (1) Graduate Education at UTSA: Mission, Structure, & Alignment; (2) Graduate School Operations & Processes; and (3) Graduate School Administrative Structure & Culture. Below is a summary of the reviewer's

observations in light of normative operations and national best practices and a set of recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of the Graduate School at the University of Texas-San Antonio.

Graduate Education at UTSA: Mission, Structure, & Alignment

Strategy and Mission

The mission of the Graduate School at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), as stated on the UTSA Graduate School website, is to cultivate “academic excellence in graduate education on a local and global platform by recruiting students from diverse cultural perspectives, encouraging intellectual curiosity and creativity, and promoting integrity and life-long learning.” The Vision Statement states:

The Graduate School is dedicated to providing innovative and quality education for student professional development, while maintaining high levels of integrity, encouraging diversity, and cultivating life-long learning within the global community.

Additionally, the Graduate School lists four values designed to “steer the direction” of their unit: Diversity, Life-long learning, Support integrity, Transparency.

As stated, the current mission and vision do not provide a clear framework to best pursue UTSA’s opportunities to grow graduate program enrollment and excellence, particularly as it relates to the institutional goals for NRUF/Carnegie R1 status. The organizational structure of the School in general and, more specifically, graduate education at UTSA, is not well aligned with the Provost’s priorities for graduate education (see *Graduate Education Structure*).

A clearly-defined mission statement focused on providing support services to units that deliver graduate education and then translated into a strategic plan would provide a clear framework through which Graduate School staff, as well as the graduate faculty, can establish specific enrollment goals, optimize program offerings, target key outcomes, and accomplish the goals of increased enrollment, retention, and timely graduation.

Graduate Education Structure

The structural elements supporting graduate education at UTSA involves a variety of units to include (1) the Vice Provost/Graduate Dean; (2) graduate faculty; (3) a graduate council; (4) associate deans of graduate studies within each academic college; (5) graduate program committees at department and graduate curriculum committee at college levels; (6) graduate advisors of record (GAR); and (7) the Graduate School.

The Vice Provost for Graduate Studies/Dean of the Graduate School reports to the Provost and serves as the University-wide executive officer for graduate studies. The Dean provides leadership for and coordination of all graduate programs at UTSA. The division of Graduate Studies serves as the center and clearing house for all policies, procedures and processes related to graduate education at UTSA, and the Graduate School administers transdisciplinary graduate programs that span across other colleges (e.g. Translational Science Ph.D.).

All full-time tenure track and tenured faculty members at UTSA automatically receive graduate faculty status upon hire. While the primary responsibilities associated with being a graduate faculty

member may differ across institutions, generally Graduate Faculty establish all academic policies governing graduate education, including curricular requirements, the development of new graduate programs, participate in the decisions of their graduate department affecting the graduate program, advise and supervise students working toward master's and doctoral degrees, and serve on final examining committees for master's and doctoral degree candidates. Faculty participation should be the singular driving force in graduate education policy development and should play a central role in the recruitment, admission, teaching, mentoring, and graduate program administration.

The Graduate Council at UTSA is an operating unit of the Faculty Senate, with representation developed independently of the Senate (according to the Graduate Council Bylaws). As designed, the Graduate Council provides advice, counsels and recommends actions to the Faculty Senate on all matters relating to graduate education at UTSA. Specifically, the Graduate Council recommends and reviews all graduate courses; reviews graduate programs; recommends qualifications for membership on the Graduate Faculty; recommends standards for appointment of graduate assistantships; recommends policies for graduate admissions; recommends policies for admitting students to candidacy; and so on.

As a policy body, the Graduate Council isn't perceived as operating effectively. Over forty graduate faculty members sit on the Council, yet few attend the meetings. The Council has had difficulty achieving a quorum; some members "repeatedly blow off" the meetings, and over the past two years, fewer Council members have continued to participate. Faculty interviewed noted that the Graduate Council had been "edged out" of the decision-making process (an example provided was the Academic Program Review). In addition, the different roles the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and the Graduate Advisers of Record play in the graduate education structure are unclear.

National best practices for the Graduate Council is to be a stand-alone entity that represents the interests of the graduate faculty and is the policy-making body for graduate education at the campus level, with responsibility for recommending approval or disapproval of all new proposed graduate programs and establishing broad policy concerning graduate education, including graduate students. It is typically a representative body composed of full-time regular graduate faculty members elected by faculty in departments offering graduate programs with the Graduate Dean serving as chair of the Council.

Each UTSA college has an Associate Dean for Graduate Studies who represents the College's interests, efforts, and reporting relative to graduate studies. The Associate Dean for Graduate Studies is responsible for providing administrative oversight to the Graduate Advisers of Record (GARS) and associated procedural matters related to the graduate recruitment, selection and admissions, as well as policy development related to academic work of graduate students in their colleges.

Graduate program committees are established for each graduate degree program in a department/college. Graduate faculty serve on the graduate program committees and are responsible for the following: recommending admissions of students to its program to the College Dean and the Dean of the Graduate School; establishing procedures to ensure the maintenance of graduate program standards; recommending action on Admission to Candidacy for all doctoral degrees in its academic program; and certifying that each candidate has fulfilled the requirements. The Graduate Program Committee also recommends new graduate courses and changes in graduate courses in that Program to the head of the appropriate academic unit, College Academic Policy Curricula Committee, the College Dean, the college Faculty Forum (as provided in College bylaws), the Dean of the Graduate School, and the Graduate Council.

The roles and responsibilities of the Graduate Advisor of Record (GAR), as outlined in the *Graduate Adviser of Record Handbook*, include graduate enrollment management (recruiting, selecting and admitting graduate students); developing and reviewing graduate curriculum; tracking student progress by maintaining and submitting degree plans; recommending allocations of fellowships and assistantships, and appointing faculty members to graduate student committees; tracking graduate student placement; and assessing program outcomes. GARS are also responsible for communicating university-wide policies on graduate programs to the departmental faculty and department decisions and recommendations to the Graduate School, through the academic associate deans for graduate studies in which the program is administered. In contrast, the *Graduate Council Bylaws* note that “duties of the Graduate Adviser of Record” are limited to coordinating and advising students and prospective students; maintaining a copy of the academic records related to students’ progress; and referring students . . . for matters requiring the attention of the department chair, School dean or the Dean of the Graduate School (p. 11).

Frustration with the current structure for graduate education at UTSA is widespread. The Associate Deans for Graduate Studies were unclear about the role and function of the Graduate Council; the Graduate Council is seen as ineffective by the Associate Deans and the GARS; the GARS don’t understand the role and function of the Associate Deans. Lack of clarity and overlap of roles and responsibilities among the Graduate Council, the Associate Deans, Graduate Program Committees and the GARS translates into inconsistent and ineffective processes, procedures and policies that negatively impact graduate education and graduate students at UTSA, and add substantial faculty burden with no measurable benefit.

There is a perceived difference in the way the Associate Deans interpret policy. Furthermore, each college has a “mini graduate committee who acts like a curriculum committee,” and the graduate program approval process is described as overly complex. Regarding the GARS, there is a perception that not all “function the same” across units nor are their responsibilities clearly distinguished from those of the Associate Deans for Graduate Studies and the Graduate Council, as well as the Graduate Program Committee/Chair. As one individual noted, it is a system with “more links in the chain that can break.”

Finally, GARS are charged with a number of recruitment and admissions responsibilities (see *GARS Handbook*) while also being expected to teach, conduct scholarly research, and advise students. They typically have no training or experience in the fundamentals of graduate recruitment. National best practices are oriented to strategic enrollment, where the Graduate school expends efforts at the top of the recruitment funnel — that is using electronic tools and resources on student prospects and inquiries to generate interest in UTSA and program offerings — in order to improve the quality and number of quality graduate students in the pool from which then departmental/college efforts are directed towards specific recruitment. While faculty can proactively recruit through conference travel and colleague referrals, the Graduate School should oversee the overall recruitment “funnel”, enabling and supporting the overall process where different units contribute at different points.

Graduate School Operations & Processes

Ideally, Graduate Studies serves as a centralized advocate for graduate education. It should provide (a) visible campus-level leadership in academic innovation in graduate education; (b) a mechanism for applying uniform standards of quality and integrity across graduate programs; (c) the capacity to disburse some graduate support funding centrally, funding emerging priorities across colleges as

needed; and (d) specialized staff with the capacity to serve as trainers and resources for graduate faculty and program staff.

Core functions essential to the role and mission of the Graduate School include graduate affairs (academic programs, fellowships, graduate registrar, student progress; thesis office); academic services (technology/tools, data, development); strategic enrollment management (admissions and recruitment); and career/ professional development. Budget administration and communications are functions that can be provided through shared services or housed in the Graduate School, depending on scale and institutional organization.

The Interim Vice Provost/Dean already has identified ten immediate strategies to address (and improve) operations and processes in the Graduate School, including redesigning the overall recruitment and admissions process into an integrated strategic enrollment function; implementing a paperless graduate admissions application; using a web-based degree audit system (*Degree Works*) to monitor students' progress toward degree completion; improving advising and reducing time-to-degree; and creating streamlined pathways to graduate school for high-achieving UTSA undergrads.

Strategic Enrollment: Recruitment

Competition for talented graduate students is intense; competition occurs at both regional, national, and international levels. UTSA competes with other neighboring institutions to attract talented graduate students, and competing successfully for these students is crucial to enrollment growth goals.

At UTSA, graduate recruitment is mostly decentralized, which is not necessarily a bad thing. The Associate Deans do not believe conference attendance by the Graduate School is effective and expressed a need for “better recruitment strategies both at the Graduate School and departmental level.” National best practices have revealed that generally conference attendance by Graduate School staff is not efficient or effective in improving the number or quality of graduate students. Graduate school staff should be oriented to focus on the top of the recruitment funnel — that is using electronic tools and resources on student prospects and inquiries to generate interest in UTSA and program offerings — in order to improve the quality and number of quality graduate students in the pool from which then departmental/college efforts can direct specific recruitment.

Graduate faculty do not want their recruitment efforts micro-managed. Rather, they are looking for direction and centralized support from the Graduate School to support them in their program specific activities (e.g. selecting candidates). The Graduate School has just started taking proactive steps to assist graduate programs in their recruitment efforts. For example, the director of recruitment and engagement is in the process of building relationships with graduate program staff in the colleges, including the associate deans and the GARS. The Graduate School is also moving towards implementing a customer relationship management (CRM) process to gather, track and communicate with prospective students. Using an effective, well-managed CRM process, prospective students will receive a variety of customized messages programmed to occur at certain intervals. Through consistent, well-planned strategic CRM strategy, UTSA can expect to increase the number and quality of applicants.

Neither the Graduate School nor the Graduate Advisers of Record have a clear understanding of what the graduate enrollment metrics should be in terms of new and continuing students. Goals for graduate enrollment have been broadly stated and have not typically been specified at the level of

the program, nor communicated to the GARS. Furthermore, any targets are necessarily consistent with the department chair and/or GARS' enrollment goals. The result is that the right hand doesn't necessarily know what the left hand is doing.

In addition, Graduate Advisers of Record do not receive training via Graduate School on best recruitment practices that occur at the level of the program. Most programs do a good job communicating and building relationships with students after they've applied and been accepted. The Graduate School's leadership is providing some direction in best practices related to recruitment which will help graduate programs build a stronger prospective graduate student inquiry pool.

Strategic Enrollment

A key function of any graduate school is the strategic management of graduate enrollment. While there are some similarities in the use of tools and resources to identify and cultivate prospects, graduate enrollment differs significantly from undergraduate enrollment. Graduate admissions staff serve a different audience who take the next step in their education based on completely different life factors. Different stage of life expectations such as family and professional careers also require a more process-oriented approach than undergraduate admissions. Finally, doctoral enrollment in particular is as much about the match between interests of the prospect and a particular faculty. As a result, the Graduate School is particularly suited to manage the strategic recruitment and admissions processes for all graduate programs which are housed in academic colleges. For these reasons alone, the Graduate School should have oversight of graduate recruitment and admissions. Of course, there should be a collaborative relationship between undergraduate and graduate recruitment/admissions, as well as the opportunity to collaborate on common tools (e.g. CRM) that are useful for strategic enrollment at both levels.

Strategic Enrollment: Admissions

Graduate admissions play an integral role in the mission of the Graduate School. The primary role of a Graduate Studies division is to support graduate applicants from the time of application to admission. During this process, staff should provide efficient and quality service to all applicants. Processes and communication to graduate faculty, graduate staff and prospective students should focus on (a) developing efficient admissions procedures with emphasis on timely processing of applications, efficient use of resources, and outstanding customer service; and (b) providing administrative services to graduate students, faculty, and programs that are effective, efficient, and responsive to constituent needs, using state-of-the-art technologies appropriately applied to Graduate School processes and procedures.

At UTSA, the entire admissions process takes place in the graduate school, including processing of all applications. The graduate program (GARS) evaluate application materials and makes recommendations for admission or denial. UTSA's admission process is inconsistent with national best practices, where the major role of a Graduate Studies division should be to monitor decisions, ensure that appropriate admissions processes are being used at the department or program level, and maintain the minimal standards established by the graduate faculty (embodied through the Graduate Council).

However, there is substantial confusion and dissatisfaction regarding graduate admissions and the role of the Graduate School in the process. Graduate Advisers of Record, who are responsible for handling graduate applications review, select and make recommendations to the college Associate

Dean for Graduate Studies for review, and the recommendations are then forwarded to the Graduate School. This process is cumbersome, inefficient and ineffective.

Almost everyone expressed dissatisfaction with the inflexibility of the application process as well as the Graduate Studies admissions staff who manages it. Although those interviewed recognized the electronic application system had changed recently through no fault of the Graduate School, the application processing time was described as taking anywhere from weeks to months. Given the intense competition for graduate students, the lack of timely processing places UTSA at a substantial disadvantage and undermines progress towards institutional goals.

The ultimate purpose of the admissions process is to enroll top quality graduate students who can complete the program and contribute to research and professional achievement. Policies and procedures should facilitate, not impede, reaching this goal.

Graduate Program Approval

The pace for approval of new degree programs is slow, and there is increased scrutiny by the Board of Regents and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board compared to those in other states. That being said, there are eight levels of review and approval before a graduate program is even considered by the external Boards, which is way out of step with national norms, which are if anything oriented towards nimbleness to stand-up market-responsive programs. At the department level, program ideas are first discussed with the college Dean, the department chair, and the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. Faculty then develop the program proposal and forward it to the appropriate departmental graduate studies committee. The College Curriculum committee reviews the proposal then forwards it to the Graduate Council who reviews and approves it and moves it to the Graduate Council Committee for approval. The Graduate School also reviews the proposal and returns it to the College Dean; the Faculty Senate then reviews and approves the proposal before it finally goes to the Provost. Approval for a new graduate program can take anywhere from one to two years, which makes it difficult to develop new and valuable graduate degree programs that are responsive to society's needs.

National best practices for program approval processes include program development at the department via Department Chair and Program Committee in consultation with the Dean to ensure internal vetting in the college, and then subsequent external vetting at dean's council, and then when finalized, the program is reviewed by the Graduate Council, with recommendation to the Provost.

Funding

Among the graduate faculty, there is a perception that both the size and composition of UTSA's funding packages to support graduate students are not comparable to the best offers prospective students receive from competing institutions. Fellowship funding is not aligned with the enrollment growth goals or national best practices (more master's students received full funding as opposed to more substantial investments in PhD students) and prestigious fellowships like the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship are often misunderstood and inappropriately treated as a scholarship. Faculty blame the Graduate School for not better leveraging fellowship funding support, noting that faculty/departments are not "rewarded" for bringing prestigious fellowship recipients to campus. Part of this criticism has to do with the Graduate School's application deadlines, which are seen as too restrictive and misaligned with enrollment growth goals.

The lack of substantial fellowship funds that would allow graduate programs to offer doctoral students five years of funding hinders UTSA's ability to compete with peer institutions for the strongest students. Lack of adequate funding support also increases PhD students' time-to-degree.

As is the trend across all higher education institutions, state, federal and other extramural fellowships and traineeships have decreased, and no one expects that trend to change. It was not clear to this reviewer what other mechanisms are open to the Graduate School to increase revenue streams (e.g., differential tuition revenue, increased graduate application fee, revenue from online programs). Several faculties noted that external funding from sources such as grants, national, state and local foundations and fundraising may need to increase to support graduate enrollment growth.

Tracking Graduate Student Progress

The Graduate School recently invested in a centralized, online system (*Degree Works*) that should allow the Graduate School, graduate chairs, and graduate students to mark program milestones, manage program documents, and monitor student progress when fully implemented. Managed well, this a cost-effective service to proactively monitor and support interventions to ensure timely degree completion.

Graduate School Administrative Structure & Culture

Structure

The Graduate School currently employs 22 full-time staff, nine part-time staff, and three part-time faculty administrative appointments (associate deans) for a total of 35 staff members. Given the size and number of graduate programs, this staffing is well above national norms. Staff are assigned to four general subunits: (1) Graduate Admissions; (2) Graduate Recruitment & Engagement; (3) Graduate Student Success and Professional Development; and (4) Administrative Support Services (i.e., data collection, graduate student progress and compliance, information technology).

Over the past two years, the Graduate School developed a student success and graduate student professional development program to promote "life-long learners" and prepare students to be future leaders in industry and academia. Graduate students are provided a wide range of development opportunities including grant writing seminars, dissertation writing campus, and workshops on teaching and job placement. The importance of professional development programs for graduate students cannot be overstated, as graduate students often do not get professional skills training in their graduate programs, particularly those oriented to careers outside of the academy. As a result, graduate schools have taken the lead to cultivate strengths in the areas of career preparation, scientific communication, and teaching to help students prepare for their next career stage. In general, the student success and graduate student professional program is perceived as valued-added by the faculty interviewed.

While the focus on professional development is laudatory, over 100 programs are offered throughout the year with many workshops and presentations attended by only a few students (in some instances 8-10). The current approach to training and professional development is out of step with national norms and not an effective use of staff effort. Additionally, some developmental

programs do not align with the mission of the program. For example, a health and wellness initiative is being launched this year – with limited resources at UTSA, such offerings do not yield sufficient return or benefit. Professional development program which helps students develop broader professional skill sets for both academic and nonacademic jobs is better aligned with the goals of the specific graduate programs as well as the Graduate School.

Culture

The Graduate College is not viewed as a service-oriented, student-centered unit. It was described as overly bureaucratic, focused on rules instead of relationships, and outright difficult. Graduate faculty believe that the “underlying purpose” of the graduate studies division should be to “facilitate programs and services to get students through to graduation.” In addition, activities “emphasized” by the Graduate School are “not aligned” with the college or graduate program goals. As stated previously, few understand the role and mission of the Graduate School and there is a perception that the staffing has expanded over the past few years without explanation, purpose, or increased support to the graduate programs.

Faculty have an important role to play in recruiting talented graduate students. They want streamlined application processes and flexible application deadlines to support their graduate program. They want a School that serves as the central, student-centered resource for graduate admissions and support services, and a staff who works collaboratively with faculty, staff, and students to promote graduate student success and ensure timely graduation.

There is a clear lack of communication between the GARs, the Associate Deans, the Graduate Council, Graduate Program Committees, and the Graduate School admission staff. The Associate Deans were quick to admit that some inconsistencies in policy application were on them, describing previous approaches as the “Wild, Wild West,” where little process or policy was followed. As a result, excessive oversight and control was implemented by the Graduate College which means the Graduate College staff now “watch everything you do.” There is little trust that the graduate programs and Colleges are following procedures and policies.

Waivers, especially, are viewed as a major obstacle. From the Graduate School perspective, GARs and Associate Deans repeatedly ask to waive policy their own program has set. From the GARs’ and Associate Deans’ perspectives, Graduate School staff are overly concerned with applying policy consistently, do not understand the concept of “holistic admissions,” and are taking decision making authority away from the graduate programs.

Admissions staff hold tight to the notion that more flexibility means more work, less control, and inconsistency in the application of policies. Furthermore, the admissions website does not communicate a friendly, service-oriented tone. For example, visitors to the admissions website will see this message: “*During peak periods, it may take up to 7 business days for us to respond to your email inquiry.*” Most institutions respond to student inquiries within 24-hours, recognizing the hyper competitive nature of graduate student recruitment.

Certain members of the Graduate School staff seem unwilling to step up and build relationships with graduate faculty or program staff. When asked about how staff members resolve issues, one staff member said she would not pick up the phone to call because, if she did she “would be on the phone all day.” Communications are generally directed to the Associate Deans who are expected by the admissions team to communicate with the GARs and other program staff. As one faculty noted,

“it not at all a collaborative relationship.” Staffing and job responsibilities needs to be reviewed for alignment with institutional goals.

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

The Graduate School has several challenges and a number of opportunities. Several challenges are similar to the 2017 *Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) Pressing Issues Survey* of graduate deans, including (1) enrollment management; (2) securing institutional resources; (3) securing additional funding support (external); and (4) securing funds for graduate stipends and research. For UTSA, the major challenges also include strategic alignment of the Graduate School’s mission with the priorities for enrollment growth and turning around a toxic work environment within the Graduate Studies division.

Opportunities

Nurturing the development of new graduate programs that fill an unmet academic need and attract students willing to pay the tuition as an investment in their future will help grow graduate enrollments. Likewise, graduate students are increasingly looking for innovative programs that allow them to do cutting-edge research, make connections across disciplinary lines, and apply what they are learning to real world problems. Graduate programs that offer exciting opportunities for innovative research and scholarship are needed to attract and retain graduate students.

New graduate programs that are responsive to non-traditional, military, and veteran students; online certificate programs; and accelerated master's degree programs will all attract new enrollments. Finally, certificate programs with high demand may serve as revenue sources for the University in addition to the academic benefits they provide for graduate education. Increasing capacity in selected programs may be a good strategy; certificate programs do not require additional faculty resources (high student demand + low-cost University investment = high yield results).

At this time of transition in UTSA’s leadership, Graduate School has the opportunity to re-organize for change and, with the commitment of the faculty, work toward the level of excellence in graduate education that will advance the institution to Carnegie RI status.

Recommendations

Based on the observations summarized above, the Reviewer offers the following recommendations:

The Structure of Graduate Education at UTSA

1. The mission of the Graduate School—and graduate education at UTSA—needs to be redefined. The mission statement should define what graduate education does for UTSA students (both prospective and current); what it does for UTSA graduate faculty and graduate programs (and its important relationship with research); and what it does for the University. In keeping with UTSA’s goal of achieving Carnegie R1/NRUF status, the mission should also address what graduate education provides for the San Antonio community, the

nation, and the world. Review of the missions of UTSA's aspirational peers, as well as Carnegie R1 and AAU institutional models, provides suitable models.

2. Once the mission of graduate education at UTSA is defined, the functions, roles and responsibilities of the various structural elements of graduate education at UTSA, including the Graduate School, should be re-aligned.
3. Eliminate the administrative oversight role played by the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in academic colleges related to graduate program admissions, recruitment, and selection. Instead, refocus the A.D.'s attention on graduate program quality, including curriculum/program development and graduate program review. In many institutions, the AD has an integrated role for both Graduate Studies and Research, given the interconnection of these activities at the level of the college.
4. Restructure the Graduate Council to be a body independent from the Faculty Senate, which reports directly to the Graduate Dean, and is made up of elected representatives from the graduate programs by college. The primary responsibility for assuring quality graduate work lies with the Graduate Faculty, the Graduate Council and the Graduate Advisers of Record with sufficient autonomy to serve their students. The structure should be designed to enable the Graduate Council and the Graduate Advisers of Record, along with designated graduate support staff, to establish and implement policies and procedures.
5. GARS should be the recognized leaders within graduate education at UTSA and must become an integral part of the graduate recruitment and admissions, curriculum, and graduate student mentoring and advising. GARS should be connected to the Graduate Program Committees, serving as the Chair.
6. Create a clearly written, single document that outlines the lines of authority and administrative structure for the entities involved in graduate education at UTSA, including defining the graduate faculty and their role in advancing quality graduate education. Although a Graduate Council Bylaws document exists, the document does not match the description of GARS' roles and responsibilities as outlined on the Graduate School website, does not state the articulation to the program committee and does not clearly address the roles and responsibilities of the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in academic colleges. This document should also formalize the procedures and roles spelling out how appointments are determined, the responsibilities of the positions, and whether or not appointments are for fixed terms. A more formalized set of guidelines would make it easier to function in these positions and successfully performing their duties.

Recruitment

1. Develop and implement a strategic enrollment plan (recruitment and admissions) that focuses on (1) recruiting excellent students in all graduate majors; (2) developing efficient admissions procedures that ensure timely processing of applications and deliver outstanding customer service; and (3) nurturing the development and delivery of high-quality graduate programs. Investments in a CRM technology and in its deployment, as well as focused recruitment efforts will allow the Graduate School to build a pool of talented, prospective graduate applicants.
2. While graduate recruitment is "decentralized" in the sense that each graduate program has its own recruitment goals and should be responsible for admission decisions, the Graduate School has the capacity to provide leadership for overall enrollment process. The director of graduate recruitment and engagement is in the process of developing a core communications plan for prospective graduate students. Helping graduate programs create individualized short-term and long-term strategic enrollment plans for each graduate

program also is a goal. The strategic enrollment function may need to be reorganized, examining staffing to function.

3. Conduct reviews of graduate program capacity and student success (time to degree), in collaboration with GARs, department chairs and college deans to establish enrollment targets for each graduate program.
4. Provide annual trend to each Graduate Adviser of Record to help them evaluate their applicant pool and make appropriate admission decisions. The data should include applications submitted; applications completed; admits; first enrollments; enrollments; and degrees conferred.
5. Graduate Advisers of Record (or the Associate Deans for Graduate Studies) should work closely with the director of graduate strategic enrollment to develop recruitment action plans that are shared with the graduate faculty. This process will lead to better understanding regarding the goals for new student enrollment.
6. Develop a set of metrics to monitor and increase incoming student quality, including but not limited to, high selectivity, high acceptance yield, and a set of quality indicators (e.g., GPAs, strong scholarly/creative portfolio, GRE and GMAT scores, TOEFL, and peer-reviewed publications as appropriate).
7. Assess competitors to better understand who the peer institutions are competing for, as well as the source of, higher quality applicants.
8. Improve data visibility across the enrollment funnel to diagnose and proactively address pipeline conversion issues (converting applicants to admits). Key metrics to watch include: Click to Lead, Lead to Application, Application to Admit, and Admit to Enroll. (Note: the director of recruitment is moving towards this goal, and similar funnel is in place already for undergraduate enrollment)
9. Leverage data for specific outreach/graduate program awareness campaigns to move applicants through the next step in the application to enrollment process.
10. Identify key performance indicators and design a process for assessing enrollment outcomes.

Admissions

1. The key to the quality of any institution's graduate student population is its admission process. The Graduate College should take steps to transition to a completely paperless process in which applicants electronically submit applications and documents needed for review, allowing graduate program faculty to review applications from a common electronic file. The current situation is substantially behind the times, and is an impediment to growing enrollments.
2. The Graduate School is currently examining the process elements of the admissions cycle, focusing on deadlines, the timely processing of applications and admissions decisions. It is expected that a more streamlined process will better serve applicants and graduate faculty/programs, as well as secure early acceptances from highly recruited admits.
3. An online application system, currently under review, will allow program faculty and staff to quickly transmit admit and financial award decisions to the Graduate College. Managed well, this step will have a positive impact on admission and enrollment numbers of high-quality graduate students.
4. In addition to the timeliness of offers of admission and financial support, applicants are often influenced by the quality of contact from the university. A quality CRM system and implementation should provide opportunities for program staff, faculty and Graduate School staff to communicate with students who have been admitted but not yet enrolled.

5. Regardless of the process followed, the primary decision to admit or deny admission of a student to a graduate program is the responsibility of the graduate faculty of the relevant academic program or department, assuming that minimum standards established by the Graduate School have been met. The Graduate School should not spend time checking and rechecking the work of the graduate programs.
6. The Graduate College should establish a process for sharing best practices on recruitment and admissions with graduate faculty advisors of record and designated graduate program staff. For example, the Graduate School might host an annual graduate enrollment workshop for Graduate Advisers of Record, associate deans for graduate studies, designated program staff and graduate faculty where Graduate School staff present enrollment trends and best practice strategies focused on best practices in graduate recruitment. Opportunities to meet face-to-face with Graduate School staff will improve communications and increase collaborations.

Graduate Student Funding

1. Establish a taskforce to review a graduate funding model to allow support for both recruiting and completion fellowships. The end goal is to maximize flexibility in supporting graduate programs' enrollment goals. Recruitment fellowships can be used to incentivize prospective students' acceptance; such fellowships also allow students the opportunity to transition into graduate school, focusing on their studies and the early stages of their research without having a work requirement. Assistantships, both research and teaching, can be allocated to support students in the middle of their graduate studies. Completion fellowships are used to help students finish the dissertation and graduate in a timely manner. A best practice model would include a mix of centrally controlled graduate assistantships (funds allocated through the Provost's office) and fellowships offered through the Graduate School and the graduate program in the college.
2. Develop a detailed understanding of resource structure and limitations (fellowships, scholarships, etc.) that impact recruitment of high-quality applicants and integrate the data into a plan for competitiveness.
3. Create a new funding model that would make fellowships more widely available to entering PhD students, especially in disciplines or fields that are high in quality and important to the university, and where fellowships are essential to maintain competitiveness.
4. Establish competitive graduate fellowships by working with the UTSA development office and the academic deans to identify private and industry donors, and by raising the priority of graduate student funding at the college and university levels.

Graduate School Administrative Structure

1. Reorganize the Graduate School to reflect the core functions: strategic enrollment (recruitment + admissions), graduate program support (academic services), and graduate student development. Provide support staff necessary to meet the needs of the managerial/professional and administrative staff.
2. Emphasize a relationship-driven, "customer" focused model that creates a culture focused primarily on the success of each student. Consistent messaging from the President, the Provost and the graduate dean about their belief in the importance of "service excellence" at UTSA can drive the culture change. The graduate dean and the administrative team also are responsible for setting expectations and defining what this model looks like for the Graduate School staff. Staff need to be empowered to communicate directly with faculty and staff in an effort to build relationships across the campus. They also need "permission" to

change. Involving staff in the reorganization, helping them recreate their job focus, allowing them flexibility in managing their work and recognizing their ability to make decisions in the best interests of the student (and UTSA) are strategies that will likely increase their willingness to engage more positively with faculty, staff, students, and administrators across campus.