Program/Unit Review 2019

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Self-Study

Unit Overview and Governance:

History, Vision and Mission: Established in 1985 with the appointment of the first dean, The Graduate School supports and advances the delivery of high-quality graduate education that reflects changing regional and state academic needs. The Graduate School addresses the administrative needs of graduate education at UNC Charlotte and advocates for graduate research and scholarship that contribute to economic, social and cultural advancement.

Primary Purpose and Key Functions: The Graduate School's role is to support and lead recruitment and admissions, academic and student affairs and administration of graduate education at UNC Charlotte. The Graduate School administers more than 150 graduate degree programs, including 23 doctoral programs, in a wide variety of fields and specialties such as architecture, biomedical engineering, computing, engineering, and health administration. With more than 5,300 students enrolled in our graduate programs, graduate students represent 18% of the total students UNC Charlotte and come from 39 states in the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Central and South America. We have the 3rd largest international student population of universities in the state. The Graduate School has approximately 750 members of the regular graduate faculty teaching and mentoring graduate students.

Administrative Structure: The Graduate School is organized around its primary roles: Enrollment Management and Funding, Academic and Student Affairs, Administration and Communication, and Office of Research Integrity. The Enrollment Management and Academic/Student Affairs units each are led by an associate dean reporting to the Dean of the Graduate School. The Research Integrity Office (RIO), Communications and Administration functions each are led directly by the Dean (see organization chart).

The Dean of the Graduate School serves as Associate Provost reporting to the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

Strategic Direction:

International applications decreased in fall 2017, although enrollment of new international students in fall 2018 matched the record set in fall 2016. Enrollment of new international students for fall 2019 is anticipated to be down by ~150 students. Domestic application rates were down in fall 2018 and are projected to remain flat for the foreseeable future given the robust economy and competition from national and international graduate programs. The 62% accepted-to-enrolled yield of domestic students in fall 2018 was the lowest in ten years. Graduation and time-to-degree rates have continually improved over the 2015-20 Plan period.

Following is an overview of the strategic implications and proposed response by the Graduate School.

Graduate Enrollment:

Graduate enrollment at UNC Charlotte grew consistently through 2017, but declined slightly in 2018 with an anticipated decrease in fall 2019 as well. A record 5,403 graduate students enrolled in fall 2017, dropping to 5,323 in 2018, with projected enrollment of 5,242 in fall 2019. Domestic applications declined 2.5% from 2017-18 to 2018-19, from 3,665 to 3,573, while applications from international students, which represent 25% of graduate students at UNC Charlotte, dropped by almost 21% (3,763-2,975) over the same period.

Domestic vs. International Applications
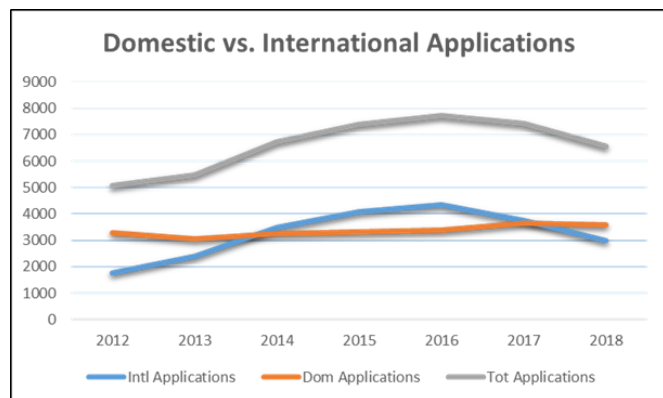
The decline in applications is continuing in 2019. As of June 11, submitted (but not necessarily complete) applications were down approximately 3.1% from fall 2018.
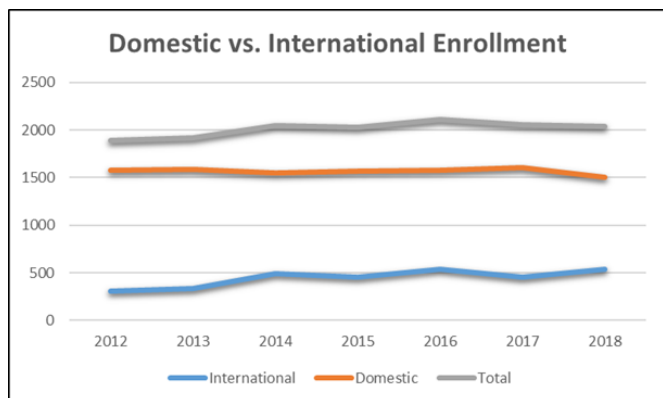
Exacerbating the enrollment challenge is a lack of geographic diversity in UNC Charlotte's graduate student make-up. The majority of UNC Charlotte's international graduate students come from a single country (India) and enroll in a single program (Computer Science).

Domestic vs. International Enrollment

Nationwide, China supplies the largest number of graduate students, but there are fewer than 120 Chinese nationals currently enrolled in UNC Charlotte graduate programs. Further, applications from Chinese students declined 14% over the past year, while the number of applications remained steady nationally (according to a Council of Graduate Schools survey; download a copy).

Several factors are driving the numbers for both domestic and international graduate students including a robust U.S. economy, increased competition from other North Carolina institutions as well as from other states and countries, an uncertain political climate, and economic downtowns globally (i.e. Iran).

Enrollment of first-time international graduate students was a bright spot in fall 2018. While the international first-time enrollment rate declined by 1% at U.S. universities, according to the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), it increased by almost 15% at UNC Charlotte. Again, however, the majority of the new enrollment was in the M.S. in Computer Science (210 new international students in fall 2018 vs 90 in fall 2017).

Based on targeted enrollment goals set by the graduate programs in 2014, growth in the 2015-20 plan was projected at 247 graduate students per year. Actual growth, while positive during the early years of the plan, never reached the projected level. Integral to programs enrolling and graduating students at optimal levels is linking resources (including physical space, fiscal budget, faculty and staff support) to anticipated program projections and program performance and providing adequate support for Graduate Program Directors.

With limited funding, our Communications group utilizes primarily free methods to promote graduate education opportunities to external and internal audiences. These methods include social media, direct email, electronic signage and collaboration with college departments. A "showcase" brochure was developed by Communications and is updated annually. Additional recruitment materials are provided upon request from Graduate Admissions and Graduate Program Directors. We also conducted an extensive review of the automated processes involved in communicating with graduate student prospects and applicants through the Graduate Admissions application portal. Those updated communication processes will be implemented in 2019.

Proposed response:

In 2015, the University implemented strategic graduate enrollment management at the program level. The enrollment management plan has yielded significant benefits, such as better communication of program capacity and delivery methods, meeting graduate program director needs and challenges, and better management of program capacity for students. However, as of the 2018-19 academic year we lack a centralized program review process and budget allocation is not linked to enrollment projections or program performance. Therefore, it remains difficult to build predictability into graduate enrollment.

As we did in our 2015-20 plan, we propose the implementation of an incentive- and performance-based budget process that includes practices and procedures for the appropriate and timely allocation of resources to support graduate education. However, to be effective, this process must be supported by Academic Affairs.

Other actions in our 2020-25 plan period include:
- Support efforts at the program and college levels to recruit, admit and enroll students from a more diverse set of countries

- Continue to recruit UNC Charlotte's best undergraduates into graduate degree programs and help retain them past the baccalaureate degree
- Support alternate program delivery methods to appeal to working professionals
- Increase capacity for high demand programs
- Build and deploy sustainable digital marketing campaigns to expand recruitment and reach additional audiences
- Implement improvements to Admissions communications as identified in the 2018-19 process review

Graduate Student Success
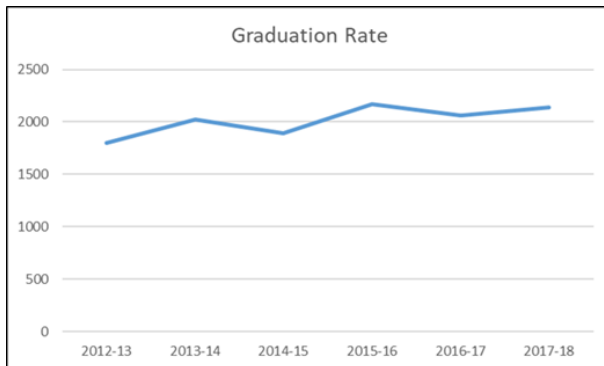
Graduation Rate

Both graduation rate and time-to-degree measures improved over the 2015-20 plan period. The number of students graduated annually grew from 1,895 in 2014-15 to 2,160 in 2018-19. Time-to-degree for doctoral students was down from 5.16 years to 5.11 from 2015-16 to 2017-18; Master's degrees remained the same at 1.88 years; and Graduate Certificate time-to-degree improved from 1.64-1.62 years. More details can be found in an attached report.

Time to Degree
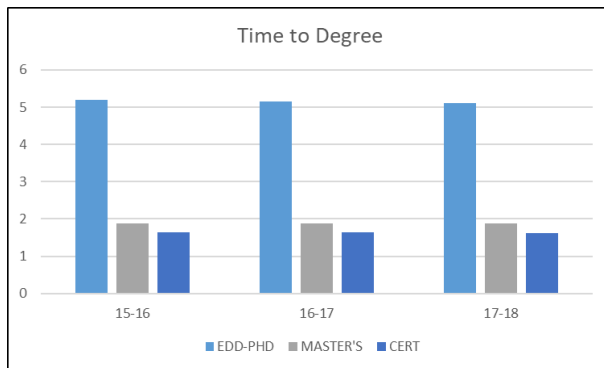
Tracking Progress: The 2016 implementation of DegreeWorks, a web-based degree tracking and audit tool to help students and advisors monitor progress toward degree completion, has had a significant positive influence on these key metrics. The system helps identify trends and collects data that can be used to improve processes. For example, the Graduate School developed a new Student Progress Report in 2018 that provides faculty with key information to assist in advising students. Also, a Time Limit report alerts Program Directors and students when courses are nearing expiration date, giving them time to adjust their plan of study.

DegreeWorks also established firm standards and reduced the level of faculty autonomy in planning a student's curriculum, requiring requests go through the academic petition. In the year following implementation, the number of academic petitions grew from 1,648 to 3,442. For the 2017-18 academic year, that number has grown to 3,816, some of the additional growth coming from a new graduate course that requires students to request a permit before registering. The new course (GRAD 7800/9800) was developed to allow students to continue to meet funding requirements following a change in definition of full-time enrollment.

Funding Support: To help students prepare for their dissertation phase, the Dissertation Completion Fellowship was launched in 2018 to support to students interested in working on their dissertation over the summer. The program provides an opportunity for an additional

semester of funding on the Graduate Assistant Support Plan. Dissertation writing and development support is available through the Center for Graduate Life where a Dissertation Boot Camp is offered three times each year.

Communications: Graduate School Communications implements best practice standards on its two major websites (https://graduateschool.uncc.edu and https://gradadmissions.uncc.edu) to ensure easy access to Graduate School services for potential students, current students and faculty. All changes and updates to these websites, including architecture and nomenclature, are screened by Communications to ensure they meet Graduate School standards. These websites act as a repository for audience information as well as a basic news service. Communications' role is to protect the integrity of the sites, not allowing them to become out-of-date or polluted with irrelevant information. We meet SACS requirements on both sites with annual audits.

Our Funding, Admissions and Center for Graduate Life websites/pages, underwent major renovation last year to improve navigability and clarity of the information.

Student Feedback: The Graduate School collects satisfaction data through Exit Surveys conducted when students apply to graduate. Those data are shared with the colleges to help improve the student experience. The most recent survey (fall 2018) showed that most students are satisfied with the graduate educational experience (81%) at UNC Charlotte and a majority (70%) rated student life very good or excellent. Still, 40% of those responding to the survey had not yet found a job or were continuing their education (the survey typically is taken nine weeks prior to graduation).

In 2016, UNC Charlotte's Career Center launched its First Destination Survey to assess student post-graduation success. The 2018 data showed a 43.2% response rate and a 78.6 % knowledge rate for graduate students. 77.3% had found full-time employment at the time of the survey, which is conducted just before and immediately after graduation. 17.4 % of graduate students reported that they were continuing on for an additional degree. Survey results from 2018 is available from Academic Affairs.

The Graduate School is working with the Career Center to combine the two surveys so that graduate student data can be collected with one instrument in the future.

Professional Development: With programming aimed at improving students' chances for success following graduation, the Graduate School's Center for Graduate Life (CGL) enrolled more than 650 in a GRAD course in 2018-19. These courses address one of six core competencies graduate students need to be successful in both academia and industry. More than 350 graduate students participated in Teaching Assistant training. From its first year in operation in 2010, the CGL has increased for-credit professional development course offerings from two to 38. A new certificate program in Work Place Competencies was recently approved and will launch in spring 2020.

Students enrolled in GRAD course or who attend a workshop are asked to complete an evaluation. These evaluations provide feedback that is used to improve program offerings.

Graduate Life Fellows (GLFs), student ambassadors from different colleges, offer community building programs throughout the year. The CGL appoints continuing graduate students to serve as GLFs each year. GLFs are awarded $5,000 for the academic year. Working with the Graduate and Professional Student Government, GLFs coordinate activities that foster diverse social and academic engagement.

For more information on programs and services to graduate students, please visit the CGL website.

Policy Development: Coordinated through the Graduate Council, the Graduate School facilitates changes in academic curriculum and policy to respond to changing needs. More than 250 course and curriculum proposals were reviewed by Graduate School staff last year before going before the Graduate Council for approval. Graduate Staff also recommend policy revisions and additions, such as the clarification of the syllabus template for course proposals last year to improve consistency for faculty. (More information on Graduate Council proceedings can be found on the Faculty Governance website).

Other recent metrics include:

- In 2018-2019, 2,452 graduate students applied for graduation. After the clearance process, 2160 degrees were conferred. 84% of those degrees were posted within three days of commencement.
- In 2018-19, 143 theses and dissertations were reviewed by Graduate School staff (summer data are not available).

Proposed response:

We will continue tracking graduation and time-to-degree rates as primary measures of student success. We expect to utilize the First Destination Survey to gather more meaningful data on competency attainment, employment outcomes and employer perceptions in the near future. We are working to modify the First Destination to answer questions that are now covered in the Exit Survey.

The Needs Assessment and CGL workshop evaluations will continue as qualitative tools to identify programming changes and modifications to services that meet changing educational requirements. We will review and analyze the feedback provided by our students, and where resources and authority make it possible, implement appropriate responses.

DegreeWorks is a critical tool for adding students and increasing transparency. We will continue to mine DegreeWorks data to create reports for programs and monitor bottlenecks in curriculum.

UNC Charlotte is partnering with NC State to offer graduate students more opportunities to explore and prepare for industry and corporate career options. The program, called Accelerate to Industry (A2i), will be implemented in the coming year.

The Graduate School also will be focused on improved mentoring in the coming plan. A mentor training program launched in fall 2018 will be expanded to include mentee training through the Center for Graduate Life.

Because student success relies heavily upon the quality of the educational experience, we have chosen to develop specific goals and measurements that focus on this vital area.

Quality of Graduate Education

The quality of the experience graduate students have while attending UNC Charlotte is the most important contributor to student success. For that reason, the Graduate School chose to develop a focused plan on quality in the 2020-25 Strategic Plan.

Graduation rate and time-to-degree, two measures used for our Student Success goal, are applicable to quality as well, but measures that more closely examine important aspects of the service delivery process will be more meaningful.

The graduate student Needs Assessment conducted biennially by the CGL helps us continually adjust programming and gauge student satisfaction. The survey gathers data on student perceptions of funding, course availability, advisors, and the overall sense of community for graduate students. This survey includes all enrolled graduate students and, typically, a disproportionately large response comes from first-year master's students. Tailored results are shared with colleges and used to advocate for improvements.

In the past two surveys, greater flexibility in course delivery, higher stipends and greater availability of student funding were consistent themes. In the 2019 survey, career/job help and software skills were among the most mentioned needs.

A new question for 2019 sought student input on what the Graduate School can do to attract, retain and graduate more and better students. 713 offered up advice ranging from the not surprising "increase stipends/reduce fees" to greater course definition and consistent offerings. Somewhat surprising was that more students mentioned the need for higher standards (e.g. more demanding coursework, better qualified professors and tougher entry requirements) than mentioned money.

Also frequently mentioned was the need for more and better faculty and advisors. Students expressed concern about the lack of availability and the quality of their interactions. Some students also raised concerns about the prevalence of adjunct faculty.

Faculty Appointments: The Graduate School helps assure quality Graduate Faculty by screening all appointments to Graduate Faculty posts, reappointments and associate/committee appointments. Criteria used for vetting Graduate Faculty appointments includes standards developed by the Graduate Council that apply across all posts, and college-specific criteria that is reviewed and approved by the Graduate Council. Typical standard criteria include holding an appropriate terminal degree and program specific criteria might include a requirement that existing funded research be in place, that the candidate's work has been published or that they have participated in professional conferences. Appointments and reappointments to Graduate Faculty are made by the Dean of the Graduate School using program-specific criteria.

The Graduate school screened 424 proposed faculty appointments and reappointments last year, down from the previous year's 428.

Professional Development: Since 2013, satisfaction with the CGL professional development opportunities and other aspects of graduate life such as funding, course availability, advisors, as well as overall engagement, have trended up (avg. mean 3.5 on a scale of 5). However, direct year-to-year comparisons are difficult as some survey questions were modified.

GPD Role: Graduate Program Directors (GPDs) and Graduate Program Coordinators (GPCs) play a prominent role in driving the perception of quality in UNC Charlotte's graduate studies.

GPDNet was created by the Graduate School in 2017 as a secure portal where GPDs can access all the tools and information they need as leaders, plus the latest news to keep them abreast of latest developments. This year, a "New on GPDNet" e-newsletter was launched to help drive people to the portal for information.

The GPD appointment is voluntary, is not always compensated, and often is not adequately resourced. A document detailing the GPD's responsibilities lists 15 distinct duties the volunteer assumes in addition to existing teaching and advising roles. These added tasks include coordination with the Graduate School on administration and governance processes, recruiting and admissions, student liaison and overall troubleshooting.

Especially for under-resourced programs, the weight of the GPD's workload often means delays in enrollment, lack of adherence to policies and procedures and the overall inability to be effective in the position.

Research Integrity: The Dean of the Graduate School also serves as Research Integrity Officer for UNC Charlotte and, as such, is responsible for developing strategies to discourage research misconduct including plagiarism, falsification, and fabrication of research materials.

Responsible authorship is a growing issue among faculty and students, including situations where researchers are omitted from authorship and cases where 'phantom' authors are included for added cachet.

In response, the Graduate School launched a campus-wide effort to create a more transparent and supportive culture in the classroom and in the laboratory. An interdisciplinary team of faculty and staff from the Graduate School submitted a grant proposal to NSF: Fostering a Culture of Openness and Transparency with Institutional Authorship Policies in Cultivating Cultures in Ethical STEM. We anticipate a response to this proposal sometime in July 2019. Regardless of the outcome we will work to implement a policy and guidelines on Responsible Authorship practices in 2019-20. Additionally a workshop on mentoring was introduced last year to strengthen this crucial aspect of student success. The workshop, based on a program offered at the Center for Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, focuses on communication, expectation setting and encouraging independence. Also, plagiarism detection software *iThenticate* will be made available to students to support their submission of theses and dissertations beginning in the fall 2019.

Note: A survey of Graduate Faculty on perception of Graduate School performance was conducted in 2019, the results of which were incomplete as of this writing. A summary of survey findings can be downloaded.

Proposed response:
While we will continue to track graduate rate and time-to-degree in the 2020-25 plan, we will add 'customer focused' measurements that gauge perception of quality among key stakeholders of graduate education at UNC Charlotte including faculty, students and post-graduates, and employers.

We believe the vehicles to accomplish these new measures already exist in the Career Center's First Destination Survey. Additional tools like SalesForce.com, which the University recently licensed, offer opportunities to track and manage student data in a number of areas. A priority will be to develop measurements for all four key stakeholder groups that will be consistently implemented over the life of the 2020-25 Strategic Plan.

The top issues identified through the 2019 Needs Assessment and Exit Surveys will be examined and plans to address issues will be developed for the 2020-25 Strategic Plan. Implemented responses will be assessed in the 2021, 2023 and 2025 Needs Assessments.

We will continue to develop strategies to drive GPDs to GPDNet for information resources, as well as to improve the effectiveness of the GPD role and to better accommodate the added workload the appointment brings.

To improve the research climate on campus, a program of robust training and interventions will be developed and implemented in support of Responsible Conduct of Research and Scholarship

(RCRS). Currently all doctoral students participate in a credit-bearing course covering the nine areas of responsible conduct of research. The mentoring initiative and a new authorship policy will further address concerns raised by students. We will expand the RCRS initiative to provide training and education to our students throughout their program of study.

Funding for Graduate Education

Sustainable and scalable funding for graduate education is a long-standing challenge at UNC Charlotte as enrollments have increased. Financial support received the lowest scores of all issues mentioned in the 2018 Graduate Student Exit Survey.

A Graduate Student Funding Task Force was established in fall 2017 to examine the state of graduate student funding at UNC Charlotte. It was tasked to make recommendations on how the University might better ensure sustainable and scalable funding for graduate students and make better use of institutional and extramural resources. The task force completed its report in February 2019. A Graduate Council Standing Committee on Graduate Student Funding was subsequently established to provide oversight for the implementation of the recommendations, which have already begun.

The Funding Task Force report takes a comprehensive look at the funding policies and processes in use today. Among its findings were that:

- The decentralized management of graduate assistantship funds creates inconsistencies in eligibility, funding levels and administrative processes
- There is an overreliance on institutional dollars for graduate assistant funding and use of extramural funding has been flat even though research expenditures have increased
- Growth in students and graduate programs strain resources for tuition and fee support
- Tuition funds and stipends have not kept up with the increasing cost of attendance

Proposed response:

The Task Force recommendations are numerous and implementation will likely span the 2020-2025 plan period and beyond.

Among the recommendations are to:

- Standardize GAs as 'positions' with consistently applied compensation and benefits
- Establish a university-wide policy governing TA workload and responsibilities
- Establish an annual review of stipend levels
- Tie appropriate funding levels to new program approval

A copy of The Graduate Student Funding Task Force's report is available for [download](#).

Aside from the Funding Task Force, the Graduate School recently initiated measures to improve administrative processes that support graduate student funding. An online funding system was developed in 2018-19 to allow GPDs to make funding offers to students and monitor them in real time. The new funding system is expected to help facilitate implementation of Task Force recommendations as well as improve timeliness and transparency of the funding process.

Another initiative implemented last year uses financial incentives to encourage students to apply for external grants and fellowships. The Fellowship Application Incentive Program (FAIP) resulted in more than $411,000 in student extramural funding in 2017-18.

Through FAIP, Graduate School staff work with doctoral students to identify and apply for external grants and fellowships. If a student submits an application, they receive a modest incentive grant, and if the application is funded there is an additional award. We awarded $155,000 in incentive grants in 2018.

Previous Program Review:

The focus of the 2015-20 Strategic Plan was on improving the standardization of planning, policies and procedures. Key initiatives the Graduate School accomplished as part of that plan add rigor to the administration of key processes such as enrollment management and progress toward graduation.

A Graduate Enrollment Management system (now known as GPDNet) was developed in 2015 to help GPDs establish enrollment projections at the program level, and access data and information to produce measurable improvements in areas such as recruitment, admissions, retention, funding, and graduation. Program directors can build and manage enrollment management plans, and by 2018 more than 75% had plans filed in the system.

DegreeWorks, a web-based tool that allows students and advisors to monitor progress toward degree completion, was implemented in 2016. While some faculty were slow to embrace the new system, DegreeWorks was readily accepted by students. Student usage increased by 20% over the past year, while faculty usage increased even more (53%, representing 4899 faculty and staff logons).

While the system improved accuracy of the graduation clearance process, it now requires significant staff time to review student audits. However, moving from a paper process to a digital process has greatly improved the graduation clearance cycle. 84% of degrees were awarded within three days of graduation during the 2018-19 academic year.

Data Summary of Key Areas:

Administrative Structure & Roles: The Graduate School is organized around its primary roles: Enrollment Management and Funding, Academic and Student Affairs, Administration and Communication, and Office of the Research Integrity. The Recruitment and Academic Affairs units each are led by an associate dean reporting to the dean of the Graduate School. The Research Integrity Office, Communications and Administration functions each are led directly by the Dean. The UNC Charlotte Graduate School organization chart is available for [download](#).

The Graduate School administers more than 150 graduate degree programs, including 23 doctoral programs, in a wide variety of fields and specialties such as architecture, biomedical engineering, computing, engineering, and health administration. With more than 5,300 students enrolled in our graduate programs, graduate students represent 18% of the total students UNC Charlotte. Graduate students at UNC Charlotte represent 39 states in the U.S., Europe, Asia, Africa, Central and South America. We have the 3rd largest international student population in the state. The Graduate School has approximately 750 members of the regular graduate faculty teaching and mentoring graduate students.

The Dean of the Graduate School serves as Associate Provost reporting to the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Johnna Watson, Associate Dean for Graduate Enrollment Management and Funding, manages the admissions, enrollment management and grants programs. Katherine Hall-Hertel, Associate Dean for Graduate Academic and Student Affairs, is responsible for student affairs and academic policies and processes related to a student's academic plan of study.

Graduate School Communications leads the marketing and advertising efforts for the Graduate Admissions team as well as assessing and addressing the information needs of our campus and external stakeholders.

Our front office staff typically support more than 9,500 calls and 2,300 walk-in requests related to Admissions and Student Affairs. Following is a summary of the routine administrative tasks performed by the staff of the Graduate School:
- Support students and faculty through a wide range of situations ranging from admission to graduation
- Help students get funding via employment, scholarships and grants
- Provide technology tools to help faculty and students access information they need
- Help Graduate Program Directors and faculty plan and prepare for changes in enrollment
- Help attract new students and ensure applicants are of the highest caliber
- Ensure the accuracy of student/faculty records
- Help students prepare for graduation and for success in their career
- Encourage and reward the best of student and faculty performance
- Promote student wellness and community building
- Review and revise policies and processes to improve the quality of graduate education
- Manage budgeting to ensure adequate physical and human resources to accomplish priority activities
- Facilitate faculty appointment and on-boarding
- Develop and execute plans to ensure academic integrity

- Facilitate governance of graduate education through the Graduate Council
- Manage communication with key internal and external audiences

A comprehensive directory of Graduate School staff and their roles (see Internal Processes Directory tab), is available for download.

Staff Development:
To assess and enhance performance, staff members meet with their supervisor weekly; the entire Graduate School team meets monthly to review progress toward goals and provide updates on key events and issues and respond to questions.

In 2018, the Graduate School Employee Handbook was developed to provide staff, especially ones who are new to the team, with important information to help them become acclimated with the Graduate School's standards, policies and processes. The handbook is available for download.

Graduate School staff are supported by Graduate Assistants who assist with tasks like coding, event planning and implementation, teaching and research.

Diversity: As part of our collaboration with colleges to identify underserved populations in North Carolina that might benefit from a UNC Charlotte graduate program, this year we partnered with faculty in the Cato College of Education to deliver the MEd, MAT, and Graduate Certificates to off-site cohorts in different counties including Cabarrus, Iredell, Rowan, and Mecklenburg. The program provides tuition incentives and reaches students who likely would not have enrolled in an advanced degree if they couldn't get funding and had to travel to the campus to participate.

Our Graduate Admissions staff selectively attend recruitment fairs seeking a diverse application pool. Some examples from 2018 include the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS) and the annual conference of the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans. Graduate Admissions maintains a Recruitment Events list that is updated regularly and shared with graduate program faculty.

We consider the diversity of our student body when we create programs and communications. We consider student demographics when assessing student needs. Programs and initiatives are evaluated regularly.

Resources: The Graduate School delivers services from two primary sites: Staff offices occupy all of the Cato Building 2nd floor offices. The Center for Graduate Life is located in Cone University Center 268, at the center of campus. The CGL includes offices, classroom space and a lounge area for graduate student use.

While enrollment, number of programs and the associated workload has grown over the 2015-20 plan period, the number of Graduate School staff has remained essentially unchanged. From 2014-19 enrollment increased 6% (5022-5323) while Graduate School staffing remained at 33.

Tools and Technology: The Graduate School has acquired off-the-shelf systems and developed proprietary ones to support graduate education at UNC Charlotte, some of which are discussed in this report. Among the primary systems are those that support enrollment management, academic progress and student funding. A guide to [Graduate School systems and tools](#) is listed on the Graduate School's website as a reference for Graduate faculty and staff.

Campus Collaboration: The Graduate School works regularly with Academic Affairs, International Affairs, Office of the Registrar, Financial Aid, Career Center, University Communications and others. Our coordination with the colleges is led by the appointed Graduate Program Directors, addressed elsewhere in this study.

Informal contacts with these organizations are daily, with regularly scheduled meetings with Graduate Program Directors to introduce policy and process changes, address current issues and provide an opportunity for dialogue.

Regular coordinating meetings are held with:

> **GEM Working Group** – Staff and faculty collaboration to develop and communicate well-planned strategies to shape graduate enrollment and meet enrollment goals
> **Communications Council** – Communications representatives from across the university meet regularly and share issues and plans
> **Council on University Community Working Group** – Whose mission is to recognize and support diversity on campus
> **Campus Accessibility Advisory Committee** – Examines and advocates for improvements in accessibility
> **Title IX** – Support efforts to maintain an environment conducive to learning and a professional workplace for employees
> **Deans' Council and Associate Deans' Council** – Meets regularly to discuss emerging issues and coordinate responses

Peer/Industry Comparison: Graduate School staff are kept apprised of developments in academia by reading industry journals, attending and leading pertinent conferences, and through membership in national organizations whose mission is the support of graduate education.

For the purposes of this Self-Study, the Graduate School reached out to two UNC Charlotte Peer Institutions in search of insights in organization and program strategy to take into our 2020-25 Strategic Planning process. The institutions included University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Portland State University. Both are similar in size and structure to UNC Charlotte's Graduate School.

Peer Comparison

University	Portland State	Univ. Wisc. - Milwaukee	UNC Charlotte
Programs	21 doctoral; 89 master's; 48 certificate	50 doctoral; 77 master's & other	23 doctoral; 67 master's; 50 certificate
Doctoral Students	516	1,369	1,019
Masters Students	3,367	2,952	3,410
Total Graduate Enrollment	5,822	4,635	5,300
Total Undergraduate Enrollment	21,848	20,777	24,387
Minority Graduate Students	967	809	1,342
International Graduate Students	978	703	1,378
#Doctoral Degrees Awarded	78	185	149

A set of common questions were posed to representatives of each institution. Highlights of their responses are included in the table below.

Milwaukee	Portland State
1. What drives graduate program development? How do you determine what and when in introducing new programs and retiring old ones?	
Programs generated within colleges; academic program review every 10 years; The UW System has recently instituted some minimal requirements for the number of PhD and Master's graduates per year for program continuation. The governance approval process for new programs expressly requires a market analysis and projection of future required resources, enrollment, and growth.	Same as UW-M. But they provide a thought leadership role in bringing trends and issues to the attention of programs to encourage them to rethink curriculum or design new programmatic content. Defining a process for sun-setting programs is an active initiative at PSU.
2. What do you consider the right ratio of master's to doctoral programs?	
System restraints prevented the growth of doctoral programs and that's reflected in the way they manage that today. Not interested in number of and balance of, but rather interested in growing the doctoral programs.	They are currently exploring that question. Current mix is 75% master's 25% doctoral.

Milwaukee	Portland State
3. How important are alternative course/program delivery methods and hybrid offerings and how do you manage them? Have you discovered ways to avoid duplication of efforts with traditional program delivery?	
Online courses and programs have become popular in past 10 years; perception is no cannibalization of in person classes is happening.	The Graduate School works with the Provost's Office to identify pathways to delivery alternative programming; only has a handful of online/hybrid programs exist. Duplication of efforts doesn't happen currently because Grad Council reviews all formats of programs – however going forward it's something they are aware could happen and plans to address that.
4. How does your unit collaborate with individual programs or program directors? Please include both formal and informal processes.	
Graduate School takes a lead in introducing innovations to the program leaders through monthly meetings with GPDs and GPCs (which most programs have). Recruitment: a full-time traveling graduate recruiter in the Graduate School and part-time recruiter in India. Uses pertinent data and creating a dashboard for program directors to grow their program/enrollment. Petitions: The Graduate School runs a Request for Exception (RFE) process by which students with the support of their program can request exemptions from existing policies and procedures. "We process about 800 of these requests per year, some of which lead to more substantive discussions about possible policy changes." All RFEs involve individual program directors.	Quarterly meetings and one-on-ones as necessary.

Milwaukee	Portland State
5. What forms of funding streams have you developed to support students and how is consistency achieved?	
Assistantships managed at the college level and the Graduate School is not involved; Does provide roughly 72 fellowships and awards through the Graduate School which are not Assistantships (30 of which are state appropriated for low income disadvantaged students). In the past five years the Graduate School has opened its own development office and has begun raising private fellowship money for more modest Graduate Student Excellence Fund awards. "In the first year of this effort, 2015-16, we raised enough money for a single award of $1,500. This year we raised enough to give 34 awards totaling $63,500. Since inception we have distributed $208,500 total."	They are unionized; assistantships governed by collective bargaining agreement that dictates compensation. Other funding consists of diversity awards ($4,500 for master's, $7,000 for doctoral), renewable for 2 years. "We award tuition remissions for graduate administrative assistants that non-academic units apply to request. We also have a Dean's Award which is funded by sports lottery money and is administered to support new PhD students. Three awards from donations that support student travel Diversity awards from general fund dollars which we administer but are not part of our budget. In total, we administer approximately $700,000 in awards each year.
6. Please provide an estimate of your annual student funding, and your operating budget.	
Basically they operate and fund at approx. $10 million. Doesn't fund Assistantships.	Operating budget of $2.2 Million; 16.5 FTE (doesn't say if $ cover FTEs or separate).
7. Do you provide professional development opportunities for graduate students? If so, how are they delivered?	
Annual Dissertation Boot Camp; Preparing Future Faculty series (8x annually) which are recorded those on video and then make them available later, as a professionalization course listed as GRAD801, a 1-credit course that requires students to attend; 3MT; employs 8 graduate students within the graduate school as employees in various capacities.	Has been a significant focus since 2017. -Certificate course in training future faculty -Writing workshops -*Annual* mini-conference on communication, pedagogy, mental health, applying for grants, intellectual property, data management, etc.

Milwaukee	Portland State
8. Where in the university system does your graduate school report? What is your organizational structure and staff roles/duties?	
Reports to the Provost.	GS recently merged with research to form Office of Research and Graduate Studies. GS formerly reported to Provost, but now to the Vice Provost for Research. Grad Schools structure and staffing: Admissions=8; academic services=5; student services=1; IT support=1; admin asst.=1
9. Does your alumni play a role in attracting new student applications? If so, how?	
They have no organized Alumni program. They do have a volunteer committee that does fundraising, networking and advising. That committee has alumni on it.	Alumni play minimal role in recruitment. Business school has its own CRS and is effective at marketing to alumni
10. Please list any roles your graduate school performs beyond administration of graduate education.	
Administration is the only role.	They are looking to become the strategic planning arm of graduate education. Recruiting a VP of Enrollment Management. Advocating for a single CRM for undergraduate and graduate admissions and tracking. Leading an effort to develop self-study guidelines for academic program review.

Key Issues and Areas of Improvement:

In the Graduate School's 2020-25 Strategic Plan, specific programmatic work plans will be developed to:

1. **Stabilize or increase applications and enrollment**
2. **Enhance graduate student success**
3. **Assess and improve the quality of graduate education**
4. **Create a sustainable funding model for graduate education**

Notes:

This Self-Study was completed by Graduate School Dean Tom Reynolds and a Self-Study Team consisting of Katherine Hall-Hertel, Associate Dean for Graduate Academic and Student Affairs, Christi Skerlak, Executive Assistant to the Dean, Karla Stanchina, Communications Manager, Johnna Watson, Associate Dean for Graduate Enrollment Management and Funding, and Brian White, Public Relations Specialist.

The Self-Study Team met in a series of SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) meetings to identify areas of focus for the study and for the 2020-25 Strategic Plan.

Benchmarking studies were conducted with two graduate school partners: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Portland State University. External review and feedback on this study was requested of Dr. Jim Oris, Associate Provost for Research and Scholarship and Dean of the Graduate School, Miami University; Dr. Karen P. Depauw, Vice President and Dean for Graduate Education, Virginia Tech, and Dr. Peter Harries, Interim Dean of the Graduate School, NC State University.

During the course of developing this study, we were shocked and saddened by the tragic and horrific events of April 30, 2019 where two students were killed and four injured. As the University moves forward in the coming months, the Graduate School will support the efforts to recover and remember in ways that demonstrate that we are different now, but not defined by the event.