

Western Kentucky University Graduate School



Council of Graduate Schools Strategic Consultation Report

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Area2

Review of New Graduate Program Development

Area 2 Current Status of New Graduate Program Development

A review of its Fact Book (2016) and web pages (2017) indicated that Western Kentucky University offers approximately 101 graduate study programs including 60 master's degrees, 32 graduate certificates, 5 specialist/endorsements, and 4 doctoral programs. Some of the programs are divided into sub-plans, resulting in 145 program options for graduate students. Twelve of the graduate programs are joint undergraduate-graduate master's programs (JUMP). Thirty-two of the master's degree programs, 26 of the graduate certificates, and 5 of the graduate endorsements are offered online.

Of the 2,600 graduate students, 63% are part time and 37% are full time; 65% are female and 35% are male. Most graduate students (83%) take courses offered through the Bowling Green campus; 17% take courses offered through the three regional campuses. The majority of graduate students (66%) are in-state and primarily come from Warren, Jefferson, Hardin, or Davies county. The out-of-state students (22%) primarily come from Tennessee, New York, and the surrounding states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. International students (12%) primarily come from India, China,

Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Vietnam, and Taiwan. According to demographics in the WKU Fact Book, 2016, 88% are Caucasian and 8.8% are Black.

Consistent with national trends, graduate domestic enrollment has decreased by 9% since 2013. The steepest declines include a decrease of 37% in the Potter College of Arts and Letters and a decrease of 34% in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences between 2011 and 2015. In contrast, the other colleges have experienced an increase in graduate enrollment during that same period. These include an increase of 86% in University College, 21% in the Gordon Ford College of Business, 18.5% in the College of Health and Human Services, and 6% in the Ogden College of Science and Engineering (WKU Fact Book, 2016).

Area 2 Recommendations on New Graduate Program Development

The following list of recommendations is related to the Graduate School's request for a) datasets to verify demands for programs, and b) dataset expertise to guide long term planning for its future graduate portfolio. Additional recommendations are provided about program opportunities based on the analysis of program information gathered during the onsite visit and document reviews.

Recommendation 2.a. National and State Datasets

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provides datasets at the national and state levels that may prove valuable for guiding the direction of Graduate School program development. These datasets were shared with Dean Lyons during the onsite visit. In addition to assessing employer demand for specific degrees with BLS data, it is also important to assess the degree production of competing universities in surrounding regions using the US Department of Education Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). At many universities, Offices of Institutional Research provide expertise to access and collect research data from IPEDS. Societal demand for specific degrees then can be estimated where gaps are observed between employer demand and regional degree production.

A review of the national and Kentucky BLS datasets, and those from the surrounding states, suggest potential graduate program growth in the areas of business and industry, health and human services, and STEM fields. Appendix B lists graduate programs that may be viable

for the Western Kentucky University to offer that are compatible with this data and the programs that the university currently offers. Based on the above demographics, the delivery mode for such programs should be tailored to meet the part-time and distance learning needs of students from Kentucky and the surrounding states, where feasible. Reviews provided through *the Chronicle of Higher Education* indicate that graduate students prefer blended rather than 100% face-to-face or fully on-line delivery formats.

Recommendation 2.b. Workforce Data

The Kentucky Center for Education Workforce may be another valuable source for determining future options. The Center is developing a database to track employment and salary trends of students who have graduated from Kentucky institutions of higher education. The Western Kentucky deans, chairs, and program directors will be able to use such information to assess the contributions of their programs to the economies and workforce needs of the Commonwealth and to predict future program opportunities. The CRM discussed in Section 1a, once implemented, can provide dashboard analytics as to programs that are of interest to prospective students, the locales from where they come, and the percentage of conversion from prospect to applied, to admitted and enrolled. A more formalized partnership with the staff in the Office of Institutional Research may provide the additional internal analytical expertise the Graduate School is seeking to guide its long-term portfolio development.

In addition, there are a number of commercial vendors that specialize in higher-education market research such as Hanover, STAMATS, Simpson Scarborough, and Educational Advisory Board (EAB). Note, this list is not meant to be inclusive or interpreted as an endorsement by CGS or its consultants. Typically, such vendors use a combination of IPEDS data, BLS data and a Burning Glass Technologies database developed by scanning the web for millions of online job postings. Burning Glass Technologies mines online job postings with AI tools for specific job skills, experience, and educational requirements in different job classes. Research reports from commercial vendors provide an alternative method for evaluating graduate program enrollment trends and societal demand at the

regional, state, national, and international levels. Western Kentucky University needs to decide if the cost for purchasing these consulting services is of value and will fill a void in existing university expertise.

Recommendation 2.c. Holistic Admissions Processes

The current plans of the University of Kentucky Medical School and the Medical Center in Bowling Green to contract with Western Kentucky University for teaching, library and health care services also offer some graduate program growth potential. As indicated in Appendix B, these include the development of a master of science in physician's assistant, master's in leadership and management for staff with associate's and bachelor's degrees in allied health fields, a master of science in applied information technology in health informatics and medical record security, and a doctor of occupational therapy. According to the national BLS, all of these degree programs represent areas for employment growth, address the advanced knowledge required to meet Kentucky's health care workforce shortages, and result in long-term professional careers with competitive salaries. Given the mission of the university and the importance of the cultural competency and the workforce diversity of the health care practitioners needed to serve the health needs of the citizenry, acceptance into these programs should incorporate holistic admissions processes. Research conducted by other universities found that holistic admissions processes resulted in strengthened student learning outcomes in health care professions (Drees, Nairn, Nivet, & Danek, 2014). See Appendix C for additional resources on holistic admissions practices.

Recommendation 2.d. Joint Meetings with the Provost

Respecting the importance of graduate and college dean partnerships for drafting future direction for graduate programs, it is recommended that the Graduate Dean and the dean of each college jointly meet with the Provost on a regular basis. These meetings can be incorporated into the one-on-one monthly meetings that the Provost currently holds with each of the deans. The purpose is to examine the status of each program in the college, develop an action plan and timeline for developing/revising programs, determine recruitment and marketing strategies, and identify and allocate needed resources.

Recommendation 2.e. Assessment

Feedback from graduate students also will be valuable for the Graduate Dean to assess the strength of existing programs and learning resources to support student success. Narrative feedback can be gathered from focus groups. Given that the Graduate School Office funds a number of assistantships, the Graduate Dean should consider meeting with the graduate assistants in each of the colleges yearly, and invite the collegiate dean to attend. Discussion topics might include the structure and value of the assistantship; the availability of learning and university resources for graduate students; course delivery modes; and admissions, recruitment, retention, and graduation supports/processes. Quantitative data can be gathered from all graduate students through electronic surveys that protect their confidentiality. Opportune times for collecting such information are one year after enrollment, and prior to or post-graduation. Data can be reported at the program specific, college, and university levels to examine students' level of satisfaction with their educational experience, and their perceptions of the value of various aspects of the program and learning processes to prepare them for post-graduation roles and careers.

Recommendation 2.f Strategies for Program Growth & Reconfiguration

As Western Kentucky University considers opportunities for graduate program growth, it should also consider strategies for reconfiguring or sun setting underproductive programs. Of the 145 graduate program options available at Western Kentucky University, 85 have fewer than nine students enrolled in them. This is particularly notable in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences which has approximately 47 such programs. Potter College of Arts and Letters has 13 such programs, and the College of Health and Human Services has 12 such programs. There are 13 additional low enrollment programs distributed among the three other colleges. Some of these program options have a pattern of zero student enrollment over several years (WKU Fact Book, 2016). Such low enrollments lead to inefficiencies in faculty instruction and credit hour production, and a lack of availability of essential courses for students to complete their degrees in a timely manner. It may be possible that the low enrollment in some of these programs stems from students taking courses in certificate and master's degrees concurrently, but only formally

enrolling in one of them. If this is so, adjustments to the admissions and registrar functions can correct this oversight. Low enrollment in some of these programs also may result from limited recruitment and marketing efforts. If this is so, joint advocacy on the part of the college deans and the Dean of the Graduate School will be important for designing a strategy and procuring resources to launch an integrated marketing and recruitment campaign at the college, Graduate School and university levels. This topic is addressed more thoroughly in Area 3. It is recommended that the Provost and deans establish program enrollment benchmarks that take into consideration revenues, expenditures, program sustainability, and impact on the university and region. Though difficult, it also is recommended that they create procedures for sun setting programs that remain under-enrolled after efforts to boost enrollment have been attempted. Program accountability for achieving these benchmarks, reconfiguring the program, or initiating sun setting can be tied to the yearly and six-year assessment processes.

Appendix B

Western Kentucky University Graduate Program Recommendations

DEd Health Professions Education

MS Marketing Intelligence

MS Supply Chain Management

MS Actuarial Science and Predictive Analytics

MS Computer Systems Analysis

MS Computer/Forensic Security

MA Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorders Counseling

MEd Educational Leadership/Administration for non- profits, private, charter schools

MS Physician Assistant

OTD Occupational Therapy

MS Applied Information Technology in Health Informatics and Medical Record Security

MS Health Management and Leadership for Allied Health Professionals

MS Athletic Training

Accelerated Business Management and Leadership (for those not wanting an MBA e.g.,
construction industry, farming industry IT industry)