

Increasing Access and Expanding Opportunities in Graduate and Professional Education

Report of the Task Force for Graduate and Professional Admissions

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On September 26, 2000, as a result of Governor Jeb Bush's One Florida Initiative, Provost David Colburn charged the Task Force with developing procedures to guarantee that graduate and professional decisions are made without regard to race, ethnicity, or gender. The committee was also asked to examine ways to safeguard the university's commitment to diversity in all graduate and professional programs and simultaneously to maintain our commitment to academic excellence.

The Task Force assessed current admissions processes, discussed the elements of the One Florida Initiative with college and departmental administrators, faculty and graduate coordinators, and explored ways to assure that all admissions committees make decisions without regard to race, ethnicity, or gender. Central to our conversations were ways to promote diversity in our graduate and professional programs.

Governor Bush's One Florida Plan was discussed with all five professional programs, the Graduate Council, Council of Academic Deans, Council of Graduate Deans, Graduate Coordinators Advisory Council, and graduate student leaders. Committee members have reviewed procedures with all colleges and visited graduate coordinators in most colleges.

Admissions decisions of graduate and professional students at the University of Florida are highly decentralized. For the university to succeed in its goal to stimulate and sustain a high quality, diverse student body, it must continue to facilitate decentralized admissions processes while providing for a central infrastructure to promote recruitment, intercampus communications, and program assessment. With five professional programs (Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Dentistry, Law, and Pharmacy) and over 200 graduate programs in 17 colleges, educating admissions committees and graduate coordinators requires a sustained commitment on the part of the university. The process by which graduate and professional students are admitted varies from discipline to discipline and college to college. Maintaining the unique features of the disciplines' recruitment, admissions, and mentoring processes is essential to assure enrolling the brightest and most competitive graduate and professional students.

The Task Force discussed ways to promote diversity by considering the entire admissions process from the point of first inquiry, through graduation, and beyond. We have focused our conversations on ways to improve the application process for both majority and minority students in an effort to project a more professional and supportive environment for all applicants.

Goals

The committee recommends the following short- and long-term goals:

Short-term

1. Confirm removal of race and gender indicators from the departmental copies of graduate and professional applications.
2. Inform all selections committee members and graduate coordinators about the requirements of the One Florida Plan.

3. Develop suggested guidelines for using holistic admissions procedures.
4. Improve the application process from the moment of inquiry to enrollment.

Long-term

1. Support attainment of diversity in all graduate and professional programs in order to provide new opportunities for academic enrichment.
2. Promote a campus environment that fosters a free exchange of ideas and encourages the highest level of scholarship.
3. Improve the campus climate for students in underrepresented groups.

Recommendations

In order to achieve these goals the committee developed a general set of recommendations and specific recommendations organized under three headings: recruitment, admissions, and mentoring and the educational environment. Two principles guided the development of these recommendations. Decentralized admissions procedures remain critical in order to attract and enroll talented students, and a campus-wide committee should assist the Provost, colleges, and departments in fulfilling these goals.

General

Establish a Recruitment, Admission and Mentoring Committee, consisting of university administrators and faculty, charged with promoting diversity on campus. Specific goals of the committee would include the following. This committee should be chaired by an associate provost, and must have the authority to influence the development of policies and guidelines that promote diversity in Graduate and Professional programs.

- Revise and improve the application process.
- Identify and respond to campus and community factors that positively or negatively affect recruitment and retention of diverse students, faculty, administrators, and professional staff.
- Conduct conferences and seminars to increase awareness of minority issues and provide information about successful programs for increasing minority participation in higher education.
- Establish a clearinghouse for successful minority recruitment and retention programs.
- Develop methods to evaluate success in minority recruiting and retention efforts, and provide feedback to the Provost to be used as a component of program evaluation.
- Coordinate all offices of graduate and professional minority programs, affirmative action, and students in underrepresented groups.

Recruitment

1. Consider employing college-based recruiters to assist departments in identifying qualified minority students and providing continuity of contact throughout the recruitment and admissions process from admissions through enrollment.
2. Recruit our own academically competitive undergraduate minority students by having graduate coordinators, graduate students, and recruiters encourage their application.
3. Ask the Office of the University Registrar to develop lists of qualified undergraduate students in each department and distribute them to the most appropriate graduate coordinator. Graduate coordinators could elicit the help of graduate student organizations to recruit these students into the graduate programs in their departments.
4. Make a concerted effort to use informal student-to-student networks to identify and recruit qualified applicants. For example, once an inquiry is made about a particular program, the name of the potential applicant is given to both a graduate student in that program and a faculty member. Then the potential student should be contacted and offered information and assistance. This should form the beginning of a mentoring relationship that ideally would continue through the application process and the first year of graduate education.
5. Develop and post a registry of undergraduate minority students at all SUS institutions on a secure web site for access by all institutions.
6. Since many undergraduate students major in one field but ultimately pursue graduate education in another field, query our juniors and seniors regarding their interests after graduation and distribute the names of qualified students to the appropriate graduate or professional program for review and recruitment.
7. Acknowledge and reward programs that develop effective recruitment strategies.
8. Develop procedures to evaluate recruitment efforts effectively in graduate and professional programs.
9. Expand summer outreach experiences that encourage the academic and research interests of undergraduate minority students from UF and other universities.
10. Recruit minority students from a broad range of undergraduate institutions, including predominately minority colleges and universities, through cooperative linkages and outreach programs. Faculty should identify other institutions without advanced degrees and develop a means to recruit their talented undergraduate minority students. Departments could use these educational ties as a means to encourage qualified undergraduate minority students to pursue advanced education.

Admissions

1. Re-evaluate the entire application process with an eye toward effective and consistent communication with the applicant from the time of inquiry until the student is enrolled. We believe this contact should be between the department and the applicant whenever possible. Three important elements related to this effort have been identified.
 - Accept credit-card payment for application fees.
 - Have one application dossier submitted to the department rather than the current process of individual element (letters of reference, transcripts, etc.) arriving separately.
 - Improve and automate web sites and e-mail systems.
2. Encourage programs to adopt a holistic admission process with less emphasis on quantitative indicators. Suggested procedures are included in Appendix A.
3. Establish fellowships for McNair Scholars to support graduate studies at the master's level. Once a student completes the master's degree, s/he could compete for fellowships designated for doctoral level studies.
4. Increase minority fellowships to promote completion of graduate and professional programs.
5. Encourage colleges and departments to seek private and corporate support for minority students.

Mentoring and the Educational Environment

1. Improve the mentoring of and climate for graduate students. If their experiences are positive, they will become effective recruiters for our institution after graduation.
2. Solicit the help of existing graduate and professional student organizations for recruitment and student-to-student mentoring.
3. Develop active placement programs to assist all students in finding jobs in the profession and/or the academy.
4. Work to improve the campus climate to ensure that it is conducive for recruiting and retaining minority students. Strengthen academic support programs to ensure that the special needs of a diverse student body are met. These support programs should minimally include career counseling, academic advising, and college- and department-based mentoring programs.

Appendix A: Suggested Holistic Admission Review

Introduction:

The departmental faculty supports an admissions policy intended to admit student fairly and in a manner that results in a talented and diverse student body that will stimulate an intellectual exchange of ideas, develop critical thinking, improve the learning environment, and ultimately serve the citizens of Florida, the nation, and the profession.

Application Portfolio:

1. Application for Admission to Graduate School
2. Application Fee
3. Letters of recommendation
4. Personal statement
5. Standardized test scores
6. Transcripts

Selection Methods:

Departments may use two selection methods to admit its students:

- 1) Admit a fixed percentage of its entering class based largely on standardized test scores (GRE, GMAT) and upper division undergraduate grade-point average. The selection committee considers all three scores on the GRE and weights them based on the nature of the discipline. Graduates in critical academic courses are weighted based upon disciplinary requirements.
- 2) Admit the remaining percentage of each entering class based on an evaluation of academic credentials and with consideration for the following discretionary criteria:
 - Progress in undergraduate or other academic programs
 - College or university where, and the discipline in which, the degree was earned
 - Accomplishments following the awarding of the bachelor's degree
 - Leadership and other relevant activities
 - Community involvement or service
 - Language spoken at home
 - Evaluations by person who can objectively judge the applicant's potential in the discipline
 - Maturing experiences (employment, law enforcement, military service)
 - Economic background
 - Geographical origin

Because precise measures of these criteria are not possible, admissions committee members must exercise discretion in using them to assess each applicant.

Letters of Recommendation:

Letters should evaluate the applicant's performance (academic, employment, community service), and not be personal recommendations. Letters are encouraged from individuals most intimately acquainted with academic progress and likelihood for success in the profession.

The Personal Statement:

Please submit a statement providing information about yourself. The subject matter is up to you, but keep in mind that the reader will be seeking a sense of you as a person and as a potential student in the department. Your personal statement should be limited to two pages. Be sure to include your Social Security number and sign your statement.

We seek to enroll a class of highly qualified students with varied backgrounds and interest. Such diversity contributes to the learning environment and has historically produced graduates who have served all segments of society and who have become leaders in our profession. If you wish, you may discuss how your interests, background, life experiences, and perspectives would contribute to the diversity of the entering class. If applicable, you may also describe how personal adversity or challenge has been a factor in your past, including linguistic barriers or a personal or family history of educational or socioeconomic disadvantage.