

# Boldness by Design: A Focus on Graduate Education

## Introduction

On March 30, 2007, 23 faculty, graduate students and administrators (see list at the end of this report) convened to respond to a charge by Provost Kim Wilcox to identify any gaps in the Boldness by Design task force reports (<http://boldnessbydesign.msu.edu>) related to graduate education. We provide this commentary with focus areas and key strategies for implementation for each of the strategic imperatives of Boldness by Design.

Graduate education is multidimensional. Master's, doctoral and graduate-professional students may earn one (or more) of 19 types of degrees (six types at the bachelor's level). Each graduate major is in a nationally competitive environment and these environments differ across disciplines. Because the models of graduate education in our more than 200 graduate majors are diverse, we focus on broad university goals. We understand that some of the specific implementation items may require unit action, but present these as strategies that will improve the quality of graduate education broadly across MSU.

More than a decade ago, the Council on the Review of Research and Graduation Education (CORRAGE) was convened to study graduate education as well as research. The values of graduate education they defined are as true today as they were in 1991 and worth remembering as we move forward on this task:

*“Programs of advanced study within the university represent the variety, complexity and high levels of expertise that characterize intellectual life today. Graduate education is the means by which virtually all scholars and other professionals acquire initial mastery of their fields. Through their academic work and with the close guidance and supervision of faculty members, students are prepared for leadership roles in their chosen professions ... MSU ... must now devote more of its resources to ensuring parallel excellence in graduate education. This is what the state of Michigan expects of its land-grant university and what society at large expects from one of the nation's leading public research institutions.*

*The Council on the Review of Research and Graduate Education at (CORRAGE) MSU has conducted its review of graduate education with a sense of urgency. Shifting geopolitical realities around the world highlight the growing challenges of scientific exploration, technological development, cultural preservation and advancement, and environmental protection. The social and economic health of the international community of nations depends on a continuous supply of highly educated people. The university has a responsibility to provide its share of future scholars and leaders.*

*The Council sees the following institutional obligations concerning graduate education as primary ones:*

- *To prepare the next generation of scholars for careers in higher education, research and other activities that require state-of-the-art knowledge and skill together with independence and creativity.*

- *To prepare qualified students for leadership roles within their professions. The presence of MSU graduates in areas such as health care, education, business and government should reflect well on the university.*
- *To provide opportunities in graduate education to qualified citizens of this state and nation. MSU has this obligation as a public institution.*
- *To encourage and assist women, ethnic and racial minorities, handicappers and other groups to pursue opportunities associated with graduate education. This is an obligation that MSU assumes as a leader in the effort to reflect and draw upon diversity in our society.*
- *To involve international students and scholars in its graduate programs and to encourage cooperative interactions with foreign universities. MSU has strong international research and teaching interests and global outreach commitments that enrich all aspects of our mission.”*

*Council on the Review of Research and Graduate Education, MSU, 1991*

Please note: Due to the short timetable in preparing this report, the recommendations were **not** (by vote) supported unanimously by all task force members.

First, a general comment is provided. We could find no other appropriate place to include it since “Enrich community, economic and family life” is the only strategic imperative that includes the word “diversity.”

Several task force members had a serious concern about the general lack of attention in Boldness by Design to issues of domestic diversity and inclusiveness and their role in the future of MSU.

As one member of the task force expressed it, “MSU can't hope to instill international intercultural competence in our students if our own U.S. students have only a superficial understanding of diversity within their own country. When international graduate students can ask more intelligent questions about American cultures and American history than our own U.S. students can, then we need to think about educating about American diversity as well as for international competence.”

## **Strategic Imperative 1**

**Enhance the student experience** by continually improving the quality of academic programs and the value of an MSU degree for undergraduate and graduate students.

**Strategy 1:** Enhance the connection between undergraduate and graduate students AND enhance the professional development of graduate students for a range of faculty positions by continuing to improve and expand the training for graduate teaching assistants (TAs).

Specifically, expand the opportunities for discipline-specific pedagogical training that is iterative and ongoing. Improve ANGEL training for graduate TAs.

Ensure that there are sufficient teaching assistantships to provide quality undergraduate education. This is especially important for Tier 1 and 2 writing courses and large lecture classes with recitation sections, problem sets or other active learning experiences. Provide opportunities for doctoral students to both teach and to mentor undergraduates in the conduct of research.

Expand the number of teacher-scholar awards for junior faculty and the number of excellence-in-teaching citations for graduate TAs to equal those of the distinguished faculty awards.

Provide a Web-based “one stop shop” to advertise assistantships that are available to students outside of the usual departmental units.

Provide increased flexibility in terms of the semesters in which graduate TAs can use their total credits for an academic year (e.g., 18 credits to be used in whichever semester makes the most academic sense, instead of a rigid nine fall and nine spring).

Continue with curricular activities and innovations that encourage the involvement of undergraduates in beginning their graduate programs (especially master’s degree level) in a seamless manner.

**Strategy 2:** Ensure that the appropriate support services on campus serve the needs of graduate students **and** graduate-professional students as these are often different than the needs of undergraduate students (e.g., age, marital status, country of origin, dependents). These quality of life issues include: housing options and a central staff that is culturally sensitive (especially for international students), financial support, writing support, psychological support, health care needs, child care needs and, in some cases, spousal/partner support such as health insurance. Some members of the task force strongly encouraged that the housing office assign a staff member to specifically work with graduate and international students.

The deep and extended intellectual effort and time required of doctoral students and graduate-professional students in human and veterinary medicine, in particular, makes these quality of life issues essential to address. The research and scholarship these students produce in partnership with their faculty mentors **is** the visible reputation of the university as a whole.

Some universities are establishing formal “graduate centers” to house all of the services and provide a hub for graduate students. A similar suggestion was made for a faculty center. These centers or hubs are places to develop a community amongst graduate students and to provide a space for social networking. The graduate student representatives on the task force felt strongly that such a center was “a necessity to develop a community and hub for increasingly essential support services.”

Specific suggestions for the Graduate School: better advertise housing options, more funding options for travel, etc., during orientation and then periodically thereafter.

Consider a “first year” experience that extends beyond the various orientation programs in units and colleges to include more opportunities to learn about the discipline **and** MSU.

**Strategy 3:** Continue to actively and visibly support the Research Mentoring Task Force report (<http://grad.msu.edu/integrity.htm>) and expand discussions on the ethics of mentoring.

**Strategy 4:** Improve the connections between academic achievement and financial reward for graduate students. Specifically, this is an issue for University Graduate Council to study this issue and recommend an orderly sequence of graduate assistantships (or other employment titles) that recognizes academic achievement, not just time-on-task. Such a connection must be done with care in order **not** to equate academic, merit-based achievement with financial gain and to ensure that students do not view their graduate time as a “career.” Members of the task force also were aware of the MSU-GEU collective bargaining agreement as related to graduate TAs.

Ensure that stipends are competitive with (aspirational) peer institutions.

**Possible metrics:**

- Number of applications, acceptances and actual enrollments (to assess competitiveness).
- Support available (fellowships, assistantships) and used (number of accepted university fellowships).
- Time to degree, completion rates.
- Debt for graduate education.
- Student satisfaction on Graduate School and other surveys.

## **Strategic Imperative 2**

**Enrich community, economic and family life** through research, outreach, engagement, entrepreneurship, innovation and diversity.

In general, the special task force found no serious gaps and had no specific additional recommendations for graduate education.

Two notes are in order:

1. This topic was seen as closely linked to strategic imperative No. 4 on research (it is, in fact, seen as a specific topic for research, education and outreach) and, therefore, tied to graduate education.
2. This is a focus area that engages some of our larger master’s programs (social work, teacher education, criminal justice, MBA, labor and industrial relations, etc.) and some graduate specializations. These programs also are among the early innovators of online and distance education in order to serve communities in Michigan. These should be recognized and supported.

Since this is a strategic imperative that is not similar in scope to the other four, we offer the following recommendation: promote and fund opportunities for graduate students and their faculty mentors to contribute to enriching community, economic and family life through basic and applied research.

**Possible Metrics:**

- Number of graduate students linked to or funded by Outreach and Engagement projects.
- Number of graduate students funded by outside faculty grants related to this topic.

### **Strategic Imperative 3**

**Expand international reach** through academic, research and economic development initiatives and global, national and local strategic alliances.

The task force approached this imperative from two perspectives: sending our MSU graduate and graduate-professional students abroad and recruiting and retaining international students. MSU is 12th in the United States in our number of international students. We now have a partnership (and a person) among three offices (Graduate School, International Studies and Programs, and Academic Services) to better coordinate our recruitment efforts for sponsored students (both undergraduate and graduate).

Expanding the international experiences of our domestic graduate students is a critical feature of educating the next generation of scholars and leaders of the disciplines and professions. Likewise, the presence of international students enhances the opportunities for young scholars from abroad to receive the best education that the United States can offer and to enhance understanding of different cultures on our own campus.

In general, an important key to success is grass-roots research collaborations between faculty at MSU and other institutions. Institutional travel support (some exists now at the Graduate School in collaboration with International Studies and Programs) should be expanded.

**Strategy 1:** Provide training to graduate program directors for the evaluation of international transcripts and international institutions. Graduate admissions are very decentralized at MSU. This permits the primary decisions on admission to be made at the program level, which is entirely appropriate. With the expansion of international interest in graduate education from countries outside of our “top five” (China, India, Korea, Taiwan and Canada), graduate program personnel need more information in order to make the best decisions. This is particularly important as we link international TAs, English proficiency and undergraduate education.

**Strategy 2:** The task force also noted the importance of international research associates (= post docs) and visiting scholars and the need for additional support (social integration, etc.) for them (beyond the MSU Post Doc Association currently supported by the

Graduate School). The MSU PDA suggests a small, but formal “post doc office,” which is a strategy used by an increasing number of AAU universities to help connect post docs with each other and with the information they need and want.

Relating international students and international postdocs: a suggestion there be a more formal way to establish a network that links MSU to our international colleagues after they leave the campus.

**Possible Metrics:**

- Increase numbers of domestic graduate students connected to programs abroad.
- Attract international graduate students to MSU from a wider variety of countries.

## **Strategic Imperative 4**

**Increase research opportunities** by significantly expanding research funding and involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in research and scholarship.

**Strategy 1:** Enhance and expand the opportunities for research and graduate education that spans disciplines in interdisciplinary and/or multidisciplinary ways. The major problems facing societies around the globe require teams of scholars bringing together knowledge and expertise from a wide variety of disciplines. This does not mean making our current graduate education programs shallower. It means encouraging and training students to work across disciplinary boundaries, bringing their expertise to bear on problems and learning to converse intelligently with other disciplines.

Explicit implementation suggestions include: Expanding the opportunities for workshops or one-credit university courses on: responsible conduct of research; and cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary perspectives on major research topics (e.g., hunger, poverty, environment, education).

Administrators must recognize that graduate programs often span colleges, yet the funding flows through a hierarchical model based on departments and colleges. Central support for interdisciplinary efforts, including fellowship dollars explicitly for these cross college programs so that they are not considered as “drains” of departmental funds is a signal that these efforts are valued in a 21st century public institution of higher education.

**Strategy 2:** There is considerable interest in expanding the available summer research support. Graduate students may start early (usually a summer semester) at MSU, but the perceived “inflexibility” of the changeover of our fiscal year at July 1 does not provide a ready mechanism to fund these students on carry-forward dollars nor to start them on next fiscal year dollars during June and July. Enhance communication so that graduate students understand the summer opportunities. Use summer support as a competitive advantage in recruiting. Ensure that research assistantship stipends are competitive with (aspirational) peer institutions.

**Strategy 3:** Expand advertising for study abroad programs for graduate students. Ensure that the compensation for graduate TAs employed to assist on study abroad programs is more consistent and appropriate for the time and effort required.

## **Strategic Imperative 5**

**Strengthen stewardship** by appreciating and nurturing the university's financial assets, campus infrastructure and people for optimal effectiveness for today and tomorrow.

Recruitment and retention of the brightest graduate and graduate-professional students to MSU requires resources in the form of fellowships and assistantships. The competition for both domestic and international students has increased in the past decade with an increasing number of countries focusing resources on graduate education in order to enhance the quality and speed of their economic development.

**Strategy 1:** Focus the next Capital Campaign (and interim period leading to that campaign) on **universitywide** efforts to raise funds for endowed graduate fellowships. Establish a "tax" on general annual giving to the university moving those funds directly into general university graduate and graduate-professional fellowships.

**Strategy 2:** Better link to our international alumni for purposes of recruitment of new international students, internship opportunities, knowledge transfer and fund-raising. A specific suggestion was raising funds for a pool of resources to assist international students with family/dependent health insurance coverage, where needed.

**Strategy 3:** Expand opportunities for out-of-state tuition waivers for some international students (could be a priority list by college, by country or by disciplines).

### **NAMES OF TASK FORCE PARTICIPANTS:**

- Karen Klomparens: The Graduate School
- Shawnee Vickery: The Eli Broad College of Business
- Soledad Quiroz: Council of Graduate Students
- Roger Baldwin: Education
- Clark Radcliffe: Mechanical Engineering
- Brad Love: Council of Graduate Students - Management Information Systems Ph.D.
- John Hettinger: Council of Graduate Students - Computer Science Engineering
- Matthew Boyer: Council of Graduate Students - Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education
- Meleia Egger: Graduate Employee Union - Geography
- Susan Applegate-Krouse: Anthropology - American Indian Studies
- Alison Rautman: Anthropology
- Rique Campa: Fisheries and Wildlife - The Graduate School
- Robert Caldwell: Social Science

- Susan Conrad: Cell and Molecular Biology
- John Merrill: Biological Sciences Program
- Rich Schwartz: Microbiology and Molecular Genetics
- Glenda Lappan: Division of Science and Mathematics Education - Math - University Graduate Council
- Rosemary Max: Office for International Students and Scholars
- Mary Noel: College of Human Medicine - University Graduate Council
- Paul Menchik: Social Science - Economics
- Rick Brandenburg: College of Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Gary Blanchard: Chemistry
- Jarrod Morrice: Council of Graduate Students - Plant Biology M.S.

IN ADDITION to these task force members, all members of the University Graduate Council and all members of the Graduate Assistant/Associate Deans group had an opportunity to comment on the first two drafts of this report.