Balancing Graduate Student Enrollments to Achieve Revenue Goals
Graduate Enrollment Review and Outcomes
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# Table of Contents

1) Executive Overview ................................................................. 4
   Key Observations ........................................................................ 4

2) Resources and Organization ..................................................... 5
   Staff ......................................................................................... 5
   Funding ..................................................................................... 5

3) Graduate Enrollment Review Processes ...................................... 5
   Enrollment and Revenue Goal Setting .......................................... 6
   Student Funding ......................................................................... 7
   One-time Reviews ..................................................................... 8
   Iterative Reviews ...................................................................... 8

3) Graduate Enrollment Review Outcomes ..................................... 10
   Program Expansion and Reduction ............................................. 10
   Recruitment Strategies ............................................................ 10

4) Research Methodology ............................................................. 12
   Project Challenge ...................................................................... 12
   Project Sources .......................................................................... 12
   Research Parameters ............................................................... 13
1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Institutions rarely fully dedicate one person to graduate student enrollment management. Contact institutions assign academic leaders (e.g., provosts, vice provosts, deans of graduate studies), admissions staff, or a combination of staff dedicated to enrollment management functions (e.g., marketing and communications) to evaluate graduate student enrollments.

Iterative program reviews examine enrollment targets compared to actual enrollments; one-time reviews evaluate all graduate programs for substantial adjustments (e.g., funding structures, number of students accepted). Iterative reviews occur annually, semi-annually, or even weekly with enrollment updates. These reviews often form the basis of enrollment and revenue goals. Contacts apply one-time reviews to make large-scale changes in light of funding or strategic alterations (e.g., an institutional commitment to high-quality doctoral students).

Several profiled institutions intentionally balance master’s and doctoral students within programs; few profiled institutions intentionally balance revenue-generating and non-revenue generating students across programs. Contacts report a lack of departmental initiative to share profits across unrelated areas of the institution, though departments often share revenue from master’s students within programs to assist units with low enrollments.

Contacts employ incentives (e.g., tuition discounts) and disincentives (e.g., admissions suspension) to manage low-enrollment programs. Programs that fail to meet enrollment targets several years in a row typically confront disincentives that encourage faculty to reexamine curricular structure and course offerings. Incentives encourage students to enroll in programs who might otherwise hesitate due to financial hardships; programs that qualify change based on labor markets and employer demands.
2) Resources and Organization

**Staff**

*Administrators Typically Decentralize Graduate Enrollment Management Staff across the University*

While two profiled institutions employ centralized graduate admissions or enrollment managers, the majority of institutions decentralize enrollment management functions.

**Location of Responsibility for Graduate Student Enrollment Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Admissions Staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| University Marketing Staff | - Conduct graduate admissions and enrollment functions for school  
- Collaborate with the marketing office |
| Graduate Enrollment Management Staff | - Create consistent branding materials across all units within the university  
- Serve as primary contacts for graduate enrollment  
- Liaise between program directors and deans or provosts  
- Analyze enrollment numbers  
- Collaborate with recruitment and marketing staff |
| Graduate School Data Managers | - Compile weekly audits of applications, yield, and credits |

**10 People**

Graduate admissions staff members at Institution D are centralized in one office with 8 administrators and 2 clerical staff.

**Funding**

*Personnel, Business Systems Compose Majority of Enrollment Management Costs*

Contacts report that personnel costs (e.g., staff salaries, graduate student assistantships for marketing and communications) account for the largest expense of enrollment management operations. Business systems to record, track, and maintain registration, billing, and student records (e.g., Banner) remain the second-largest cost incurred.
3) Graduate Enrollment Review Processes

Enrollment and Revenue Goal Setting

Set Enrollment and Revenue Goals in Tandem with University Strategic Plan

The enrollment review committee at Institution D, the vice president for enrollment management at Institution E, and the director of graduate admissions at Institution B base enrollment and revenue goals on regular program reviews. Reviews account for the following factors:

- Prior budget,
- Prior year enrollments,
- Competitor programs (both academic peers and geographic competitors), and
- National trends.

The finance vice president at Institution A sets graduate enrollment targets across the institution each year to meet centralized revenue goals; a representative from the provost’s office meets with each graduate dean to discuss if and how they can meet that target. Contacts report that departments often cannot meet the target due to external factors such as a lack of potential applicants in the field of study. The vice provost for faculties works closely with deans on a case-by-case basis to decide if deans should lower admissions standards to increase enrollment.

Balance Master’s and Doctoral Students within Programs rather than across Programs to Support Doctoral Students

No profiled institution has a formal process in place to balance master’s and doctoral students intentionally for revenue management, though contacts informally encourage increases in master’s student enrollments to offset costs of doctoral student stipends within departments. Contacts rarely pressure graduate deans to increase master’s student enrollments to offset costs in other departments or schools.

Sample Process to Balance Master’s and Doctoral Students within Programs

Contacts at Institution F do not use revenue from master’s programs to fund doctoral student stipends; rather, revenue goes back to the programs to support master’s students on partial scholarships.

Graduate dean identifies a need for higher quality psychology PhD students

Psychology PhD program director analyzes doctoral stipends at competitor programs to determine necessary resources

Graduate dean and psychology master’s program director assess the feasibility of accepting more students into the master’s program

Increased stipends attract higher quality psychology PhD students

Psychology master’s student tuition revenues fund increased psychology PhD stipends

Psychology master’s program accepts and enrolls more students, increasing tuition revenue
Student Funding

**Doctoral Stipends Positively Correlate with Student Quality**

Contacts aim to provide full funding for doctoral students and limit admission to the number of available scholarships; this strategy maintains high student quality. Institutional commitments guarantee funding for a certain amount of time (usually five years); contacts adjust stipend amounts based on market conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctoral Student Funding Structures</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of Funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Institution F     | 5              | ▪ Unrestricted funds from University  
▪ Endowed fellowships | ▪ Tuition scholarship  
▪ Stipend  
▪ Health insurance subsidy | ▪ Students must find alternate sources of funding for more than 5 years in program |
| Institution A     | 5*             | ▪ Undergraduate tuition  
▪ Master’s programs | ▪ Full tuition remission  
▪ Stipend | ▪ Adjust stipend based on faculty-identified national trends |
| Institution C     | Varies by program | ▪ Partially funded doctoral programs  
▪ Master’s programs  
▪ External research grants | ▪ Tuition scholarship  
▪ Living stipend  
▪ Contribution to health insurance | ▪ Divide graduate assistantships into 3 partial scholarships to increase the number of students supported |

*Applies to three of five graduate schools

**Divide Master’s Student Scholarships to Stretch Financial Resources**

Institution C also provides funding for students in master’s programs; while full scholarships entice a few quality applicants, contacts recommend dividing full scholarships into partial assistantships or dollar amounts to support additional students.

**Master’s Student Funding Structures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thousands of dollars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Scholarship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Funding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Encourage Program Directors to Conduct Internal Reviews of Graduate Programs to Reevaluate Program Size and Funding

Contacts perform large-scale internal program reviews when reevaluating budgets to examine program funding and enrollment size. One-time program reviews either support existing funding and enrollment structures or generate ideas for revised structures.

Criteria for Evaluation

- Strength and depth of applicant pool
- Ability of faculty to mentor the proposed number of students
- Prospective ability to place students in quality positions after program completion
- Impact of teaching needs on department size
- Financial support for students

Graduate Program Review Process at Institution F

Iterative Reviews Provide Regular Examination of Enrollments

Contacts conduct iterative reviews to examine enrollment data on a consistent basis; these reviews inform strategic enrollment and revenue decisions. Reviews occur by program, but institutions may conduct reviews of multiple programs simultaneously.

University-wide Iterative Review Model

Compile Weekly Audit with Enrollment Data

- Weekly audits include:
  - Number of applications
  - Number of admitted students
  - Number of students submitted enrollment deposit
  - Number of students registered
  - Number of credits currently enrolled
  - Number of degrees conferred
- Data managers or graduate admissions directors compile data
### Disseminate Reports to Enrollment Leadership Team
- Data managers or graduate admissions directors send weekly audit reports to deans within each graduate school and others by request (e.g., provost, department chairs).
- Optional – include:
  - Comparisons with historical data
  - Recommendations for admissions decisions based on yield rates

### Meet Regularly to Review Program Performance
- **Program review components:**
  - Employer recruiting activity
  - Search engine activity
  - Information session interest and attendance
  - Number of applicants
  - Number of students enrolled
  - Number of credit hours completed
- The enrollment review committee at **Institution D** meets biweekly; enrollment managers and college deans at **Institution E** meet semi-annually.
- **Enrollment review committee:**
  - Provost
  - Dean of Graduate Studies
  - Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
  - Senior Vice President for Planning and Administration
  - Director of Institutional Research
  - Dean of Graduate Admissions
  - Vice President for Finance

### Analyze Enrollment Information to Determine Outcomes
- Enrollment review committees study enrollment data for:
  - Indicators of recruitment initiatives’ success or failure
  - Enrollment target adjustments
  - Consideration of new program creation
  - Consideration of program discontinuation
Provide Positive or Negative Financial Incentives to Manage Low-Enrollment Programs

To encourage student attendance, the provost and director of graduate admissions at Institution B award a 25 percent discount on tuition and fees for selected programs with low enrollments; participating programs include those targeting students particularly impacted by the recession (e.g., school of education) and those of unique institutional priority (e.g., theology).

Negative Incentive Strategies

Admissions Suspension
Contacts at Institution C put six programs with declining and low enrollments on a one-year admissions hiatus; faculty in three of the programs have directed substantial curricular changes to reopen their programs pending state approval, while the others will be cancelled.

Budget Reduction
Contacts at Institution D and Institution A consider reducing program operating budgets and available scholarship dollars for programs with continually decreasing enrollments; contacts reason that fewer students require less financial aid support.

Denial of Faculty Tenure
Contacts consider denying faculty tenure in programs with consistently declining enrollments; these programs do not meet the criteria for long-term need, despite individual faculty member achievements.

Target Undergraduate Students and Adult Learners to Increase Graduate Enrollments

Contact institutions reach out to a variety of student populations to increase graduate student enrollments; faculty and staff attempt to recruit recent undergraduates and adult learners to increase program enrollments.

Graduate Student Recruitment Strategies

Undergraduate

Graduate directors at Institution D travel to local colleges and universities to speak with students in undergraduate programs related to the University’s unique graduate programs (e.g., medical physics).

Institution D engages in articulation agreements with international universities to increase international student enrollment; the agreements allow students to start a degree at one institution and complete degrees at another.
Contacts at **Institution D** employ dual-degree bachelor’s and master’s programs to increase domestic student enrollment in graduate programs. Undergraduate admissions staff inform prospective students about dual-degree programs; contacts note that parents demonstrate enthusiasm for the time and cost savings of dual-degree programs.

**Adult**

Contacts at **Institution D** provide corporate discounts for local companies to send employees for continuing education and relevant job training. Additional discounts encourage corporations to send large groups of students to the University.

**All Students**

Contacts at **Institution C** host all accepted PhD students on campus for two days in response to current student feedback suggesting such programs; accepted students have the opportunity to meet faculty and peers before making acceptance decisions.

Administrators at **Institution C** prefer online marketing strategies (e.g., social media, updated program websites) to traditional print marketing materials (e.g., brochures); a paid graduate student assistant maintains a Facebook page and graduate student blog.
Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- How do administrators set tuition revenue goals for graduate divisions?
- How do administrators balance the revenue-generating and non-revenue-generating students enrolled in graduate programs across different schools?
- What process do administrators follow to review graduate student enrollment?
- How do administrators calculate tuition discounts for doctoral students? How do tuition discounts vary by school or by discipline?
- How do variations in doctoral student stipends influence enrollment balances and targets at contact institutions?
- Who conducts reviews of graduate student enrollment?
- How many staff members manage graduate student enrollment? What funding do graduate student enrollment offices require?
- What changes have contact institutions made in response to reviews of graduate enrollment?
- How do contact institutions adjust support levels for doctoral students to meet revenue goals?
- How do reviews of graduate student enrollment influence decisions to either expand or reduce certain graduate programs? How do administrators identify which programs to reduce?
- How do contact institutions use reviews of graduate student enrollment to inform recruitment strategies for both traditional master’s and doctoral programs and professional master’s programs?
- What challenges do administrators experience in conducting reviews of graduate student enrollment? How do administrators address these challenges? What would administrators change if they repeated the review process?
- What advice do administrators provide for conducting reviews of graduate student enrollment?

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- Advisory Board’s internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/)
- Institutional websites
The Forum interviewed academic affairs administrators at private research universities.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution A</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>9,000 / 14,000</td>
<td>Research universities (high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution B</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic</td>
<td>6,000 / 10,000</td>
<td>Research universities (high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution C</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>8,000 / 15,000</td>
<td>Research universities (high research activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution D</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>7,000 / 11,000</td>
<td>Doctoral/Research universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution E</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>8,000 / 13,000</td>
<td>Doctoral/Research universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution F</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>8,000 / 12,000</td>
<td>Research universities (very high research activity)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>