

**GRADUATE STUDENT
STRATEGIC PLANNING
COMMITTEE
Report**

June 30th 2003

Introduction

Our discussions were based on reading and evaluating two surveys. The first was performed by EGSA in Fall 2002, following the campus-wide unionization vote, in which efforts to found a graduate student union failed. The purpose of the survey was to identify service awareness and needs of graduate students in the College of Engineering. The second survey was performed by ORSGPE (Graduate Exit Survey) in Spring 2002 and was focused more on evaluating the overall experience of graduate students. Of the 262 respondents, 75% were Master of Engineering students, 7% were Master of Science students, and 18% were Doctor of Philosophy students.

Tasks

I. The first task of our council was to create a list of Strengths, Weakness, and Challenges in each one of the following areas:

- 1) Recruitment and Retention
- 2) Professional Development
- 3) Services
- 4) Research and Educational Environment
- 5) College Culture
- 6) Infrastructure/Facilities/Equipment
- 7) Policy
- 8) Practices

The summary of our discussions is included in this document as Appendix A.

II. Prioritize our list based primarily on the following criteria:

- General well-being of graduate experience
- Environment- Is this a friendly place to maintain and attract good students?

We thought this was a great opportunity to create a “wish list”, which included the most important needs for a comprehensive graduate life, both academically and personally.

This document contains four themes:

- 1) Community
- 2) Professional Development
- 3) Facilities/Space
- 4) Visibility and Awareness

III. Devise a list of metrics that could be used for each of these themes.

Identifying measurable parameters proved difficult, so the list is mostly qualitative.

IV. Develop useful strategies to ease the “wish list” implementation.

The list, along with its respective metrics and strategies, are presented in Appendix B.

We hope this document will help to improve the Graduate Student life experience and provide decision takers with a Graduate Student Perspective.

Appendix A

a) RECRUITMENT/RETENTION

Strengths:

- Visits are organized and implemented well
 - Individualized schedule
- Unique – specific – special
- Competitive \$\$ offers

Weaknesses:

- Too many professors/not enough students
- Do not meet cohort in all departments
- Targeted programs for women/minority grad recruiting
- Consistent follow-up from faculty
- Differing needs based on where student is in their selection of research areas/advisors need to be considered

Opportunities:

- Faculty interactions are helpful both formal and informal
- Recruiting Weekend
- More people could be involved...
- Morale issues impact retention
- Retention make sure folks know resources if they are unhappy

b) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Strengths:

- Seminars
 - Giving a job talk
 - Posters
- Conference attendance
- TA Development Program

Weaknesses:

- Teaching support (lecturers)
 - Real life applications
 - Academic careers. Programming, etc. Programming around
 - College support/facilitated

Symposium – Evaluative aspect...
Encourage faculty to be involved

Opportunities:

- TA Evaluations can be more tailored (N/A category)

More broad-based colloquial updates...across fields

- How can we use things (committees, etc.) to aid in their professional development efforts
- “Czarships”
- Had to plan ahead

Engineering-wide central calendar

c) SERVICES

Strengths:

- Many available

Weaknesses:

- Visibility of services
- Software availability/accessibility
- Formula to discern acceptable #s of computers, etc.

Bus Passes

Opportunities:

- One sheet only
- Parking

d) RESEARCH/EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Strengths:

- Committee structure - Cornell University obligation TA's ??
- Seminars
- Breadth of courses (always have new ones pop up)

Weakness:

- Teaching experience mandatory, but not consistent
- Lack of knowledge of seminars between departments
- Written policy – non-uniformity different between departments
- Minors are not well defined
- Advisor dependent
- Faculty awareness of things
- Expectations of TAs not uniform

- How things are assigned
- Language
- Between research areas...

Opportunity:

- Do not rely on faculty/advisor as the only resource

e) COLLEGE CULTURE

Strengths:

- Diversity
- Interdisciplinary
- Encouragement to cross boundaries (field structure)
- Doesn't seem as competitive as peers
- Pockets of social opportunities
- Activities do exist, but people don't participate fully
- EGSA

Weaknesses:

- Not much encouragement to participate outside of department
- Perception is that there is nothing to do
- Hard to define what "culture" really is

*Note: overall students are "good" with things.

- Segregation of "services" – UG/Grad students??? (is this really a weakness)

Opportunities

- Documentation in the college that depicts the diversity/#s/etc.
- More acknowledgement of the "we are here" appreciated – necessary

f) INFRASTRUCTURE/FACILITIES

Strengths:

- The "Centers" including the Theory Center
- Library Services
 - On-line journals
 - Staff are great
 - Computer #s/access

Weaknesses:

- Type of work done in library is different than the space allowed
- Some lack of knowledge on what's available computer-wise
- No real grad space for gathering and programs

- Network connections
- Graduate Student Office space
- Physical space isn't inviting/attractive

Opportunities:

- Wireless access is limited
- Renovate/reinvigorate
- Save energy – lighting is on way too much
- White boards instead of black boards
- Projector

g) POLICY

Strengths:

- Well-documented and available

Weaknesses:

- People are not reading/looking for information out there
- Grad schools requirements are too general
- Unclear on what to do for a “minor”
- No written expectations. DGS imparted - want consistency
- Sometimes maybe it is too relaxed

Opportunities:

- Document requirements move deliberately
- Review the consistency of “minors” program

h) PROCESSES/PRACTICES

Strengths:

- TA Program is good

Weaknesses:

- Inconsistency because of documentation
- Departmental dependant
- Do not understand the difference between the Grad School and the College
- Appointment letters
- TA training (inconsistency) subsequent accountability

Opportunities:

- Enforce rules that are set consistently
- Redundancy – consistency
- TA training – consistency -- mandatory??
- Preemptive strike

Appendix B

1) COMMUNITY

Strengths are mostly in recruiting, and weaknesses are in retention.
(related to Recruiting/ Retention and College Culture)

Goal: Increase involvement, build a community within students, and improve the relationship between students and professors (especially advisors).

Metrics and Strategies:

1) Annual Meeting:

Participation: 4 randomly chosen students, GFA, and DGS.

Responsibility: GFA's will keep a list of students that participate in the meetings, and will schedule an annual meeting with the DGS. We think it is important to have a majority of students during the meeting to produce an environment where students feel free to speak openly of problems, and issues, and evaluate the department freely. Also, reassure students that meeting outcomes will not include their names. The DGS would report every 5 years including all problems and solutions.

2) Exit interviews

Responsibility:

- a) Create a survey: EGSA survey is very good example.
- b) Give the survey to the student and get it when the student is done: GFA from each department.
- c) Analyze, collect survey data: ORGSPE.
- d) Timeline: Surveys should be collected throughout the year and survey analysis could be performed every two year.

Surveys should be collected throughout the year, and survey analysis could be performed every two years. Survey results should be available for people who request it. It is important to make an effort to include all candidates and to make a clear distinction between the analyses from Ph.D., Masters, or M. Eng students. Well-documented and analyzed exit interviews may provide the solutions for many graduate student problems.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED ON THE SURVEY:

Graduate Field
Degree Program
Current Year in program
TA appointments served
Current funding situation (if they are aware of it)

Satisfaction with college, department, academic experience, compensation, TA or RA experience, research support, resolution of concerns or conflicts within the university
 Familiarity with: Cornell Emergency Medical Grants, Cornell Ombudsman, Engineer Career/Services, travel grants, Engineering Safe Havens, GPSA, ORGSPE, and Cornell University Grievance Procedure
 Employment conditions opinion
 Academic and Research conditions opinion.

3) Records:

- 1) Degree student desires,
- 2) What degree they leave with,
- 3) Department
- 4) Funding and amounts per year, compare to information available from peers.

Responsibility:

- a) This is information already available to GFA's. Each piece of information will need to be placed in a document, example:

Department Name

	# of graduates	#of graduates peers	time spent	Degree came for	Degree awarded	Average Salary	Average Salary p
Year 1							
Year 2							
Year 3							
Year 4							
Year 5							

- b) Analyze collect data from all departments: ORGSPE.
- c) Produce a report every 5 years: ORGSPE.

4)EGSA

Attendance at activities--will need administrative help, since no student will want to be responsible for this.

5) Graduate Student Space.

Each department should provide a lounge for graduate students.

Responsibility: Graduate students from each department could report to GFA's if the space is used or not.

2) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Workshops: similar to the ones the Graduate schools offers, but engineering oriented. C.V. writing, what is out there?, how do we apply those skills,
- Administrative support for EGSA.
- Advertisement of all colloquia – general website.

- Each department have it's own research symposium (low-key), and will help in feedback within students and professors
- Encourage attendance to B-exam's within each department.

Metrics and Strategies:

1) Attendance to workshops, colloquia and B-Exam's by year and department.

Responsibility:

- a) Whoever is responsible for the workshops could maintain a record of the number of graduate students participating and their department
- b) Department hosting colloquia could distribute a list at the seminar to obtain the departments people come from (Attendance # will come from same list)
- d) Department can maintain a sheet with attendance to B exam. GFA's should be responsible for creating posters and hanging them in all floors of the building. Advisors should encourage students to attend B exams of fellow students (not only within research groups).

2) A more user friendly website

Responsibility: Whoever is in charge can measure the statistics of usage. This issue could be included in the exit survey.

3) Involvement in professional activities

Activity: Number of students who serve as reviewers, organize workshops, and how often they attend conferences, etc. - At least in part, this is the sort of thing professional development is supposed to encourage, so it might make sense to measure it.

Responsibility: EGSA, ORGSPE, GFA's could keep records and share them with the Dean's Office.

3) FACILITIES, (SPACE FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THEIR OWN BUILDING).

- Graduate Students Lounge. Each Department has to provide the space, basic furniture (central table, chairs, and couches) and a refrigerator.
- Full-time access to kitchens for graduate students in their own building.
- Renovation of graduate student offices--lighting, carpets, blinds, chairs and desks, and air-conditioning/heating in all rooms. Ergonomic Assessment of working environment. Limit # of graduate students per office. X square foot/person.
- Assess age of furniture and time since last renovation
Ergonomic assessment of working environment--Limit the number of graduate students per office (calculate the number of square feet per person).

Metrics and Strategies:**1) Graduate Student Lounge Usage**

Activity: Number of graduate students that use the lounge (can be counter productive—you use; therefore you are not working)

Responsibility: Graduate students could report usage to GFA.

2) Usage of kitchen.**3) Graduate student furniture and office maintenance.**

Activity:

a) Maintain records of when the furniture was purchased, when carpets were changed, etc...

b) Maintenance reports of office air conditioning and heating for each office.

c) Ergonomic assessment.

d) Office renovation.

Responsibility: Building Manager could be in charge of the Maintenance and Reports. GFA, DGS, and Chair of Department could have periodic meetings with graduate students to assess, report, and discuss the state of offices and furniture. Regarding ergonomics and office renovation, it would be good to keep track via Gannett of incidence of workplace-related injuries/illnesses (e.g. if desks get better, fewer people should get treatment for RSI). Also, we should make sure air quality gets measured regularly, particularly in offices without external

4) VISIBILITY AND AWARENESS

-To make all graduate students aware of all services available.

1) Visibility

Activity: Create a more organized and appealing website with all the to different departments, including activities, seminars, colloquia, etc...

Responsibility: Each Department should also have an updated and easy to navigate website. The College could provide a general website manager to have consistency and create general websites.

2) Awareness

a. Orientation, Graduate School handbook, EGSA handbook.

Responsibility: GFA can make sure all first years graduate students are aware of the importance of attending orientation events, and that they have a copy of the handbook.

b. Periodically send a sheet to all Engineering graduate students to remind them.

Responsibility: The Dean's office can design an appealing sheet of paper that includes all services available for graduate students, and the GFA could be responsible for putting the sheet in graduate student mailboxes.

c. Funding Awareness:

Responsibility: Advisor should inform students about funding sources for their project and stipend.

d. Funding details:

Responsibility: Administrative Staff in each department should be responsible of sending an email that includes the following information: how much money you will be paid for the semester and how, and if possible what is the source of the money.

Graduates students should receive a written document that describes: Expectations for us as graduate students and TAs, and Minor requirements.

Responsibility: T.A. description → DGS. Minor Requirements → Minor advisor. Graduate student expectations → DGS and Advisor.