

Report of the UK Faculty Senate Committee on Research and Graduate Education *
Discussion of Essential Functions of the Graduate School
with Interim Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School Susan Carvalho
25 March 2016

Committee Members present:

Mark Richard Lauersdorf, chair (AS/Modern and Classical Languages)

John D’Orazio (ME/Pediatrics)

Robert Geneve (AG/Horticulture)

Christina Payne (EN/Chemical and Materials Engineering)

Susan Smyth (ME/Internal Medicine)

Bruce Webb (AG/Entomology)

ex officio: Martha Peterson (Office of the Vice President for Research)

In its consultative capacity, the UK Faculty Senate Committee on Research and Graduate Education met with Interim Associate Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, Susan Carvalho, to review the report on graduate education leadership at the University of Kentucky developed by the faculty group involved in strategic planning for graduate education (“Report on Essential Functions and Priorities for Graduate Education”, dated 21 December 2015), and responses to that report from several colleges and their deans (College of Nursing, dated 24 March 2016; College of Arts and Sciences, undated).

The committee reached consensus on many points, reflected in the following main lines:

- The structure and functions of the Graduate School and the graduate-education structures within the colleges should be aligned for optimal implementation of the strategic plan, which first and foremost proposes to “strengthen the quality and distinctiveness of our graduate programs”.
- The flow of funding should track alongside what we are trying to achieve.
- Ultimately, the overall quality of graduate education depends on the strength of the faculty and the degree to which the governance structures allow for maximum faculty input and maximum transparency of process (at the level of both the college deans and the Graduate School/central administration) regarding how decisions are made and funds are allocated.
- Perhaps the most acute needs for strategic planning related to graduate education is increased transparency about how TA/RA lines are allocated, what the criteria are, to what extent reallocation is feasible, and how the allocation system is aligned with the overall graduate-education goals of the strategic plan. This issue remains primary regardless of the final decisions regarding the centralization/decentralization balance.

The committee considered the critical question of whether the Graduate School’s core function is as a purely administrative/clerical office or as a unit that has academic oversight. We also examined benefits and problems with the current system and the relative advantages and disadvantages of greater decentralization of graduate-education structures.

It was noted that, with decentralized governance of resources, there is a potential for divergence vis-à-vis the institution-wide strategic plan for graduate education, as well as a potential for less flexibility in

building and strengthening cross-college ties in graduate training. If reallocation of TA/RA funding is possible, it was agreed that this reallocation is easier if either a) the governing structures for TA/RA funding are centralized, or b) the funding is distributed based on a fixed formula that works across the different colleges.

Weighing all of these factors, the committee members felt that the Graduate School, in close collaboration with the faculty, is best positioned to establish general metrics and maintain general oversight of funding allocation based on those metrics, as long as transparency is maintained. It is also best positioned to maintain institution-wide quality control and to play a central advocacy role for graduate education with the central administration (and its role in the area of advocacy could be strengthened). College deans are subject to all kinds of pressures that can jeopardize the prioritization of graduate education. Maintaining the academic functions of the Graduate School will best facilitate achievement of the strategic plan's goal.

At the same time, cooperation with colleges and deans is essential, as this is the most direct link to faculty quality and performance vis-à-vis graduate education. Academic content resides within the faculty and at the department level. Deans are expected to maintain a strong focus on the funding and improvement of graduate education, on which the academic reputation of their college rests.

** pending review by Senate Council*