

**EXTERNAL REVIEW OF  
GRADUATE EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION AT  
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE**

**Introduction**

In Summer 2011, Dr. Charles Riordan, Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education at University of Delaware (UD), invited a team of external reviewers to examine the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies (OGPE) at UD. The team comprised Dr. Charles Caramello, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School (University of Maryland); Dr. Karen DePauw, Vice President and Dean for Graduate Education (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University); and Dr. Henry Foley, Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School (Pennsylvania State University). While the three universities are very similar, their Graduate Schools vary somewhat in structure and responsibilities. As a result, the three deans brought a high degree of shared institutional knowledge relevant to UD, together with varying perspectives on graduate education administration.

Dr. Riordan asked the external team (ERT) to engage in conversations with stakeholders and constituent groups across the UD campus regarding graduate and professional education at UD; to assess the OGPE's organizational structure and position in the broader UD context; and to review the strengths and weaknesses of the OGPE in the context of national best practices in graduate education. Over the course of two days, the ERT held seventeen separate meetings with faculty, staff, students, and campus administrators, in both large group and individual settings. The ERT gathered substantial information and opinion during these meetings; some very clear themes emerged.

Dr. Riordan also asked the ERT to submit a report, following the site visit, summarizing its observations and findings; proposing recommendations for improvement; and highlighting specific challenges that OGPE faces in moving forward. The report follows.

**Context**

The immediate context for the external review is twofold: 1) *The Path to Prominence*, specifically its commitment to "achieving levels of excellence, intensity and breadth of research of graduate and post-doctoral education never before seen at the University"; and 2) the OGPE Self Study of Fall 2011, which provides an overview of the organization, structure and scale of graduate and professional education at UD and the role of OGPE in advancing the UD graduate mission.

UD aspires to become a major regional and national player in graduate and professional education and research. Those of its regional competitors who have achieved that status aspire to *improve* their national positions. UD, in other words, strives to advance in a very competitive graduate, professional, and research marketplace and to do so at a moment when, regionally and nationally, graduate applications and available research dollars are both shrinking. In order to realize its aspirations, UD must operate from realistic assessments of 1) the enabling and constraining conditions for graduate education in the current economic climate, and 2) the opportunities and challenges facing UD in maximizing potential success within those broader conditions.

The ERT found a great deal to praise and commend in the UD graduate enterprise: administrators at all levels are committed to advancing graduate education; faculty are highly engaged in graduate education; and graduate students seem very satisfied with the quality of their educational experience. Under the very capable leadership of Dr. Riordan, OGPE provides excellent support services and direction to the overall graduate enterprise. Academically, graduate education at UD is sound. To make substantial advances, however, UD will want to address four essentially administrative issues:

- 1) Stakeholders repeatedly indicated that the implementation of Responsibility Based Budgeting (RBB) had occurred with insufficient planning; one potential consequence may be insufficient resources at the campus level for graduate education. This should be addressed and resolved.
- 2) Faculty, departmental administrators, and even members of the Graduate Studies Committee of the Faculty Senate could benefit from a greater command of national best practices in graduate education, a campus level view of graduate education at UD, and a mastery of the details of graduate education at UD. OGPE has this knowledge and should work closely with these constituencies in conveying it.
- 3) Graduate education at UD is highly decentralized, and most constituencies appear to regard the role of OGPE as one of solving problems and providing services, not one of leadership. This view is particularly strong among the Deans. This level of decentralization, and this view of graduate leadership, is not the norm at first tier institutions.
- 4) Generally speaking, graduate education at first tier institutions and aspirational first tier institutions falls under a Graduate School (or Graduate College) led by an administrator at the rank of Dean.

## Analysis

Vice Provost Riordan opened the site visit with a briefing on OGPE. The unit is charged with recruitment, admission, academic progress, orientation and mentoring, diversity, and international students. New graduate degree programs, especially interdisciplinary and professional programs figure prominently in *The Path to Prominence*, and both are expected to lead to growth in the graduate student population at UD. Our analysis of the current situation indicates that OGPE faces the challenge of trying to carry out day-to-day operations that already are testing the office's functional capacity, while also trying to inspire and encourage new program development and increase student enrollment. It is not clear that the goals of UD can be accomplished with the current structure.

Beginning with a Monday morning meeting with the Deans and continuing through a closing lunch with Provost Apple and Vice Provost Riordan on the next day, the ERT had the opportunity to engage with multiple constituency groups critical to the OGPE and the future of graduate and professional education at UD. While our analysis and recommendations are based upon the collective wisdom of these groups and the information gathered in these sessions, we address only selected points below.

The meeting with the Deans revealed that all but one is relatively new to his or her position. The Deans are open to enhancement of graduate education, growth in graduate programs, programs and even new structures for graduate administration. If they are to be "taxed" to make this happen, however, then they would be supportive only if they see specific benefits to their colleges. Each Dean also made the point that he or she was still adjusting to the demands and expectations of RBB. Although one can argue that RBB should lead to more innovation and academic entrepreneurship, it seems that the effect at this point is actually inhibitory. The Deans need reassurance that risk taking in graduate education will be encouraged and not penalized.

The meeting with Assistant Provost Mary Martin covered her duties and activities in OGPE. Though the ERT is very impressed with the breath of problems that Dr. Martin addresses, and her effort and success in resolving them, it is clear that she is working at (indeed beyond) full capacity. Given Dr. Martin's extensive portfolio and workload, moreover, she does not have the opportunity to advance new projects. OGPE, consequently, finds itself generally in response mode and is more reactive than proactive. It would be beneficial to allow Dr. Martin to begin to groom others in a way that would relieve current pressure and ensure that other staff members benefit from, and inherit, her knowledge and expertise.

The Graduate Studies Committee, as at peer institutions, comprises members of the faculty. As is often the case, they are focused on the specific issues under their jurisdiction, namely approving courses, eliminating courses, and reviewing graduate

programs. Though done in close collaboration with the OGPE, this work could benefit from a sharper campus perspective.

Other groups made the following points:

- RBB apparently has concentrated power in the offices of the deans, somewhat diminishing the influence of the provost, on the one hand, and the autonomy of department chairs, on the other.
- RBB inadvertently may be inhibiting the creation of vibrant new interdisciplinary graduate degree programs.
- Stipends for graduate assistants are not competitive and are an impediment to achieving strategic goals.
- The role of OGPE and roles within OGPE are not sufficiently clear. Interestingly, the OGPE is regularly referred to as “the graduate school.”
- When international students encounter problems, they often find themselves shuttled between the OGPE and the International Students and Scholars Office. The International Students and Scholars Office should be in OGPE rather than in Human Resources.

Almost every group began its conversation with some discussion of RBB. Though RBB was introduced almost two years ago, it is still very much on the minds of administrators, faculty, and staff, and is widely perceived as problematic in a number of ways. Two of these, directly related to advancing graduate education, are noted above.

The ERT talked with many constituencies about OGPE resources, and among ourselves about OGPE resources in relation to those of our Graduate Schools. It is critical that OGPE have the funding necessary not only to operate successfully as an oversight and program and student support unit, but also to advance innovative campus wide graduate initiatives and to provide seed funding for such initiatives. This requires personnel, and it is equally critical that OGPE be staffed appropriately and adequately, particularly with regard to emerging areas of importance such as IT expertise.

At present, both the operating budget and staff of OGPE are reasonably appropriate and adequate to the shape and scale of graduate education at UD and to the current mission of GGPE. (To place this in comparative context, the annual operating budgets of our three Graduate Schools range from roughly \$1M to \$4M and our staffs from roughly 20 to 40 FTE.) The aspirations of UD for graduate and professional education, however, will alter the graduate enterprise and the mission of OGPE, and funding and staffing must grow accordingly.

There is consensus that graduate education is critical to the future of the UD, and it is clear that many campus constituencies would welcome an enhanced leadership role for OGPE. The Graduate Schools at our universities would be pleased to collaborate with OGPE in sharing best practices regarding programs and activities for building graduate community, student support services, communication and networking with academic units, recruitment, academic progress, and more. We would all benefit from such collaboration. We are also open to exploring opportunities for inter-institutional initiatives. We look forward to working with OGPE and UD. In the interim, we offer the following recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

- Challenge and empower the Vice Provost and OGPE with providing strategic leadership for graduate and professional education at UD.
- Ensure that OGPE has funding and personnel sufficient to enable it to meet the challenge and provide the necessary leadership.
- Give serious consideration to reorganizing OGPE as a “graduate school” under the leadership of a Graduate Dean. We believe that this would be instrumental to UD’s achieving the goals for graduate and professional education set out in *The Pathway to Prominence*.

Charles Caramello  
*University of Maryland*

Karen DePauw  
*Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University*

Henry Foley  
*Pennsylvania State University*