

# **A Proposal to Enhance Graduate Education and Research through Restructuring of Graduate Education at Saint Louis University**

**By**

**Manoj S. Patankar, Ph.D., Interim Provost**

## **Introduction**

This document presents a brief context for research and graduate programs at SLU, focuses on structural limitations in achieving the University's potential, and presents a proposal to restructure graduate education.

The entire SLU community is invited to comment on this proposal. All comments will be reviewed by a Faculty Senate Task Force and a succinct, synthesized document will be presented by the Executive Committee of the Senate to the Administration. The Task Force will present the pros and cons of the proposal, and it may or may not present an alternate solution. The President will make the final decision.

## **Brief Context**

In order for all the academic deans to fully own the responsibility to grow graduate programs and research, they need to have administrative flexibility and resources. This section presents strategic and budgetary contexts for the proposal to restructure graduate education.

## **CONSIDERATIONS FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH GROWTH**

The Graduate School was built to foster the development of research and graduate programs across the University. Over the past two decades, the Graduate School has been successful at creating processes and policies that did not exist and at building the overall quality of graduate education and research at SLU. The Graduate School created a culture of graduate education across the campus and provided the resources and information that individual departments and colleges lacked.

Because of the work of those in the Graduate School and across the University, SLU now has a culture of excellence in graduation education that permeates throughout every department/college/and program and can provide a foundation for addressing the opportunities/challenges we face today. These challenges include increasingly specialized areas of study, rapid shifts in areas of knowledge and application, the need to bring together interdisciplinary teams to address global challenges<sup>1</sup>, alternative funding sources not previously accounted for, multiple funding streams, increased expectations for more sophisticated admissions and marketing materials, and the complex nature of grant and research management. In the last two decades the University, and our world, has become more complex and requires more agility to respond to the emerging needs for innovative research and graduate programs.

For example, the Graduate School had continually taken on additional responsibilities for managing the increasing complex nature of research including pre- and post-award management, research administration, and compliance. Upon review, two structural changes were made in

---

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved on October 24, 2009 from <http://www.millennium-project.org/millennium/challeng.html>

response to the growing needs of the SLU research community. First, research administration and compliance were transferred to a new position, Vice Provost for Research, to ensure that SLU provide faculty with needed administrative and compliance functions. Second, in fall 2009, the Vice Provost for Research, the Interim Provost, and the Vice President and Chief Financial Officer collaborated on a proposal, based upon the recommendations of the 2009 Research Task Force established by Dr. Weixlmann, that would standardize the indirect cost distribution, reward researchers who are successful in obtaining external funding, and provide new internal funding opportunities in the form of seed grants. This proposal was approved by President Biondi, S.J., and the President's Research Grant Program<sup>2</sup> was created. This program has attracted over 100 proposals in the first round. This, however, is not enough. Overall, we need to accelerate our research<sup>3</sup> productivity and grow total external funding if we wish to build our research competitiveness among the research extensive universities and ultimately be recognized as the finest Catholic university in the nation. We should be able to grow our external funding from the current \$66M/year to \$120M/year over the next five years. In order to achieve this goal, we must seriously and objectively examine growth opportunities, invest in our faculty and research infrastructure, and continue to ensure that our organizational structures are optimal for today's internal and external opportunities.

The changing nature of Saint Louis University and our world also compels us to look at how we provide graduate education. A review of the distribution of graduate programs across the University indicates uneven development across the University. In particular, the College of Arts and Sciences has 17 graduate programs, while all other colleges have a total of 19 graduate programs. This distribution suggests that the development of "traditional graduate programs" has languished outside the College of Arts and Sciences. At the same time, professional graduate programs (e.g., Law, Business, and Nursing) have flourished in both enrollment and quality. The latter pattern indicates that individual colleges and schools who build high quality professional graduate programs now have the knowledge and track record to build research-oriented graduate programs alongside their practice-oriented programs. At the least, the patterns described above suggest that it is time to re-examine the administration and budgeting of our graduate programs and consider structural changes that incentivize the development of graduate programs across all colleges and schools.

Historically, graduate students financed their education by serving as staff for undergraduate courses. Because of this shared role expectation, stipends could be uniform across a university. Universities could also presume a single payer or revenue stream for the support of graduate education including stipends and other costs associated with their graduate programs. In today's rapidly changing world, graduate programs (in general) must compete with industry and other programs for quality students and funding. Graduate students not only contribute to undergraduate courses, but also support individual and departmental research agendas. Funding is often a mix of university and grant dollars requiring programs to balance revenue objectives with academic goals and funding requirements. All of these conditions create a tumultuous environment that requires constant negotiation. They also suggest that if we strengthen our ability to respond to these changing demands and build upon the foundation provided over the

---

<sup>2</sup> President's Research Grant Program authorization is attached

<sup>3</sup> Research productivity at SLU includes scholarly endeavors across all disciplines and in all formats/contexts, regardless of the level of external funding.

past two decades by the Graduate School, we can be more competitive in attracting the best graduate students and be more productive in our research, thereby further enhancing the reputation of graduate education at Saint Louis University.

It is also imperative that we move quickly to take advantage of SLU's unique economic window. A three-year review of our fiscal performance from FY07 through FY09 indicates that we have been successful in managing our costs and growing our net revenue; as a result, we have generated resources to support investments in new and existing academic programs and research. During FY09, we were deeply concerned about our fiscal health due to the impact of the global financial crisis and economic recession. Tuition is our single largest source of revenue and the financial crisis and recession posed a serious threat to our ability to meet our revenue targets. With full cooperation across the University, we reduced costs and ramped up enrollment and marketing efforts. Collectively, we succeeded in not only enrolling one of our largest and best academic freshman classes, but also in exceeding our net tuition revenue target. A recent *Chronicle* survey<sup>4</sup> showed that 30 percent of respondents failed to meet their revenue goals. In the same *Chronicle* survey, 62% of the respondents said they did not think the worst of the financial pressures on their institutions had passed. Hence, SLU is in a relatively strong financial position at this time and is well positioned to make strategic decisions such as those described above. Looking forward, however, the impact of the recession and financial crisis may not be over, so that SLU may not be so well positioned in years to come.

It is important to note that our budget for FY11 will be determined by the first week in December and presented to the Board of Trustees in the week of December 7<sup>th</sup>. The longer we wait for the final decision regarding various initiatives, the harder it will be to include those initiatives in the FY11 budget cycle. The initiatives that are not included in the FY11 planning will not be reconsidered until FY12 and will be vulnerable to further fluctuations of the financial climate. Moreover, University Administration acknowledges that restructuring our graduate education would require investments in individual schools and colleges; however, those investments cannot be authorized if the decision to restructure is not reached early enough. The budget and planning meetings are scheduled every Tuesday, beginning October 27, to progressively finalize the FY11 budget. It is also important to note that budget requests are submitted based on needs throughout the University, and they are prioritized by the President's Coordinating Council, Executive Staff and the President.

In sum, the key considerations for obtaining growth in our graduate programs are:

1. The Graduate School Structure and Budgetary Impact: The current Graduate School model is constructed such that all the revenue from graduate programs is attributed to the Graduate School, and most of the expenses are borne by the program's home department. For a given graduate program, the home department markets the program, provides the faculty, offers most of the courses, and provides mentoring to graduate students. The Graduate School handles the admission application processing and general recruitment (not admission decisions), offers assistantship support (including orientation and some training of teaching assistantships), and candidacy advising (formatting guidance for

---

<sup>4</sup> Blumenstyk, Goldie. "In a Time of Uncertainty, Colleges Hold Fast to Status Quo". *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 25, 2009).

theses and dissertations, as well as logistics associated with thesis/dissertation defense and qualifying exams). The Graduate School functions as a vehicle for dissemination of assistantships, approval of new graduate programs and courses, appointment of graduate faculty, and periodic review of graduate programs. Since the graduate programs appear on the Graduate Dean's portfolio, the Graduate Dean, in consultation with the Graduate Board, makes decisions regarding the continued viability of specific programs.

Proposals for new graduate programs typically seek graduate assistantship support from the Graduate School and faculty resources from the respective college/school. Therefore, the two resource requirements are sought from two different units, so a new graduate program may not receive the necessary joint resources even if it is approved. Consequently, the graduate programs may start with less than optimal resources, yet be held accountable for performance expectations outlined in the original proposal.

*Benefits of Restructuring:* Restructuring will allow the individual college/school to build a comprehensive focus on their education and research goals and meet the expense needs with their total net tuition revenue (a combination of undergraduate, graduate, and professional program net tuition). They will be able to package their requests for faculty and assistantships lines with respect to the total net tuition revenue record, and if those are not approved, quickly adjust their programmatic performance expectations.

2. Strength of Graduate Assistantships: Graduate Assistantships are fundamental to the growth of graduate programs. An examination of the SLU's graduate assistantships indicates two issues: disparity in the distribution of assistantships and lack of competitive stipends.

Current distribution of graduate assistantships indicates that 233 out of a total of 345 internally funded assistantships are allocated across 17 programs in the College of Arts and Sciences. On average, the College of Arts and Sciences has almost 14 assistantships per graduate program, while the average for all other units is 4 assistantships per program (a low of zero per program and a high of six per program). While many of the assistantships in the College of Arts and Sciences support core educational goals across the University, other colleges and schools could also benefit from additional teaching and/or research assistantships.

Currently, SLU's graduate stipend is at about \$12,000 per year. Comparatively, the National Institutes of Health stipends range between \$27,700 and \$35,600<sup>5</sup>; in biological and medical sciences, the stipends range around \$20,000-\$30,000<sup>6</sup>, depending on the type of institution<sup>7</sup>. Further, assistantships in disciplines such as engineering, health care, and business need to be competitive with entry-level jobs in the industry. Equally important, SLU's assistantships do not offer a discipline-specific differential in stipends—regardless of whether the student is in humanities, basic sciences, health sciences, or engineering, the stipend is set at \$12,000 per year. Consequently, our ability

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.training.nih.gov/stipends.asp>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.wendychao.com/science/stipends/2007-8.html>

<sup>7</sup> Anecdotal information from principal investigators

to attract top graduate students is severely restricted when individual departments and colleges are not able to repackage graduate funding.

*Benefits of Restructuring:* While restructuring does not guarantee base budget increase for any one college/school, it does provide each college/school the flexibility for internal reallocation as well as rationale for base budget increases in the subsequent years.

3. Restricted Ability to Offer Graduate Tuition Discounts: Currently, it is extremely difficult<sup>8</sup> to waive graduate tuition for students who are supported by external grants. Consequently, a principal investigator has to seek funding for the full tuition, stipend, and health insurance. The ultimate cost of a research assistantship, even with the current stipend, could easily approach \$40,000. In contrast, most other universities discount or waive the tuition for externally-funded assistantships, which enables the distribution of external funding directly to the students in the form of more competitive stipends to a larger number of graduate students.

*Benefits of Restructuring:* Ultimately, a tuition discount/waiver allows a principal investigator, or other representative of the college, to hire more graduate students and build a more robust research infrastructure, thereby becoming more competitive in future grants.

4. Graduate Program Marketing and Recruitment: Currently, most graduate programs do not receive any substantive support from the Graduate School in marketing or recruitment efforts, primarily because the Graduate School does not have sufficient resources. Further, the infrastructure to process graduate applications and transcripts is much more antiquated than that in the Division of Enrollment Management, which administers the undergraduate admission process and recruitment for domestic and international students. In the absence of adequate support from the Graduate School, the responsibility for marketing graduate programs rests on individual program directors who lack the infrastructure, expertise, and time to develop marketing campaigns that appeal to today's more sophisticated student.

*Benefits of Restructuring:* Administration of graduate admission process could be enhanced and brought up to par with the current technology. Similarly, marketing efforts, including web-marketing, could be made more competitive. The individual program faculty will continue to make the admission decisions and play a critical role in shaping the marketing efforts, but the bulk of the tasks will be handled by the Enrollment Management Office. Additional resources will be added to support the enhancements.

### **The Proposal: Restructure the Graduate Programs**

The preceding analysis shows that the growth of graduate programs at SLU is constrained by the current collective configuration of graduate program administration and resourcing structure. While it is possible to address each of the considerations separately, to do so would reduce our

---

<sup>8</sup> There are some exceptions where tuition has been waived or an internal matching support has been provided, but these are not always aligned with specific college/program objectives.

ability to significantly advance graduate education and research. In order to make a much needed infusion of resources into the growth of such programs, multiple and significant structural changes are needed. Accordingly, we propose that the administration of graduate programs be restructured while creating systems that capitalize on current structures and ensure the quality of graduate education effective July 1, 2010.

Proposed changes include the following:

1. This proposal is not a cost-savings measure. It is a proposal to enhance graduate education across the University.
2. Maintain the current number of graduate assistantships allocated to the respective colleges and schools as the baseline. None of the programs would lose its current assistantship(s)
3. Maintain all current Graduate School staff with the possibility of shifting some positions to different units based upon need
4. Empower the deans of respective schools and colleges to manage their graduate programs, including growth and termination
5. Empower the deans to adjust graduate stipend levels through total unit budgeting in order to be competitive in attracting top quality graduate students
6. Empower the deans to selectively discount graduate tuition to students receiving assistantship stipends. Such decisions will be made in consultation with the Provost's Office and Business and Finance
7. Transition the admission application processing and general recruitment functions to the Division of Enrollment Management. Deans are encouraged to collaborate with Enrollment Management to develop optimum marketing strategies.
8. Immediately allocate proportional increases in each school/college's base budgets to accommodate for increased staffing, assistantship, marketing, and other costs. Such increases in base budget must be balanced against the total net tuition revenue in the respective school/college.
9. Promote the growth of 5-year integrated master's degree programs that allow students to obtain their degrees in a more cohesive format while exploring the financial aid advantages.
10. Enable faculty researchers to extend multi-year offers to their graduate assistants.
11. Modify University financial reports as follows to align expenses and revenue:
  - a. Credit revenue earned by graduate credit hours generated by each school/college (unless other agreements are reached among the schools/colleges in advance)
  - b. Equal distribution of revenue between dual graduate degree programs
12. In the future, support additional faculty and staff resources, at undergraduate, graduate and professional levels, based on the total net tuition revenue generated by the respective colleges and schools.
13. Dissolve the current Graduate Council.
14. To ensure the continued quality of graduate education and research at SLU, reconfigure the current Board of Graduate Studies into the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee (GAAC), consistent with the Undergraduate Academic Affairs Committee (UAAC). Specific responsibilities of the GAAC will be determined by a Transitional Taskforce, but should include review and adoption of current policies into the restructured system, approval of new programs, and periodic review of existing programs. Conduct and discipline issues may be handled at the college/school level similar to undergraduate cases.

15. Starting July 1, 2010, integrate graduate pre-commencement ceremony with their respective undergraduate pre-commencement ceremony.
16. The Graduate Student Association and Professional Student Associations should continue to support the appropriate students with administrative oversight to be determined by Transition Taskforce.
17. Integrate the undergraduate and graduate catalogs into to a single University Catalog managed by the Division of Enrollment Management.

A Transition Team will be formed at the earliest possible time to map the specific steps involved in transitioning the various functions from the Graduate School to the respective schools and colleges to ensure minimal disruption to the faculty, staff, or students. The transition may begin as early as December 1, 2009.

### **Conclusion**

Restructuring SLU's graduate programs is an essential change to capitalize on the growth potential for graduate education and research across all colleges and schools. The above proposal is consistent with our budget model and will support appropriate and incremental increase in base budgets as well as flexibility and innovation among individual deans. An equitable revenue sharing structure between units will continue to support joint degree programs and sharing of courses across units. Protecting the currently allocated graduate assistantships as baseline levels will ensure that the current graduate programs continue to operate at the outstanding levels they have to date. Adding flexibility to the stipend levels in the future will further incentivize the growth of graduate program. Overall, the University must grow its research productivity. In order to achieve such growth, the graduate programs need to be innovative, the individual deans from each school/college need to be able to fully manage their programs, and the faculty and graduate students need performance-based incentives. The proposed restructuring of the graduate programs is expected to support all these needs.