Enhancing Graduate Student Engagement: Building Connections with Faculty and Departments

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My Background

Education
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Presentation Outline
Part I: Challenges of working with graduate students
Part II: Graduate student needs
Part III: Theoretical frameworks
Part IV: Strategies to increase collaboration and enhance student engagement
Presentation Objectives

I. Understand some of the challenges and needs associated with working with graduate students
II. Identify theoretical approaches that can be applied to graduate student advising
III. Acquire advising strategies that may be applied to enhance graduate student engagement and build connections with other professionals within the institution

Part I: Challenges of Working with Graduate Students

Take a Moment to Consider
1. What are some challenges that you face working with graduate students?
2. What characteristics distinguish graduate students from undergraduates?
3. Who do you commonly collaborate with to provide services to your students?
Who is Responsible for Advising?
- Faculty Advisor
- Program Director
- Graduate Student Affairs
- Departmental Advisor

Graduate Programs Function Independently
- Graduate programs often function independently
- Graduate faculty not aware of resources within other departments
- Policies constantly changing
- No standard communication method across departments

Misconceptions About Grad Students
1. School is their primary focus
2. They will use loan or fellowship to pay for their tuition
3. Time management has been mastered
4. They understand institutional policies and procedures
5. They do not need as much guidance
6. They understand academic culture
7. Do not need as much career development support
Education Barriers

- Outside obligations
- Time constraints
- Costs
- Intrapersonal characteristics
- Navigating the institution

(Powers & Wartalski, 2021; Rabourn, Bilkutumun, & Shoup, 2018)

Online and Cohort Program Barriers

- **Online**
  - Students are located a distance away from the institution
  - May not have access to all on-campus resources
  - Do not meet with their advisor in person

- **Cohort Based**
  - Small set of students may feel more comfortable relying on each other throughout degree program
  - Miscommunication can often occur

(Schroeder & Terras, 2015)

How Things Have Always Been Done

- What you want:
  - Offer professional development opportunities at a variety of times and days
  - Provide virtual and face to face programming
  - Create diverse opportunities for student interaction
Finding Mutual Relevance

What you think is important. + What interests them. = Meaningful Engagement

Part II: Theoretical Framework

Student Engagement

• Student engagement can be perceived in two ways:
  1. Amount of time spent on educationally purposeful activities
  2. Institutional resources and activities that facilitate participation in meaningful activities

• Collaborative learning, interactions with faculty, students and the campus

(Rabourn, Brackenridge, & Shoup, 2018)
Social Integration

- Tinto (1993) asserts social integration and peer relationships influence graduate student success
- Socializing new students with knowledge, skills, and values of the professional field
- Engaging students on a holistic level

Chickering and Gamson’s 7 Principles

1. Encourage student and faculty interaction
2. Increase opportunities for interchange and cooperation between students
3. Create opportunities for active learning
4. Provide prompt feedback
5. Emphasize time on task
6. Communicate high expectations
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning

Adult Learner Characteristics

- Age 25 or older
- Working full-time or part-time
- Financially independent
- Contains professional or personal obligations
- Delayed enrollment after high school (nontraditional)
- Did not complete high school (nontraditional)
 Knowles five key assumptions:
1. Self-concept
2. Experience
3. Readiness to learn
4. Orientation to learning
5. Motivation to learn

Adult Learning Theory

Let’s Take a Pause
What are your graduate students’ greatest needs?

Part III: Graduate Student Needs

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20

21
Important Functions of Graduate Advisor

- Reliable Information source
- Departmental socializer
- Occupational socializer
- Role model
- Advocate

Effective Academic Advising

- Developing a program of study
- Selecting relevant courses
- Navigating policies and procedures
- Offering resources

(Original, 2015)

Advising Needs

- Addressing graduate student needs are essential to support academic retention and engagement
- Needs may vary by program
- Qualitative study with 13 adult learners enrolled in graduate programs examined advising experiences with junior faculty advisors

(Powers & Wartalski, 2021)
Advising Needs (Online, Cohort, & Traditional)

Interrelated Themes

1. Value is attributed to advising
2. Trust is key
3. Individualized and Flexible

[Schroeder & Teres, 2015]

Mentoring

• “A process in which one person, usually of superior rank, achievement and prestige, guides the development of or sponsors another person, who is the protégé.”
• Process may take form of counseling, confirming, sponsoring, protecting, role modeling, networking or informing
• Primary and secondary advising
• Disciplinary differences

[Noy & Rex, 2021]
Take a Moment to Consider

1. How do adult learners engage with traditional age students on campus?
2. What initiatives does your program have in place to engage graduate students?
3. What strategies have you found successful towards increasing graduate student engagement?

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Orientation Programming

Holistic programming and intervention

Orientation programming should have explicit goals:

- Familiarize students with staff and faculty
- Introduce students to the program requirements and curriculum
- Provide students with a variety of resources
- Connect students with the university community

Departmental Advisor

- Connect students to opportunities within the campus community
- On campus resources
- Connect students to faculty within the program
- Liaison between faculty and other departments to offer students information
- Develop programming (workshops, webinars... etc.)
Faculty
• Instrumental in facilitating major curriculum-based opportunities
• Inter-professional experiences
• Career development
• Mentoring
• Professional networking

Students
• Student led organization or groups
• Monthly seminars
• Student participation on committees
• Celebrations
• Graduate research symposium

Needs Assessment
• Offers students a voice in the program
• Each cohort is different
• Focused targeted programming
• Meaningful resources and programming
• Identify areas of issue
• Comprehensive student feedback is collected over time
Communication is Key

Are your stakeholders included?

Departments

Faculty

Advisors

Students

Approach for Sharing Information

Target: Target your audience

Include: Include stakeholders in the process

Reach: Reach students on their time and terms

Engage: Engage students in the process

Create a Retention and Engagement Plan

Holistic focus

Create measurable goals and objectives

Data-driven approach

On-going assessment
Increase program accountability
Assessment of the extent orientation goals have been achieved
Effectiveness of programming
Identify what works and doesn’t
Documentation of outcomes

Program Evaluation

Questions

References


References


