Best Practices in Strategic Graduate Enrollment Report
Prepared by the Western Michigan University Graduate College
2022
Goals of this Report
Staff of the WMU Graduate College prepared this report with the following goals:

- Summarize the state of graduate enrollment at WMU
- Compare our enrollment with national data
- Offer information on trends in graduate education and suggestions for improvement
- Outline recruiting and retention efforts of the Graduate College

Overview of Graduate Enrollment at WMU
WMU is a learner-centered, discovery-driven, and globally engaged institution. Graduate education is an integral part of this mission. We offer over 150 master’s, specialist, and doctoral degrees and graduate certificates in 6 academic colleges. Approximately one out of every five students at WMU is a graduate student, and they are enrolled in programs offered on campus, at regional sites, and online.

Graduate enrollment at Western Michigan University has been in a steady state of decline since 2012, except for a slight increase of less than 1.0% in Fall 2017. In the last 5 years, WMU has lost one quarter of our graduate students. The biggest decline in graduate headcount occurred in the Fall 2019 (8.0% decline) and Fall 2020-COVID-19 Impacted (10.9% decline) semesters. Between Fall 2019 and Fall 2020-COVID-19 Impacted semesters every college experienced a decrease in headcount that ranged from 6.5% to 21.6%, except for the College of Health and Human Services, which remained flat.

[Table showing WMU Enrolled Students by College - Fall Terms]
Residency

WMU classifies student residency status into three categories: Non-Resident Domestic, Non-Resident International, Resident. The chart below illustrates the graduate student enrollment levels disaggregated by these categories. The top section reflects a mostly positive trend in Non-Resident Domestic while the middle section, Non-Resident International, reflects a decline recently reversed, and the bottom section shows a consistent decline in Resident.
Non-Resident Domestic
The Non-Resident Domestic graduate student enrollment levels have shown promise with a steady increase in this population since 2012, except for a slight dip in 2018. It is fortunate that the change in residency policy implemented in 2020 that does not allow students to change residency status after admission does not appear to have had a significant effect on non-resident domestic enrollment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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WMU Enrolled Students by Residency Status - Fall Terms
Non-Resident International
The Non-Resident International graduate student enrollment levels showed steady growth from 2011 to 2015, with a peak of 1,008 Non-Resident International graduate students. Between 2016 and 2020, this group of graduate students experienced a decline, with COVID-19, political climate and travel restrictions significantly impacting international student enrollment in 2019 and 2020. In Fall 2021, there was a slight recovery in international graduate enrollment, providing optimism for the future of this category.
Resident
In the last ten years, resident graduate student enrollment levels have steadily declined, with the steepest decline in 2020 and 2021 (COVID-19 impacted). In 2012, 4,047 resident students were enrolled. Since then, the number of resident graduate students has dropped by 1,500 students or 37% to 2,547 in 2021. As resident students typically comprise 70% or more of our graduate enrollment, this decline has a significant negative impact on enrollment.
Racial/Ethnic Groups

Enrollment of graduate students from historically underrepresented groups at WMU has remained relatively stable over the last ten years, with a decline in 2020 and 2021. The number of Hispanic graduate students has increased, but enrollment of black or African American graduate students has decreased.

All BIPOC Graduate Student Enrollment

![Bar chart showing WMU Enrolled Students by Student Level (Primary Majors) - Fall Terms]

American Indian or Alaska Native Graduate Student Enrollment

![Bar chart showing WMU Enrolled Students by Student Level (Primary Majors) - Fall Terms]
Asian Graduate Student Enrollment

Black or African American Graduate Student Enrollment
Hispanic Graduate Student Enrollment

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Graduate Student Enrollment
Graduate Degree Programs

Over 60% of graduate students at WMU are in master’s level programs. Doctoral students make up 25% of graduate students. Non-degree seeking (11%), Graduate Certificate (2%), and Specialist (<1%) students comprise the remainder of graduate enrollment.

Doctoral Students

Master’s Students
Graduate Certificate Students

Graduate Non-Degree Seeking Students

These are students who are not in a program but have a bachelor’s degree and take any course (undergraduate- or graduate-level).
National Data and Trends in Graduate Education

National data shows a number of reasons for concern. While WMU graduate enrollment has declined, according to industry experts graduate enrollment is increasing nationwide, despite COVID-19 implications. In May 2021, Ruffalo Noel Levitz (RNL), a higher education enrollment management company, shared that the National Student Clearinghouse reported year-over-year graduate level growth of 4.5% for the Spring 2021 semester, following a 2.7% increase in enrollment for fall 2020. They note that this increase in graduate enrollment occurred despite the impact of the pandemic on undergraduate enrollment (-4.5% for both fall 2020 and spring 2021).

**WMU Graduate Enrollment Over Last 5 Years**

- **Total grad enrollment down 25%**
- **Ave. Annual % Change**
  - WMU -6.75%
  - National +1.2%
  - R2 +0.4%
WMU Graduate Enrollment **decreased** 10.7% between F19 and F20

National Graduate Enrollment **increased** 2.5% between F19 and F20

Additionally, in October 2021, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) found that total graduate enrollment experienced a 2.5% increase between 2019 and 2020 after minor levels of growth since 2010. Moreover, CGS also reported that R2, Doctoral: High Research Carnegie Classification institutions increased enrollment by 2.7% after minor levels of growth since 2010. While WMU experienced an average annual decline of 6.75%, national graduate enrollment increased an average of 1.2% annually and R2 institutions increased 0.4% annually. (CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees)
Applications to WMU graduate programs have declined over the last several years, while national graduate applications, including those to R2 institutions, have been on the rise.

**WMU Grad Applications decreased 1% between F19 and F20**

**National Grad Applications increased 7.3% between F19 and F20**

(Applications to R2 Institutions increased 4.5%)

Graduate enrollment nationally is predicted to continue to increase (Aslanian Market Research, 2019), so while WMU is seeing a reverse trend there is a reason for optimism, if we review our practices and revise as needed to meet student needs. In addition, WMU should consider that increased graduate enrollment could make up for declining undergraduate enrollment over the next decade.
General Considerations

- **Graduate Education at WMU**
  Graduate education is critical to the identity of WMU as a learner-centered, discovery-driven, and globally engaged institution. Graduate education supports the research and innovation missions at WMU. Graduate students contribute to much of the scholarly work from the institution; they collaborate with faculty to advance faculty research and scholarship; their presentations, publications, and creative works enhance the reputation of WMU; and they represent the institution when they move on to the workforce. Some graduate students serve in service roles at WMU and provide clerical, clinical, and support duties. Graduate students also support the teaching mission of WMU. Graduate teaching assistants provide instruction in lectures and lab sections or they assist faculty with teaching efforts. In many instances, the roles of graduate teaching assistants allow faculty to teach upper-level specialty courses or to spend time on their scholarly work, which would not be possible if faculty were responsible for teaching all courses.

- **Graduate Student Applicant Pool**
  Nationally, the number of high school graduates is expected to peak with the Class of 2025 before entering a period of modest decline through the end of the projections in 2037 (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education [WICHE (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education)], Knocking at the College Door, 10th edition, 2020). Regional differences are forecasted, but all areas of the country are expected to grow over the next few years then decline through 2037. The Midwest is expected to see modest growth into 2025 before declining through 2037. In Michigan, the high school graduation rate is projected to drop 15% between 2019 and 2037, one of the largest declines in the nation. Based on this data, it is more important now than ever that we make concerted efforts at ensuring viable, high quality, competitive, and desirable graduate programs.

- **Graduate Admissions**
  The graduate admission process is distinct from that of the undergraduate admission process. In the graduate admission process, decisions are made by faculty in the department where the graduate program is housed. The faculty members make acceptance decisions based on a variety of factors, not just the quality of the application. Admission factors can include faculty time, availability of faculty in specific areas of research interest, availability of funding, class sizes, internship space, etc.

- **Graduate Assistantship (GA) Funding**
  While Graduate Assistantship (GA) funding levels have decreased since Fall 2020, the overall proportion of graduate students on assistantships has remained steady at 18-20% since Fall 2015. Nonetheless, faculty in some areas are concerned that the flat or reduced level of GA funding hinders their ability to recruit students and suggest that WMU’s GA stipend levels are lower than competitor institutions, and both are valid points for programs where students expect funding. At WMU, the vast majority (consistently over 80%) of GAs are funded from university funds, as opposed to grant funds, which is the case at many other institutions. National Data on doctoral graduates reveals that WMU supports more doctoral students on teaching assistants and many fewer on research assistants than do our peers or all institutions (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2020). Comparison of WMU data for all doctoral students in fall 2021 with national data for doctoral graduates in 2020 (the only population for which national data available), shows that WMU has many more self-funded doctoral students than other schools. This is likely
a reflection of the types of graduate programs at WMU, which include large professional and education programs and fewer STEM programs.

- **Departmental Recruitment and Practices**
  Recruitment for graduate programs is generally department specific. In most instances, graduate program advisors are tasked with recruiting efforts for their graduate program, although most do not have the time or training for these activities. College-level recruiting is generally focused on undergraduate enrollment. Another issue is that graduate programs in many instances have not reviewed their practices recently and continue to operate as they have in the past. This is a problem because graduate education has evolved, outdated practices may not meet current student needs and interests, and department operations must take into account changes including declining undergraduate enrollment, reduced class sizes and course offerings, and adjustments in research productivity.

- **Academic Program Review**
  Regular, honest evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each graduate program is necessary to ensure continuous improvement. Faculty must be assured that information from an honest review of their programs will be used to facilitate success of the program and not as a reason to reduce funding and support. In addition, serious consideration of enrollment capacities for graduate programs would support intentional recruiting and admission practices.

**Enrollment Strategies** It must be mentioned that graduate education at WMU is broad, diverse, and complex. We offer over 150 master’s, specialist, and doctoral degrees and graduate certificates in 6 academic colleges. There are differences in accreditation status, admissions practices, research and scholarship expectations, type of students served, curricular design, and more. We recognize the unique nature of each graduate program and offer the following analysis with the understanding that not all information pertains to every graduate program.

We are concerned that the declining graduate enrollment may mean that some WMU programs are not meeting the needs of current students. With a sustained reduction in numbers of high school graduates and a good economy, the number of traditional students entering graduate school immediately after college continues to decline. National reports show increasing numbers of underrepresented minorities and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in higher education (CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees). In addition, contemporary learners, defined as students 25 years or older, have been a dominant presence in graduate school for many years now, and their importance to the sustainability of programs is increasing (ref, maybe something from EAB?). Most doctoral students will not obtain jobs in academia, highlighting the importance of teaching transferable skills instead of offering only an academic track (NCSES Survey of Earned Doctorates). WMU, like most universities, has built graduate programs that may not really serve the wants and needs of these students. Changes are necessary to ensure sustainable, thriving graduate programs. The following is evidence to support the fact that WMU must be responsive to the wants and needs of graduate students to be competitive. The Graduate College regularly reviews national trends and recommendations. After careful consideration of the data, we offer the following strategies and best practices.
Graduate College Recommendations

Student-Centered Focus
WMU must shift from being university centered to student centered in order to ensure successful graduate education. This fits with the University learner-centered pillar and requires examination of all aspects of graduate programs (from lead generation to admission to graduation) keeping in mind the wants and needs of current students. A priority should be to develop and maintain high-quality, student centered, service-oriented programs and practices. Numerous reports have shown that current students, adult learners in particular, actively seek the following:

Convenience- flexible options and programs that work with their schedules
Credentials- require a return on their education
Completion time- they feel an urgency to finish quickly
Cost- the program must be affordable

EAB Adult Learner Themes

Roadmap: Three Themes from EAB’s Research

Survey of current and prospective students of graduate, bachelor’s degree completion, online, and certificate programs

1. Adult learners require a return on their education.
2. Adult learners are extremely pragmatic.
3. Adult learners require flexible options.

Course Delivery
WMU must address the modality of main campus graduate programs, which is a consideration that does not require financial commitment. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the conversation around online instruction and made it a viable option. It is time to consider offering graduate programs in the modality that makes the most sense for the discipline, whether in person, hybrid, or online. Wiley Education Services recommends a strategic online portfolio with clusters of related programs. This takes advantage of shared programs and broader market reach. WMU needs to have discussions about establishing anchor programs and overlapping course offerings among multiple online programs, in a coordinated fashion.
Graduate student preference for online or partially only/hybrid courses over fully classroom courses continue to grow, and the pandemic is predicted to enhance this preference. These formats do not work for all disciplines, so departments are encouraged to consider what fits their program needs. There is also increasing competition in graduate programs. Online programs are showing the most growth, but ground-based programs are also growing. Programs are encouraged to meet the needs of their students with regards to course format, time of classes, and course sequences. Current student needs may be different from those of the past.

**RNL 2021 Preferred Instructional Format**  
WMU Fall 2022 Graduate Instructional Format

There is a growing demand from graduate students for fast-tracked programs with mini semesters. **WMU’s infrastructure is slowly shifting to allow for shorter than traditional semester and session formats with the creation of the M.S. in Cybersecurity.**
WMU must address the time of graduate course offerings. In Fall 2021, 68% of in-person graduate classes were offered before 5 p.m. Scheduling of graduate classes must take into account the need for some sections to be offered after 5 p.m. to ensure that working professionals can enroll in the program. Moreover, strong consideration should be given to encouraging graduate programs to consider offering hybrid or weekend courses. This is more important for some graduate programs, but all should consider whether courses are offered at times that make sense for their students.

**Stackable Credentials**
WMU should consider ensuring that programs include stackable credentials and should make policies to facilitate progression from one degree to the next. Graduate certificates should easily stack into master’s degrees that easily stack into doctoral degrees. More of the newly approved graduate certificate programs are being created with this mind. In addition, many graduate programs have developed accelerated graduate programs that allow them to retain their best undergraduate students.

**Recruiting Our Own Students**
WMU must focus additional recruitment efforts on the existing WMU undergraduate class as prospective graduate students. We are our largest feeder institution, with 40% of graduate students coming from the WMU undergraduate population. This is supported by Ruffalo Noel Levitz as a best practice, and Hanover Research asserts “undergraduates are more likely to apply to graduate programs at the same institution from which they earned a bachelor’s degree if they are incentivized to do so in some way.” Focused efforts can include covering the application fee and the development of a campaign for accelerated graduate degree program pathways.

**Recruiting and Retaining Diverse Graduate Student Populations**
WMU is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion and graduate education practices must reflect this commitment. According to a 2021 report published by the Council of Graduate Schools, the number of first-generation and Pell grant recipient graduate students continues to rise nationally. Similar to the trends of first-time graduate enrollment among underrepresented students of color, there were healthy increases in total graduate enrollment among these groups.
nationally. Total enrollment of graduate students across the nation increased between Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 among the following populations (CGS, 2021):

- Latinx (Nationally +11.3%, WMU –9.0%)
- Asian/Pacific Islanders (Nationally +9.6%, WMU –1.0%)
- Black/African Americans (Nationally +8.1%, WMU -14.9%)
- Caucasian (Nationally +4.2%, WMU –7.6%)
- American Indian/Alaskan Natives (Nationally +2.3%, WMU –7.6%)
- Native Hawaiians/Other Pacific Islanders (Nationally +2.3%, WMU –66.6% represents a decline from three to one student, 2019 to 2020)

**More support and resources for first-generation and BIPOC graduate students are needed to ensure success of a diverse graduate student population.** At WMU, we have not seen the same increase in these student populations as other schools. We should review retention practices to ensure that they meet the needs of these students. A new mentoring initiative through the Dream Fellowship Program is aimed at supporting a small group of graduate students and a variety of initiatives through the Graduate College are being offered and developed.

**Holistic review of applications** by graduate programs is encouraged in order to ensure unbiased evaluation of all applicants. Programs may need to revisit their admissions review practices to remove biased practices and may want to consider training new faculty in holistic review. (See the [WMU Graduate College website](#) for resources on holistic review) In addition, consideration of additional challenges often faced by these students, including the need to work full time and the demand of family obligations.

**Prior Learning Assessment**
In January 2020, WMU approved the Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Opportunities for Graduate Students policy that allows working professionals to apply for potential credit toward their graduate program for their prior learning and experience based on evaluation of a portfolio of competencies. Graduate programs, particularly in fields where students often have professional experience, should consider implementing the PLA policy.

**Admission Practices**
We encourage programs to review their admission practices to ensure they are meeting student needs. Factors to be considered include the number of application deadlines, dates of deadlines, and application decision timelines. **Approximately 64% of graduate students apply only to one or two schools/programs** (RNL, 2021) and **more than 80% accept the first admissions offer** (RNL, 2021). Students expect to receive notification of acceptance more quickly than ever, with **46% expecting a decision within seven days**. On average, once an application is started, **WMU averages 56 days before a decision is rendered**. It is important to notify applicants about when they can expect an admission decision. WMU has nine major graduate application deadlines for the fall semester.
Graduate Assistantship Funding
In some fields, there is a higher expectation for university funding than others. At WMU, we have funded 18-20% of graduate students over the last decade. An average of 80-85% are university-funded teaching, service, and research assistants, while less than 10% are funded from grants. Without doubt, offers of university funding help graduate recruitment and yield, particularly in some disciplines, but it is unlikely that the amount of GA funding from university sources will increase in the near future.
Given that departmental GA allocations are capricious and often are not distributed until late in spring semester, we encourage programs to separate admission and funding decisions. Rather than denying admission due to lack of GA funding, qualified students should be admitted and allowed to make their acceptance decisions with consideration of their financial situation. University support for graduate assistantships has suffered significant budget reductions recently. Academic colleges should use the limited Graduate Assistantship dollars strategically, instead of relying on historical distribution. **We encourage graduate programs to separate the admission process from funding decisions and admit qualified students as soon as an admission decision is made.**

While university GA funding is likely to remain limited for the foreseeable future, there are **best practices to maximize use of the limited departmental GA allocations:** 1) The Graduate Catalog indicates time limits for GA funding, with master’s students receiving funding for up to two years, with a possible third year, and doctoral students receiving funding for up to five years. We have not adhered to this limit, and many students are funded beyond this time frame. While we do not advocate removing funding from students who exceed the limit, programs are encouraged to reduce their time to degree and facilitate timely degree completion with annual reviews. Certainly, students should not extend their time in the program because they have an assistantship, which is sometimes, although rarely, the case. 2) Graduate students should be encouraged to apply for Graduate College fellowships and for external funding. 3) Faculty are encouraged to fund their graduate students from external grants, when possible.

**Professional Master’s Programs**
WMU should consider adding more professional master’s programs to our portfolio. Professional master’s programs are a CGS best practice that emphasize technical training and business skills and often lead directly to jobs, making them desired by prospective students. Students in these programs expect to pay for the program, so the need for graduate assistantships is low, and the tuition revenue generated can allow colleges to support other high-impact initiatives.

WMU should pay attention to **national trends** in growth and decline in specific disciplines. Not all programs in areas showing national decline are suffering from decreasing enrollment, but this is another factor for consideration as we look at strategic enrollment and resource management. Graduate programs with consistent decline in enrollment in national reports should develop a plan for dealing with the issue.
Figure 7. Trends in First-time Graduate Enrollment by Broad Field of Study, Fall 2010 to Fall 2020

Note: Trends were developed based upon institutions that provided data for all years 2010 to 2020; therefore, the numbers of first-time enrollments do not match data in the tables.

Source: CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees
Steps the Graduate College is Taking to Assist with Graduate Enrollment

Graduate College Mission (from Strategic Plan 2015-2020): The Graduate College, the institution’s primary advocate for graduate study, promotes academic excellence by providing leadership in shaping graduate policy, assisting faculty in guiding and mentoring graduate students, and integrating services that help to recruit, retain, support, and graduate a diverse population of students who are becoming accomplished and ethical scholars, researchers, and professionals within and across disciplines.

Graduate College Vision (from Strategic Plan 2015-2020): The Graduate College strives to be the primary resource for graduate education at WMU, serving students, faculty, and staff. We endeavor to foster intellectual and scholarly advancement and professional development in a welcoming and inclusive environment and aspire to be a recognized and respected global leader in best practices for graduate education.

Graduate College Commitment to Recruitment and Enrollment: WMU Graduate College is committed to investing in these efforts and serving as leaders in graduate recruitment. The Graduate College plans to meet prospective students where they are. We will collaborate with university partners to maximize our strategic enrollment efforts, strengthen recruitment efforts, and cultivate diversity in the following ways.

Communication Plan

Inquiry Communication Process and Plan

1. The Graduate College has led the way in developing a process to handle graduate inquiries, making it easier for departments to follow through on communication with prospective students. For example, every department in the College of Education and Human Development has an automated message that is sent after a prospect completes the inquiry form. Our goal is to increase participation in automated communication at the inquiry level across the campus. This type of automation allows departments to ensure that prospective students receive timely communications without overburdening faculty and staff.

2. The Graduate College implemented a communication plan for individuals who have inquired about a graduate program. Every two weeks, the Graduate College sends email messages encouraging these individuals to complete a Graduate Application for Admission.

3. Since WMU is the biggest feeder for WMU graduate programs, messages highlighting the Accelerated Graduate Degree Programs (AGDPs) are emailed to undergraduate students enrolled in complementary bachelor degree programs.

Applicant Communication Plan

1. Every two weeks, the Graduate College emails students who have an incomplete application due to missing checklist items required by the university or academic department encouraging them to complete the application. Our enrollment assistants
experience increased call volume after these messages are sent, suggesting that this is an effective practice.

Enrolled Student Plan

1. Every month, a graduate student newsletter is emailed to approximately 3,700 students who are enrolled in at least one credit for the semester. Nearly 700 WMU staff and faculty who engage with graduate students receive a separate customized monthly newsletter. Each newsletter includes relevant information such as updates and reminders on important policies, activities/events, funding and professional development opportunities and other items.

2. The Graduate College has a significant on-campus presence, and our staff are available to assist graduate students with walk-in hours of Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. In addition, we are available by phone, email, or WebEx.

Enhanced Recruiting Efforts

1. The Graduate College continues to serve as a resource for academic departments who are interested in hosting virtual information sessions to provide details on their programs for prospective students. The Graduate College partnered with departments and hosted ten sessions in the Fall of 2021 and Spring 2022 semesters, with approximately 80 participants. These events yielded 45 applicants.

2. The Graduate College continues to develop digital marketing strategies by working with an approved third-party vendor to increase awareness of WMU graduate education. While we do not offer financial support for marketing of individual graduate programs, we are able to work with departments that are willing to make this investment. The Graduate College reallocated traditional recruitment dollars to support digital marketing. The GC invested $14,740.13 from 10/1/21 through 6/30/22 which resulted in over 9,430 site visits and over 500,000 impressions across YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.

3. Noting the availability of financial support is the #1 factor in deciding which program graduate students will apply to (CGS, 2021), the Graduate College started offering the WMU Graduate College Welcome Scholarship. Prior to each semester, we invite newly admitted, self-pay graduate students to apply for the $2,000 scholarship. During 2019-20 academic year, we awarded $50,000 and 64% of the students enrolled at WMU.

4. The Graduate College will continue current efforts aimed at increasing our underrepresented students with the Director of Recruitment and Retention focusing on minority recruitment and retention. This includes cultivating relationships with HBCUs.
and attending minority-serving conferences. The Graduate College also offers fellowship opportunities geared towards recruiting and retaining a diverse pool of graduate students.

5. To supplement correspondence with the Graduate College via email and phone calls, we piloted a Live Chat feature on the graduate application and Graduate College websites. We now provide Spirit, the Chatbot, to answer basic questions, ensuring that there is live interaction with constituents. In addition, the Graduate College Enrollment Assistants are available to answer more complex questions.

6. The Graduate College offers campus tours for prospective students. Graduate Ambassadors conduct these tours, to allow prospective students to connect with a current graduate student.

Department Website Review

1. Most prospective graduate students begin their graduate program searches on an institutional website or landing page (RNL, 2021), with 70% of prospective graduate students browsing the site and evaluating our programs before they actually apply (EAB, 2021). Because of the importance of ensuring our webpages make a good first impression and include the necessary information for prospective students to apply and enroll, the Graduate College initiated a review of graduate program websites during FY21/22, with a goal of incorporating nationally-recognized best practices. Graduate College staff are reviewing each graduate program website to gather information and provide recommendations. Considerations included application deadlines (timing and number of cycles), application material requirements, required test scores, and time to decision. Again, we will stress the importance of programs being student centered and ensuring that deadlines are reasonable for students and are not initiated simply out of convenience of the reviewing committee. Current students have many options and seek convenience and speed when applying, according to EAB.
Program Development

1. The Graduate College continues to cultivate additional partnerships with neighboring institutions for 4+1 bachelor to master’s degree programs and to increase the number of accelerated graduate degree programs at WMU. These programs are attractive, in part, due to the cost savings for the student.

Retention Efforts

1. The Graduate College will continue to expand its retention efforts including tracking students in academic difficulty and programs with high attrition. We began last year to contact students in academic difficulty to offer support and assistance; this communication is now automated through the Registrar’s Office and encourages students in academic difficulty to seek assistance.

2. The Graduate College will continue to expand student success workshops targeting mental health, success strategies, networking, and individual development plans through our G.O.L.D. (Graduate Opportunities for Learning and Development) initiative. Writing support remains an issue, and in Fall 2021 the Graduate College initiated three Writing Circles (two in-person, one virtual) that amounted to 63 touchpoints during the semester. These will continue in 2022-23. We continue to
work with other units, including the WMU Writing Center, to ensure appropriate support is available to graduate students.

3. The Graduate College is developing mentoring resources and student success initiatives through the Dream Fellowship Program that is aimed at providing peer-mentoring support for a small group of graduate students, with the goal of increasing participation in the future. We are also piloting a variety of other initiatives. These efforts are especially important as we expand access to graduate programs to students from underrepresented groups and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Additional Efforts

1. The Graduate College has begun surveying graduate students admitted to WMU who did not attend in order to understand the reasons they chose to go elsewhere or not enroll in graduate school. We conducted a survey of 702 grad students (start terms of F20, SP21, F21), and while the survey only had a 10% response, it does provide some interesting observations. The primary reasons for not attending WMU included: (a) Program modality (in-person, online, hybrid), (b) Funding/cost, (c) Location, (d) Lack of communication from department, and (e) Personal reasons. A full report of the survey results is available through the Graduate College SharePoint site at https://wmich.sharepoint.com/sites/GRAD/SitePages/Home.aspx.

2. The Graduate College also conducted 12 focus groups with 49 graduate students who started a graduate program between Fall 2020 and Fall 2021 to identify how they learned about WMU, how WMU became a viable grad school option for them, and what their experiences were with the application, acceptance, and enrollment process. The data is being analyzed and a report will be shared soon.

3. The Grad College worked with University Advancement to participate in the annual fund campaign, which resulted in an increase in donations compared to previous years. Most of this funding is used to offer writing support, graduate student fellowships and awards, and other student success initiatives.

4. We are optimistic that the information from regular Academic Program Reviews will be valuable for understanding opportunities and threats to graduate programs.

5. The Graduate College regularly offers data to graduate programs so they can stay aware of trends in enrollment, completion rates, time to degree, etc. The Graduate College website includes Admissions and Enrollment Resources that include information on useful Cognos reports, recruitment articles, and recruitment best practices document. Also, the Graduate College worked with Institutional Research to develop Academic Program Profiles, which are available at Grad Share.

6. The Graduate College remains current on WMU trends, national trends, program audits, and other information to inform the provost and academic deans about programs with potential to grow and those that should be considered for combining or reorganizing.
Specific Considerations for Discussion

- WMU goals for the number and type of graduate students needed to fulfill our mission must be defined.
- Deans should require approval of changes to admission procedures, including removal of application cycles, intentional decreases in admitted students, or deciding not to run a cohort, since these faculty decisions can have significant effects on enrollment. The provost and graduate dean should be informed, so these factors can be considered in enrollment forecasting discussions.
- Each graduate program should evaluate and determine their capacity and factors impacting capacity.
- WMU should consider increasing capacity in high demand programs (i.e., health professions and professional master’s programs) and monitoring programs with low demand.
- Investment in additional career-starter and accelerator programs (i.e., Supply Chain Mgmt.) is recommended.
- Investment of additional resources in a Graduate Recruitment team either centrally in the Graduate College or within the academic colleges is recommended. Centralizing graduate recruitment into the Graduate College would allow synchronized and consistent communication, would reduce faculty workload by shifting duties to college-assigned recruiters while still allowing for program-specific expertise, and would recover some functions lost in the restructuring of EUP.
- Colleges and departments may find success in inviting alumni to assist with recruitment, yield, and retention efforts. Connecting prospective and current students with graduates can be an effective way to engage alumni and strengthen recruitment and retention practices.
- Graduate programs
- Annual review is an effective practice in supporting graduate student success, leading to better time-to-degree and fewer student issues. The Graduate College has outlined best practices for annual reviews in a document in Grad Share.
- HR (Human Relations) should be encouraged to consider offering a tuition benefit for graduate-level courses for employee spouses and dependents.
**Additional Information**

The following tables provide information on enrollment trends for graduate programs at WMU.

### Graduate Registration Trends by Class Level and Demographics

**University-wide**

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Graduate Registration Trends by Class Level and Demographics
College of Arts and Sciences

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Graduate Registration Trends by Class Level and Demographics
College of Education and Human Development

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# Graduate Registration Trends by Class Level and Demographics

## College of Engineering and Applied Sciences

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College of Fine Arts

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Graduate Registration Trends by Class Level and Demographics
Graduate College
(Primarily non-degree seeking students)

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Graduate Registration Trends by Class Level and Demographics
Haworth College of Business

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Graduate Registration Trends by Class Level and Demographics
College of Health and Human Services

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