

Roles and Responsibilities of the Graduate Coordinator

At Wichita State University, Graduate Coordinators play two critical, overarching roles in the development and maintenance of the highest quality of graduate education. First, they have the primary responsibility for maintaining the overall academic integrity, quality and viability of the graduate degree program they serve. To do so, they must 1) function as the primary point of articulation between the graduate degree program, the academic department and college, the graduate school, and the graduate student, to coordinate and implement the policies and procedures for graduate education; 2) facilitate the recruitment and admission of a diverse group of highly talented graduate students; 3) monitor the progress (and lack of progress) of students through the program, 4) prepare annual program assessment reports indicating achievement of relevant learning outcomes, placement of students, graduation rate, and changes made to improve the program; 5) model and encourage excellence in scholarship and teaching; 6) monitor the condition of the graduate program through the periodic review of the graduate curriculum design and implementation, and 7) work to enhance graduate student professional development opportunities.

Second, Graduate Coordinators serve a vital role in promoting the educational and career success of individual graduate students. They usually serve as the initial advisor for all newly admitted graduate students. In this capacity, they are centrally involved in nearly all decisions that impact the quality of graduate student life in the critical period before students are assigned a permanent advisor or before students find a mentor and form a committee. In many cases, they often continue to provide students with advice and assistance on the development of professional networks, career choices, and funded fellowship opportunities throughout the time the student is in the program. In addition, they work with advisers to provide useful feedback to maximize the likelihood of timely completion of the degree. They may also serve as an ombudsperson within the department or program to address the concerns or grievances of graduate students.

Successfully discharging this complex role requires that the Graduate Coordinator be given adequate resources to meet the various administrative demands associated with it. Recognizing that the time demands vary based on program size and structure as well as the specific role of the graduate coordinator, appropriate support must be provided for fulfilling all of the responsibilities associated with evaluating applications and processing admissions, matriculations, and graduation paperwork; conducting recruitment efforts; tracking students; and overseeing the advising of the graduate students. In situations where the responsibilities and program enrollment warrant, coordinators should be provided with the following kinds of support:

1. financial remuneration
 - a. in the form of additions to their base salary
 - b. in the form of administrative stipends
2. release time from teaching, research, or service obligations
3. travel funds to attend conferences for student recruitment purposes
4. staff support both within the department office and/or through new centrally provided admissions and student record software
5. access to the resources that support the recruitment of graduate students such as campus visits for prospective students, competitive stipends and benefits packages, and conference travel for students to present their research and scholarship.
6. access to resources for assessing their program(s).

The provision of these resources is a shared responsibility of the graduate program/department, the academic college, the Graduate School, and central administration. Currently, the Graduate School supports coordinator activities related to the access to resources mentioned in #3, #5, and #6 above.

Current Graduate School Bylaws indicate that Graduate Coordinators are recommended to the Graduate Dean by the department chair. The Graduate Dean consults with the Academic Dean in making the final appointment. Graduate Coordinators must hold, as a minimum, associate standing on the Graduate Faculty. It is desirable that the role be filled by a tenured faculty member with rank of associate professor or above for a number of reasons: 1) the large commitment of time associated with their role, 2) the important role they play in leading curricular and programmatic change, and 3) their role as a mediator in various graduate student/faculty disagreements.

It is vital that the important work accomplished by Graduate Coordinators is recognized in departmental and college merit review and promotion and tenure processes. Department and college criteria for merit, tenure and promotion should identify the value placed on the role of the Graduate Coordinator.