

## Blueprint for Excellence

### 1. Vision, Mission, and Goals

#### A. Executive Summary

A university's reputation as a major research institution depends in large part on its graduate program offerings. An effective graduate school plays an essential role in providing the university with a solid research foundation, which, along with the teaching and service provided by graduate faculty and graduate students, assures it of a place among prestigious research institutions in the country.

The **vision** of The Graduate School is having a stronger, more active role in helping USC define itself as a top ranked research university whose graduate faculty, students, and programs are nationally competitive based on high standards of excellence.

The **mission** of The Graduate School is to provide leadership and support that will assure excellence of graduate students, faculty, and degrees and innovation in graduate programs and research that will benefit the university, the state, and the nation.

Traditionally, our primary support of the University's goals has been through oversight and leadership in setting and maintaining high academic standards and by providing integral administrative support through the management of graduate admissions, record keeping, and clearance of graduate students for receipt of their degrees. Often referred to as "the conscience of the university," these functions emphasize the regulatory and oversight activities that safeguard the integrity of our programs but at the same time give graduate schools a reputation for "controlling" academic units. To the contrary, by carrying the burden for these responsibilities, the Graduate School empowers the various academic units at USC to concentrate their efforts on teaching and research.

As the role of graduate students in the University's mission of research, teaching, and service has expanded during the past decade, we have provided additional direct support to graduate students and to graduate faculty through workshops, seminars, and presentations that offered pedagogical support, research ethics seminars, scholarly writing and dissertation workshops, and research proposal writing training. Our doctoral hooding ceremonies, Graduate Student Day, and increased direct involvement with graduate fairs and events of the Graduate Student Association have markedly increased the visibility of graduate education at USC. Our increased presence on campus has been mirrored recently by our improved ability to offer graduate classes and degree programs across the state, nationally, and internationally through our Extended Graduate Campus.

The Graduate School's blueprint for the next five years shows how we will increase our support for the university's intention to achieve a prominent place among major research universities while we continue to look for new ways to bring the benefits of graduate student research, teaching, and service to the citizens of South Carolina and others.

- Goal #1 To assume a proactive role in enhancing the reputation of USC as a top ranked research institution with high standards.
- Goal #2 To enhance graduate student experiences through high quality professional development.
- Goal #3 To increase public and university awareness of graduate student education and the impact of graduate student research.
- Goal #4 To dispel the perception of The Graduate School as simply a regulatory body while continuing as the steward of graduate student records and quality assurance.

B. Goals, Initiatives, and Action Plans

- Goal #1 To assume a proactive role in enhancing the reputation of USC as a top ranked research institution with high standards.

Initiative 1.1 The National Research Council will collect data this year to be used for the national rankings of public universities conferring research doctorates.

*Action Plans*

- The report from the Yardley Research Group will be used to make decisions about our departments' participation in the NRC rankings.
- The Dean of the Graduate School will serve as Institutional Coordinator and will be the primary contact for NRC. The Graduate School will work with departments providing data and facilitating the collection of additional data through surveys.

Initiative 1.2 Develop new guidelines for program development and review which will involve members of the Graduate Council and Graduate School in the processes.

*Action Plans*

- Conduct a review of the admission process and “the way we do business” to increase quality and efficiency.
- Decrease the vulnerability of data security by eliminating individual departmental admissions processes. Those departments which have their own application procedures do not have the level of security that has been established for the Graduate School.
- Create a template for tracking documents as they proceed through the approval process (internal to USC and external to CHE and SACS) which can be used to facilitate communication between the Graduate School and the academic units.

Initiative 1.3 In addition to attending state, regional and international recruiting fairs, The Graduate School will expand its recruiting activities.

*Action Plans*

- Establish an automatic electronic follow-up to potential students when they make inquiries on our website.
- Provide financial support for on-campus visits/activities.
- Create a step-by-step guideline for faculty in their recruiting efforts
- Provide a university-wide template for a graduate assistantship letter of offer
- Increase stipends, tuition supplements, insurance benefits, and other benefits (e.g. subsidized housing and child care).

Goal #2 To enhance graduate student experiences through high quality professional development.

Initiative 2.1 The Graduate School has already put several significant initiatives in place over the past three years. At this point, the further development and expansion of these programs will help to broaden the impact of The Graduate School.

*Action Plans*

- Continue and add to the GRAD 800 series of courses
- Establish a collaborative partnership with the Center for Teaching Excellence on the Preparing Future Faculty program
- Broaden the variety of topics for workshops and Friday Forums

Goal #3 To increase public and university awareness of graduate student education and the impact of graduate student research.

Initiative 3.1 To increase awareness on the part of South Carolina's citizens and legislators.

*Action Plans*

- Foster the growth of F.O.R.G.E. – SC by working with the research institutions in SC to raise the visibility of graduate student research.

Initiative 3.2 To increase awareness of the part of university faculty, students and administrators.

*Action Plans*

- As part of a year-long Centennial Celebration of The Graduate School, events and activities will focus on the various aspects of graduate education as well as the historical changes that have occurred.

Goal #4 To dispel the perception of The Graduate School as simply a regulatory body while continuing as the steward of graduate student records and quality assurance.

Initiative 4.1 To facilitate a better understanding of The Graduate School's many roles and responsibilities.

*Action Plans*

- Prepare a year-long Centennial Celebration of The Graduate School which highlights various roles of The Graduate School and its support of graduate education.

Initiative 4.2 To enhance communication with colleges' administrative personnel

- Continue and expand on the bi-annual personalized newsletters which report graduate activity and statistics related to the colleges for each of the deans.
- Create a council of graduate directors

## **II. Planning and Funding Model**

### **A. Budget System Used Now**

In the past 4 years, 10 people have resigned or retired from their jobs at The Graduate School. Some have been replaced, some people have been hired for modified positions, and others, because of budget restraints have not been replaced. Recurring funds have accumulated because some of these people who retired had many years of service in the system. Now is the time to use what we have preserved, to hire additional personnel.

With our expansion of events and responsibilities as described in the earlier section, it is necessary to create new positions (perhaps 3 to 5) to fulfill those assignments. Highly respected Graduate Schools at research institutions have approximately 25% - 40% more personnel than we have doing the work of the Graduate School.

B. Plans for Enhancing Revenue

Working with the development office, the Graduate School would like to get involved in the up coming campaign and seek additional funds to increase financial support of graduate students thereby making us more competitive when it comes to recruiting highly qualified graduate students.

C. Plans for Revising the Unit's Budget Allocation System

It has been my experience that the budget person has allocated the amounts based on past endeavors. Based on the changes referred to in this document, more funds will be allocated for hiring classified and unclassified personnel. The expansion of recruiting will necessitate reallocation in two areas: purchasing software to facilitate the automatic responses to potential students and travel for classified personnel to attend appropriate workshops/conferences. Non-recurring funds must be allocated for the Centennial Celebration and increased efforts in F.O.R.G.E. - SC. Funding for graduate student travel support needs to be increased as well. Once the renovations scheduled for this summer are complete, less money will be allocated for repairs to the building.