

# Excellence in Graduate Education: Programmatic Issues

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Excellence in graduate education depends upon outstanding performance at both the individual and the program level. Even if all the faculty are superb teachers, a student receives an excellent graduate education only when elected programs achieve excellence as such; this document will offer ideas for ways to promote program excellence. A more complete understanding of the learning process has superseded the traditional model of graduate education that sees no further than the individual apprenticeship. As its *sine qua non*, individual mentoring remains at the heart of imparting graduate knowledge and is most effective within the context of a holistic learning environment that trains in all realms of professional life.

The most important principle of an excellent program is to train students in all the skills needed for professional life. In recent decades, the expectations in teaching, practice, and service that new graduates face have escalated. Students can no longer achieve success by mastering research and technical skills in graduate school while waiting until they are on the job to learn the art of teaching, the ethics of practice, the responsibilities of service, and the navigating of professional organizations. These abilities must be built into the graduate school process in order to turn out prepared professionals.

## 1. General issues: The program should provide the following:

- Resources necessary for smooth functioning and optimal interaction of students and faculty. This will ordinarily involve leadership, staff assistance, faculty graduate advisers, space, and student financial support.
- Proactive recruiting of students in California, nationally and internationally.
- Student funding that is adequate to allow candidates to advance to their degrees in a timely fashion.
- Diversity of race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and nationality amongst the faculty and student body.
- A formal program for ensuring that faculty members are sensitive to student morale.

- An actively engaged mentor with up-to-date knowledge about program requirements for all students.
  - Monitoring of student progress throughout their graduate careers, including dependable mechanisms to counsel them and prevent them from falling behind or becoming otherwise marginalized. Students need regular feedback about their performance in the program.
  - Communication regarding requirements for moving through the program, including expectations of performance and time to degree that are discussed fully and frequently.
  - A placement strategy that is proactive, providing useful information on the placement process and assisting students in preparing placement materials. Before job interviews, students should be briefed and given the opportunity to practice mock interviews.
- ## 2. Research: All programs should provide the following:
- Courses in basic and advanced methods appropriate to the discipline.
  - Opportunities for students to acquire research skills in a broad range of methods.
  - Opportunities for doing research as early as possible in the graduate career.
  - A balance of breadth and depth of specialized learning, so that students can master the foundations of their discipline as well as have access to specialization as early as feasible.
  - Specializations only on those topics that have sufficient faculty, regularly taught courses, and a solid placement record.
  - Capable faculty, especially those of stellar reputations, who are available to students for courses and mentorship.
  - Regular and thorough evaluations of all faculty members' classroom teaching and mentorship practices. Such evaluation should be part of the faculty member's personal record and a factor in promotion and advancement.
  - Encouragement for students to adopt their own research agendas, according to the standards of the discipline or profession, without allowing individual faculty members to divert graduate student efforts towards faculty research projects.

- Encouragement and resources for clusters of faculty and students to form scholarly communities.
  - Information for students about how to find extramural funding. The program should encourage them to do so and should assist in the application process. In some disciplines, it is appropriate to have courses in grant writing.
  - Fostering and funds for students to present or publish papers as early as feasible in the graduate process.
  - Encouragement of a balance between healthy competition and collegial cooperation among students through *both* formal and informal means.
  - Education of students in the ethical issues faced by scholars and practitioners in the discipline.
  - Adequate office space, laboratory equipment, and other necessary physical contexts for graduate work.
  - Allocation of all resources, including fellowships, internships, assistantships, office space, and mentorships, purely based on merit.
3. **Teaching: All programs *that prepare students for positions that will require teaching* should address the following:**
- Students should be trained in the arts of teaching with as much seriousness as for research.
  - *Training, mentoring, and experience should instill both the foundations of pedagogy and learning with the practical activities of teaching.* This should include classroom skills, grading principles, effective assignments, and sensitivity to race, gender, and class differences.
  - There should be practical and symbolic parity between students preparing for teaching careers and those preparing for purely research careers. This should be encouraged through both formal and informal mechanisms.
  - Assignments for teaching assistantships must balance the department's needs to staff their courses with students' needs for pedagogical training.
  - Students planning academic careers should be given opportunities to teach their own course, insofar as it is consistent with timely completion of their degree and the department's teaching needs. Departments offering graduate programs only should actively work to identify teaching opportunities for students who would not, under university regulations, be permitted to teach within their own programs.
- Students in professional doctorate and master's programs require preparation for the increasingly important instructional roles in their fields and in the community outside of formal academic settings.
  - Students should be made aware of the need and mechanisms for staying current with the latest developments in their fields.
  - All faculty should be active in creating an environment that represents the highest ethical standards.
4. **Education for professional practice: All programs offering professional master's and doctoral degrees should provide the following:**
- Accreditation by appropriate certifying bodies.
  - A balance between instruction in the theoretical and the applied aspects of the field.
  - All courses that are required for certification in a student's area of specialization.
  - Adequate resources to ensure that required clinical, field or internship opportunities are available.
  - Frequent and clear communication between program and field or internship sponsors.
  - Clear expectations of what students need to accomplish in their clinical, field, internship or practice teaching settings .
  - Frequent and clear feedback with students on their performance in clinical, field, internship or practice teaching settings.
  - Adequate opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate their skills as early as feasible in the graduate process.
  - Adequate laboratory equipment, internships, service learning opportunities, and other necessary physical contexts for professional work.
  - Adequate mentoring by practitioners in the field.
  - Recognition of the key roles played by clinical and professional faculty and supervisors in professional education and mechanisms to ensure their effective integration with the graduate program.
  - Opportunities for regular and effective communication between clinical or professional preceptors and academic program faculty.

5. **Professional socialization and training for service.**

All programs should provide:

- A formal set of practices, workshops, meetings, and publications to insure that students are fully socialized for all aspects of professional life, including a grounding in the social responsibilities, values, and ethics of their fields.
- Intellectual forums for the exchange of current and emerging ideas and debate on issues of concern to the field.
- Formal and informal knowledge about how the department, university, and profession operate. This should be accessible to all students in order to minimize the advantages that those with privileged social backgrounds have over those of modest experience.
- Opportunities for student participation in all program governance to the extent that it is appropriate.
- Resources for students to attend and present at professional meetings, along with providing adequate information about how to benefit from attendance.

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