Strengthening the Role of Graduate Program Directors

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Abstract

One of the responses to the demands of graduate education in the United States has been the development of faculty directors of graduate programs within academic departments. The title for this position varies widely, but it is most commonly called Graduate Program Director (GPD). The GPD serves at the departmental level and is key in the administration of graduate programs in the U.S. and in a number of other countries. However, little scholarly attention has been brought to examination of these positions although there has been acknowledgement that the faculty members holding them play key roles in student recruitment, socialization, retention, and program completion. This article is the first presentation of multi-institutional survey data on faculty members serving in this role. The survey found that the role is only partially formalized. About half of the survey respondents reported that there were written job descriptions and university-wide policies related to this role. Survey respondents reported a wide range of responsibilities, but rather limited resources to assist them in this role.

Keywords Director of graduate studies · Graduate director role · Graduate education · Graduate program administration · Graduate program director · Higher education administration

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Graduate Program Directors (GPDs) play a central role in the administration and success of graduate education in U.S. higher education institutions. They are the faculty members within an academic unit who are responsible for various activities that support the recruitment, admission, and retention of graduate students and attend to the continuing programs of graduate education. The authors of this article are former graduate deans, who have interacted with graduate program directors and have studied their roles at various universities.

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Literature Review

In 1998 a disciplinary group issued a report entitled *What do directors of graduate education do?* based on interviews and visits to six institutions (Ad Hoc Graduate Education Committee, 1998). They noted that these positions had emerged over the previous decade and that the process of institutionalization had been slow. In her study of doctoral education attrition, Lovitts (2001) observed that graduate directors play important roles for graduate students by providing orientations, serving as a source of information about program requirements, and integrating students into the department. Ortega (2003) argued that faculty graduate directors have an "enormous impact" (p. 51) on graduate education through student recruitment, providing advice to new students, connecting students to peers and faculty, socializing students into departmental norms, and providing program leadership. She noted that graduate director-ship tends to be viewed as a service obligation despite the importance of the role. She stated, "It is a role with a poorly defined professional identity, minimal prestige, and few rewards" (Ortega, 2003, p. 53). The article presented a quality model statement of the graduate director role developed for the University of Missouri - Columbia along with a discussion of profes-sional development activities for GPDs. This description presented a realistic appraisal of the roles and responsibilities of this professional position.

Data collected over a ten-year period at the University of North Carolina at Greens-boro (Petersen, Chesak, Saunders, & Wiener, 2017) provided the first insights into the GPD role based upon the results of surveys. In that study those persons holding these positions reflected a lot of variation across programs with regard to the manner of selection, orientation, resources, recognition, and responsibilities. Written documents to formalize the nature of the GPD role were not a standard feature of the position, and evaluation of the graduate program was not typically a central component of the wide range of role responsibilities.

The limited scholarly attention paid to the GPD role stands in striking contrast to the more extensive literature on departmental chairs and heads, who contribute in different ways to the success of graduate education. These administrative positions are generally well institutional-ized in American higher education institutions with established written policies about respon-sibilities and compensation. There is a rich literature on the chair's role that goes back decades (e.g., Doyle, 1953; Hancock, 2007; Roach, 1976; Tucker, 1981 Macfarlane, 2011) while little such literature is found regarding the GPD.

Accreditation, Standards and the GPD

We believe that the multiple responsibilities of the GPD are required for the smooth operation of graduate programs and the success of graduate students. With the importance of these respon-sibilities, one might wonder if the regional accrediting agencies have established any standards in this regard. An examination of the websites of the six regional accrediting bodies in the U.S. did not uncover any direct policies that pertain to GPDs and their activities. Further email inquiries to regional accrediting agencies regarding policies relating to the GPD confirmed that such policies do not exist. A representative of the Higher Learning Commission stated, "As an institutional accrediting agency, [HLC] does not offer guidance to that level. We expect an institution to follow its own guidelines and policies regarding directors of its graduate

programs" (personal communication, April 30, 2019). The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities has stated that it … "does not have any specific guidelines for such a role. Given the diversity of disciplines and programs this would be challenging", (L. Steele, personal communication, April 30, 2019). An example of some degree of guidance relating to such middle management administrative roles can be found in the policy from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, which states a requirement for" … a clearly articulated and transparent governance structure that outlines roles, responsibilities, and accountability for decision making by each constituency, including governing body, administration, faculty, staff and students" (*Standard VII Governance, Leadership, and Administration*, 2019).

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), which is concerned with the administration of graduate programs, does not directly address the role of the GPD but does articulate a need for standards that will provide for quality graduate education. The CGS states that a university must have a sufficient number of faculty members to administer each program and that the graduate school has the responsibility to determine graduate faculty status and must also specify the various responsibilities relating to students (Siegel, L., Sowell, R., Sullivan, T., Tate, P., & Denecke, D. 2004).

Therefore, given the lack of specificity by the accrediting bodies and the Council of Graduate Schools on this topic, it is up to each university to provide guidelines and policies relating to the management role of the GPD.

The Study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gather data on various aspects of the GPD in the administration of graduate programs within academic units. The article provides information on the graduate program director role, who holds it, related university policies and resources, directors' priorities and concerns, and recommendations to strengthen the role. The goal was to determine if there are adequate policies and resources to support the role and what additional changes should be made to ensure effective administration of programs and fair treatment of graduate program directors. Approval to conduct this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board of the authors' institution.

Sample

We collected these data through an internet survey of graduate program directors in Alabama, North Carolina, and Virginia during the spring of 2017. A total of 353 questionnaires were completed by graduate directors from a total of 26 institutions. Because not all questions applied to all survey respondents and some GPDs failed to answer some questions, the number of respondents for individual survey questions varied.

Overall, the respondents came from a diverse range of institutions with 52.3% of them working in programs that offered doctoral degrees. They also represented a wide array of disciplinary areas. The areas with the largest concentrations of respondents were education (15.9%); social and behavioral sciences (15.9%); biological, natural, physical, and mathematical sciences (14.7%); health professions (13.5%); and humanities (10.1%).

Data Collection

A graduate dean in each of the three states was recruited to email all the graduate deans in their state and ask them to forward an attachment to each of their graduate program directors. The attachment explained the purpose of the research, invited their participation, and included the link to the survey. We used Qualtrics software that allowed us to ensure that respondents did not complete more than one survey and permitted respondents to complete the survey only partially and then to return to it later to finish answering the questions. Because the email addresses of all graduate directors in these three states were not available, we used the anonymous survey link feature of Qualtrics. This approach allowed potential respondents to access the survey through a link posted on a website or placed in an email attachment. Respondents, however, remained anonymous so it was not possible to identify those who completed the survey.

The survey included a wide range of questions about the graduate director role including title, existence of a job description, existence of university-wide policies, length of term, selection criteria, preparation process, responsibilities, resources provided for the position, means of communicating with graduate students, and biggest challenges. The survey generally took less than ten minutes to complete. Skip logic was used to move respondents to appropriate questions. When graduate directors were asked to select the biggest challenges they faced, the order of the responses provided in the question was randomized.

Because an anonymous survey link was used and the number of graduate directors who received the invitation was unknown, it was not possible to calculate a response rate. It appears that some graduate deans did not pass along the attachment, and institutional policies limiting surveys prevented distribution for at least one university. A follow-up email thanking those who had completed the survey and encouraging others to participate was sent to the network of deans for distribution to graduate directors. In addition, one of the researchers contacted graduate deans at some institutions from which there had been no responses and encouraged the distribution of the email attachment to graduate program directors.

The questionnaire required respondents to choose answers from a pre-formulated list of possibilities that had been developed from a previous study on GPDs (Petersen et al., 2017). Each question provided a final open-ended response to solicit and invite any additional items that were not in the pre-formulated list with an explanation for their inclusion. Therefore, data consisted of both quantitative responses that enabled identification of the percent of the respondents who selected each of the items and qualitative responses that reflected the comments. The qualitative responses to the questions ranged from 23 responses to 133 responses with a mean of 63 responses. In the findings we have noted specific comments and have also identified themes from those comments when approximately 20% or more of the comments voiced similar opinions.

Findings

Characteristics of Graduate Program Directors

Quantitative Findings GPD positions were typically held by faculty members. Nearly half (45.8%) of the survey respondents held the rank of professor, and over one-third (37.7%) held the rank of associate professor. About one-tenth (9.4%) were assistant professors; and another 7.1% held other titles and positions and included lecturers, academic professionals, and clinical

faculty. More than one-quarter (27.1%) of the respondents were 60 years of age and older. About one-third (32.9%) were 50–59, and nearly as many (30.2%) were between 40 and 49. Just one-tenth (9.8%) were between 30 and 39. Respondents were nearly evenly split between males (51.5%) and females (48.5%).

Qualitative Comments While the overwhelming majority of GPDs were faculty members in their departments, a small number indicated that they were administrators who had graduate program director responsibilities along with their other responsibilities. Some were responsible for graduate programs across a school or campus, while others were associate deans affiliated with their academic school or with the graduate school.

Titles and Appointment to the GPD Position

Quantitative Findings When asked about their title, almost half (45%) identified themselves as a Graduate Program Director (GPD), while about one-quarter (26.3%) reported having the title of Director of Graduate Studies. Several other titles were also reported. These titles were generally some combination of the terms graduate, program, director, and coordinator.

The questionnaire asked if rank, length of service, graduate teaching experience, or other factors were used in selecting the graduate program director in the respondent's program or department, and respondents could check all factors that were appropriate. The most often cited factors were graduate teaching experience (65.7%), followed by rank (56.8%) and length of service (42.9%).

Nearly three-quarters (73.7%) of the graduate program directors were appointed by their chairpersons. The remainder were elected to the position (6.6%), volunteered (6.0%), or were appointed by other means. Some had been selected by their school or department deans, and a few had been appointed after an external search.

Just over half (52.5%) of GPDs reported that their terms were indefinite. The next largest group (19.5%) reported a 3-year term. The remainder had terms of 1 year, 2 years, four years, or five and beyond. Some stated that there was also the possibility for renewal after completing the first term.

Qualitative Comments Nearly half of those commenting cited a wide variety of other factors as also relevant to their appointment. Among these were administrative ability, willingness to serve, previous experience on graduate committees, past experience with other graduate duties, and organizational and people skills.

Preparation for the GPD Position

Quantitative Findings Respondents were asked to report all the ways in which they were prepared for their position as a GPD. Table 1 presents the means of preparation organized in the order of frequency of selection. Conversations with the department head or chair and with the previous graduate program director were the only forms of preparation for the GPD position for more than half of the respondents. Between 30 and 40% reported that their preparation included reviewing existing material covering departmental procedures (39.5%), role expectations (37.8%), a handbook (36.1%), and information about available resources

Table 1 Graduate program director preparation

Which of the following were used to prepare you for your work as a graduate director in your department? (Select all that apply)

Responses	Percentage	Number
Conversations with the department head or chair	70.2	210
Conversations with the previous graduate director	67.6	202
Review of departmental procedures	39.5	118
Review of role expectations	37.8	113
Handbook	31.4	94
Information about available resources	31.4	94
Suggestions for time/priority	15.7	47
Other (please explain)	14.4	43
Nothing	11.4	34

Total of 299 respondents

(31.4%). Only 15.7% reported receiving suggestions for time prioritization, and 11.4% reported receiving no preparation whatsoever for the GPD role. Others reported learning from prior years on the graduate committee, assistance and information from the graduate school, and meeting with other graduate program directors across the university. Other survey items showed that written job descriptions were made available to 51.6% of the respondents. Fifty-one percent reported that there were university-wide policies related to the position.

Qualitative Comments Some comments indicated that the graduate school played a major role in preparing them for their roles as a GPD. This occurred through an orientation, workshop, or meetings arranged by the graduate school. A second theme was that experience in serving on the Graduate Studies Council helped prepare them for the duties that would be required in their new position.

Responsibilities of the GPD

Quantitative Findings Respondents were asked to identify all the responsibilities associated with their role as a GPD. Table 2 presents these responsibilities organized in the order of frequency of selection. Six responsibilities were nearly universal: responding to requests for program information (95.7%), reviewing and signing required forms (94.0%), advising graduate students (91.4%), coordinating admission decisions for new students (90.4%), recruiting new students (86.1%), and serving as a liaison between the department and other units (82.5%). To a lesser extent other responsibilities were also widely reported such as maintaining files on graduate students (74.2%), appointing students to assistantships (62.6%), completing final degree audits (61.6%), scheduling qualifying examinations (53.6%), and advertising assistantships (46.4%).

Qualitative Comments In addition, those who commented identified other responsibilities including the following: updating curriculum/a and administering program assessment; overseeing assistantships, fellowships, and scholarships; developing and interpreting internal graduate policy; serving on the graduate council; engaging in accreditation activities; resolving issues and conflicts; conducting student orientations; administering mentoring and professional

Table 2 Role of graduate program director

Which of the following were made available to assist you in your role as graduate director? (Select all that apply)

Responses	Percentage	Number
Responding to requests for program information	95.7	289
Reviewing and signing required forms	94	284
Advising graduate students	91.4	276
Coordinating admission decisions for new students	90.4	273
Recruiting new students	86.1	260
Serving as a liaison between departments and other units	82.5	249
Appointing students to assistantships	62.6	189
Completing final degree audits	61.6	186
Scheduling qualifying examinations	53.6	162
Advertising assistantships	46.4	140
Other (please explain)	34.8	105

Total of 302 respondents

development for students; assisting with financial matters; proctoring theses defenses; administering student travel funding; conducting student reviews; course scheduling; coordinating internship placements; and engaging in communication with domestic and international applicants.

The intricacies of evaluating international applications emerged as a theme identified by almost 20% of the respondents. In many other countries the four-year baccalaureate degree is not the standard, and a three-year degree more narrowly focused upon the major is instead the norm (Adelman, 2010). While the typical U.S. degree includes general education, in many European and non-European countries the broader general education background is provided through secondary education rather than at the university level (Inamete, 2015). These differences present an issue for the GPD, who must consider the equivalency of an international three-year degree in comparison to the four-year degree which is the standard in the United States.

Respondents further identified the handling of visa inquiries as areas requiring special expertise for which they were often unprepared. The GPD must understand how the institution evaluates transcripts from countries that have different evaluation systems and different lengths of degrees. One respondent said, "I need to know how to handle international students with visas and deadlines for finishing when different from US citizens." Another respondent said, "Immigration questions (visas, CPT, OPT, etc.) are still a learning area for me, so more training from the Grad School in that area would be helpful." This suggests that it is important for the GPD to establish and maintain good relations with persons in the international education office.

Support for the GPD Position

Quantitative Findings Respondents identified resources that had been provided to assist them in their role as a graduate program director. Table 3 presents the resources organized in the order of frequency of selection. Perhaps what is most striking about Table 3 is the rather small percentage of GPDs who reported receiving any of resources listed under this survey item. In fact, one-quarter of respondents reported that they received nothing to assist them in their role

Table 3 Resources available to the graduate program director

Which of the following were made available to assist you in your role as graduate director? (Select all that apply)

Responses	Percentage	Number
Database of students enrolled in your departmental programs	40.2	119
Nothing	25.3	75
Full-time administrative assistant	25	74
Budget	21.3	63
Part-time administrative assistant	20.6	61
Graduate assistant	18.2	54
Other (please explain)	17.2	51

Note: Total of 296 respondents

as graduate program director. They stated that the most common resource they received (40.2%) was a database that listed the graduate students enrolled in their program. One-quarter of GPDs were assigned a full-time administrative assistant. Just slightly over one-fifth reported having a budget (21.3%), part-time administrative assistants (20.6%), or graduate assistants (18.2%).

Qualitative Comments Those who commented identified other resources and training that would help them be more effective in their role. Among the other resources identified were IT support, assistance from the graduate school, and administrative support shared with the department. By far the most frequent theme was the need for more assistance with the job. GPDs, in comment after comment, cited the heavy workload that the position imposes and the need for full-time assistants, part-time assistants, graduate assistants, or others to help with the required tasks. One respondent summed it up nicely by saying that "the addition of clerical support to organize admissions proceedings and day to day clerical tasks is needed." Others commented that additional support from the graduate school would make the job easier and that technical and software support would also improve the smooth operation of the GPD.

One of the themes expressed was a need for training prior to beginning the position. Respondents cited the need for an orientation to the unique needs of the department and often cited the need for training that goes beyond the boundaries of their own department. Most asked for such training to be provided by the graduate school, while some thought it could also come from a faculty development office or through state, regional, or national conferences that addressed topics relevant to managing graduate programs.

As noted earlier approximately 51% of respondents indicated that job descriptions and policies relating to the GPD were available. Of the remaining respondents, many indicated an interest in the availability of a set of written guidelines. For example, one said "Need clearer university, college, and department policies and standards for the GPD. Historically the role has been idiosyncratic at the program level." Consistent with this direction, some indicated that they would like a handbook which would provide a unified approach going beyond the department and would present information about graduate education across the university so as to standardize the position to at least some extent. Others asked for a formal job description that would give clear guidance regarding the various roles.

Another need expressed was for a budget for recruitment activities. Those requesting this kind of support indicated that they were expected to manage program recruitment but had no funding for this activity. Some felt that travel funding to conferences for recruitment purposes was essential.

Finally, others indicated a need to support their work during the summer months. Since many of the coordinating activities must take place in the summer, the GPD is called upon to work when other faculty members are free to pursue research and other activities. Many comments indicated that lack of compensation during the summer for the GPD led to much frustration. One respondent wrote:

> Without a doubt – guaranteed summer stipend for graduate program director duties would be ideal. There are so many duties and requirements (creating spring schedules, admissions and orientation, accreditation reports) that are due over summer, and I have no guaranteed salary to handle these duties.

Another wrote:

> At this time, I am expected to work throughout the summer to manage all aspects of our graduate programs including preparation of new student fall enrollment, fall teaching assignments, TA and RA contract preparation, budgeting, and other preparations for fall semester without compensation for these duties. At present, I have to teach during the summer to obtain salary "compensation" for the work I perform as departmental Director of Graduate Studies.

Adjustments to the Faculty Role

Quantitative Findings Table 4 presents the adjustments to their faculty role that were made when survey respondents became GPDs. The table organizes the adjustments in order of frequency of responses. More than half (58.3%) reported that they were given a reduction in their teaching load. Just over half (52.5%) of the GPDs also reported an addition to their salaries or a special stipend. Nearly one-fifth (18.5%) indicated that they received no adjustments to their faculty role for serving as GPD. About one-tenth indicated that they were given a reduction of committee assignments within their department or school.

Table 4 Adjustments to faculty role

Which of the following adjustments were made to your faculty role when you assumed the graduate director position? (Select all that apply)

Responses	Percentage	Number
Adjustment to teaching or course load	58.3	173
Salary differential or stipend	52.5	156
None	18.5	55
Other (please explain)	11.5	34
Reduction of committee assignments within the department/school	9.1	27

Total of 297 respondents

Qualitative Comments Other adjustments reported in the comments included professional development funds, research/travel support, and lower expectations for service. Only one person reported receiving a reduction in the expected research responsibilities.

The granting of compensation during the year was uneven among the various institutions. While 71% provided some form of compensation, the remainder provided little or nothing. It was a common complaint that course release time was promised but not delivered or was started but reduced as time went on. Stipends were too small or were not sustainable.

Meetings of GPDs

Quantitative Findings Approximately 70% of the GPDs reported having regularly scheduled meetings with other GPDs at their institution. About one-third (35.0%) reported monthly meetings. Meetings once a semester were reported by about one-fifth (19.4%) of respondents. Twice-a-semester meetings occurred for 12.5% of the respondents. Just over 16% reported no requirement for meetings. Others reported infrequent or informal meetings as needed to discuss issues that developed. Just under half of the GPDs (45.7%) reported having membership on their graduate studies committee or council.

Qualitative Comments A small number of those who commented and held positions on their graduate studies committee reported that topics at those meetings often did not address issues pertaining to their roles as GPDs. Approximately 70% of those who commented indicated that meetings specifically for GPDs are scheduled and administered by the Graduate School.

Communication with Graduate Students

Quantitative Findings The GPDs communicated with graduate students in multiple ways. Table 5 presents the means of communication organized in the order of frequency of selection. Of the various communication methods, nearly all (97.6%) of the GPDs used email for communication. Providing individual advising sessions was also frequently identified

Table 5 Communication with graduate students

Which of the following approaches do you use to communicate information to graduate students in your programs? (Select all that apply)

Responses	Percentage	Number
E-mail	97.6	282
Individual advising	80.3	232
Website	60.2	174
Group meetings	49.5	143
Listserv	40.5	117
Flyers in your department	28.7	83
Social media	26.3	76
Other (please explain)	11.8	34

Total of 289 respondents

(80.3%). Websites were used by three-fifths (60.2%) of respondents. About half (49.5%) used group meetings. Listservs were utilized by two-fifths (40.5%), and about one-quarter reported using flyers (28.7%) and social media (26.3%).

Qualitative Comments Additional means of communication reported through comments included presentations to classes, contact with graduate student organizations, and orientation programs. Nearly 20% of those commenting relied upon learning management systems such as Blackboard or Canvas.

Challenges and Concerns

Quantitative Findings To assess the priority that GPDs assigned to the challenges that they faced, respondents were asked to identify the biggest challenge they faced in the graduate program director role and then to identify the second biggest challenge they faced. For both questions the order of the challenges listed in the question was randomized for each respondent. Given the remarkable range of responsibilities for which GPDs may be responsible, it is not surprising that, when asked about the biggest challenge that GPDs face, the most common response (43.4%) was insufficient time to balance all responsibilities. The next greatest challenge was finding financial support for graduate students (34.3%). Some cited expectations for year-round responsibilities (7.7%); lack of recognition for their work at time of promotion and tenure decisions (3.9%); and lack of preparation, training, or support as their biggest challenge (2.8%). Responses to the question about the second biggest challenge were similar to those provided for the item about their biggest challenge.

Qualitative Comments A few respondents saw the combination of the above issues as their biggest challenge; and others cited too few faculty members to offer courses, inadequate funding, access to needed data, and unclear role responsibilities. One respondent stated,

> Even within a department the different programs often approach the role differently. While some of this is in response to the unique needs of diverse programs, most, in my view, is the lack of structure that would bring some better order to how GPDs use their valuable time.

Another wrote, "We need a much clearer description of the job, policies and standards that help GPDs have a clearer understanding of the boundaries of their work and office staff to help with the technical and clerical work." From the comments, a theme emerged suggesting that departments should develop guidelines with a formal job description and written policies.

Preparation and training for the position was another common theme. GPDs asked for training on the use of databases, specialized software, and the various forms that are required. They wanted to learn more about the budgetary allocations and resources available for recruitment and support of graduate students. They called for workshops on admission policies, immigration, use of social media, thesis preparation and submission, marketing and web design, degree auditing, and training in conflict resolution. Many felt these topics could be provided by the department and the graduate school, but others felt that state and regional conferences could include topics specific to the role of the GPD.

Recommendations

Graduate programs vary widely on many dimensions including size, complexity, resource needs,extent of online course content, type of degrees offered, and budget. As a result, it is inevitable that there will be many models for the position of graduate program director. This situation is not a "one size will fit all." At the same time, the concerns of the graduate program directors reported in this survey and the experience of the authors as graduate deans suggest that institutions should take specific steps to improve the administration of graduate programs by strengthening the role of the GPD and providing needed support. Table 6 outlines the various elements that will make up a strong foundation for the effective work of the GPD. It can be used as a checklist when developing or reviewing a GPD position. The recommendations and discussion that follow match the expectations for the role of GPD with identification of the appropriate resources and rewards that are essential.

Each department should develop formal guidelines and a job description for the appointment and functioning of a faculty member in the position of Graduate Program Director. The elements should include how the hiring determination is made and by whom, qualifications for the position, tasks to be completed, resources available, time commitment, term of appointment, number of appointment terms possible, and evaluation criteria.

The newly appointed GPD should have an orientation to responsibilities of the position. Overlapping with the previous GPD and shadowing the individual will contribute to a smooth transition for the incoming GPD. During this time, meeting with GPDs from other departments should also occur so that the individual can gain a broader understanding of the role. The Graduate School or authority responsible for graduate studies should also provide an overview of the position and its interaction with other parts of the university structure.

The GPD should be given clerical assistance to help with the routine requirements of the job. Depending upon the size of the unit, this individual may have a quarter-time, half-time or greater commitment to the GPD. A graduate assistant could also serve in this capacity, but care must be taken to maintain student confidentiality.

Written guidelines governing the daily operations of the position should be made available to the GPD. This may take the form of a Standard Operating Procedures handbook. This handbook should address such areas as pertinent policies, use of application software,

Table 6 Recommendations checklist

Recommended Action	Description	Source
Formal Job Description	Roles and Responsibilities	Dept./Grad School
Orientation Program	Overlap with Previous Director	Dept./Grad School
Personnel Assistance	Clerical	Department
Written Guidelines	Standard Operating Procedures	Department
Compensation	Workload Release and/or Financial Incentive	Dept./University
Recruitment	Materials and Travel Budget	Department
Summer Compensation	Stipend	Dept./University
Periodic Meetings	With other Graduate Program Directors	Graduate School
Technical/Software	Training with Databases/Applications	Dept./Grad School
Marketing Approaches	Training on Social Media, Web, Brochures	Graduate School
Conflict Resolution	Protocol and Procedures	Graduate School
International Admissions	Training on Bologna Process, Visas, CPT, OPT, Etc.	International Office, NACES, AICE

admission standards and procedures, recruitment activities, promotion of the program, use of standard forms, program assessment, contact information for individuals and offices that are essential, and any other information deemed to be pertinent to the position.

An agreement should be formed that specifies the compensation that will be available for the GPD. While GPD responsibilities should be included in the individual's record of service, it also will take considerable time; and the holder must be provided with some form of compensation for his or her efforts. Will the individual be given workload release from teaching or research expectations? Will the individual be given a stipend above and beyond the normal faculty compensation? These issues should be addressed prior to the individual assuming the position.

Resources should be made available to assist with recruitment if that is to be part of the role of the GPD within the department. There is a need for a budget that will allow for successful completion of the responsibilities. Often this will include funds for advertising and program promotion. Development of brochures and other materials may fall into this category. Since many departments use their disciplinary conferences to recruit new students, funds should be allocated for travel and expenses related to recruitment at such conferences.

A special arrangement should be made to compensate the GPD for time spent in activities over the summer. This could take the form of an alternate schedule or a stipend for work over the summer. Currently many GPDs teach courses in the summer in order to provide funding to cover their administrative activities relating to their role as GPD. GPDs should not have to depend upon teaching courses in order to fund their administrative work.

The organizational structure relating to this position should include periodic meetings with other GPDs from across the university, and we suggest a minimum of at least once a semester. These meetings will provide the GPD with a broader understanding of the issues facing the university as a whole and the resources that may be available. Often during such meetings individuals learn about effective ways of handling issues common among those who share the same roles and responsibilities. Also, initiatives that are developed by the Graduate School or Office can be shared with the GPDs during these meetings and may help in carrying out the necessary responsibilities. Such meetings, when organized by the Graduate School, may have the added benefit of providing feedback to the graduate dean or other individuals responsible for graduate education.

Workshops that serve to assist the GPD with the technical side of the position should be sponsored by the Graduate School or Office. Application software and databases may need explanation for their most efficient usage. Degree auditing of student records and the running of data inquiries can be facilitated by proper instruction.

Marketing and program promotion that are a part of the responsibilities will often require knowledge of how to best utilize social media, the internet, and production of promotional materials. The GPD may benefit from learning how to make best use of all available resources. Workshops on these topics will enhance the individual's ability to make effective use of these avenues for program promotion.

The GPD is often on the front line when it comes to making decisions that will directly affect students' well-being. These may be emotional issues for students and may result in anxiety and tensions that can affect student progress. The GPD would benefit from learning ways to process these issues and help students solve problems that they may be experiencing. A basic education in conflict resolution may be a helpful element in this role, and workshops relating to the topic should be provided. A familiarity with the Counseling Center will also benefit the GPD.

In some departments enrollment of international students is a critical component. This may involve evaluating transcripts and determining equivalencies between a program from a university in another country and the program at one's own university. In order to gain an understanding of the differences and similarities between programs, the GPD should have access to seminars offered by the university's international office or by international credentialing organizations that are members of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (www.naces.org) or the Association of International Credential Evaluators (www.aice-eval.org). Questions are often asked of the GPD regarding the requirements for entrance into the United States and the attainment of student visas. Training on international issues is therefore necessary for the GDP who is involved in international admissions.

One additional factor that deserves discussion is the attitude of the survey respondents toward interaction with their own graduate schools. From the comments in the various open-ended questions, it was clear that the respondents found the role of the graduate school to be paramount in assisting with both the orientation of the new Graduate Program Directors and the ongoing dissemination about policies, procedures, and ever-changing doctrines. Comment after comment addressed how the graduate school had contributed to the preparation and effective functioning of the GPDs. Only in one or two comments was there an indication that the graduate school had hindered their progress or administrative activities in any way. It was also striking that in the few situations where there was not a graduate school at the university, the GPDs complained that one was badly needed. One of the survey respondents stated "We need a graduate school. The department is responsible for everything, and it's exhausting grad directors." Another made the point of indicating the need for "establishment of a graduate school at the university with standardized policies and procedures." While some institutions have moved to decentralize graduate education, Graduate Program Directors rely on their graduate schools and such support is critical to their effectiveness.

Conclusion

Even with all the frustrations expressed, the role of GDP has its rewards. As one respondent commented, "I can admit, fund, and also advise graduate students; this is time-consuming, but it is why I wanted to do the position." The GPD is a middle management role that allows an individual to serve in both a teaching function and an administrative function that contributes to the operation of the department and the success of the students. One respondent provided an overview of the position and what it takes to be successful in that role:

> More than anything else... perhaps the key to success is the ability—from whatever sources that may come—to be a good communicator and the ability to relate to/work with faculty colleagues, students, and staff... within your dept. and throughout the University... especially with the Dean of the Grad School and all the Associate/ Assistant Deans and staff in that office. Being a good "problem-solver" is a very important characteristic to have.

Graduate program directors form an important part of ensuring the smooth operation of graduate programs and success of graduate students, and the position and the persons serving in it deserve our attention and support.

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