

BEST PRACTICES for Successful Graduate Student Recruitment

Successful recruitment moves masters and doctoral students through several stages of the recruitment process but for the purposes of advancing and strengthening recruitment efforts, these best practices focus on three broad stages:

1. Program visibility and student identification stages
2. Prospective and application stages
3. Admission and enrollment stages

Recommendations below apply to masters and doctoral students, unless otherwise noted by **(Doc only)**.

Program visibility and student identification stages: Requires effective marketing through branding, consistency in communications, and drawing on a variety of electronic recruiting mechanisms. Effective marketing includes clear, concise, and complete information about academic offerings, career outcomes, and student experiences. Effective recruitment mechanisms include:

- Creating visible, accessible websites, social media advertisements, student video testimonials, visibility in high traffic areas (including public transportation), hosting receptions at professional conferences, targeted mailings, and telephone calls or text messaging campaigns;
- Developing effective pipelines and networks;
- Delivering prompt and expedient responses.

Creating visibility

- Make your website engaging, so that:
 - It is easy to find faculty interests, recent publications, and prestigious awards;
 - Potential students can find their area of interest and link directly to faculty mentors and graduate students in that subarea;
 - Diversity within your program is showcased through impact stories and articles, including pictures of faculty and students. Many students want to see evidence that you have an inclusive, welcoming environment. Post group pictures of faculty and students working together on various projects;
 - It showcases graduate student accomplishments (e.g., publications, awards), and persuasive testimonials from current students and alumni;
 - It includes a Frequently Asked Questions section;
 - A link to the graduate application and basic requirements for admission are easy to find on any page.
- Ask students to test your website! Have them conduct keyword searches on popular search engines (e.g., Google) to see if your page comes up. Does your website load quickly and is it easy to navigate? Give students a list of questions; they should be able to find the answers to each question in three clicks or less.
- Highlight key statistics prominently online and in print. Identify the percentage of graduate students receiving funding (assistantships and fellowships), placements of graduates, time-to-degree, and completion rates for your program. Provide a profile of your students, including number of master's and doctoral students broken out by gender, ethnicity, country of origin, etc.

- Create and post your Graduate Student Handbook. The handbook should include: program requirements and policies (e.g., satisfactory academic progress, criteria for allocating teaching and research assistantships, criteria for allocating travel awards, office/lab space and other resources).
- Update your handbook and website regularly.

Developing effective pipelines and networks

- Advertise your degree programs to undergraduates in related disciplines.
- Recognize the unique characteristics of underrepresented students, including first generation college students, and what sets them apart from their non-first-generation peers. Create distinctive campaigns and use regional and national databases, such as:
 - McNair Scholars <http://coenet.org/mcnair.shtml>
 - National Name Exchange (NNE) <http://apps.grad.uw.edu/nne/index.html>
 - Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS) <http://www.abrcms.org/index.php>
 - California Forum for Diversity in Graduate Education <https://www.caldiversityforum.org/>
 - The National Consortium for Graduate Degrees for Minorities in Engineering and Science (GEM) <http://www.gemfellowship.org/>
 - [Initiative for Maximizing Student Development](https://www.nigms.nih.gov/Training/IMSD/Pages/default.aspx) (IMSD), <https://www.nigms.nih.gov/Training/IMSD/Pages/default.aspx>
 - NIH Prep in Biomedical Sciences <https://www.nigms.nih.gov/training/PREP/Pages/default.aspx>
 - Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans (SACNAS) <http://www.sacnas.org/>
- Help faculty and students be effective recruiters. Develop tools such as a PowerPoint presentation about your program that they can show at conferences at other universities.

Delivering prompt and expedient responses

- Respond to student inquiries within 24 hours.
- Create an electronic prospective student request form that feeds into Salesforce. Ensure your department has an electronic communication campaign in Salesforce.
- Ensure prospective students can connect with faculty mentors and current graduate students to speak about research and the graduate student experience.
- Set up a “Live Chat” campaign and answer questions instantly for one a week or more.
- Plan an evening or weekend faculty telethon or on-line chat session to communicate with prospective students about the application process. Make it fun!

Prospective and application stages: This stage demonstrates a level of commitment and investment from prospective students and university stakeholders. Investment is both financial and non-financial activities such as:

Inviting potential students for a recruitment visit or informational session

- Bring your top recruits to campus at the same time—this builds a cohort feeling among the new recruits and increases the likelihood that they will accept your offer.
- February and March are ideal months for recruitment visits—the weather, contrast between AZ and the rest of the country is a selling point!
- Set up individual meetings for each prospective student with faculty mentors and graduate students with similar interests.
- Involve faculty and graduate students in the recruitment visit. Showcase graduate student achievements through a poster session and/or focused working group discussions which involve the new recruits. Make a presentation outlining the accomplishments and exciting directions in the program.

- Offer a mix of social and academic activities (e.g., potluck dinner at a faculty member's home, hike or softball game, small group discussions) that allow prospective students to mingle with faculty, staff and current students, getting a feel for departmental environment and culture.
- Arrange to have a graduate student with similar areas of interest take the recruit to lunch. Provide them with money for lunch at a restaurant of their choice on or near campus.
- Invite relevant colleagues to meet with potential students (e.g., your dean's office to discuss how the program fits into the college's strategic initiatives; Graduate College to discuss professional development opportunities and fellowship opportunities).
- Provide potential students an opportunity to meet with students and faculty in other disciplines, either through your own interdisciplinary initiatives or drawing on the various graduate student associations (e.g., leadership of the Black, Latino/a, and American Indian Graduate Student Associations or the Graduate and Professional Student Association).
- If the timing works for your program, you might have your recruitment week/weekend coincide with ASU's annual Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week (generally late March). There are many activities planned for graduate students during this week including a picnic, professional development workshops, TA Appreciation lunch, and research symposia.
- Follow up with emails and phone calls when the student returns home telling them you enjoyed meeting them and hope they will decide to come to ASU. Ask if there are any further questions you can answer.
- Sponsor a Graduate Networking Conference. Contact other academic units to collaborate on a joint event. For example, ASU Justice Studies and Gender Studies co-sponsored a Graduate Networking Conference for Justice Studies and Gender Studies Graduate Students.

Invite potential students to a summer research program (Doc only)

- Develop a NSF REU Program <https://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/>
- Host a California Pre-Doctoral Scholar Summer Research Experience <http://www.calstate.edu/predoc/research/>
- Host a McNair Summer Conference or Research Experience <http://mcnairscholars.com/conferences/>

Admission and enrollment stages: Requires a look beyond the application. Initiating a graduate school application is one indicator of students' graduate educational aspirations. After an application is started, here are several approaches programs can use to increase the likelihood of moving students through the stages of application completion, admission and enrollment.

Think in advance about your selection and admission processes

- What is the "right size" cohort for your program, based on the number of new students your faculty can mentor, the number of students you can support with assistantships, desired class sizes, and average time-to-degree?
- What is your yield ratio (# new students enrolled / # admits)? Use this information to determine how many students you should admit to reach your desired cohort size.
- Determine which indicators are the best predictors of success in your program (e.g., grades in specific courses, research experience). Ask students to provide a statement of purpose or personal statement as part of their application. This allows students to demonstrate strengths that might not be apparent in a quick review of GPA and test scores.
- Track your alumni! Are you placing your students in desirable positions, and what kinds of positions? If not, what changes can you make in your student selection and program requirements?
- Know your competition. Survey your peers to ascertain the stipends they offer to TAs/RAs. Do they offer fellowships? Summer support?
- Survey or call prospective students who declined your offer. Where did they go, and why did they select another university instead of your program?

- Unless you have a very early application deadline, don't wait for applications to be complete before you start reviewing for strong candidates. When you find excellent students whose applications are incomplete, contact them to indicate your interest in their candidacy and encourage them to complete the application.
- Make your admissions decisions early—before your competition.
- Make teaching/research assistantship offers early, preferably at the time of the admission decision. Review the Graduate College [TA Policies and Procedure handbook](https://graduate.asu.edu/ta-ra-handbook) <https://graduate.asu.edu/ta-ra-handbook> for items that should be included in a standard TA offer letter available.
- Look for funding sources to supplement departmental funds (e.g., university fellowships, TA in related fields of study). Make sure prospective students know funding application processes for your department.

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