

University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Detailed Assessment Report 2015-2016 Graduate School

As of: 11/18/2016 10:30 AM CENTRAL

(Includes those Action Plans with Budget Amounts marked *One-Time, Recurring, No Request.*)

Mission / Purpose

The University is dedicated to achieving excellence in undergraduate and graduate education. The University has an historic commitment to diversity and integration. Through instruction, research, and service, the University promotes regional economic and cultural development, explores solutions to national and world issues, and advances its reputation among its peers. The Graduate School offers the administrative structure, leadership, and guidance necessary to support graduate education at the University. The staff of the Graduate School works with the Graduate Council, the academic deans, and the graduate programs and faculty to provide students a superior education environment within which to pursue graduate and professional degrees.

Other Outcomes/Objectives, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Targets, Findings, and Action Plans

O/O 1: Grad Headcount Enrollment

Increase official graduate headcount enrollment (comparison of current fall semester to previous fall semester).

Related Measures

M 1: 14th Class Day Enrollment

A comparison will be made of the total number of graduate students enrolled at UL Lafayette by the year-to-date 14th day of class numbers for the Fall semesters under review.

Source of Evidence: Activity volume

Target:

Success will be defined if Graduate School headcount enrollment (as of the 14th class day) increases by 3% or more. A comparison will be made between Fall 2013 (1,593) and Fall 2014 enrollment figures. A 3% increase in headcount enrollment would result in 1,641 students for Fall 2014.

Finding (2015-2016) - Target: Partially Met

The Graduate School headcount enrollment (as of the 14th day of class) for the Fall 2015 semester was 1,638 versus 1,621 in Fall of 2014, a rise in enrollment by 17 students or 1.04%. As such, the Graduate School did not meet its target for increasing enrollment of 3%.

As enrollment was higher than the previous Fall semester, though not in the amount we wanted, I'm listing this finding as partially met.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

Decrease Time from Application to Decision

The Graduate School must decrease the time it takes from an initial application submission to a decision on admission. A number of measures can be taken to decrease this duration, all of which ultimately lead to higher enrollment counts and bolstered graduate programs. These measures include:

- Establish baseline data. Using 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 application data, the Graduate School will work with the Office of Institutional Research to determine the average time from application to admission decision for both domestic and international applications. The goal is to identify the average time applications in these two groups spent in REC, PEND, and DEPT statuses. Working with David DesOrmeaux, IT Specialists from the Office of the VP for Research, the Graduate School can now accurately determine the time that applications spend in the various stages of the admission review cycle, critical data to determining where holdups occur and which programs typically require more time to render a decision.

[UPDATE: *David Desormeaux, who now works in our office, can determine how long an application spends in each stage of the admissions process, owing largely to assigning decision statuses with date-stamps in Banner. So, it would not be difficult for to determine by program how long it takes to render a decision.*]

- Implement new application software, Banner ERP.

[UPDATE: *The Banner ERP has been implemented, at least in the areas that we use, and the transition from CAPTURE to the Banner application was not a smooth one. There were a number of complications that arose in the implementation and employment of the software that may have hampered our ability to process applications quickly. There was also a learning curve as our staff was adapting to working in two systems simultaneously, ISIS and Banner.*]

- Improve communications with applicants who have incomplete applications (REC). **[UPDATE:** *Credential letters are sent out weekly, providing a recurring stream of information to applicants with incomplete applications.*]

- Establish new communication flow for Banner-based applications.

§ We anticipate a reduction in phone/email communication from applicants who must

currently inquire about the status of an application because Banner Self Service will show – real time – an applicant what has/has not been received. **[UPDATE: This functionality works to an extent in Banner, though not in the way that we were originally told. IF an applicant updates their application, then Banner doesn't recognize an updated checklist. The functionality does work, but in a limited capacity.]**

§ Implement new automated communications through Hobsons Connect. The Graduate School will work to create automated email communications with applicants, with a priority being placed on emails that concern missing documents. **[UPDATE: This initiative was completed though we did not renew our contract with Hobsons as a University. We will be switching to Banner Recruit in Fall 2016.]**

§ Facilitate receipt of letters of recommendation. Banner will allow applicants to list their reference letter writers at which point letter writers will receive an email from the Graduate School to submit letters. **[UPDATE: Banner does not do this, at least not with the implementation that we've done now. Hopefully, we'll have that functionality through Hobsons Recruit.]**

- Improve and increase communication with remaining Capture-based applicants. **[UPDATE: At this point, no applications can be submitted through CAPTURE.]**

- Implement digitized filing system, with files of new applications being prioritized. **[UPDATE: This initiative has been completed. All past and current student files have been digitized and are accessible through Banner Document Management. Graduate Coordinators can access application documents electronically making for a much-faster review process. Our office has now fully acclimated to the adjusted workflow of processing documents into a digital system.]**

- Improve process by which graduate coordinators receive, review, and make a recommendation on applications.

- Work to eliminate reliance on campus mail to deliver application packets to Graduate Coordinators. **[UPDATE: All applications are reviewed electronically through Banner Document Management. Only decision letters are sent in hard copy to Graduate Coordinators.]**
- Implement an electronic/digitized system for Graduate Coordinators to receive and review applications. This was done using the software Onbase, currently employed by Undergraduate Admissions, the Registrar's Office, and Human Resources. Onbase works well for getting information about applicants quickly to Graduate Coordinators, but the lack of a digitized approval workflow prevents the Graduate School from eliminating campus mail altogether for the admission process.

Established in Cycle: 2015-2016

Implementation Status: In-Progress

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: 14th Class Day Enrollment | **Outcome/Objective:** Grad Headcount Enrollment

Measure: Completed Graduate Applications |

Outcome/Objective: Increase Grad School Applications

Implementation Description: Over the past year, the Graduate School has done much to improve the application process for prospective students, including a decrease in the time from application to decision. A number of the initiatives in this action planned have been carried out with success, though of course with kinks to work out, but a few things have changed. Our new application will be through the Banner ERP and not through Hobsons Apply Yourself as originally intended.

Responsible Person/Group: Graduate School Office

Improve Communication with Applicants to Facilitate Completed Applications

The Graduate School will work to see more incomplete applications completed in order to obtain admissions decisions and in turn boost graduate enrollment. The Graduate School will do this by improving communications with applicants whose applications remain incomplete for an extended period of time. Improvements will be made in a number of ways including:

- Redefine "completed applications" in Goal 2. Determine number by comparing the number of applications that remain incomplete (REC) by a specified date with the number of applications that have been sent to graduate departments for review (DEPT). **[UPDATE: This**

initiative has been completed. Through the use of improved reporting functionality and generation both through the Banner ERP and Microsoft Access/Excel, we have a clear understanding now of how long applications stay in department and how long an admission decision typically takes. This information allows us to see patterns and trends in certain programs as well as applicants pools for specific programs, ultimately helping us understand better our strengths and weakness in getting applications completed.]

- Transition from our current application software, Capture, to our new ERP, Banner. Banner will allow applicants to check in real time (a 24 hour delay) what documents have been received and posted by the Graduate School. By providing applicants with a quick, accurate, and user-friendly means of checking their status themselves, the Graduate School creates a more enjoyable and timely application process, thus presenting the University and its administrative offices as professional and student centered. **[UPDATE:** the Banner application has now been implemented, though to varying degrees of success. Server malfunctions and implementation problems has made for a rough start to launching a new application through Banner but our offices proficiency with the software is rising and thus the learning curve inherent in a new system is lessening.]

- Determine a new report schedule to identify incomplete applications (REC). These reports will be used to generate automated email communications utilizing Hobsons Connect. Student-specific email communications encourage applicants to finish their applications while creating a communication flow between potential students and the University. The implementation for Hobsons Connect has been going on since early Spring 2015 with a anticipated go live range of late June early July. Hobsons Connect will allow the Graduate School to implement a precise communication plan that will effectively communicate with all graduate student populations, whether prospective or actual. **[UPDATE:** This initiative has been completed but will be continued through the use of Banner Recruit, implementation of which will begin Fall 2016. Polished communications though are still being sent through Hobsons Connect until Banner Recruit will be implemented. Also, the actual implementation of Hobsons Connect did not roll out as planned as numerous issues with data transfer and crosswalking from ISIS slowed the entire project down. Our absolute reliance on IT to get the data transfer corrected put us in a position with little leverage. Our requests to IT for a Hobsons/ISIS crosswalk coupled with the University-wide implementation of Banner created frequent time and resources conflicts. Hopefully, the Banner Recruit implementation will not proceed as Hobsons Connect did, what with many sectors of campus already online with the Banner ERP.]

- Review and Update “potential students” section of Graduate School website. The new website contains a wealth of information that can be ideal for some applicants but at times can also be impractical or overwhelming for others. The Graduate School will thus work to decrease the number of clicks and redirects students or applicants encounter to find pertinent or essential information. In addition, the

Graduate School will update the FAQs page to provide as many answers for common questions. The Graduate School will also work to restructure the International Students section(s) of the website. The Graduate School will also work to utilize analytics software to learn how applicants and students are using the Graduate School website, what works or doesn't, and how quickly users leave our site searching for information elsewhere. The Office of Communications and Marketing is also working with us to determine how useful and user friendly our website is while addressing pages and links that hinder usability. **[UPDATE:** This project has been ongoing with a company called Up & Up who specializes in SEO (Search Engine Optimization) efforts and content review. They've done a great job in helping us identify areas for improvement or overhauling while focusing in on a number of specific graduate programs that need restructuring online. They also worked to identify which keywords and terms trigger higher ranking in online searches, and then provided ideas for implementing those keywords across our website and program pages to garner higher spots on search engine lists. In addition, they've helped us strengthen and re-imagine our online presence in terms of social networking on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and a Graduate School blog. The blog in particular has been successful in providing prospective and current students with information about graduate studies, both during admissions and as a student, while highlighting some outstanding faculty and students.

Established in Cycle: 2015-2016

Implementation Status: In-Progress

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: 14th Class Day Enrollment | **Outcome/Objective:** Grad Headcount Enrollment

Measure: Completed Graduate Applications |

Outcome/Objective: Increase Grad School Applications

Implementation Description: Some of the elements of this action plan are in the works, with some being very close to completion or implementation. We're hoping that by the beginning of the 2015-2016 assessment cycle this action plan will be finished.

Responsible Person/Group: Graduate School Office

New/Improved Recruiting Initiatives

Some of the ways we're working to improve graduate enrollment is with increased recruiting efforts through on-demand print publications, communications plans through Hobsons Connect and Banner Recruit, and the use of Gradschoolmatch.com. Each of these initiatives is designed to connect students with both the information we have regarding Graduate School and the people (faculty, staff) who can best explain that information.

1. We've been working with an on-demand print company

called Liaison international to design new Graduate School brochures along with inquiry postcards that help us make connections with potential students early on. We spent a good amount of time making all of these print materials customizable by program, so that when prospects submit an inquiry through our website, they'll be sent personalized materials with information directly related to the program(s) in which they are interested. They'll also be provided with direct contact information for the graduate coordinator overseeing their prospective program. The heart of the information we're provided (application/admission info, program contacts, etc.) is not new but we have created program descriptions, faculty/student highlights, and hi-res images that showcase (and sell) our programs in a new way. We're hoping these materials make our graduate programs much more attractive to potential students.

2. The addition of an Applications and Communications Coordinator position has helped the Graduate School in managing our infant communication plan through Hobsons Connect. While that software implementation was taking place during last year's recruiting cycle, we've come much closer to realizing an actual communications plan, complete with automated communications that address application, admissions, and even some post-admissions issues. The switch to the Banner ERP has resulted in discussion about the continued use of Hobsons Connect for managing communication, with the decision ultimately being made to move the Banner CRM, Recruit. Implementation for that software will take place in the Fall 2016 semester with our goal set to use that software as soon as possible. Though beginning another implementation so soon after finishing our Hobsons Connect set up (which was prolonged due to data transfer and crosswalk issues) using Recruit will afford us the easy access of data through the Banner ERP. The experience should thus be a much more integrated one, where Banner will fuel Banner communications and not a third party software. An additional position is now being filled to oversee the implementation and continued use of Banner Recruit. We need to maximize usage of this software to bridge the communication gap between our prospects, applicants, admits, and enrolled students.

3. Gradschoolmatch.com is an online graduate education communications site. It's method is not unlike a dating site where students and universities are putting their best attributes and characteristics forward in hopes of making a match. We recently purchased a year subscription to this service as something of a trial run. We've now equipped all of our Graduate Coordinators with online profiles for their graduate

programs where they can search for and bookmark potential students and reach out to them with more information. To be sure, you get out of the software what you put in, so those programs who wish to use the software to its fullest functionality will most likely see the greatest return. We'll be assessing the return on investment for this software after our year's subscription expires. Should the software prove productive in terms of generating applicants and ultimately enrolled students, then we'll consider renewing.

Established in Cycle: 2015-2016

Implementation Status: Finished

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: 14th Class Day Enrollment | **Outcome/Objective:** Grad Headcount Enrollment

Measure: Completed Graduate Applications |

Outcome/Objective: Increase Grad School Applications

Implementation Description: We're already underway with all of these recruitment initiatives.

Responsible Person/Group: Graduate School Office Staff

O/O 2: Increase Grad School Applications

Increase the number of completed applications submitted to the Graduate School (comparison of current fall semester to previous fall semester).

Related Measures

M 2: Completed Graduate Applications

After the 14th day of class, a comparison will be made of the total number of completed applications for Fall 2012 (1100) vs. Fall 2013.

Source of Evidence: Benchmarking of learning outcomes against peers

Target:

Success will be defined if a 3% or more increase is observed in the number of completed applications as of the 14th day from Fall 2013 (1229) to Fall 2014. A 3% increase in the number of completed applications (Admitted + Denied) would result in 1266 completed applications for Fall 2014.

Finding (2015-2016) - Target: Not Met

The Graduate School observed a total of 1,369 completed applications as of September 11, 2015 (the 14th day of classes) for the Fall 2015 semester. 1,369 completed applications (admitted + denied) results in a literal decrease of 123 completed applications or a 8.2% decrease from the Fall 2014 semester completed application count of 1,492.

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):

Reassess Graduate School Goals and Objectives

The Graduate School will analyze our assessment goals and determine how effective those goals have been and will be in seeing the University's strategic plan realized. This self-reflection of current goals will involve a redefinition of terms used in current goals, specifically the

current definition of "completed applications." At the same time, the Graduate School will review closely the University's strategic plans to devise a trajectory for graduate education consistent and concordant with the University's larger mission. Doing so will invariably result in new assessment goals that will be at once broadened in scope yet specified in execution. In addition, the Graduate School will work to realign our own strategic goals in light of the re-conceptualized and revised University strategic plan, set to be released this academic year.

Established in Cycle: 2013-2014

Implementation Status: In-Progress

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Completed Graduate Applications |

Outcome/Objective: Increase Grad School Applications

Responsible Person/Group: Graduate School Dean Assistant to the Dean Director of Applications and Records

Decrease Time from Application to Decision

The Graduate School must decrease the time it takes from an initial application submission to a decision on admission. A number of measures can be taken to decrease this duration, all of which ultimately lead to higher enrollment counts and bolstered graduate programs. These measures include:

- Establish baseline data. Using 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 application data, the Graduate School will work with the Office of Institutional Research to determine the average time from application to admission decision for both domestic and international applications. The goal is to identify the average time applications in these two groups spent in REC, PEND, and DEPT statuses. Working with David DesOrmeaux, IT Specialists from the Office of the VP for Research, the Graduate School can now accurately determine the time that applications spend in the various stages of the admission review cycle, critical data to determining where holdups occur and which programs typically require more time to render a decision. **[UPDATE: David Desormeaux, who now works in our office, can determine how long an application spends in each stage of the admissions process, owing largely to assigning decision statuses with date-stamps in Banner. So, it would not be difficult for to determine by program how long it takes to render a decision.]**

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Established in Cycle: 2015-2016

Implementation Status: In-Progress

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: 14th Class Day Enrollment | **Outcome/Objective:**
Grad Headcount Enrollment

Measure: Completed Graduate Applications |

Outcome/Objective: Increase Grad School Applications

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Responsible Person/Group: Graduate School Office

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Established in Cycle: 2015-2016

Implementation Status: Finished

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: 14th Class Day Enrollment | **Outcome/Objective:**
Grad Headcount Enrollment

Measure: Completed Graduate Applications |

Outcome/Objective: Increase Grad School Applications

Implementation Description: We're already underway with all of these recruitment initiatives.

Responsible Person/Group: Graduate School Office Staff

O/O 3: Graduate School Orientation Survey

At the start of the fall 2010 semester, the Graduate School will conduct an orientation session for incoming graduate students highlighting relevant campus services and facilities. The goal of the orientation session is to provide incoming graduate students with information that will help them to

successfully navigate the administrative services and university policies of UL Lafayette and the Graduate School.

Related Measures

M 3: Graduate School Orientation Survey

Participants of the annual fall Graduate School Orientation will be asked to complete a survey at the end of the day. The survey responses for each session will help the Graduate School to gauge the general effectiveness of the orientation session and the usefulness of information presented, as well as guide future sessions and offerings.

Graduate School Orientation consists of the following:

- Campus tour * (optional)
- Library tour * (optional)
- Welcome Session
- Breakout Sessions #1:
 - Making the Transition to Graduate Studies (Master's)
 - Making the Transition to Graduate Studies (Doctoral)
- Breakout Sessions #2:
 - Graduate Coordinators, Graduate Mentors, and You
 - Becoming a Virtual Cajun
 - Getting to Know the Needs and Resources for Your Students
- UL Lafayette for You Networking Session
- Breakout Session #3
 - \$\$\$ for You: Research and Travel Funding for Grad Students
 - Becoming a Virtual Cajun
 - Expecting the Unexpected in the Classroom
- Breakout Sessions #4
 - Planning for the Future from the Start
 - Graduate Coordinators, Graduate Mentors, and You
 - Human Resources Paperwork and Policies
- Late Session for those who couldn't attend during the day
 - The Graduate Student Experience at UL Lafayette

For each session above, attendees will be asked to respond to questions gauging the usefulness of information presented. Questions will be scored on a 1-5 scale with 5 representing the highest possible score. The Graduate School will consider Fall Graduate Student Orientation, and its individual sessions, effective and useful if scores average 4.0 or higher.

Scores will be attached to the finding below as a PDF export from SurveyMonkey.com. Please note that qualitative answers or comments provided in the survey are not included in the attached PDF.

Source of Evidence: Academic indirect indicator of learning - other

Target:

Success will be defined as receiving a 4.0 average rank for each graduate school orientation item assessed.

Finding (2015-2016) - Target: Met

Please see attached PDF for the Fall 2015 Graduate Student Orientation survey findings. Survey results show that for the majority of the sessions offered, the average rating for questions gauging usefulness of sessions was 4.0 or higher. Therefore, we're considering this finding as "met." Also attached to this finding are all individual responses to the Graduate Student Orientation survey, which include comments and suggestions for future orientations. Though these responses are not quantifiable for our findings, they nevertheless represent an important influence on our Orientation planning.

Connected Document

[Fall 2015 Orientation Survey Results](#)

Related Action Plans (by Established cycle, then alpha):**Grad School Orientation**

Explanation: Based on the survey responses, the Graduate School will adjust, where possible, its Orientation planning to cover topics of interest to incoming graduate students. When possible, additional mini-sessions or speakers will be added to the next orientation session. Another avenue to address student concerns will be to provide printed information in the orientation packets given to the students at the session, especially information for critical services when a speaker is unavailable to attend or when necessary to reinforce the topic. The Graduate School will also provide orientation participants with a form to submit to request additional information. The Graduate School will then follow-up with these students within the first few weeks of class to ensure that their information need has been adequately addressed.

Established in Cycle: 2009-2010

Implementation Status: Planned

Priority: High

Relationships (Measure | Outcome/Objective):

Measure: Graduate School Orientation Survey |

Outcome/Objective: Graduate School Orientation Survey

Analysis Questions and Analysis Answers

How were assessment results shared and evaluated within the unit?

We frequently discuss our application and enrollment numbers, both at weekly staff meetings and admissions team members. Our numbers by semester, as well as our efforts to affect those numbers are openly shared and discussed with the office staff. We also provide final numbers as recorded in WEAVE to all office staff.

Identify which action plans [created in prior cycle(s)] were implemented in this current cycle. For each of these implemented plans, were there any measurable or perceivable effects? How, if at all, did the findings appear to be affected by the implemented action plan?**Decrease Time from Application to Decision (Final)**

We can now measure the time from application to decision for each individual graduate program, largely due to new functionalities in Banner, including more detailed reporting. Each stage of the application process can now be date-stamped in Banner to determine how long an application remains in those stages. That reporting can identify what hold-ups we have with applications, whether we're missing documents or an application remains in department awaiting a decision.

Improve Communication with Applicants to Facilitate Completed Applications (Final)

We know that our communications with students have become more regular and explanatory, with regular credential letters going out weekly to address missing documentation for applications. Our inquiry system has also been revamped to include automated communications that provide applicants with a clear understanding of what documents are required for admission. In addition, our website is being revised and optimized through work Communications & Marketing and an outside company. A cleaner website provides applicants with easier navigation to the information they need.

New/Improved Recruiting Initiatives (Final)

We're beginning to track the return on our new recruiting initiatives though we can't account for all new traffic being generated. We plan to have more concrete information by the end of our next assessment cycle.

Grad School Orientation (Final)

For sure, our Orientation has been affected by our action plan. We've purposely restructured Orientation to reflect both what other universities are doing (and so be in line with our peers) and the feedback we were receiving from our own students. Our post-orientation surveys speak to the success of our restructuring efforts.

What has the unit learned from the current assessment cycle? What is working well, and what is working less well in achieving desired outcomes?

Overall, I think this assessment cycle can be characterized as a year in flux. I think we've learned that our recruitment efforts have to be more concentrated and have to incorporate faculty and graduate coordinators if we hope to see program growth. Our recruitment initiatives, while certainly geared towards having students apply, really try to direct students to faculty in their prospective programs. Greater faculty involvement will help generate greater enrollment.

We've also learned to manage our expectations in terms of software implementations. While all programs are sold with a bells-and-whistles sales pitch, any new program requires a sufficient time for setup, implementation, and management to get to an optimized version of the program. So, we've learned to mitigate our software expectations with the reality of what those programs can do based on the time we have to give. I think going through these implementations has made us smarter as an office and more realistic about what can be achieved with our resources.

To be honest, most of our outcomes depended on the completion of various software implementations as well as our understanding of those programs and what they could offer us. The extreme delays we experienced in implementing Hobsons Connect that stemmed from IT complications really hampered our ability to utilize Connect in this assessment cycle. Similarly, the Banner implementation has added much to the workload of everyone in the office and has restructured the workflow for admissions drastically. So, it's not to fault those changes to our office that we report this, only to state that our office has been mitigating those changes like everyone else on campus, and the results have ranged from very positive to somewhat negative.

We can say that our new digitized filing system that began in Onbase and then finished in Banner Document Management has changed our office for the better, both in admissions and post-admissions. Graduate Coordinators are also reaping the benefits of a much more accessible documentation system. It's made everyone's job easier and has made our office cleaner, as we're not dealing with physical files in the same way. The shift to that system did necessitate an analysis of our current workflow, as we had to adjust how things could be done digitally, but we believe we've progressed through those changes.

Similarly, the reporting functions of Banner are much more expanded than in ISIS, and we can find much more information readily, especially since we have people in-office who can operate through the reporting side of Banner.