

## *Summary of 2008 Annual Forum on Graduate Studies*

### *The Culture of Graduate Studies at William Paterson University: Making it a Reality*

The forum was attended by approximately 30 faculty, professional staff, and librarians. Discussion took place in four breakout groups and is summarized below. In general the forum confirmed that while William Paterson University has many of the resources and structures needed to enhance and promote graduate studies at our institution, we still need to develop a more coordinated approach to graduate studies in order to make it competitive within the region.

#### **1) Establishing a “College” of Graduate Studies at William Paterson University**

What is your conception of a College of Graduate Studies at WPU?

- Purpose is to establish a clear identity and image for graduate studies beyond specific programs
- Needs to be a physical place, not just a concept
- Should not compete or challenge autonomy of the Academic Colleges. Rather this “college” would cover administrative functions for graduate studies as a whole and not be responsible for programs or faculty who are part of the Academic Colleges.
- Should be called a School of Graduate Education, not to be confused with the Academic Colleges.
- Distinctive identities, uniqueness, and separateness of each program should be maintained apart from the unifying image of graduate studies as a whole

What functions and purposes would a School of Graduate Studies serve? What would some of the roles and responsibilities of a School of Graduate Studies include?

- Handle admissions, financial aid, scholarships, assistantships, retention through graduation. Most of these functions would be the same as those that the Office of Graduate Admissions currently handles.
- Provide a University Center for supporting research and scholarship
- Provide a unifying structure for facilitating the completion, collection, and dissemination of comprehensive requirements, theses, and other capstone academic requirements across all programs
- Provide a central calendar for research presentations and colloquia
- Provide a place for graduate students to go to socialize and collaborate with other students and faculty
- Provide a mechanism for programs and departments to communicate with each other

What structures, resources, and personnel would a School of Graduate Studies at WPU require?

- Unified website that provides a picture of graduate studies overall with links to specific programs
- Space in a building for offices, lounges, technology, etc.
- Dean of Graduate Studies – full-time responsibility will be in SGS

- Associate Dean of Graduate Studies – full-time responsibility will be in SGS
- Coordinators/Professional Staff to communicate with each of the Colleges
- Faculty advisory committee
- Targeted advertising/promotional campaign and the resources to pay for it in print and online
- A view book – describing in a dignified and attractive way - all the options that the School of Graduate Studies at WPU has to offer
- Active and pro-active graduate student organization
- A “benefactor” who can support the start-up of the School – grateful alumnus or alumna would be good – name the building after that person
- An operating budget

What do we already have in place to begin operating as a School of Graduate Studies?

- 17 master’s degree programs and a host of other post-baccalaureate professional programs
- A Dean of Graduate Studies
- Graduate Admissions Office and Staff
- Graduate Program Directors
- Council of Graduate Program Directors
- Faculty who teach graduate courses
- Program brochures
- Graduate Student Housing – very limited
- Graduate Assistants
- Library resources for existing graduate programs
- Grants Office
- Computers, university network, and IRT support staff

What do we still need and do not yet have to build an enduring and self-sustaining School of Graduate Studies?

- A collective vision and image of graduate studies at WPU represented by the School of Graduate Studies
- Operating budget for the School
- Benefactor to provide funding and name for building/space
- Full-time Dean of Graduate Studies
- Full-time Associate Dean of Graduate Studies
- Additional professional support staff and graduate studies coordinators to work with faculty and handle administrative work
- Comprehensive view book to represent all of graduate studies at WPU
- Improved comprehensive graduate studies website that will link all programs and be easily accessed from outside; part-time webmaster would be needed to monitor this
- Increased access to and expertise in assisting applications for external funding to support the School and its programs – Grants office to run through SGS

## 2) Establishing a “Brand” for Graduate Studies at William Paterson University

The branding group began by stating what the master program is up against:

- There has been an emphasis on undergraduate studies.
- William Paterson University’s location is a mystery both quite locally and within the state and beyond.
- We are not a research institution, so we have less funding

From these challenges, we discussed our needs:

- Graduate assistantships and funding is paramount for applicants, a big-ticket attraction.
- A graduate student in our group mentioned he was interested in the business master’s program as he had heard there were other international students and he would “fit in,” (feel comfortable), that this was a large factor along with the financial incentive.

We began to examine the master’s degree areas (with which we were familiar) to discuss that “brands” need to be different for different programs:

- For established areas as music and business, whose programs are well established and recognized within the larger professional communities of their areas of interest. (For example, those interested in a master music degree immediately consider William Paterson and know where the university is located, and find the proximity to New York City a plus, as do those applicants considering the business program.)

We had initially spoken of identifying our target clients, working adults who needed night courses, non-traditional students, minority populations, first generation to college students. We abandoned addressing these points in favor of addressing what is the image of the university, that branding needs to speak directly to certain areas of interest, that each area population has a different population to address, for example the business has a more conservative approach than other master’s degree areas.

We felt that components ubiquitous to all areas as night and part- time programs and target populations can be addressed by individual areas.

At this point, we felt enthusiastic, that the emphasis of our branding should be on **Quality**. The successful long-standing reputation of existing programs could serve as a showcase for the rest of the master programs and the university. (That WPUNJ is a well-kept secret within easy proximity to NYC was not the issue in successful programs at our university.)

We discussed how having students compete to get into a program, not only strengthens the program, but might make it more attractive and prestigious.

Along the lines of prestige, we began to speak of the accomplishments of the faculty and the necessity to highlight them as an advertising tool to attract students – much the opposite of the current undergraduate campaign in which students were featured.

### **3)Consolidating and Collaborating Graduate Studies at William Paterson University**

In general, the group talked about how their departments and programs were already seeking greater collaboration across disciplines and the possible mechanisms for encouraging such collaboration. Also noted was the fact that all our students are entering a workplace that is increasingly multi-disciplinary and thus, it is important to reflect this trend in preparing them through graduate studies.

#### **Advantages of Cross-Discipline or Collaborative Programs**

- Individualized masters programs for students who do not fit the mold of graduate students seeking teaching certification, which has very specific requirements.
- Re-designing masters programs to allow for more electives and thus opportunities to take appropriate courses in other departments.
- Independent Study coursework that transcends disciplines.

#### **What Needs to Be Done at WPU to Encourage More Collaborative Programs**

- Listening closely to incoming students about their needs and studying some case studies of programs that already are making use of greater collaboration.
- Release time for faculty to research other institutions and how they create more cross-disciplinary and collaborative opportunities.
- Creation of an entity, such as a council, that would bring together like-minded faculty from different disciplines.
- Faculty providing consultation to other departments: i.e., Library Science students making use of the video production courses in Communications.
- Co-sponsored degree, i.e., a Masters in Writing via Communications and English.

### **4)Resources for Enhancing Graduate Studies at William Paterson University**

Resource needs must be determined based on the nature of the graduate programs. They need to be applied strategically to build upon the expertise and particular niches of each program.

There needs to be some coordination of these resources and a process for setting priorities. Resources needed to support graduate studies can be grouped into several areas.

Resources such as library, technology support can be planned to support the specific niches that either exist or need to be developed. Careful planning can help focus resources to where they are needed most.

Resource Needs:

Operating budget

Advertising & Promotion

Professionally designed brochures

Student resources needed

Housing

Scholarship

Assistantships

Research support

Library resources

Faculty resources needed

Resources to support faculty productivity such as research support, library resources

Resources to promote and support development of faculty expertise

Grant support