

Graduate Education Planning Task Force September 2009

Executive Summary

The Graduate Education Planning Task Force met throughout the summer and early fall of 2009 and included members from the Humanities, Social Sciences, Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences and Engineering. Discussions were wide-ranging and addressed key questions related to the vision and mission of the Graduate School; the graduate field structure; fellowship allocation strategies; and administrative and graduate student support functions. While disciplinary norms in graduate education varied among the graduate fields represented by task force members, and college-level differences in perspective also emerged in discussions, task force members agreed on the recommendations listed below. Above all, there was unanimous support for retaining the distinctive field structure, a system of graduate education for which Cornell is recognized throughout the higher education community. In addition, there was no support for unilaterally disbursing graduate student services to Student and Academic Services.

Recommendations

- 1. Retain the Graduate School as a distinct administrative unit and university-wide advocate for graduate education and graduate students at Cornell. The Graduate School represents expertise in graduate education that does not reside in the Colleges and serves the entire campus with relatively low numbers of administrative staff. There are no obvious efficiencies or cost savings to be achieved by transferring Graduate School functions to individual colleges.*
- 2. Retain the Graduate Field System, but reduce the number of very small doctoral fields using both quantitative and qualitative criteria for closure or mergers. The primary faculty of very small fields should identify other fields that might be potential partners, either for merging or for clustering. New graduate fields should be evaluated 5 years after the first cohort has entered, to assess long-term viability.*
- 3. Consider establishing field clusters, particularly in areas where there are multiple small fields that cannot be merged appropriately with other larger fields. Clusters could facilitate improvements to existing graduate programs, such as the development of common first-year curricula, could provide students entering small fields with a larger student cohort, and could allow for more effective and efficient student recruitment.*
- 4. Maintain the current fellowship budget, consistent with the University's focus on maintaining financial aid programs, as well as maintaining core strengths. Fellowships are essential for recruiting the very best graduate students, a practice that in turn allows us to recruit and retain outstanding faculty.*
- 5. Resume the original schedule for implementation of a single graduate tuition rate at the contract college level across all research degree programs by fiscal year 2012.*
- 6. Increase central career services for graduate students in response to the expected growth of professional master's students, while maintaining the role of the Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Life as an advocate for graduate career services across campus.*