

Research and Graduate Education Task Force
Executive Summary, 10/2006

In the fall of 2004, the President and Provost created the Research and Graduate Education Task Force. Membership on the task force included all the academic deans, the Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies, and representatives from the University Graduate Committee, the Faculty Senate, the Academic Chairs Council, and the Regents' Professors. The RGE Task Force was charged to study and discuss Northern Arizona University's research and graduate education enterprises and make recommendations regarding the role of these aspects of NAU's mission, both now and in the future.

We began our work by studying the "now," looking at data from NAU as well as comparative data from our peer institutions. The bulk of the RGE Task Force report presents our data for graduate education (Part I) and research (Part II). Much of this data collection and comparative work was done during 2004-05 academic year, and the numbers reflect the data available at the time. During the 2005-06 academic year, the task force developed specific recommendations for research and graduate education at NAU (Part III); these were discussed extensively on campus with a variety of groups during that year.

Key findings:

- NAU offers 49 master's degrees, 9 doctoral degrees (includes "first professional" DPT), and 17 graduate certificates.
- Compared to peer institutions, we rank #4 in terms of graduate enrollment, but much lower in terms of number of programs. (Ratio of grad students to programs is 102; higher than all our peers except one; much higher than most.)
- In fall 2004, key graduate student statistics include:
 - 5814 students (= 30% of NAU total headcount); 63% are in the College of Education
 - 80% are master's degree students
 - 36% full time, 64% part time
 - 70% women, 30% men
 - 29% Flagstaff, 71% distance
 - 24% identify as minority
- NAU's externally sponsored projects are relatively balanced among the three categories of research, instruction, and public service, whereas our sister institutions (University of Arizona and Arizona State University) are much more heavily weighted toward research.
- Sponsored program support at NAU has increased more than 300 % in the past decade, from \$12.6 million received in awards in FY '94 to \$53.6 million in FY '04.
- Federal agencies have been the source of 55 – 60% of the sponsored project support at NAU over last three years. State and local government sources (including Proposition 301/TRIF) have provided another 25 – 28%.
- A very small proportion of support comes from industry (0.4 % of the total, or \$200,000 in FY2004); this is an obvious area of potential growth.
- Tenured/tenure-track faculty at NAU spend about 21% of their time in research activities (this equates to about one course per semester).

--In academic year 2003-04, NAU faculty were highly productive, reporting more than 1,300 publications, exhibits, performances; plus >1,100 presentations.

Key recommendations:

- NAU should adopt the concept of “**Integrated, Focused Scholarship and Graduate Education,**” allowing us to identify our particular areas of strength and support these areas as we move forward with our research and graduate programs.
- The task force identified four interdisciplinary areas of strength that build upon NAU’s location and our historic mission, and also address areas of state, national and global need. As a university, we recommend that we focus investments on the following areas of strength.
- Focus Areas:
 - Biotechnology and Health – Arizona’s focus for near-term economic development with a biotechnology corridor from Flagstaff to Tucson
 - Environment and Sustainable Systems – one of four economic development priorities for Arizona
 - Learning and Teaching – meeting the needs of P-20 for Arizona and beyond
 - Human Connections and Diversity of the Human Experience – particularly focused on Native American issues.

Specific graduate program recommendations:

- NAU should assess our current graduate programs for academic rigor, quality and relevance to NAU’s stated priorities and the research themes/strengths outlined above.
- Expand our strong master’s degree programming, which has a clear professional and applied focus. (National data indicate that master’s degrees have shown the most dramatic growth in graduate education over the last 15 years; growth that is predicted to continue until at least 2013. The largest enrollment growth has been in students who are women or from underrepresented groups.)
- Provide adequate support for current successful doctoral programs.
- Initiate new graduate programs (both degree programs and certificates) in areas of greatest demand and need. Look at possible 3+2 programs, international student opportunities, possible cooperative programs w/ other institutions.
- Address the competitiveness of our graduate programs through actions such as:
 - a) implementing a three-year plan to provide full tuition waivers for graduate teaching assistants and full tuition remission for graduate research and graduate service assistants
 - b) providing competitive funds for graduate program development, such as student recruitment (including diversifying the graduate student population) and support for enhanced web sites, printed materials, travel, curricular innovations, strategic partnerships, and new program implementation—all in accordance with the focused priorities outlined above
 - c) increasing availability of graduate assistantships by setting aside 25% of the recovered indirect cost funds above the \$4M mark for graduate assistantships

Infrastructure recommendation:

- NAU should add at least one administrator to the current structure in Research and Graduate Studies - either a full-time Graduate Dean or an Associate Vice President for Research.