

# Building on Excellence: Guide to Recruiting and Retaining Diverse Graduate Students at UC Berkeley

In September 2007, The Regents of the University of California affirmed the statement of the Academic Senate that diversity is fundamental to UC's mission, quality and service to the state. The Regents identified graduate study as one of four critical areas for addressing diversity to maintain academic excellence.

In order to create a pool of qualified scholars for faculty appointments, strategies for graduate recruitment and retention must recognize the academic value of scholars' contributions to diversity, and address the barriers that have prevented the full participation of women and underrepresented minorities in academic careers.

The University of California Academic Personnel Manual policy governing faculty appointment and advancement (APM 210) was amended effective July 2005 so that faculty contributions to diversity would receive recognition and reward in the academic personnel process. An excerpt from the policy states:

*The University of California is committed to excellence and equity in every facet of its mission. Teaching, research, professional and public service contributions that promote diversity and equal opportunity are to be encouraged and given recognition in the evaluation of the candidate's qualifications. These contributions to diversity and equal opportunity can take a variety of forms including efforts to advance equitable access to education, public service that addresses the needs of California's diverse population, or research in a scholar's area of expertise that highlights inequalities. (APM 210-1-d)*

<http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/committees/ucaad/apm210.pdf>

The following guidelines describe practices consistent with the law and University policy which may be undertaken to promote equal opportunity and diversity in graduate admissions and financial support. These guidelines will provide departments with best practices to attract excellent graduate students who will contribute to the University's diversity imperative.

## 1 OUTREACH

### A. Graduate Admissions Committee Composition

- Ensure that the graduate admissions committee includes faculty who are committed to diversity and equal opportunity in graduate education.
- Provide committee members with demographic data for women and minorities in the department and the field. This should encompass applicant, admission and enrolled graduate student data for the past 10 years if possible (minimally 5 years) in each department.
- Designate one committee member to ensure that equity issues are addressed. This may be the departmental Equity Advisor, or a faculty member with equivalent qualifications.

### B. Increasing the Applicant Pool

- Work closely with the Graduate Diversity Director and/or the Departmental Equity Advisor in your division to pool together the list of potential applicants.
- Encourage participants from summer research and other academic achievement and enrichment programs to apply.
- Go beyond the 'usual' range of institutions from which you recruit to include minority serving institutions such as historically black colleges and universities.
- Call your colleagues to inquire about potential applicants who will contribute to the diversity of the department.

## 2 SELECTION

- Be attentive to applicants who have participated in academic enrichment programs such as McNair, UC Leads and summer research programs, as they will be better equipped with academic skill sets and research experience necessary for success in graduate school.

- Be aware of the possibility of unconscious bias in the selection and evaluation of applicants.
- Ensure that applicants will be reviewed by more than one committee member.
- Think in terms of building cohort strength based in diversity, thereby enhancing varied interests, experiences, and perspectives in the department.
- Consider admitting students on the basis of promise and potential than solely on traditional indicators.
- Consider the relevance of GRE scores and subsequent graduate school success. See the following link for guidelines in using the GRE tests for admissions:  
<http://www.ets.org/portal/site/ets/menuitem.1488512ecfd5b8849a77b13bc3921509/?vgnextoid=ebb42d3631df4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD&vgnnextchannel=b3ce46f1674f4010VgnVCM10000022f95190RCRD>
- Debrief as a committee after the admissions cycle to gain lessons learned for future admissions. Include the Diversity Director and/or the Equity Advisor.

*A. Consider additional qualifications applicants may have that could contribute to diversity and excellence in your department such as;*

- Applicants with the potential to bring to their research a critical perspective that comes from their non-traditional educational background or their understanding of the experiences of members of groups historically under-represented in higher education;
- Applicants who display drive and motivation to persist and succeed in their careers notwithstanding barriers in higher education that disproportionately disadvantage them;
- Applicants who have the communication skills and cross-cultural abilities to maximize effective collaboration with a diverse cross section of the academic community;
- Applicants who have research interests in subjects that will contribute to diversity and equal opportunity in higher education.  
For example:
  1. Research that addresses issues such as race gender, diversity and inclusion;
  2. Research that addresses health disparities, educational access and achievement, political engagement, economic justice, social mobility, civil and human rights and other questions of interest to historically underrepresented groups;
  3. Artistic expression and cultural production that reflects diverse communities or voices not well represented in the arts and humanities.
- Applicants who have the potential to contribute to their graduate research through their understanding of the barriers facing women, domestic minorities, students with disabilities,

and other members of groups underrepresented in higher education careers, as evidenced by life experiences and educational background. For example:

1. Attendance at a minority serving institution;
  2. Experience with issues facing students with disabilities;
  3. Ability to articulate the barriers facing women in some science and engineering fields.
- Applicants who, in addition to their primary field of interest, have the potential to make research contributions to understanding the barriers facing members of groups who have been historically excluded from higher education. For example:
    1. Studying patterns of participation and advancement of women and minorities in academic fields where they are underrepresented;
    2. Studying socio-cultural issues confronting underrepresented minority and second language learner students in college preparation curricula;
    3. Evaluating programs, curricula and teaching strategies designed to enhance participation of students from groups underserved by higher education.

*B. Actively Recruiting Admitted Students*

- Enlist faculty, staff, and graduate students to maintain communication with the list of admits.
- Address concerns and questions from the admits honestly and promptly.
- Invite students to campus coordinating departmental activities such as the Vice Chancellor of Equity and Inclusion-sponsored Diversity Visit Day.
- Provide opportunities for prospective students to socialize with continuing graduate students.
- Provide monetary incentives for hard to recruit diversity students with competitive financial offers from outside sources.
- Provide bold offer letters that spells out what ideally is a five-year package, without making promises you cannot keep.

*C. Planning Successful On-Campus Visits*

- Inform prospective students about their financial support status before extending an invitation to campus.
- Send out the program of events far ahead of time.
- During the visit enlist faculty participation to keep extended office hours, give presentations and to interact with prospective students.
- Meet any special needs of the prospective students (physical, dietary, etc.).
- Create a welcoming, inclusive environment in all aspects of the planning.

## 3 RETENTION

### *A. Especially for the Newly Enrolled*

- Provide a thorough-going orientation and guidelines as a road map to attaining the Ph.D.
- Assign a faculty mentor to each student.
- Formalize a peer-mentor system among graduate students.
- Institute a comprehensive end of the first year interview with all students.

### *B. Creating a Culture of Inclusivity*

- Make graduate student retention an on-going task for the department.
- Continue to monitor students' progress.
- Include graduate student input in department decision-making.
- Provide a space for graduate students.
- Encourage and model collaborative and collegial learning and teaching.
- Be supportive of graduate diversity both in the composition of the graduate student body and in their scholarship.
- Be attentive and alert to systematic barriers that may limit advancement and retention of women and minorities.
- Keep longitudinal retention data, including exit interviews.