The Graduate School

STRATEGIC PLAN

Illinois State University

Fall 2022

The purpose of this study was to utilize stakeholder input to make informed decisions in establishing an updated strategic plan to best utilize Graduate School resources and elevate graduate education at Illinois State University over the next five years.

Process:

The research aspect of this study included three phases: a series of stakeholder focus groups; a survey distributed to graduate faculty members; and graduate council reviewing themes and setting goals.

Results:

The results indicate how stakeholders perceived the role of the Graduate School, graduate programs, and graduate student services. Of particular interest was that the graduate faculty continue to support and value graduate programs, and graduate programs significantly contribute to be a reason faculty work at ISU.

Please evaluate the following items, with 5 being strongly agree and 1 being strongly disagree	2021	2016
The Graduate programs add value to the university.	4.60	4.7
Graduate programs contribute to scholarship at ISU.	4.51	4.64
The Graduate programs add prestige to the university.	4.45	4.64
Graduate programs deserve more institutional recognition than they currently receive.	4.37	4.32
Having a graduate program in my department/school was an important part of my decision to work at ISU.	4.22	4.34
Faculty should be involved in recruiting students into a graduate program.	4.22	4.38
The Graduate program in my academic unit contributes to my job satisfaction at ISU.	4.19	4.31
I would not want to work at a university that did not have graduate programs.	4.01	4.24

A 5 Year Vision:

In 5 years, the Graduate School will:

- Have 3,000-3,500 students.
- Have graduate faculty, graduate program support staff, graduate students, or Graduate School staff involved in committee work at all levels of the University to represent graduate education.
- Have at least 20 percent of all graduate students from historically marginalized populations.
- Have at least 25 percent of all graduate students from international countries.
- Increase offerings of non-tradition programs/degrees, such as accelerated master's degree programs, online programs, stackable certificates, and microcredentials.
- Obtain external grants to support graduate students and programs.

Strategies and Tactics:

Ten strategies (goals) and accompanying tactics (objectives) were developed from the research findings. The tactics will be used to form the annual work plan for the Graduate School. They are as follows:

1. Improve financial support for graduate students at and beyond the department/school level

    a. Collect annual financial support information for graduate students at the department/school/university level. (ongoing)

    b. Identify historical funding sources for department/school level funds for common and unique themes. (ongoing)

    c. Use historical source data to improve funding opportunities for students in poorly supported department/schools.

    d. Identify and publicize external fellowship/grant opportunities for graduate students. (FY 24)

    e. Report and publicize successes by students obtaining internal/external funding. (FY 25)

    f. Create a faculty mentorship award in research to support graduate students (FY 26)

    g. Create merit-based funding to be used for recruitment during admission (FY 27)

2. Assist in recruitment and enrollment efforts at and beyond the department/school level

    a. Work with the chairs/directors to establish recruitment and enrollment targets for each graduate program (FY 24)

    b. Work with the Deans to establish graduate student scholarships from alumni and donors (FY 26)

    c. Create graduate student and faculty spotlights to showcase to perspective students. (ongoing)

    d. Collaborate with University Advancement on fundraising efforts for graduate students. (FY 27)

    e. In consultation with Advancement, put together a stand-alone event to fundraise for the Graduate School. (FY 27)

    f. Create promotional materials and advertise programs at the program level for targeted audiences using electronic databases, social media, and other avenues. (FY 25)

3. Advocate for graduate students, student services, and student scholarship and creative activity

    a. Survey graduate students to identify strengths and weaknesses in student services (FY 24)

    b. Expand university wide annual competition for awards for graduate student research and creative scholarship (FY 25)

    c. Obtain funding through corporate sponsorship to support research events and award winners. (FY 26)

    d. Collaborate with the Office of Student Research to expand support for graduate students, including travel support to conferences. (FY 25)

    e. Collaborate with Research and Sponsored Programs on a research newsletter outlining funding opportunities for graduate students. (FY 26)

    f. Investigate a different payment plan structure for graduate students, where the first payment is after the first distribution of student employment stipends. (FY 27)

    g. Create an internal research tools certificate for graduate students (FY 26)

4. Maintain standards of graduate programs across campus

    a. Develop survey, in collaboration with schools/departments, on graduate student satisfaction, as well as understand why students do not attend ISU. (FY 23)

b. Review accelerated master's degree program requirements and collaborate with the Registrar on seamless transition of courses between undergraduate and graduate careers. (FY 24)

c. Work with programs on recruitment strategies to increase the quality of the applicant pool, as well as develop a university-wide recruitment plan. (FY 24)

d. Implement Graduate Education Manager for every graduate student, establishing retention rates for programs, communication with research committees, and assess faculty research load. (FY 24)

e. Collect annual progress reports for every graduate student. (FY 25)

f. Review the graduate catalog on an annual basis to address barriers to graduate students from an EDI lens (ongoing)

5. Assess market value for graduate programs, including quality and feasibility of programs

a. Collaborate with EAB to identify high-demand programs and best practices for certificates and micro-credentials. (FY 24)

b. Increase marketing and resources for programs that are targeted to grow enrollment or establish new programs (ongoing)

c. Work with human resources and labor relations on competitive graduate assistant stipends among comparator schools. (ongoing)

d. Assess graduate assistant allocations, tuition waivers, and operating budgets for graduate programs. (FY 23)

6. Elevate the position of Graduate Education within Illinois State University

a. Add Dean of the Graduate School to the title of the Director of the Graduate School, or create a stand-alone Associate Vice President position for Graduate Education. (FY 27)

b. Work with student affairs on opportunities for graduate student specific services and events, including writing resources and support. (FY 24)

c. Develop a plan to establish a Graduate School Advisory Board, with representation of current students and alumni from all colleges. (FY 26)

d. Continue to advocate for a second seat on the Academic Senate, which would create representation equal to the percentage of graduate students enrolled at the University (FY 24)

e. Add an EDI subcommittee to the Graduate Council (FY 24)

7. Collaborate with International Studies on student support and resources

a. Advocate for increased graduate international student housing, including options for family housing. (ongoing)

b. Coordinate communication efforts and information between international and graduate students.

c. Expand funding opportunities for international graduate students to use in the recruitment process. (FY 26)

d. Collaborate on professional development opportunities, including academic integrity, writing support, and faculty mentorship. (FY 24)

e. Assist with recruitment efforts internationally, expand academic partnerships abroad, and establish guidelines for graduate degree sharing programs. (FY 24)

8. Capitalize on establishing/growing programs that meet the demands of potential students and the job market

   a. Establish interdisciplinary graduate degree programs housed in the Graduate School, to provide students more options for workforce development. (FY 25)
   b. Collaborate with academic programming and online education on parameters for online course/program development, assessment, and quality. (ongoing)
   c. Collaborate with enrollment management, undergraduate education, and student services on resources and student support for online and adult learner programs.
   d. Create stackable certificates for graduate students to build to a master's degree (FY 25)

9. Support graduate faculty in mentorship of graduate students

   a. Provide graduate faculty with monthly quick tips on graduate student mentoring. (FY 23)
   b. Host annual speaker series on graduate student mentorship. (FY 24)
   c. Host once per semester a journal club and social on hot topics in graduate student mentoring. (FY 25)
   d. Utilize Graduate Education Manager and Graduate Student Success Dashboard for mentorship interventions (FY 24)

10. Track graduate student retention and progress toward degree

   a. Eliminate ProQuest and use ISU ReD as the repository for thesis/dissertation/capstones. (FY 24)
   b. Understand retention rates for doctoral students and determine why students drop out, at what point they drop out, and if historically marginalized students drop out at higher rates (FY 25)
   c. Provide training each semester on the Graduate Student Success Dashboard and Graduate Education Manager (ongoing)
   d. Work with PRPA to collect graduate student data on retention at the program, college, and university level. (FY 25)
   e. Collect data annually using a student survey about the graduate school experience (ongoing)

SWOT Analysis
This analysis enables the Graduate School to examine its strategic fit within the University as a whole.

Strengths:
- All staff is accessible and helpful; attentive to students and graduate coordinators.
- The Graduate School has effective communication
- Collaboration across campus and within the community
- Professional development for graduate students
- Promoting positive change with new programs, such as certificates and accelerated programs

Weaknesses
- Subordinate position of graduate education
- Perception that graduate programs are a drain on resources
- Head of the Graduate School is a Director, not a Dean
- Lack of authority in important decisions, such as in enrollment

- Support for international students and unique circumstances

Opportunities
- Interdisciplinary programs
- International student recruitment
- Online programming
- Expansion of adult learners
- Stackable certificates
- Expansion of accelerated programs

Threats
- Competition for other graduate programs (funding, online programs)
- Lack of support for online programs
- Funding for graduate assistants
- Negative publicity of graduate teaching assistant union
- Declining number of high school students
- Undergraduate student loans as barrier to graduate school