

## **Report of the Breakout Session on Recruitment and Retention of Graduate Students**

### **Session Chair: Roger McNeil – Louisiana State University**

We had about 15 participants in the session with a variety of graduate programs that ranged from none (Dennis Henry from Gustavus Adolphus College and author of the AAPT guide: *Planning for Graduate Studies in Physics and Related Fields*) to smaller programs to larger graduate programs of 60-90 students.

Participants were asked to give examples of successful practices that were introduced recently into their program to improve the recruitment and retention of graduate students as well as a remain challenge in your program. Below is a summary of the list of successful practices as well as challenges:

#### Successful Graduate Recruitment Practices:

- Open House – Bring all recruited students (in the US) that you have offers to or intend to make offers to your campus in late February or March. Financially support the trips for the students. This was found to be superior to bringing them out individually.
- Faculty should make visits to schools to give talks. It is especially valuable to travel to 4-year institutions to give these talks, as they are responsible for a substantial fraction of the physics graduates.
- Establish pipelines to institutions overseas. This is most successful if a faculty member makes a visit and talks and interviews the students.
- For students who are succeeding in your graduate program, make contact to their previous undergraduate institution and use the success story to attract more students from that institution
- Contact Alumni of your program in academic institutions and ask them to talk to undergraduates at their institution about your graduate program.
- A few of the session participants pointed out that advertised new thrusts in the research programs of the department can be used to attract graduate students, e.g. nanobiology or photonics.
- Have REU programs at your institution. This is an especially good way to target potential students from underrepresented groups.
- Many potential graduate students now have spouses or partners, and they may also be looking for graduate admission, maybe in another discipline. To the extent possible, assist in the placing of the partner. This may involve simply informing the other department chair that you are recruiting one of the partners.
- One session participant pointed out that having several women faculty significantly aids in recruiting women graduate students.

#### Successful Retention Practices:

- Host dinners for faculty. This is particularly important for women and minority students. Build a sense of community among students and faculty
- Faculty giving 5 minute talks at Colloquiums to introduce grad students to their research programs.
- One session participant described an Accelerated Ph.D. program for students that were former undergraduates of the same institution. For example, the students could begin research and/or coursework as an undergraduate.

- We had a long discussion as to the best place to put the Qualifying Exam. There was no conclusions, but we should make sure our students understand our Qualifying Exam and our expectations about it.
- We also had a discussion about when students should move onto a Research Assistantships from a Teaching Assistantships and whether this should be mandatory and if so, when (e.g. by the end of the first year, the end of the second year,...)

Challenges:

- Stipends are too low! This was a fairly universal challenge. Most session participants indicated their upper administration was either not receptive or not responsive to their case for increasing stipends based on the stipend levels of peer programs.
- Tuition waivers -> There was widely varying treatment of this issue at the universities of the session participants. Also, in some cases, the cost of the tuition was placed on grants for Research Assistants. This creates a disincentive to faculty to put graduate students on research funding.
- Different universities do not universally subsidize health care Insurance for graduate students. Lots of students are now entering graduate school with families.
- Smaller departments were concern with juggling the number of offers of Assistantships to make, with number of available slots. How far to stick the department's neck out.

## PARTICIPANT LIST

- |                    |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Gail Dodge      | 9. Michael Pechan       |
| 2. Maria Dworzecka | 10. Demetrius Venerable |
| 3. Timothy Heckman | 11. Gwo-Ching Wang      |
| 4. Dennis Henry    | 12. James Wicksted      |
| 5. James Horwitz   | 13. Ed Lipson           |
| 6. Daniel Kroll    | 14. David Shealy        |
| 7. Laurie McNeil   | 15. Roger McNeil        |
| 8. James Miller    | 16. Ken Kelton          |