

Benchmarking Approaches at Master's

Institutions:

**Promoting Best
Practices in Graduate
Education**

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‘Benchmark’ Definitions

- Determining whether manner in which your organization performs particular functions and activities represents ‘best practices’
- Use of comprehensive comparative data as a tool for evaluating performance
- Process of identifying performance or reputational data on the ‘best’ practices, for purposes of future efforts.

Purpose of Benchmarking

- Assess performance in areas critical to the organization's mission
- Inform decisions to shift resources and/or improve performance
- Challenge beliefs and rethink problems and opportunities, strengths and weaknesses
- Clarify where changes are needed in order to improve performance

‘Peer’ Institutions

- **Comparable – Institutions like yours on core and critical dimensions**
- **Aspirant – Similar but higher performing on critical dimensions**
- **Example: GVSU is a Public Master’s I regional comprehensive university, with a total enrollment of 24,000 students, two main campuses, one ‘rural’, one ‘urban’**

GVSU's Benchmarking Needs

- **Creating a Graduate Education Administrative Infrastructure**
- **Improving Master's Program Quality**
- **Graduate Outcomes Assessment**
- **Graduate Enrollment Management**

Selection of GVSU Peers

- Carnegie Public Master's I, with a proportionately large undergraduate liberal education mission
- Relatively young institutions (GVSU was created in 1960's); strong regional identity
- High portion of part-time graduate students and growing residential undergraduates
- Rapidly growing university (1990 ~8,000, 2007 ~24,000).

About GVSU Peers

- Initially chose much smaller schools as ‘peers’ (small liberal arts colleges)
- Settled on list of about 10 master’s –focused universities–
 - Peers are used for all sorts of purposes beyond graduate education, including strategic positioning
 - Most are much more ‘developed’ in terms of graduate infrastructure;
 - GVSU graduate programs tend to be large in terms of enrollments compared to peers

Actual Peers/Factors Considered

Institution Name	State	Carnegie Classification (2000)	Degree of urbanization	First-year retention	4-year Graduation Rate	5-year Graduation Rate	6-year Graduation Rate	Tenured & Tenure-track Faculty	In-State Undergraduate Tuition & Fees	Undergraduate Enrollment	Graduate Enrollment
Appalachian State University	NC	Masters I	Town: Distant	84%	34.3%	57.7%	61.7%	597	4023	13447	1670
Boise State University	ID	Masters I	City: Midsize	63%	5.8%	17.0%	23.7%	460	4154	17040	1786
CUNY Hunter College	NY	Masters I	City: Large	80%	10.8%	30.7%	37.5%	573	4349	15805	5094
Grand Valley State University	MI	Masters I	Rural: Fringe	83%	19.4%	42.8%	51.5%	700	6588	19578	3717
James Madison University	VA	Masters I	City: Small	92%	64.8%	78.4%	79.8%	637	6290	16031	1370
Montclair State University	NJ	Masters I	Suburb: Large	81%	26.5%	52.6%	59.3%	485	8404	12365	3711
Portland State University	OR	Doctoral - Intensive	City: Large	67%	14.5%	30.3%	37.2%	454	5210	17219	6041
Towson University	MD	Masters I	City: Small	79%	31.8%	57.1%	63.6%	493	7164	15374	3547
University of Nebraska at Omaha	NE	Masters I	City: Large	71%	10.3%	29.7%	39.9%	407	5118	11156	2750
University of Northern Iowa	IA	Masters I	City: Midsize	82%	33.9%	62.1%	67.1%	523	6112	10702	1558
Western Washington University	WA	Masters I	City: Small	86%	29.4%	58.5%	64.3%	449	5302	12154	825
Youngstown State University	OH	Masters I	City: Small	70%	12.5%	28.6%	36.7%	375	6697	11991	1192

Benchmarking to Create a Graduate Infrastructure

- Graduate Program Directors – already in place (originally very autonomous)
- Graduate Dean – new in 2000
- Graduate Council – new in 2003
- Graduate Student Association – new in 2004
- Graduate Faculty – now under discussion

Benchmarking Process Followed

- Identify structure or issue of concern
- Review CGS Policy guides, if available
- Collect information on each peer (web search process)
- Summarize key elements/best practices
- Develop proposal to adopt structure or address issue, respectful of GVSU culture
- Follow appropriate governance processes...

Benchmarking for Master's Program Quality

- Review of CGS *Master's Education* policy guide
- Review of external accrediting standards, if any
- Establish written guidelines for graduate courses and programs, distinguishing them from u/grad
- Review/develop university standards for *graduate capstone* courses, with peer benchmarks (in process)
- Update admissions policies, standards, practices, after review of those of peers (in process)
- Revisit graduate faculty standards and workload

Benchmarking for Graduate Outcomes Assessment

- Review all existing graduate program assessment plans (focus is on student learning outcomes)
- Review peer graduate program assessment plans, each program finding own peers
- Develop common core set of university-wide graduate program learning outcomes (in process)
- Include outcomes measures on faculty scholarly productivity

Benchmarking for Graduate Enrollment Management

- Admissions standards and procedures – communications with/to student
- Program progress standards and review procedures
- Retention and completion rates and barriers to completion
- Data needed to assess quality and ensure best practices in graduate education

Summary of Graduate Benchmarking at GVSU

- Need to quickly develop or update a wide range of best practices in administration, standards, and procedures
- Look to like/comparable peers, and aspirants, and to CGS policy/practice guidance
- Establish internal benchmarks against which graduate programs will be measured (until now, most were pegged to external accreditation only)
- Develop data sets to permit more transparency about our graduate programs and their quality
- Use quality benchmarks to challenge for higher performance and rigor, to allocate limited resources/reward accomplishments, and justify requests for more resources

For further information

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