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Graduate Admissions Overview for Associate/Assistant Deans

CGS New Deans Institute
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Graduate Admissions: Differences

- Graduate admission requirements
 - Required documents and test scores
 - Prerequisites and minimum standards
 - Selectivity

- Admissions processes and timelines
 - Key decision makers
 - Rolling admissions vs. collective review
 - Deadlines
 - International transcript evaluation and visa processing

- Organizational structure
 - Centralized vs. decentralized vs. collaborative



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Graduate Admissions: Consistencies

- Admission decisions are based on the total application packet.
- Meeting minimum requirements does not guarantee admission.
- Decisions are intended to meet the needs, interests, and competency level of the student, as well as the enrollment goals and educational priorities of the institution.



Graduate Student Recruitment

- **38% decentralized**
 - 21% at the school/college level
 - 17% decentralized to the department/program level

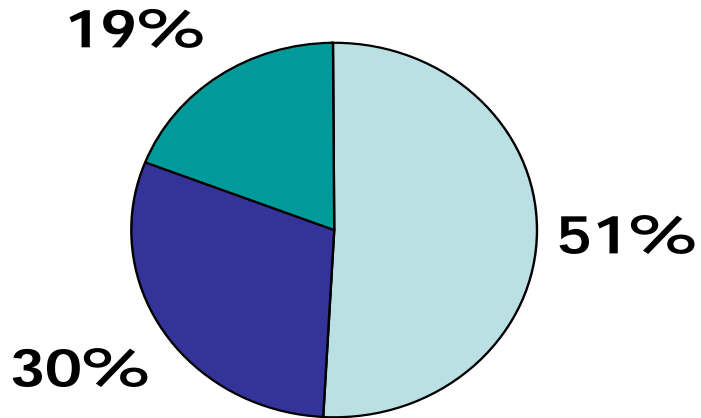
- **35% centralized**
 - 21% highly centralized (all graduate recruitment within single office)
 - 14% primarily centralized (all but one or two specific fields, such as law and/or medicine, handled by a single office)

- **27% collaborative**
 - Joint effort by central administration and schools; schools and programs; or by all levels

Graduate Admissions -- Processing



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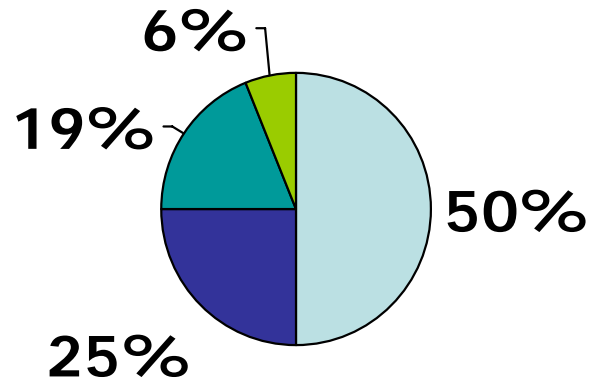


- Highly or primarily centralized
- Decentralized to schools or departments
- Collaborative

Source: 2003 NAGAP Survey of Member Organizational Structures



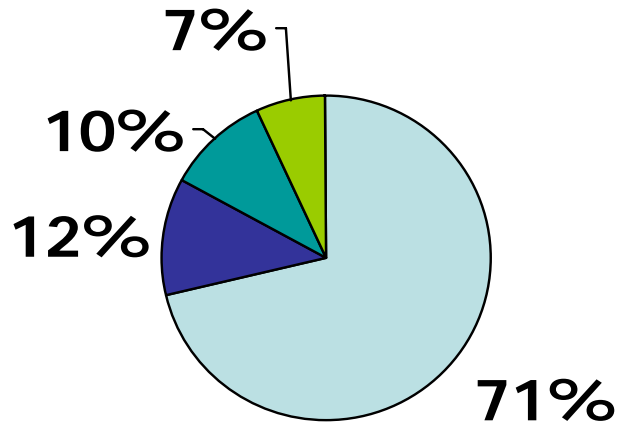
International Credential Evaluation



- Same office as domestic credentials
- Professional credentialing agency
- International admissions/services office
- Other

Source: 2003 NAGAP Survey of Member Organizational Structures

Graduate Admissions -- Decisions



- Faculty within academic department
- Admissions staff
- Other (faculty & staff jointly, varies by department)
- Academic dean (e.g., Dean of Graduate Studies)

Source: 2003 NAGAP Survey of Member Organizational Structures



Fellowship and Assistantship Decisions

50% made within the student's academic program
(chair or other faculty)

Other decisionmakers:

- multiple offices or committees (19%)
- academic dean (14%)
- admissions dean/director (10%)
- university-wide financial aid or fellowship officer (5%)

2% don't provide any institutional funding



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“Prior to five years ago, recruitment for graduate programs and admissions paper work were centralized under enrollment services, and individual program directors made decisions about admitting an individual. Then the decision was made to decentralize as much as possible. Each school was responsible for its own marketing and recruitment; some schools took over the whole admissions process, while others had enrollment services continue handling the paper work. Now the university is changing back to a centralized format. Over the past 16 years, I have gone through this four times.”

*Patricia Callahan, Director (retired)
Graduate & Allied Health Admissions
Barry University*

Source: 2003 NAGAP Survey of Member Organizational Structures



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Good graduate admissions structure and staffing should promote:

- **Resource efficiency**
 - eliminate duplication of effort
 - look for economies of scale
 - effectively use technology
- **Better service**
 - minimize applicant confusion and errors
 - increase responsiveness, prompt decision-making
- **Greater consistency**
 - application of (and exceptions to) admissions policies & procedures
 - communications with prospects, applicants, and admits
 - standards of staff professionalism
- **Clear leadership**
 - promote shared vision and priorities
 - support a clear understanding of short-term enrollment objectives and long-term strategic goals



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Legal Issues In Graduate Admissions

Disclaimer: *Intended solely to heighten awareness of potential legal issues and is not a substitute for professional advice.*



Affirmative action “post-Michigan”

Two-part analysis in reviewing affirmative action programs:

1. Does it serve a compelling reason?

Only two compelling reasons clearly accepted by the courts to-date:

- To remedy present effects of prior discrimination.
- To achieve the educational benefits that come from racial/ethnic diversity in the classroom.

2. Is it narrowly tailored to serve this purpose?

Impermissible methods include:

- Using quotas (or numerical goals implemented in such a way that they effectively are quotas).
- Having separate review tracks for different applicant populations.
- Using race or ethnicity as the sole criterion for minority applicants.
- Automatically assigning a specific number of “admissions points” to members of certain racial or ethnic groups.



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Affirmative action “post-Michigan”

- Programs must be deemed necessary to achieve the goals: universities need to examine alternate methods other than race-consciousness.
- Institutions need to periodically re-evaluate programs to:
 - determine effectiveness;
 - confirm whether they are still needed; and
 - make refinements as appropriate.
- Race and ethnicity should be only one of many factors considered in the admission decision.
- Programs should involve all forms of diversity, not simply racial and ethnic diversity.



Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA)

- Provides access rights of **admitted** students to their admission records.
 - Excludes confidential recommendations for which a valid waiver to the right of access has been signed by the student.
- Admitted students have the right to see comments written about them by admissions officers.
 - Includes documents kept separate from the student's permanent record.
 - Universities can destroy admissions comments once a student has been admitted, unless a student has requested access to the material prior to its destruction.
- FERPA does **not** apply to:
 - unsuccessful applicants;
 - applicants who do not enroll; or
 - applicants applying to a different program at an institution they have already attended.



Advice from a layperson

1. Don't act capriciously or arbitrarily.
2. Do not unjustifiably discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability or citizenship.
3. Adhere to published/stated admissions standards, policies, and criteria.
4. Base admissions and fellowships decisions on academic criteria.
5. Consult university counsel.



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General Rule-of-thumb

Don't ask anything on an application, in an interview, or in informal communications that you don't need, can't justify, and/or won't use in the admission decision.





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Avoiding Pitfalls: Application Materials

- No pre-admission inquiries about marital status or disabilities.
- Carefully review all parts of your application and recruitment materials yearly.
- Include disclaimers:
 - The catalog is not a contract.
 - The information provided is accurate at the time of publication and may change without notice.
 - Not all courses are offered each academic year and faculty assignments may change.
- Notify applicants of the consequences of submitting incorrect or incomplete information.
- Require online applicants to take some affirmative step indicating they will be bound by your signature language.



Avoiding Pitfalls: Application Materials

Questions about prior criminal record:

- Allowable, although some states prohibit discriminating against persons convicted for criminal offenses.
- Limit questions to convictions rather than charges or arrests.
- Develop a policy for responding to the information.
- Prior to rejecting an applicant, consider:
 1. the nature of the criminal activity and its relationship to the academic program and a campus environment;
 2. the elapsed time since the crime was committed; and
 3. rehabilitation efforts of the applicant.



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Avoiding Pitfalls: Admissions Decisions

- Don't waive published deadlines or admission requirements without clearly articulating the justification.
- Follow testing organizations' stated guidelines and policies for test-use.
- Have a written policy describing exactly who has the authority to make an offer of admission.
- Don't give a single individual the power to accept or reject a candidate
- When making conditional/provisional admits, clearly state the conditions of admission and timelines for compliance.
- Don't provide details in "deny" letters.



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Avoiding Pitfalls: Data Confidentiality

- Don't release information about the status of an application over the phone or by e-mail.
- Everyone involved in the admissions process (faculty, staff, student workers, alumni) need to be informed about your confidentiality policies and required to sign confidentiality agreements.
- Have a clear policy about when an applicant is considered a student (and when FERPA will apply).



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Final caution

“...the marketplace has some built-in punishments for questionable behavior that are worse than any potential legal sanctions.”

James Vaseleck
LSAC Associate Counsel