

Transforming the University

**Final Recommendations of the Task Force on
Graduate Reform: Discipline Evolution**

Submitted on behalf of the Task Force by:

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Executive Summary

Mission

The mission of the Graduate Reform: Discipline Evolution Task Force is to create a strategic plan for world-class graduate programs and education with particular emphasis on emerging and evolving disciplines. The University should strive to be a national and international model for the strength, breadth, and especially the interdisciplinary scope of its graduate programs.

Deliverables

The Task Force was charged to develop recommendations in the following areas:

- Recommendations that identify how to overcome barriers, both structural and cultural, to the success of interdisciplinary research, teaching, and study.
- Recommendations regarding how to leverage the strengths and comparative advantages in the University's graduate programs, with an aim of fostering interdisciplinary research and teaching.
- Recommendations as to how the University can best leverage its current and potential academic advantages especially in new and evolving disciplines.
- Recommendations regarding mechanisms to insure the regular and continuing evaluation of disciplines of graduate offerings as academic strengths, interests, and societal needs and demands evolve.
- Recommendations regarding whether and under what circumstances the University should consider offering applied doctorates.

Task Force Members

Shirley Garner, *Co-chair*, Associate Dean, Graduate School and Professor, Department of English, Language/Literature, CLA

Stephen C. Ekker, *Co-chair*, Associate Professor, Department of Cell Biology and Development, Medical School/CBS

Varadarajan Chari, Professor, Department of Economics, CLA (did not participate)

Mary Louise Fellows, Professor, Law School

Ann Forsyth, Director, Metropolitan Design Center, CALA

Karin Kettenring, Graduate Student, Department of Horticultural Science, COAFES

Wendy Pradt Lougee, University Librarian, University Libraries

Jean Montgomery, Associate Professor, Department of Theatre Arts and Dance, CLA

Yvette Perry, Graduate Student, Department of Family Social Science, CHE

Jeff Roberts, Professor, Department of Chemistry, IT

Key Recommendations

The Discipline Evolution Task Force identifies the following five recommendations as having the greatest potential for transforming the University commensurate with its Strategic Positioning goals:

- Establish a named and high-profile institute, modeled after the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University (<http://www.radcliffe.edu/>), to support interdisciplinary scholarship at the University of Minnesota. (Recommendation 1, p. 2.)
- Create internal faculty exchanges whereby faculty members work in a department or program other than their own for a semester or two, doing research, teaching, and serving as they would in their own departments or programs. (Recommendation 2, p. 2.)
- Establish a program similar to the faculty exchange program for graduate students to enable them to develop interdisciplinary expertise. (Recommendation 3, p. 2.)
- Seed and, when appropriate, provide long-term support to new and transformational research initiatives that bring together teams of highly talented faculty and students. These initiatives should originate in ideas that are proposed by faculty. (Recommendation 17, p. 6.)
- Implement meaningful systems for assessing existing centers, including the expectation that new and existing centers will close after five years unless there is a cogent rationale to continue them. (Recommendation 24, p. 7.)

Broader Themes Outside the Scope of the Inquiry

1. The new budget model: We are concerned that the new budget model will lead to a greater separation of colleges, which would make our recommendations hard to implement. We are also concerned that there will not be sufficient resources for central administration to develop tools and policies to encourage colleges to work together.

2. The importance of undergraduate education in developing interdisciplinary research and education. Disciplinary evolution and interdisciplinary research needs to develop at the undergraduate level as well as the graduate level. Residing solely in colleges, undergraduate education may be more narrowly focused than is desirable.

3. The need to clarify the roles of the Vice President for Research and the Dean of the Graduate School and to establish policies that foster collaboration between the two offices. We feel strongly that these offices should share in implementing our recommendations.

Recommendations for Future Areas of Effort

Implementation of the substantial recommendations that we have made will need to occur over a period of time and, most of them, by steps. The Task Force would like to meet with the Provost at the beginning of spring semester 2007 to learn which of our recommendations have been implemented and which have been planned for future implementation