



Council of Graduate Schools

PRESS RELEASE

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Report highlights best practices in preparing graduate students for faculty careers

Washington, D.C. (May 17, 2011) – Today, the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) released a new report, *Preparing Future Faculty to Assess Student Learning*, which describes the need for greater faculty engagement in the assessment of undergraduate student learning and outlines a strategy for achieving this goal through enhanced preparation of graduate students. The report examines how model programs introduce graduate students to assessment concepts and approaches and identifies promising practices for scaling up these efforts within and across institutions of higher education. The report is the result of a grant to CGS from the Teagle Foundation to explore the potential for an expanded national network of universities to improve the preparation of graduate students in the assessment of undergraduate learning.

Most higher education faculty in the US are now expected to assess undergraduate student learning in ways that would have been unfamiliar to their predecessors and were rare just a decade ago. Heightened expectations for well-defined learning outcomes and evidence that those outcomes are being used to improve teaching and learning are coming from all sides: regional accrediting bodies, state boards, federal agencies, and senior college and university leaders. Yet, while many of today's graduate students will soon move into faculty positions, most graduate programs do not currently expose their graduate students to learning assessment strategies they can use when they join the ranks of faculty.

“The key to effective assessment is not only faculty understanding of key principles and approaches, but also strong faculty input on and championship of these principles and approaches,” said CGS President Debra Stewart. She continued, “We are grateful for Teagle’s leadership in recognizing the importance of preparing graduate students to embrace these roles.”

Along with highlighting model programs, the report also discusses shortcomings of current approaches, persistent challenges, and ways of more widely disseminating promising practices to ensure that a larger portion of US faculty begin their careers with the skills and understanding needed to enhance the quality of undergraduate learning in US higher education.

Dr. Stewart added, “This project has identified where the biggest opportunities lie in the graduate community for enhancing the quality of undergraduate education. If we can coordinate and scale up enhancements of efforts already underway, Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) and PFF-type programs provide a great opportunity to improve the quality of undergraduate learning through the enhanced training of graduate students.”

Between 1993 and 2003, CGS, in partnership with the Association of American Colleges and Universities, funded and coordinated the development of PFF programs at 45 doctoral universities. These

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PFF programs prepared graduate students for the full range of faculty roles and responsibilities, with an emphasis on teaching, through collaborations with nearly 300 other US colleges and universities. While seed funding ended in 2003, CGS has continued to assist the development of new programs, and many of the original programs have continued to evolve, though some have scaled back their activities.

Preparing Future Faculty to Assess Student Learning reviews recent literature on trends in assessment and learning, discusses the national and institutional contexts for assessment, and reports findings from a national survey of 37 institutions with PFF and other, similar programs as well as a workshop that convened national assessment experts, graduate deans with model programs, and recent student participants. Key findings include:

- The majority of respondents (78%) reported that, over the past decade, requirements for faculty at their university in the assessment of student learning increased. Only 14% reported that such requirements stayed about the same, and none reported a decrease in such requirements.
- About two-thirds (68%) of PFF or similar programs currently integrate some form of learning assessment, but these programs reach small numbers of graduate students and only a fraction of the future faculty.
- More evidence about what works, more active forums for best practice exchange, and more discussion about the assessment of learning in the disciplines are needed to strengthen faculty support for learning assessment.

More information, about the project and ordering the publication, is available on the [CGS website](#).

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The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of over 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. Among U.S. institutions, CGS members award 93% of the doctoral degrees and 76% of the master's degrees. The organization's mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.*

* Based on data from the 2009 CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment and Degrees