



### **Assistant Dean for Graduate Studies in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) at Iowa State University**

**Issue:** Graduate programs across the CALs were not well coordinated and there was increasing need for student support activities, recruitment and engagement to enhance student performance and retention. Oversight of graduate programs was managed by several individuals in the college with multiple other assignments. The CALs Dean created a new position of Assistant Dean for Graduate Programs and I was appointed to that position in January 2012. The role and responsibilities for this position were not well defined, therefore my first responsibility was to create a vision and plan for this new position. Concurrently, the new central administration at ISU defined enhancement of graduate programs to be a priority, among other areas, and created a Presidential Excellence Committee to define goals for these key areas. I was appointed to co-chair the subcommittee on graduate program enhancement in May 2012.

#### **What has been done:**

I have committed 25% of my effort to the Assistant Dean of Graduate Programs position. My goals are to:

- Enhance communication across the 32 graduate programs offered through the CALs (regular meetings of Directors of Graduate Education (DOGE), Administrative Assistants, and student club leaders; build a website for CALs graduate programs; create an electronic 'best practices' forum)
- Create support programs for current students (orientation, career planning and professional development)
- Enhance recruitment efforts by CALs graduate programs
- Establish collaborative relationships with minority-serving institutions
- Coordinate efforts in CALs with other colleges and the Graduate College
- Develop resource for data collection to benchmark student performance and quality

As Co-Chair of the Graduate Student Enhancement Presidential Excellence Committee, we met several times over the past 18 months with advisory groups comprised of DOGEs, graduate students and post-docs. A list of priorities was generated and winnowed to actionable items. A summary document that identified top priorities by year was submitted to the President in May 2013. Budget requests to enhance graduate student programs are under consideration to be implemented in fiscal year 2014-15. I will continue to work on assessing the impact of the proposed programs and ongoing dialog relative to graduate education.

**Impacts/New Partnerships:**

As Assistant Dean of Graduate Programs I have addressed each of the goals listed above. Regular once-per-semester meetings of DOGEs and administrative assistants have been held to generate ideas and plans for program enhancement. A website has been created that provides information to potential students and a portal for current students to share information about events and programs. I have worked with student club leaders to gain their input and recommendations on program needs which led to holding a career planning workshop last spring and an orientation planned for this fall. Programs to support student writing and professional development are being planned as well. A graduate student recruitment weekend event to be held annually was developed with the goal to foster social connections and camaraderie between recruited and current students. Connections with targeted 1890 institutions are in development, initiated by attending the Agricultural Research Dean meeting in May 2013. This includes developing a strong collaboration with the Assistant Dean for Diversity in the college. Yet to be achieved are the data collection resources. This has been delayed by the concurrent change in technology infrastructure occurring on campus – moving to an electronic data warehouse system.

**Outcome of Project (societal impact/ measure of increased quality of life)**

Improving graduate student performance and quality is the overarching goal of my role as Assistant Dean for Graduate Programs. Many of the graduate programs in CALS have small numbers of students at each level therefore having a common resource for training and student development is beneficial. Additionally, we believe that cross-disciplinary engagement is of great value to student learning, and enhancing the diversity of the student body will increase the quality of all programs. Students are eager for more opportunities to expand their learning beyond their laboratory research team as demonstrated by the high turnout for all events we have held.

**How has your project been aided by your FSLI experience?**

The FSLI experience has given me the tools needed to develop a clear vision for this new leadership position and to work effectively with a range of people – from central administration to faculty colleagues, to student leaders. I have used many of the tools and methods we learned in our FSLI workshops to develop effective ways to achieve the defined goals. My interactions with colleagues in Cohort 7 have enhanced my understanding of academic leadership across a wide range of institutions, programs and disciplines. I have taken advantage of the resources provided to us on several occasions to gain a better perspective or solve a challenging situation.

**Contact information:** Ruth S. MacDonald, RD, PhD, Professor and Chair Food Science and Human Nutrition; Assistant Dean of Graduate Programs College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Iowa State University, 2312 Food Sciences, Ames, IA 50011. [Ruthmacd@iastate.edu](mailto:Ruthmacd@iastate.edu)