



# RACKHAM GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

## QUICK TIPS FOR MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMS: RECRUITING FOR DIVERSITY AND RETAINING FOR SUCCESS

The following tips are activities proven to be useful in securing diverse applicants who accept your offers and go on to successful program completion. The suggestions outlined here, used by graduate programs at U-M and by our peers across the nation, are consistent with the law and University policy. These practices have been shown to attract excellent graduate students who will contribute to the University's diversity imperative.

The deans and staff at the Graduate School can assist with funding to facilitate recruiting efforts and provide other resources, information and advice. Contact Gisselle Vélez-Ruiz ([gvr Ruiz@umich.edu](mailto:gvr Ruiz@umich.edu) or 615-4474) in the office of Graduate Student Success for more information about these resources and related research.

### Recruiting Target Prospects

- Talk to those who know

Consult with other U-M departments that have a successful record of recruiting a diverse community of students and faculty. Involve your underrepresented students, alumni, staff, faculty—and faculty who have been successful at attracting diverse students or whose work may attract those students—in each phase of recruitment. This includes identifying prospects, encouraging applications, and persuading those you admit to accept. Determine if there are aspects of your program that may signal an unwelcoming climate to prospects and if so, how to make your environment more welcoming and supportive.

- Use available data

Use the GRE Search Service to identify students who are interested in your field and who have taken the GRE. Consult websites that identify the institutions graduating the largest number of underrepresented students, see <http://diverseeducation.com/top100/top100listing.html>. Employ the specialty lists of contact data from those large organizations designed specifically to work with underrepresented students who are interested in graduate school; e.g., National Name Exchange, McNair Scholars, CIC-SROP participants. All of these resources are available to you from Rackham's office of Graduate Student Success (GSS). We'll also show you how to use them. Your own staff can request recruiting reports from M-Pathways on a regular basis.

- Identify and develop networks

Contact your alumni who are members of underrepresented groups, and ask them to refer prospective students to your program. When visiting campuses for your own work, ask if you can meet with faculty to discuss recruiting interests, or meet with undergraduate student groups who may be interested in graduate study. Ask current underrepresented students in

your program and find out where and with whom they studied with as undergraduates. Many programs focus on the current undergraduates on our own campus.

- Clarify the application process

Often prospects are reluctant to reveal that they have questions about the nuts and bolts of applying to graduate school. Make it a routine part of your recruiting activity to provide an outline of the application process and a suggested timeline. Include information about what both your degree program and Rackham require for a complete submission. When talking with prospects offer suggestions for what the successful application will contain and the profiles that the admissions committee may consider desirable.

- Maximize personal contact

Encourage faculty and students currently in your program to take advantage of every opportunity to recruit formally and informally at relevant professional conferences, conferences that target diverse students, and specific college fairs for schools that serve a predominantly diverse population. Activities led by underrepresented graduate students often have the best outcomes in terms of impressing prospective students with the potential of U-M. Engage graduate student organizations in identifying and talking to prospects. Involve alumni from underrepresented groups in your recruitment events. Make use of social media such as Facebook.com and Blackplanet.com. Respond promptly to inquiries, by phone if possible, and do not simply refer prospects to brochures and university websites. **Personal connections make a difference.**

### **Reviewing Applications**

- Use a holistic review of applications

Give careful consideration to all the credentials presented by the student, not just the quantitative factors. Look for a range of indicators that the applicant has the skills, experiences and resilience for the program. Resist using a single factor to select or exclude the applicant from admission. Be aware of unconscious bias in the letters of recommendation that you receive. By carefully weighing strengths, achievements, and promise you increase the likelihood of offering admission to those most likely to succeed.

- Consider the data

Putting the applications in a long-term and/or comparative perspective can help to indicate unconscious or institutional biases. Provide committee members with demographic data that were shared during Rackham's Program Review. This should encompass applicant, admission and enrolled graduate student data for the past 10 years if possible (minimally 5 years) in each program.

- Build the cohort

Think in terms of building cohort strength based in diversity, thereby enhancing varied interests, experiences, and perspectives in the department. Consider the promising applicants in relation to

others in the pool and to those currently in your program. Remember that next year's top applicants will look at your program's students as well as the faculty strengths when they consider which offer to accept.

### **Encouraging Admitted Students to Accept Your Offers of Admission**

- Host a campus visit

Once you have made offers of admission, invite these underrepresented students to campus—and fund their visits if possible. Engage them in activities that allow an in-depth preview of both your program's academic and wider campus resources. Make certain to include the opportunity for candid discussions with current underrepresented graduate students about potential mentors, department climate, and life in Ann Arbor.

- Contact them personally

Focus on converting admitted students to matriculated students during the winter term. Follow through on your offer with e-mail and personal calls from both faculty and the grad chair, offering to discuss any additional questions. Respond to their concerns and questions honestly. Offer to put them in touch with underrepresented students and faculty for a personal view of life at U-M. Make it possible for them to communicate with other admitted students so you can leverage the enthusiasm of cohort members.

- Clarify the funding

Don't assume that all students are familiar with the variety of ways in which they might fund their graduate education. Clearly state in the offer letter the details of any funding you are able to provide. Inform them of funding for graduate education that targets a diverse student population. Include a written guide to other forms of funding available and how to apply. Nominate eligible students for available fellowships.

### **Supporting Student Success**

- Assign advisors early

Advising and mentoring are important to the success of students in Master's degree programs. Practices vary widely among programs when it comes to formal advising, but students should never be in doubt about who will assist them from the outset with understanding options, essential milestones, requirements, and deadlines.

- Encourage mentoring

All students benefit from multiple sources of guidance. In addition to the formal advisor there are others who can share advice based on experience. Suggest to students with diverse backgrounds that they contact faculty both inside and outside the program who may share overlapping research interests, life experiences, and/or career goals. More advanced graduate students and alumni can also provide the valuable support of peer mentoring.

- Provide research opportunities

In addition to providing the student with an in-depth orientation to the norms of research activity in the program, closely working on a project with faculty and other students can help to acclimate the students to department life and encourage a sense of belonging, especially for those coming from traditionally under-funded colleges and universities.

- Encourage professional development

Share information with all students about the many venues for developing professional and personal skills that facilitate success. Suggest they take part in workshops and seminars that provide additional training in subjects such as grant-writing, oral presentation, time management, networking, etc.

- Promote awareness of student support

Our campus has a wealth of opportunities for diverse students to find personal support and community through staff in U-M offices and with their peers in student organizations. Encourage them to take advantage of student activities and organizations in the departments, campus wide, and nationally. When providing any type of orientation, make certain to include listings of U-M support offices such as Trotter House, the Center for the Education of Women and the Spectrum Center.

- Facilitate an inclusive environment

Be attentive to the ongoing need for a welcoming environment. At the start of the school year make an effort to greet those who are new and make them feel welcome. For example, invite incoming students to attend and take part in departmental seminars and brown bags. Remind students how important it is to become part of cohorts inside and outside the department. Develop and maintain an environment where all perspectives are valued, both inside and outside the classroom.