Report on Graduate Program Director Workload and Compensation

Prepared by Meredith Thomsen, Graduate Studies Director, on behalf of the Graduate Council

Endorsed by Graduate Council 5/3/2019

Key Recommendations

- We encourage departments to develop a formal position description for the role of graduate program director (GPD) if one does not exist, along with a process for the election or appointment of the GPD on a regular basis. Both of these can be documented in departmental bylaws. Departments should explore the possibility that an academic department associate or student workers could assist with GPD activities.
- The Graduate Studies Office will work with programs to clarify the application information presented on program websites. Graduate Studies is partnering with Admissions to develop program-specific portals for applicants to upload supplemental application materials and request letters of reference.
- We recommend that departments work with their Dean to obtain a minimum of 17% percent assignment for graduate program directors (four contact hours/year on a 12-hour load, 3 hours per year on a 9-hour load).
- Graduate Studies will use GRC 799 funds to supply $1000 in summer salary for all graduate program directors not on 12-month contracts.

Introduction

Graduate program directors are campus leaders who ensure the quality of graduate programs at UWL. They work with potential applicants, serve as a resource for current students, and in some programs lead outreach efforts to alumni (Appendix A). The largely decentralized model for graduate education at UWL means that graduate program directors (GPDs) represent and advocate for their programs at the department, college, and university levels.

Despite the critical roles they play, we lack information about the scale of graduate program directors' workload responsibilities, and we have never directly examined how they are compensated for their work. The UWL Graduate Strategic Plan points towards a need to examine GPD workload and compensation, under the following action steps:

- *Develop written materials about duties of graduate program directors.*
- *Explore workload equity for graduate program directors across all colleges and schools, including summer stipends.*

In Fall 2018, the graduate studies director and Graduate Council developed a survey for UWL graduate program directors, to gain a more detailed understanding of the work of these campus leaders. It is our intention to use the information we have gathered to advocate for improved equity in the compensation of GPDs. We will further utilize the insights we gain to make recommendations about strategies which might help lessen the burden on graduate program directors. A final goal is to use the survey responses to help us make good decisions about how to prioritize projects and allocate resources in support of graduate studies at UWL.

Methods

With input from the Graduate Council, its consultants, and Provost Betsy Morgan, Graduate Studies Director Meredith Thomsen developed a survey to gather information about GPD workload and compensation. The survey was approved by the Graduate Council on October 19, 2018. It was shared with graduate program directors as a Qualtrics survey, and directors were reminded several times to complete the survey. Survey questions are available in Appendix B.

We evaluated graduate program director annual workload specifically for the tasks listed in Table 1. GPDs were asked to consider the number of hours they typically spend per week on each task during the fall, J-term, spring and summer, and then generate an estimate in hours for each time period. We also asked GPDs to provide information about which aspects of their work were not captured by the survey. Our survey likely underestimates true workload, since many activities span the regular graduate faculty duties related to teaching, research, and service, and those expected specifically of GPDs.

Survey responses were downloaded into Excel. Open responses were edited for brevity, to facilitate their use within the spreadsheet. Several GPDs were contacted to verify or clarify anomalous responses.

Graduate program directors were asked to provide information on the number of hours of teaching reassignment they received each year or semester as applicable. We calculated to total number of reassigned hours per academic year, assuming that reassignment counts just towards decreased hours in the classroom, and to only the 30 weeks of the spring and fall semesters (i.e. number of reassigned hours per week x 30 weeks in an academic year). Percent reassignment per semester was also calculated for each graduate program director based on the typical assigned teaching load within their department (generally 9 or 12 hours, depending on the department).

We summed GPD estimates for workload tasks completed in fall, J-term, spring and summer to generate an annual workload estimate in hours. We then used the workload estimates to determine the top three most time-consuming tasks for each graduate program director, on an annual basis. When ties occurred, more than three tasks were included as being among the "top three" most time-consuming tasks for a given individual.

Administrative assistance was assigned an index based on how it was described by the GPD, with 0 being no assistance, 1 being minimal assistance, and 2 being substantial assistance. Information about GPD position type and rank was obtained from each individual's UWL Profile. Data about the size of each graduate program (number of students enrolled in F18) were obtained from UWL's Institutional Research Office.

Results

General

We received complete survey responses from 20 graduate program directors and partial surveys from two others. We are missing data on one GPD's workload and compensation. One GPD estimated their workload based on the work they do as director of an undergraduate program which is transitioning next year into a graduate program.

Graduate program directors are as diverse as their programs. Eight are professors, five are associate professors, three are assistant professors, three are IAS, one is NIAS, and one is employed by the Mayo Clinic Health System as an Assistant Professor of Nursing. Nine report they are on 12-month contracts while the others are on 9-month contracts. Seven work within self-supporting graduate programs, of which we have four distinct types (IPSE, SAA, CEE, and Medical Dosimetry). At the time of the survey, graduate program directors had been in their positions for time ranging from two weeks to 29 years, with a median of 3.5 years and an average of 9 years in the position.

Sixteen GPDs are serving in indefinite appointments within their departments, while five are serving in three-year positions. Three of the three-year positions will be filled via a department election, while two will be assigned by the program director. One GPD indicated that their department is currently considering this issue of GPD term length, and one mentioned there was a need to bring the topic into discussion for the by-laws. Thirteen GPDs indicate that they have a position description for their director role. Five indicated they do not, and two were not sure.

Thirteen GPDs reported that they had administrative support in their roles, through other unit staff, an Academic Department Associate, or University Services Associate. The amount of time those individuals put toward graduate program-related work was hard for many GPDs to estimate, but ranged from occasional help with student issues to 100s of hours spent processing application materials. Of the 13 GPDs who reported that they received administrative assistance in their roles, eleven descriptions were coded as substantial and two as minimal. In general, substantial administrative assistance was found in the self-supporting programs (IPSE and SAA), in the Department of Health Professions, and in one program where external grant funds are used to support an administrative position. Administrative assistance was either minimal or absent in most other programs.

Workload

Total estimated program director-specific workload across GPDs ranged widely, from 119 hours per year to 854 hours per year, with a median value of 267 hours/year and an average of 377 hours/year (Figure 1). Multiple GPDs noted that the amount of time spent on certain tasks (e.g. working with student conflicts) was highly variable, making it hard to estimate an average value.

Twenty GPDs completed the detailed workload breakdown. Responses in terms of which tasks required the greatest number of hours were fairly consistent across GPDs. Recruiting was among the top three most time-consuming tasks for ninety percent of the twenty respondents (Table 1). Admissions-related tasks were in the top three for 70% of respondents. All told, the two categories of recruiting and admissions accounted for 44% of the total reported GPD workload hours (3477 out of 7916 hours). Working on curriculum-related tasks (e.g. updating materials in CIM, discussing curriculum with colleagues) was ranked among the top three most time consuming tasks by 50% of GPDs, followed by student employment-related tasks (top three for 40% of GPDs) and assessment (top three for 30 %).
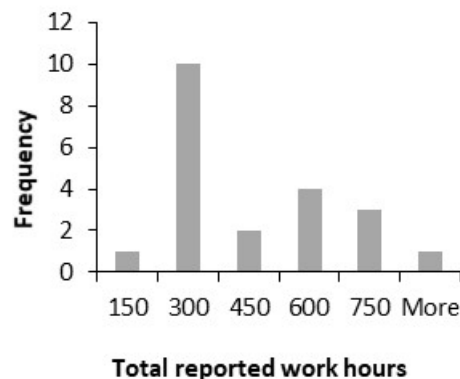

Figure 1: Number of hours reported for total workload on graduate program director tasks (N=21).

Table 1: Results for graduate program director workload survey. Median and mean hours refer to total annual estimates of hours spent on each task. "Top 3" indicates the percent of GPDs who reported that a given task was among the top three most time consuming tasks in their role as program director. Based on the responses of the 21 GPDs who completed the detailed workload breakdown.

Task	Median hours	Mean hours (±SE)	Top 3 (%)
Recruiting	72.5	92.1 (±15.9)	90%
Admissions	51.0	81.8 (±15.4)	70%
Curriculum	35.5	54.9 (±13.5)	50%
Employment	15.0	24.8 (±5.3)	40%
Assessment	24.5	30.4 (±8.5)	30%
Conflicts	10.5	19.5 (±4.6)	15%
Alumni	1.0	9.6 (±3.7)	15%
Fundraising	0.0	6.8 (±4.6)	5%
Annual reporting	0.0	6.5 (±2.1)	5%

When asked which aspects of their work were not captured by the survey, two GPDs mentioned that they serve as the primary advisor for graduate students in their program. Both individuals estimated their advising workload at about 60 hours/year (within the top three most time-consuming GPD tasks for both of these individuals). One GPD explained that because the majority of courses in their program are taught by adjunct instructors, the bulk of the workload for revisions of course content falls to the GPD. This effort was estimated at 450 hours per year, which was by a large margin the most time-consuming aspect of this individual's role as GPD. One GPD described a substantial time commitment to another campus unit, which they viewed as necessary for providing hands-on opportunities for students. This effort was estimated at 275 hours/year, the biggest item in this individual's annual workload.

The 13 GPDs with 9-month contracts report a median summer workload of 33 hours, and a mean summer workload of 57 hours. None of these individuals indicated that they were receiving any type of compensation for work completed while they were not on contract.

We evaluated workload estimates related to Graduate Annual Program Review and external accreditation reports separately from other types of work which occur every year. These reports represent a very significant amount of work. Eight GPDs had completed a Graduate APR report, but only five of these reported how long it took to complete it. These GPDs reported spending between 18 and 100 hours on their Grad APR report; the median was 30.0 hours and the average was 43.3 hours. For two of the GPDs, the workload hours reported for Grad APR would put it into the top three most time-consuming tasks for their year. Four out of five GPDs reported doing 95% or more of the work on the Grad APR report, while the other reported they did 40% of the work.

Ten graduate program directors indicated that their programs are externally accredited. GPD estimates of the number of hours it took to complete their most recent accreditation report ranged widely, from 5 to 1982 (it is possible that some of the lower reported values were in reference to interim annual reports rather than full cycle reports). The individual on the upper end of the accreditation workload range reports that writing their program's 10-year accreditation report was 50% of their total workload for two years. The median number of hours reported for accreditation reports was 50.0, and the mean was 260.7. Five GPDs reported completing 100% of their accreditation reports, while the others completed 50-60% of the reports.

Compensation

Nineteen GPDs reported their reassignment time from teaching, which varied from 0% to 50%. The median reassignment time was 17% and the average was 20% (Figure 2). Two of the GPDs who reported 0% reassignment time receive direct monetary compensation. One GPD reported that the only compensation they received was a release from undergraduate advising. One GPD did not report a reassignment time because they are NIAS.

Five GPDs reported that they receive direct monetary compensation for their work as GPD. Two of these individuals indicated that their salaries or contracts reflect their role as GPD. The other three are working with Continuing Education and Extension in online graduate programs and are paid by CEE for their work as GPD.

We found no correlation between the GPD's number of reassigned hours per academic year and the number of students within each graduate program (Pearson's correlation coefficient, N=17, P>0.18; Figure 3). (Two GPDs were omitted from this analysis because their programs started S19 or will start F19, so enrollment data were not available). We noted a wide span in reassigned hours among GPDs who administer graduate programs of similar size.
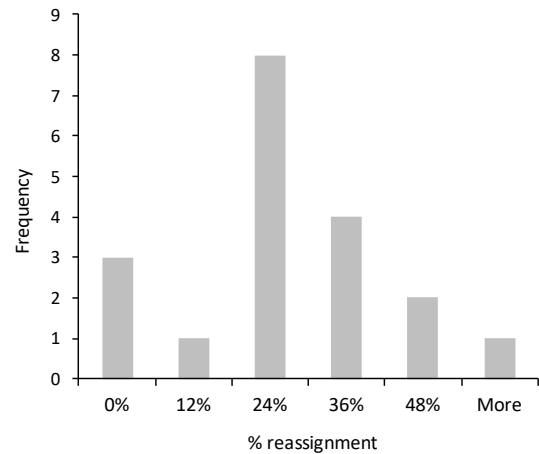

Figure 2: Graduate program director percent reassignment per semester, based on the number of hours reassigned and the standard teaching load in the department (N=19).
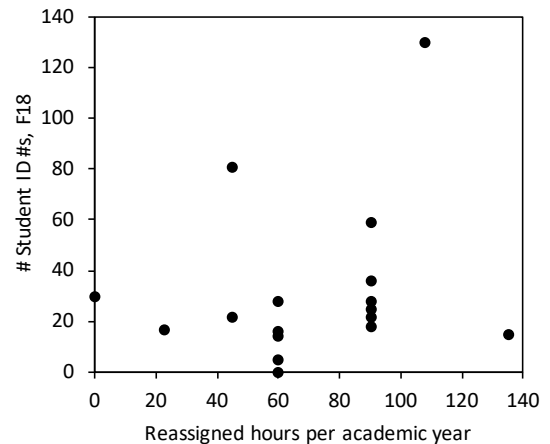

Figure 3: Number of reassigned hours per academic year does not correlate with the number of students within the graduate program (N=17).

Discussion and Recommendations

The 2016 UWL Graduate Strategic Plan states:

… [I]t is critical that graduate education make a shift from a fragmented collection of independent programs to a centralized approach with sustained management and vision. To achieve a more centralized administration, the infrastructure of graduate studies needs to be revised and expanded … Without this investment in the infrastructure of graduate education, the remaining recommendations will be difficult to achieve.

UWL made an investment in graduate studies the following year, with the creation of a new graduate studies coordinator position. That change has in turned made it possible for the graduate studies director to take on a more central administrative role, as envisioned by the Strategic Plan.

The next step is to extend the investment in infrastructure outward, into the individual graduate programs, by building the leadership capacity of the graduate program directors. The only way that will be possible is by examining the work they are doing, making efforts to streamline that effort as much as possible, and investing in their development as campus leaders.

General

Most graduate program directors have position descriptions for their roles. **Where GPD duties are not documented within department bylaws, we strongly encourage the department to do so.** The description of the role is also key to personnel review as indicated below. The Graduate Studies Office has developed "boilerplate" language for GPD duties, which may be used when GPD duties are added to or revised within bylaws (***Appendix A***). Graduate program directors associated with the School of Education should have position descriptions and selection processes and criteria that align with the documentation developed by SOE faculty that is available at https://www.uwlax.edu/soe/about-us/soe-leadership-team/.

We found that many graduate program directors are serving in indefinite terms within their departments. In some respects, as one GPD pointed out "continuity is key." Individuals who serve in a leadership role for a long period build up institutional knowledge and develop perspectives which benefit their programs. Indefinite appointments may also result in individuals feeling trapped in a role they no longer relish, and provide no clear path for other faculty who may wish to test themselves in a leadership role.

Departments are encouraged to develop a process for the election or appointment of GPDs on a regular basis and to document that process in their by-laws. Within some programs, qualifications for GPDs will be dictated by external accrediting agencies. Having a public position description and statement of the percent reassignment associated with the role will help potential applicants evaluate whether they are interested in the position. In many cases, the current GPD will be re-elected or reappointed, maintaining continuity. However, the process will allow each GPD and each department to reflect periodically on whether the program and students would be best served by maintaining the status quo, or by bringing a new person into the role of GPD. Where it is impossible to imagine another individual serving as GPD because the graduate program is essentially a "one-person show," this is one of several reasons to explore ways to broaden participation in the program.

Our survey revealed differences in the administrative assistance GPDs receive. **Graduate program directors who are not currently receiving assistance from an Academic Departmental Associate (ADA) or others in their units should explore that possibility.** We have one graduate program which has taken the innovative step of securing administrative assistance through a grant; that model might be explored elsewhere. Student workers on campus receive FERPA training to work with student records; they can also be given access to shared file spaces such as an O drive folder. An idea which might facilitate delegating some GPD tasks is to create a generic email address such as "BioGrad@uwlax.edu," which could be accessed by an ADA or student worker. That individual could then take primary responsibility for answering basic questions or forwarding emails to other campus offices.

Recruiting and Admissions

Our survey indicates that recruiting and admissions are a significant component of the annual workload for graduate program directors. Given how important it is to maintain or increase graduate student enrollments, it is important to recognize and support this role. To this end, **Graduate Studies Coordinator Kayah-Bah Malecek will work with programs to clarify application information on program websites,** using the School Psychology page as a model. Creating clear, step-by-step instructions for applicants may decrease the number of questions that GPDs are fielding on this topic.

Furthermore, the **Graduate Studies Office and Admissions are working to use the Customer Relationship Management system to support graduate admissions.** Specifically, we will build program-specific portals for applicants to upload supplemental materials such as statements of purpose and to automate the process for requesting and receiving letters of recommendation. This will streamline the application process for both applicants and GPDs, as well as facilitating the review of graduate application materials.

Program Reporting and Accreditation

Reporting and accreditation responsibilities result in many hours of work for graduate program directors. Graduate Academic Program Review and the University Program Assessment Reports are relatively new innovations, which have added to GPD workload. GPDs report that they do most of the work in completing assessment and accreditation reports. Where possible, **academic units should delegate part of the work of graduate program assessment and accreditation to an assessment committee.** Furthermore, Institutional Research assists some graduate programs with accreditation-related tasks, and is open to the idea of helping other programs as well. **Programs with heavy accreditation responsibilities should explore the possibility of working with Institutional Research**, to take some of the workload off the GPD.

Equity in Workload and Compensation

We recognize the diversity of our graduate programs and the unique situations found within them. In our evaluations, we have tried to avoid making "one size fits all" assumptions. Despite that caveat, our results reveal that there are disparities among GPDs in terms of the amount of reassigned time they are receiving for their work as program directors. For individuals directing programs with fewer than 40 graduate students, our calculation of the number of hours of reassigned time being invested in them each year ranges from zero to 140.

We recommend that the colleges set a minimum of 17% percent reassignment for graduate program directors (four contact hours/year on a 12-hour load, 3 hours per year on a 9-hour load). GPDs with larger programs, or who have less help with the tasks associated with program leadership, will need more reassignment time than this minimum level. Where program or department teaching loads are too heavy to accommodate reassignment time, GPDs could be offered overload payments in place of teaching reassignment.

Furthermore, **we encourage departments to plan for how the activities of untenured or unpromoted graduate program directors will be documented within promotion and tenure materials.** A letter from the GPD's supervisor outlining the job description, and documentation of the level of success in the role will be required. Furthermore, the service conducted as GPD will need to be clearly delineated from other service to the university provided by that individual, "above and beyond" that provided within the GPD role. See the JPC Guide to Faculty Promotions and Portfolio Development for more information. An untenured assistant professor in a GPD role should be mentored by their department to find the right balance among GPD duties, teaching, research, and other service activities.

Finally, following the recommendation of the Graduate Studies Strategic Plan, **Graduate Studies will use GRC 799 funds to supply $1000 in summer salary for all graduate program directors not on 12-month contracts.** This level of compensation (estimated as 22.5 hours, as per the Curriculum Redesign Grant guidelines) is considerably less than the median (33 hours) and mean (57 hours) summer workload hours reported by GPDs on 9-month contracts.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Graduate Program Directors, who took the time to complete our survey about their workload and compensation. The work they do is impressive in its scope and variety. Examining their responses and searching for common threads has given us a greater appreciation of the diversity of our programs and of our program directors. Graduate studies at UWL is what it is today thanks to their work, and we know we are in good hands as we look toward the future.

Appendix A: Description of Graduate Program Director Duties

Note: *This description of duties is comprehensive – the GPD within any given program is not expected to do everything listed here. Edit this text needed to reflect the situation in your program.*

The graduate program director (GPD) plays an important leadership role within the department. They hold primary responsibility for recruiting and admission to the graduate program. The GPD or their designee maintains the graduate program website, making changes as necessary to keep the site accurate and updated. The GPD ensures that queries from potential applicants are answered, works with Admissions to process applications, and makes sure that Admissions is notified about which students are accepted. The GPD may also be involved in recruiting activities such as participating at recruiting fairs at professional conferences. The GPD serves as an important point of contact for students within the department, for issues such as advising, employment as a GA, and/or conflict resolution.

The GPD also plays a central role in tending to the graduate program curriculum and assessment, e.g. updating materials for the Graduate Catalog, and completing University Program Assessment, Graduate Academic Program Review, and external accreditation reports. The GPD may work within established guidelines at the College or Department level on fundraising related to graduate student scholarships and/or reaching out to alumni.

The graduate program director also serves as an important liaison between the program and the Graduate Studies Office. Duties related to this role include regular attendance at the annual Graduate Summit, and at monthly meetings of the graduate program directors, held from 10-11 am on the second Friday of each month while school is in session. The graduate program director serves as a conduit of information between the graduate studies office and the program's graduate faculty and students. This includes forwarding emails, making announcements at department meetings, and/or posting flyers shared by the Graduate Studies Office.

In compensation for this work, the graduate program director receives an X% reassignment from the teaching. This reassignment should be considered when evaluating the GPD for personnel review procedures including annual merit review and career progression.

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Introduction

One of the recommendations in ***Vision 2021: A Strategic Plan for Graduate Education at UW-La Crosse*** is to examine the issue of workload and compensation for Graduate Program Directors. This survey has been designed to capture information on these topics, which will allow us to move forward to explore options for adjusting workload or seeking additional compensation.

Please note that **your responses will not be anonymous**. Please contact Meredith Thomsen, Graduate Studies Director, if you have questions or concerns about how this information will be used.

Assignment information and compensation

Your name:

For which graduate program do you serve as director?

What is the length of your annual contract?

○ 9 month

○ 10 month

○ 12 month

○ Other (please explain):

What is your regular assigned teaching load?

○ 12 contact hours per semester

○ 9 contact hours per semester

○ Other (please explain):

On average, what proportion of your annual teaching load is graduate credit (including graduate students in slash courses)?

For how long have you served as Program Director?

How is the term of service for Program Director role handled in your departmental bylaws? Is there a set term length (e.g. 3 years, followed by an election)? Do you serve indefinitely? Some other model? Not sure?

Do you have a Position Description for your role as Graduate Program Director?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Not sure

Do you have any administrative support in your role as Program Director? For example does your department's ADA assist with some graduate-related tasks?

○ Yes

○ No

Please describe the nature of the administrative support you receive in your role as program director in hours or percent of FTE, whichever makes the most sense.

Do you receive reassignment time as Graduate Program Director?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Please provide as much detail as you can about your reassignment time. When does it occur? How many contact hours? Anything else you can tell us?

Do you receive any direct monetary compensation for your work as Graduate Program Director, such as an overload payment for a semester or during the summer?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Please provide as much detail as you can about your direct monetary compensation for your work as Graduate Program Director. How much money? Is it connected to particular tasks? Is it connected to a certain period of time?

Are you compensated for your work as Graduate Program Director in any way that is not captured here? If yes, please describe.

Workload

The workload questions below ask you to estimate the number of hours you spend on various Graduate Program Director tasks, during different times of the year. Please try to focus on what you do because you are Program Director, separate from your "regular" graduate faculty duties.

To estimate hours, we request that you think about what you do in an "average week" during a given period, then multiply that by 15 weeks for a semester, by 3 weeks for J-term, and by however many weeks you typically work during the summer. Blanks will be recorded as zeros, so if there is a type of job you do not do, just leave that section blank. There is space at the end for you to add information about job duties not captured in our survey.

In your role as Program Director, approximately how many hours do you spend on graduate **recruiting** tasks during each time period? (e.g. answering emails from applicants, updating your program website, attending recruitment events)

Fall semester	
J-term	
Spring semester	
Summer	
Any explanation you'd like to add?	

In your role as Program Director, approximately how many hours do you spend on graduate **admissions** tasks during each period? (e.g. reviewing applications, writing acceptance letters, responding to follow-up questions from admitted students)

Fall semester

J-term

Spring semester

Summer

Any explanation you'd like to add?

In your role as Program Director, approximately how many hours do you spend on graduate **employment** tasks during each period? (e.g. updating materials in PeopleAdmin, reviewing applications for GAs, writing acceptance letters, responding to follow-up questions from students chosen for GA positions, supervising GAs)

Fall semester

J-term

Spring semester

Summer

Any explanation you'd like to add?

In your role as Program Director, approximately how many hours do you spend on graduate **curriculum** tasks during each period? (e.g. course or program revisions in CIM, meeting with colleagues to discuss curriculum)

Fall semester

J-term

Spring semester

Summer

Any explanation you'd like to add?

In your role as Program Director, approximately how many hours do you spend on helping graduate students with **conflicts or problems** of various types? (e.g. course or program grievances, mental health issues, harassment, etc.)

Fall semester

J-term

Spring semester

Summer

Any explanation you'd like to add?

In your role as Program Director, approximately how many hours do you spend on graduate **assessment** tasks during each period? (e.g. working on SLOs, designing assessment tasks, using Tasktream, working with assessment data)

Fall semester

J-term

Spring semester

Summer

Any explanation you'd like to add?

In your role as Program Director, approximately how many hours do you spend on **fundraising**? (e.g. communicating with potential donors, working with the Foundation)

Fall semester

J-term

Spring semester

Summer

Any explanation you'd like to add?

In your role as Program Director, approximately how many hours do you spend on work with **alumni**? (e.g. updating a database, alumni newsletter)

Fall semester

J-term

Spring semester

Summer

Any explanation you'd like to add?

Have you completed a Graduate APR report?

○ Yes

○ No

How many hours do you estimate it took to complete your Grad APR report?
Approximately what percentage of the total time on the Graduate APR Report did you complete?

Is your program externally accredited?
○ Yes

○ No

What is the name of your accrediting body? (This is for our records, not workload.)

If you complete quarterly or annual reports for your external accreditation body, how many hours do you spend on this type of reporting each year?

Fall semester	
J-term	
Spring semester	
Summer	
Any explanation you'd like to add?	

How many hours do you estimate it took to complete your most recent accreditation report?

Approximately what percentage of the total time on the most recent accreditation report did you complete?

What aspects of your work as Graduate Program Director are not captured here?