Council of Graduate Schools
Site Visit Report for University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Conducted by:

Dr. Jianping Zhu
Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
Cleveland State University
And
Dr. Jerry Pogatshnik
Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Vice President for Research
Eastern Kentucky University

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Executive Summary

This report is based on the Self-Study report compiled by the University of Wisconsin La Crosse (UW-L) dated March 15, 2015 as well as extensive conversations with key constituencies that took place during our site visit on April 19-20, 2015. Much of the groundwork for moving graduate education forward at UW-L was laid prior to the visit, particularly with the Graduate Studies Task Force Report from May 2012. This report summarizes the key findings during our review and is organized according to an outline agreed upon by the review team and representatives from UW-L.

Although the university is well known for the quality of its undergraduate programs, efforts in graduate education have been less successful. As a whole, graduate enrollments have decreased significantly over the past five years. The decentralized structure of graduate education and the lack of a clear institutional vision, with concomitant allocation of resources, have resulted in a fragmented approach to graduate education rather than development through an institutional strategic plan. The threats of significant cuts in state funding will complicate efforts as to how the institution chooses to move forward. However, given the quality of the institution and the dedication of faculty and staff, the institution has the capacity to be a leader in graduate education among comprehensive institutions in the state.

Imbedded in the report are a number of recommendations that will hopefully serve as guidelines as the institution moves forward in developing a strategic plan for graduate education. Some of the key recommendations are, that UW-L as an institution should;

• Provide a clearer understanding of the role of graduate education within the mission of the University
• Provide for appropriate personnel to support the Office of Graduate Studies. At a minimum, this should include moving the Director to a full time position and adding a full-time staff person to support graduate admissions, graduate recruitment and communications.
• Assure graduate perspectives are included in academic discussions by adding the Director to the Council of Deans
• Develop recruiting strategies for current undergraduate students to encourage them to pursue graduate education at UW-L
• Consider development and/or expansion of graduate programs in either online or low residency formats to more effectively compete for working professionals who wish to pursue graduate education.
• Set a goal to increase graduate enrollment to 1000 students by 2020
Introduction

This report is based on the Self-Study report compiled by UW-L dated March 15, 2015 as well as extensive conversations with key constituencies that took place during our site visit on April 19-20, 2015. Groups that were interviewed included graduate program directors and departmental chairs, deans of the academic colleges, the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and members of her staff, members of the Graduate Council and Graduate Curriculum Committee, graduate students, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and members of his staff, and Representatives from Continuing Education, CATL and the Sponsored programs office. The review team also had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Steven Simpson, Director of the Office of Graduate Studies, Provost Heidi Macpherson, Associate Provost Robert Hoar, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance Robert Hetzel, and Chancellor Joe Gow. The review team is grateful to all of these individuals for their hospitality and insights.

Much of the groundwork for moving graduate education forward at UW-L was laid prior to the visit, particularly with the Graduate Studies Task Force Report from May 2012. This document, along with an extensive self-study report prepared prior to our visit guided many of the questions during our interviews. This report summarizes the key findings during our review and is organized according to an outline agreed upon by the review team and representatives from UW-L. Imbedded in the report are a number of recommendations for consideration by UW-L administrators, faculty and staff for enhancing graduate education at the institution.

A. Administrative

Role of Graduate Education – National and at UWL

Nationally, graduate education in general plays a vital role in preparing and training students for cutting edge research and professions that require post-baccalaureate education. At individual institutions, however, the role of graduate education can vary significantly depending on the mission and vision of the institutions.

1. Major research universities - most departments offer doctoral degrees. The role of graduate education is focused on doctoral education and preparing students for careers as researchers, faculty at institution of higher learning, or in professions where terminal degrees are required. Graduate students are an essential part of the university’s research enterprise to support faculty research. Most of the graduate students at these universities receive tuition waivers and stipends. The graduate tuition revenue is not a significant part of the universities’ total tuition revenue.

1 See Appendix 1 for Complete Itinerary
2. Universities that have doctoral program in select areas and master’s program in most departments – the role of graduate education is typically focused on preparing students for professional careers or more advanced study at doctoral level. Graduate enrollment at these institutions can range from 10% to more than 30%. Most of the graduate students are tuition paying students at these institutions. The graduate tuition revenue is a significant part of the universities’ total tuition revenue.

3. Universities that have few, if any, doctoral programs and some master’s program in select disciplines. The role of graduate education at these institutions is similar to that at the institutions of the second category above. The main difference is that graduate enrollment at these institutions is typically less than 10% of the total enrollment. Since graduate tuition is not a significant part of the universities total tuition revenue, graduate education often struggles for visibility, resources, and future direction at these universities. In addition, graduate education is often viewed as a competing force with undergraduate education for limited resources at these institutions.

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse appears to fall into this latter category. During the past several years, UW-L has given considerable thought in assessing the role and limitations of graduate education on its campus. Much of this is captured in the report of the Graduate Studies Task Force, dated May 2012. Many of the recommendations suggest incremental improvements (fee changes, policy revisions, marketing improvements). But goals for graduate education are less clear. The visibility and vitality of graduate programs are a challenge at most universities where institutional goals are highly driven by the undergraduate mission. A key question that does not appear to be answered is where does graduate education fit within the framework of the institution’s overall strategic plan?

We recommend that UW-L faculty and administration work together to clarify the importance and potential of graduate education at UW-L. While UW-L has traditionally focused on undergraduate education, graduate education will play an increasingly important role going forward in enhancing UW-L’s program quality and financial strength for the following reasons:

- Graduate education enhances, instead of competes, with undergraduate education at UW-L: Having graduate programs help to attract stronger faculty and the presence of graduate students in classrooms benefit undergraduate students as well.
- As master’s degrees are becoming entry level degrees for many professions, developing strong graduate programs in select disciplines will better position UW-L to train students for tomorrow’s workforce.
- In today’s environment, undergraduate tuition rate at public universities is closely scrutinized and often capped by the States. The situation is unlikely to improve significantly in the near future. On the other hand, universities usually have more flexibility to set their graduate tuition rates, making graduate tuition revenue...
increasingly more important even at universities that have traditionally relied on undergraduate tuition for their operations.

Administrative Structure and the Office of Graduate Studies

Universities employ a wide range of models to promote and foster graduate education on their campuses. Generally speaking, these models range from highly centralized to highly decentralized. In highly centralized models, much of the policy and process implementation is handled by a Graduate School or Graduate College, typically headed by a graduate dean. Centralized institutions use the Graduate School, typically aided by a Graduate Council or similar faculty governance body, for developing campus-wide admissions policies, conducting academic reviews of graduate programs and often times handle the graduate admissions process within the Graduate School. They also are typically charged with assuring that graduate students meet degree requirements through the degree-audit function and thesis and dissertation approval. In many of these cases, Graduate Schools allocate considerable resources to other Academic units through distribution of graduate assistantships, scholarships and other financial support. Institutions that rely on a decentralized model delegate many of these functions to the academic units, themselves.

As institutions have faced increasingly difficult budgets, some have looked in moving to a more decentralized model as a cost-saving approach. However, a study conducted by Western Washington University\(^2\) on institutions similar in size to UW-L concluded that a more centralized model actually results in cost savings since decentralization often leads to duplicative processes at the unit level. Once a decentralized model is adopted, however, it may be difficult to transition to a centralized model because of the upfront costs in establishing (or reestablishing) a Graduate School, and the fact that academic units are sometimes reluctant to cede authority over their graduate programs once they have been charged with their oversight. Many comprehensive or master’s-focused institutions combine the Graduate School with one or more administrative offices where a full-time Graduate Dean may not be needed. The most common of these is to combine the Graduate Dean with the Chief Research Office due to the synergy between graduate education and research. Other examples include the combination of the Graduate School with Continuing Education or online programs.

Given the diversity of models for the administration of graduate programs, it is safe to say that there is no “best” model. Any of these can work well given the appropriate institutional commitment and any of these are subject to failure.

It is clear that the administration of graduate programs at UW-L tends strongly toward a decentralized model. The graduate admissions process is handled by the central admissions office, degree audit is conducted within the academic colleges, and there is a comparably low

\(^2\) Moheb Ghali, Comparing the Costs of Alternative Structures of Graduate Schools: Centralized vs Decentralized, CGS Communicator, June 2011
level of staff support for the Office of Graduate Studies. There doesn’t appear to be any
centralized recruitment for, or marketing of, graduate programs other than on university
websites and that which is conducted by the graduate programs, themselves. It is also clear
that administrative support staff are highly dedicated and make significant efforts to serve the
needs of graduate students. Most critically, we were impressed by the deep level of
commitment from the faculty and graduate program coordinators that were interviewed during
the site visit.

- **Current structure – adequacy to meet the needs**

  Much of the discussion during the visit focused on the question as to whether the
  present administrative structure was sufficient to support graduate education at UW-L.
  Administration of graduate programs at UW-L relies on a highly decentralized model;
  part of this is historical and part is based on the assumption that a decentralized model
  results in lower costs. Decentralized models for administering graduate education can
  be effective if the governing units establish graduate programs as a high priority.
  However, the steep declines in graduate enrollment coupled with questions at
  numerous levels about the institution’s commitment to graduate education lead us to
  question the assumption that the current model is working well at UW-L.

  In our view, the staffing level of the Office of Graduate Studies seems unusually low,
  both in comparison to similar universities within the UW system and within the broader
  graduate education community. Apart from a graduate assistant, the Office staff
  consists solely of a part-time director and a part-time assistant. It is our opinion that the
  current level of staff support is not adequate to meet the challenges faced by graduate
  programs and graduate students at UW-L. The highest priority should be given to
  expanding the role of the Director of Graduate Studies to provide greater leadership for
  graduate education.

  Recommendation #1 of the Graduate Studies Task Force was to move the Director of
  Graduate Studies position to a full-time appointment. We concur with this
  recommendation. Given the current number of graduate students at UW-La, the
  importance of a coordinated effort to identify graduate programs with high growth
  potential and to grow enrollment in those programs, and the need to streamline
  functions related to graduate education, there is an urgent need to have a full-time
  Director of the Office of Graduate Studies whose sole responsibility is to lead campus
  wide efforts to enhance graduate education at UW-L, to coordinate interactions across
different campus units, and to advocate for graduate programs at UW-L. The Director
  should participate in academic decision-making through the Deans’ Council and other
  appropriate channels and should play a key role in graduate curriculum review, program
  review, and new program approval. Consideration should be given to consolidating the
Graduate Council, Graduate Curriculum Committee, and Graduate Advisory Council into an expanded and strengthened Graduate Council. Ideally, the Graduate Council would also be involved in the review of graduate programs. The full-time Director should be a member of the Dean’s Council and chair or co-Chair of the expanded Graduate Council.

In addition, as a long-term strategy, the university should consider establishing a Graduate School headed by a graduate dean and appropriately staffed to provide expanded services to current and potential students. A high priority should be given to a staff person who could help coordinate the graduate admissions process by collaborating with the central admissions office and the graduate programs, as well as assist with graduate recruitment and marketing through social media and other avenues.

• **Visibility of Graduate Studies**

  Maintaining the visibility and viability of graduate programs is a challenge at most universities where institutional goals are highly driven by the undergraduate mission. This becomes an increasing challenge when graduate enrollments fall to less than 10% of total enrollment. To increase the visibility of Office of Graduate Studies and graduate education at UW-L, we recommend

  - Publishing a Graduate Studies Newsletter to highlight accomplishments of graduate faculty and graduate students, new services offered for graduate students, policy and procedure changes affecting graduate faculty and graduate students, upcoming events for graduate faculty and graduate students, and news from graduate alumni. To be cost-effective, the Newsletter can be in a pdf format distributed through the Internet.
  - Updating University, college, and department websites to ensure graduate programs are properly highlighted. While individual departments or even colleges may not have the proper personnel to do this, the Office of Graduate Studies could hire a competent student or part-time employee do this for all colleges and departments that have graduate programs.
  - Establishing university level awards to recognize outstanding graduate students who excel in teaching, research, professional service or community engagement. Annual high profile recognition events should be held to present these awards.
  - Advocating the importance of graduate education at strategic planning, budgeting, and other major university events and forums. See discussion under the section of the “Role of Graduate Education.”
• **Enrollment Management**

Graduate enrollment among public comprehensive universities in Wisconsin has faced key challenges during the past five years. UW-L, along with its sister institutions at Oshkosh, Eau Claire, Whitewater, Stout and River Falls have had significant declines in graduate enrollment from Fall 2009 to Fall 2014. Much of the decline is attributable to the fact that master’s degrees for teacher advancement are no longer required in Wisconsin. However, the impact on the UW-L campus has been greater in terms of loss of enrolled students (-361 headcount) and percentage of enrolled students (-32%) than those peer institutions. The difficulty here is that, as graduate enrollments decline under a decentralized model, academic units may tend to make decisions that shift resources away from graduate programs into undergraduate programs, thus further eroding the situation.

We note special opportunities for UW-L in the following three areas:

**Tuition paying students, particular part-time students:** Public master’s focused institutions tend to rely heavily on part-time students in professional programs, most of whom pay full tuition and do not require or are not eligible for institutional support through graduate assistantships. UW-L seems somewhat unusual in that it has a relatively high percentage of full-time students based on comparing FTE enrollments to headcounts. We did not do a budget analysis of any kind but anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that there is a high demand for graduate assistantships and these can contribute to a higher cost for graduate programs. The cost can be mitigated somewhat when graduate assistants are used to support undergraduate education by serving as TA’s, tutors, part-time/lab instructors, etc. When developing new graduate programs, the need for graduate assistantship funds should be taken into consideration. The emphasis should be on the development of programs that can attract tuition-paying students.

**Online Programs:** As the University seeks to expand its graduate programs, strong consideration should be given to providing additional course delivery options through online or low residency programs. This strategy is particularly important in meeting the needs of working professionals who are looking to master’s programs for career advancement. In programs where some face-to-face course delivery is essential, low residency programs where a substantial portion of the curriculum can be offered online, provide additional possibilities where face-to-face components can be offered through workshops or other flexible formats. While some faculty and administrators question the merits of online programs, the fact of the matter is that working professionals in many fields strongly prefer these programs and advances in technology over the past
decade have led to improvements in the academic quality of online courses. Done correctly, online education opens additional markets for graduate education and serves the needs of students, many from rural areas, who are increasingly dependent on these types of programs for their professional needs.

UW-L Undergraduate Students: In the past, UW – L has not focused on recruiting its own undergraduate students. While undergraduate students at UW – L should be properly advised to consider a broad range of options for graduate studies, both within and beyond UW – L, based on their ability, interest, and personal situation, it makes good sense for UW – L to actively recruit and attract its own undergraduate students for whom UW – L’s graduate programs are a good fit. This can be accomplished by offering accelerated 3 + 2 or 4 + 1 programs through which students can receive both an undergraduate and a master’s degree in 5 years.

We recommend that UW – L

- Set a goal to grow graduate enrollment to more than 1,000 students
- Launch a concerted effort to recruit undergraduate students from UW-L through the development of 3+2 or 4+1 programs.
- Identify current programs with capacity to grow and provide appropriate resources to support those programs to grow enrollment
- Expand online options or low residency programs to attract students who work or who do not reside in UW – L area
- Develop an effective communication and marketing plan to attract more fee paying students

• Opportunities and challenges

As we have discussed in other sections of this report, graduate education at UW – L is facing many challenges, including:

- Declining enrollment due to, for example, increased competition from proprietary institutions, lack of funding from many employers to subsidizing their employees to pursue graduate degrees, and elimination of requirement of master’s degrees for teachers in Wisconsin
- Lack of understanding on the importance of role of graduate education at comprehensive universities that have undergraduate education as its primary mission and that heavily depend on undergraduate tuition revenue for their operations
- Lack of consensus on proper administrative structure to support and grow graduate education at UW – L
While these are major challenges that are not unique to UW – L, we recognize that there are currently good opportunities for UW – L to take a holistic review of the role of graduate education and to develop strategies to deal with these major challenges. We have touched on some of these opportunities in other parts of this report, including:

- The realization that current status of graduate education at UW – L and its future direction need to be examined. Throughout our visit, we were very much impressed by the concerned faculty and administrators’ dedication to and passion for graduation. We hope UW – L can capitalize on this opportunity to review and enhance graduation education at UW - L.
- Untapped (or not actively tapped) pool of UW – L undergraduate students. We think active recruitment and development of accelerated programs, such as 3 +2 and 4 + 1 programs, will help to attract more UW – L undergraduate students to your graduate programs.
- Part-time students. Relative to other similar institutions, UW – L has more full-time students. Many of these students receive tuition support. UW – L should explore the pool of part-time tuition-paying students.

• UW-L Vision/Mission of Graduate Education

In our opinion, the current UW-L vision and mission statements for graduate education are appropriate for the institution. The key is to establish a proper administrative support structure and develop effective strategies to accomplish the stated mission and realize the vision. The institution might consider specific measures to indicate success in accomplishing its stated mission. For example, what specific initiatives does the institution make to “promote and support excellence in graduate programs”? While some of these may be captured at the programmatic level during program review, one might also consider making any such measures an explicit part of the Office of Graduate Studies’ Annual Report to the Provost. The mission statement also infers that graduates will be “leaders in their chosen profession with global perspectives”. This would seem to imply that “global perspectives” should be integrated into the curriculum of all graduate programs and it is not clear whether all programs do this and who might be responsible for assuring this takes place, particularly given the decentralized nature of graduate program administration.

• Current UW-L Graduate Policies, Procedures and Communication

Institutional-wide policies pertaining to graduate education are published on the University’s website. The policy base is consistent with many of the best practices in graduate education. Departments also appear to have separate policies governing their graduate programs. While this is common practice at many institutions, it can lead to difficulties if these policies are not carefully coordinated with the office of Graduate Studies. In interviewing several graduate students, the effectiveness of
communication regarding department-level policies varies widely among units. We applaud the Office of Graduate Studies in their efforts to provide a clearinghouse of departmental information so that students can be given clear and consistent information.

We believe there are opportunities for improvement in the University’s structure to review graduate policy, curriculum development/revision, and the program review process. Currently, responsibility for these activities is divided among the Graduate Council, the Graduate Curriculum Committee, and the Graduate Academic Program Review Committee. In our conversations, it also appears that communication and coordination between these important groups is not always effective. Consideration should be given to consolidating these activities under an expanded Graduate Council, augmented by faculty or staff from outside the Council on an ad-hoc basis, if needed. The Council could conceivably be divided into committees dealing with faculty approval, program review, curriculum review, student support, etc. with the activities coordinated by the Office of Graduate Studies.

• **Current UW – L Financial Structure to Support Graduate Education**

  Conversations with constituency groups and supporting documentation provided by the university highlight the challenges of providing financial support of graduate education. The types of funding mechanisms (102 funding, funding through continuing education, etc.) add levels of complexity to the budget picture. It is also important to recognize the financial pressures placed on institutions of higher education within the state given the current political debates. While a detailed budget analysis was not part of this review, financial support needs to be an important area of discussion in developing a strategic plan for graduate education. Under the current tuition plan, undergraduate tuition is expected to be held constant in FY 16 but graduate tuition would increase by 3% - 4%. Given that the increased tuition falls solely on graduate students, designating additional funding to support graduate education would seem to be warranted. Reallocation of funds, such as discussed in the section of “Financial assistance” below with regard to out-of-state tuition waivers might also be considered to provide additional resource to high priority areas within graduate education. Specifically, we recommend UW – L

  ▪ Designate a substantial part, if not all, of graduate tuition increase in the current and future years to support the enhancement of graduate education at UW – L
  ▪ Review current graduate tuition structure and implement differential graduate tuition based on market demand and program cost, and designate part of the extra revenue generated by differential tuition to support existing or new graduate programs with potential to grow enrollment.
• Enhance efforts in fund-raising for graduate scholarships

B. Student Support

Graduate student services include multiple units on campus and can be quite complicated, especially on campus with a decentralized graduate education management model. Often, it is a challenge to compile a complete inventory of graduate student support services offered by different units of the same university.

• Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions

Graduate student recruiting and effective marketing represent key challenges for graduate education at most public comprehensive universities. Typical marketing strategies that are effective for major doctoral granting institutions with national scope are not effective tools for recruiting at public comprehensive institutions. Data from the UW-L system suggests that the vast majority of graduate students come from Wisconsin & Minnesota, with Illinois a distant third. Consequently, effective graduate recruiting at comprehensive institutions usually must be locally or regionally targeted in order to be effective.

Most public comprehensive institutions rely heavily on their own undergraduate students to transition into their graduate programs. One of the more surprising findings during our visit is that there appears to be little institutional effort to encourage UW-L undergraduate students to pursue graduate education at UW-L, and in some cases, doing so is actually discouraged. In our view, this is a philosophy that needs to be reconsidered. Undergraduate students already have a strong bond to the institution and the region. Simple marketing strategies such as direct email to students in their junior or senior year, or as they apply for graduation can be effective in graduate recruiting at little cost to the University. Also, a very modest one-time scholarship offer could be an effective tool to attract UW-L undergraduate students to continue their graduate studies at UW-L. A growing number of institutions are implementing accelerated 3+2 or 4+1 programs that encourage undergraduate students to stay at the institution and receive their baccalaureate and master’s degrees in five years. These types of programs have the benefit of being effective recruiting strategies for both graduate and undergraduate programs.

The application and admission of graduate students can be a complex process. For this reason, many institutions have a separate graduate admission unit as part of their graduate school. In essence, students are applying not only to the University, but also to specific programs, each of which may have vastly different requirements and supporting documents that must be submitted as part of the application. Ideally, one would like to have all application materials and supporting documents submitted through a single portal. This type of approach simplifies the application process for the
potential student and leads to more efficient processing by the institution. Unfortunately, it appears from our conversations that constraints by the UW system make this a considerable challenge. Students must apply through the UW system application, and then in many cases, must submit a separate application to the program through a variety of program specific sites, and sometimes pay separate fees. As a result, coordinating the application process is time consuming on the part of the administrative staff and faculty, and does not always lead to timely and consistent information to potential students.

Streamlining the application process will take a coordinated effort between Graduate Studies, IT, Admissions, and the graduate programs, themselves. Some immediate steps might be to contact the admission offices at other institutions in the UW Cluster and see what types of approaches they have used. Most campus enterprise systems have built in procedures to handle applications. It would be worthwhile to explore if institutionally generated data from an in-house application system could be exported to the UW system for record keeping purposes. Sending institutional representatives to the National Association of Graduate Admission Professionals (NAGAP) meeting would familiarize staff with institutional best practices. As a long-term strategy, UW-L may wish to consider assigning a staff member to work with graduate programs in streamlining the admission process.

• Financial assistance

Nearly every group we spoke with expressed concerns about funding of graduate assistantships. Most felt that the level of the stipend and the inability to provide tuition waivers hampered the institution’s ability to compete for graduate students. In our opinion, there may be some level of disconnect as to how faculty and staff define competing institutions. In many conversations, competitors were often identified as doctoral granting institutions in Wisconsin and surrounding states. If these types of institutions are considered as competitors, then the concerns about graduate assistantships represents an intractable problem. On the positive side, if one considers the competition to be other public comprehensive institutions within the state of Wisconsin, then the current structure represents an essentially level playing field and UW-L should be well positioned to compete based on the quality of its academic programs.

That said, there may be some benefit to conducting a comprehensive review of internal policies and practices regarding student support. There seems to be wide discrepancies among programs and this may lead to confusion and a perception of unfairness among graduate students. For example, stipends for graduate assistants range from a 50% appointment for some students and programs to as low as 17% appointments in others. And while the additional funding for students identified as
Teaching Assistants is commendable, the discrepancy in the level of support between graduate students serving as TA’s and GA’s, both on 50% appointments, is striking.

Support for out-of-state students is another area for discussion. Of the 11 institutions identified as the University Cluster, UW-L along with River Falls and Rock County are the only institutions that participate in the Midwest Student Exchange Program (MSEP) at the baccalaureate level only. All others with the exception of UW-Whitewater, which does not participate in the program, offer out-of-state tuition support at the undergraduate and graduate levels. At the same time, UW-L provides over $300,000 in institutional support of tuition waivers for out-of-state students. Given that students from Minnesota are excluded due to tuition reciprocity, it appears that a very high percentage of out-of-state students receive some type of tuition support. One option to consider would be to reinstate the MSEP program at the graduate level and also guarantee in-state tuition for out-of-state students who serve as graduate assistants, but eliminate the program for others. The cost savings could be reinvested to either increase the number of graduate assistantships and/or the level of support for existing GA’s by placing a “floor” at no less than 25% appointments.

- **Communication with students**

  While communication with students was not a major focus of our review, we believe there are opportunities for improved communication both with regard to applicants and students at the time of admission, and communications to establish a greater sense of a community of graduate students.

  As competition for graduate students become more intense, rapid and effective communication with graduate applicants is essential. It is our understanding that notification of applicants with regard to their admission and application status relies heavily on mailed letters rather than electronic communication. More and more institutions are making the transition to purely electronic forms of communication that lessens the response time to students as well as reduces institutional costs. These electronic notifications can be triggered off of the electronic application system so that students receive notification within 24 hours after submission of their application. For example, at one of our institutions, applicants receive a “confirmation letter” via email immediately on submission of their application. It also refers them to a website which allows them to track the status of their application as it moves through the system.

  Consistent communications should also be provided to students during the time of admission. In addition to providing information about the program, communication pieces should include information about the student’s advisor, including contact information, any time of student support being offered (scholarships, assistantships, tuition waivers, etc.). Since these communications are generated at the department level, consistency across all programs will continue to be a challenge. But this could be
an area to explore during the program review process. Whatever the process, once a department admits a student, thought should be given to sending out a congratulatory email from the Office of Graduate Studies to welcome the student and apprise him/her of the services offered by the office.

Finally, the Office of Graduate Studies should actively pursue a communication plan targeted at UW-L undergraduates at an appropriate time to encourage them to consider UW-L for their graduate study. Typically, these communication pieces can be filtered off cumulative GPA or other factors to assure that appropriate students are targeted.

Taken together, these three strategies may aid in graduate recruitment and result in improved yield of applicants to their respective graduate programs.

Student communications can also be utilized to foster a sense of community among graduate students. For example, a quarterly electronic newsletter highlighting specific processes (e.g. applying for graduation), student research, faculty research, etc., are great ways to promote graduate education among students, faculty and the campus at large.

• **Student Support Services (i.e., advising, financial aid, registration, other)**

  We had the opportunity to discuss graduate student services with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and her staff, as well as the Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and his staff during separate meetings. Overall, we were impressed with the dedication of all the staff and their willingness to support graduate students. At the same time, many acknowledged that the level of support to graduate students, particularly in terms of marketing and recruiting, was limited. Graduate admissions was another area with particular challenges, particularly with regard to managing the variety of supporting documents that accompany graduate applications and coordinating communications and document management with the academic departments.

  As indicated above in the section on “Current Structure” consideration should be given to additional staff who could assist in coordinating the admissions process, aid in graduate recruitment and student communication, and possibly provide additional services such as coordinating professional development programs and working with other offices in providing enhanced support for graduate students.

• **Opportunities and Challenges**
Again, UW-L has opportunities and challenges in terms of graduate student support. The University has the good fortune of having an outstanding reputation for undergraduate programs and has been able to successfully recruit high quality undergraduate students. It appears that modest efforts combined with the development of accelerated graduate/undergraduate programs for qualified students in select programs would be successful in increasing graduate enrollment.

Obtaining financial support for graduate students will continue to be a challenge at UW-L as it is for nearly all institutions. UW-L is to be commended for its creative approach in providing additional support to students who serve as teaching assistants. Hopefully, these efforts can be expanded in other areas or the institution can look at ways of shifting more GA positions to Teaching Assistants.

Improving communication is another area of low-hanging fruit that may actually lead to reduced costs as communications are shifted from mail to electronic delivery. In addition to reduced costs, electronic communications also reduces response times to potential students and may result in an increased yield rate for applicants. Initial development will take collaboration between campus IT and the Office of Graduate Studies.

Summary and Concluding Comments

The University of Wisconsin La Crosse has built itself into one of the strongest, if not the strongest, comprehensive institution for undergraduate education in the state. We believe there are tremendous opportunities to build on this foundation through the expansion of high-quality graduate programs that meet the needs of professionals seeking to advance their careers. Many of the building blocks for moving graduate education forward are already in place. These include a dedicated faculty and staff, excellent facilities, and a body of current and former graduate students who have clearly valued their UW-L graduate experience. At the same time, it is clear that additional investments to support graduate education are needed. One of the major challenges, particularly in a time of severe budget constraints, is to make sure additional resources dedicated to further graduate education are viewed as investments in the future of the institution rather than being made at the expense of undergraduate programs. If recent events are any indication, it is likely that future increases in tuition will affect graduate students more than undergraduates. In addition, we believe there are opportunities for significant enrollment growth at the graduate level through initiation of online programs and pursuit of additional professional programs that meet the needs of part-time students. We believe this offers sufficient justification for the investments that will be needed to support graduate education. Given the outstanding reputation of the institution and the quality of its academic leadership and faculty, we are confident that these investments will position UW-L as a leader in graduate education among comprehensive institutions in the state.
### Appendix 1:

**Graduate Education Visitation Team Itinerary**

#### Sunday, April 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Meet With</th>
<th>Responsible</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:59 pm</td>
<td><strong>AA3382</strong> Jianping - Airport Pickup</td>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Rob to pick up and take to Grandstay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Upon Arrival</strong> Jerry - Hotel Check In</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stay at Grandstay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30 pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Rob, Chris, Steve</td>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Piggy’s at 6:30 Reservation made</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Monday, April 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Meet with</th>
<th>Organized by</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Small group of program directors/ grad council members</td>
<td>Rob to make invitations</td>
<td>Radisson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:15</td>
<td>Pick Up</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rob to bring to Graff Main</td>
<td>Grandstay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 split</td>
<td>Meet with chairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>327 Graff Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 split</td>
<td>Deans/Marcie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>325 Graff Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30am-10am</td>
<td>Meet with Chandra for reimbursement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Set up in spare room of Grad Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10am</td>
<td>Heidi, Bob, Sandy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Steve to remind</td>
<td>227 Graff Provost Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Paula Knudson</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rob to remind Paula; Steve can escort</td>
<td>Paula’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11am split</td>
<td>Bob Hetzel</td>
<td></td>
<td>Steve to remind and escort</td>
<td>Hetzel Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11am split</td>
<td>Meet with Chairs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>325 Graff Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td>Grad Council and Program Director</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rob to invite</td>
<td>325 Graff Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Students (thru program directors)</td>
<td>Chris to organize:</td>
<td>Problems with space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:45</td>
<td>GCC/Program Directors</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Meet With</td>
<td>Host/Guide</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3pm</td>
<td>CEE, distance ed,</td>
<td>CATL, Grants (Tiedt, Udermann,</td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Admiss, Fin Aid,</td>
<td>Cerbin, Nielsen)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30</td>
<td>Internat Ed (Janke,</td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>133 Graff Main</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bakkum, Schaller</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Chris</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sjoquist, Pierce)</td>
<td></td>
<td>reserved??)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4pm</td>
<td>Gow, Reichert</td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>Gow’s Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30</td>
<td>Meet with grad</td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>223 Graff Main</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5pm</td>
<td>Back to Hotel</td>
<td>Simpson</td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6:30</td>
<td>Time for team to</td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Steve, Rob, Chris</td>
<td>Radisson at 6:30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Dixon)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tuesday

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Meet With</th>
<th>Host/Guide</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>???</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>On own or with Chris, Steve,</td>
<td>Tuesday up to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and/or Rob??</td>
<td>team??</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30</td>
<td>Airport</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rob</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jianping Zhu, Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Dean, College of Graduate Studies
Cleveland State University

Jerry Pogatshnik
Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Vice President for Research,
Eastern Kentucky University