

Doctoral Program Roundtable: Admissions Networking

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Many doctoral programs may turn away doctoral applications because of funding issues, mismatches between student interest and faculty expertise, size of the program, and other reasons. The purpose of this roundtable discussion was to start a dialogue about developing a network for doctoral programs to share applicants.

Introduction. The impetus for interest in admissions networking by the co-authors began in 2006 when Ft. Hays State University, Kansas developed an initiative to “grow their own” faculty members. A Policy for University Support of Ft. Hays State University (FHSU) Faculty Seeking Terminal Degrees was adopted by the President’s Cabinet in December 2006. The policy states that if a department determines that faculty members with a PhD are highly desirable but very difficult to attract and retain to FHSU, the department may submit proposals providing tuition assistance for faculty to obtain such a degree. A partnership between the Communication Disorders Department at FHSU and the Communication Sciences and Disorders Department at Wichita State University (WSU) has developed into a beneficial program for the faculty members at both schools. Two faculty from FHSU commute to Wichita one day a week during the regular semesters to work on the PhD while faculty at WSU have scheduled doctoral classes on that day. The co-authors of this paper represent this partnership, and have worked together for the past academic year in a two-semester course offering on University Teaching and in an independent study encompassing research on pedagogy and the doctoral shortage.

Survey Information. To address the potential need for doctoral admissions networking, a brief survey was developed. Twelve doctoral program directors responded to the following questions. 1. *In this time of PhD shortages, do you have an initiatives to “grow your own” individuals with a terminal degree?* **Yes = 10, No=2.** Comments included:

- We have always had a terminal program that takes students with a bachelor’s degree into our PhD program.
- Joint AuD/PhD program with early admission and some shared credits. Early PhD admission for our promising MA students.
- No real initiative other than trying to encourage strong MS/MA students to consider research/teaching careers and trying to engage them in research projects at the master’s level to stimulate their interests.
- We have a research intensive seminar for outstanding seniors (nominated by our faculty). They learn about research in the fall semester and in the spring semester, they work in a dept. lab and present their poster in a session at the end of the semester.
- Identifying promising undergrads and MA-SLP students and encouraging research participation in faculty labs. Offering financial incentives such as TA/GA positions. Pairing promising students with faculty mentors.

- A program is in place to send clinicians with master's degrees on to get their PhD. The university pays for their tuition and travel expenses if they work one year for the university for each semester their tuition is paid.
- We try to identify promising undergraduates and MA level graduates in our programs, in other disciplines related to CSID at our university, at other area universities and from our own alum pool to provide information, research lab opportunities, visits, etc.
- We have extended our MS program to include a third year, which includes the CF. During this year, we involve students in continuing research experiences associated with Cuffs, hoping that keeping them involved and local will facilitate transitioning to doctoral study.
- We have a combined MS/PhD program.
- We currently do not offer a PhD but we do offer an EdD and SLPD and encourage those without a doctoral degree to consider continuing on with their education.
- "Bridge Program" – MS/PhD program, with either a clinical or non-clinical option.
- I'm not sure what grow our own individuals means by my guess is. What kinds of efforts do we have in recruiting our own UG and MA students for PhD study? We do have efforts to recruit our own Gus and MAs in Communication Disorders, as well as in related disciplines by emailing to different program heads an assorted array of PhD fellowship descriptions we offer.

2. *Do you communicate with any other doctoral programs to see if they have extra applicants they might refer to your program? Yes = 2, No = 10. Comments to the follow-up question, “If so, which programs (only those in your same state, region, etc.)? included:*

- However, we have encouraged MA/MS- only programs to refer students to us if they express an interest in a PhD.
- Regional institutions – we make comparable “referrals”.
- In our state and around the country. We send information packets, post on liters, and exchange information at conferences, etc.

3. *Do you contact other programs if you have doctoral applicants you cannot admit but who are qualified for admission? Yes= 3, No=9. Comments to a question similar to that asked in #2 included:*

- For the PhD these contacts are made strictly on the basis of the area of interest of the student. Contacts are not restricted geographically, but rather are made to programs with faculty working in the student’s area of interest.
- No specific expertise within our program.
- Some of the time – however, most of our applicants apply to several universities so others know about the applicants already.

4. *Have you initiated any innovative recruitment strategies to encourage applicants? Yes=5, No=7. Comments were brief descriptions of strategies:*

- I’m not sure if it is innovative but we posted a page on our website to recruit PhD students.

- New for us, at least, not necessarily innovative. We have begun to use convention presentations as potential recruiting opportunities, produced new materials for recruiting tables at conventions and published new web resources for interested potential applicants. We have also exploited new (local to the University) sources of funding.
- Promoting ongoing funding opportunities.
- Noting exactly innovative...our program is very focused on the strong association of mentor and student. We support our faculty in their individual efforts to recruit students (e.g., by providing student support, travel for recruitment, facilitating communications). We don't admit students without the explicit support and commitment of a mentor.
- I hate to say "no" though I'm not sure these are all that innovative. Key to our success is personal contact. We attend the doctoral information day at ASHA. We see the Bridge program as described in #1 as an innovative program, which assists us in outreach to top students. In addition, we have developed an undergraduate research class to start students earlier in the development process thinking about research.
- Have created a number of PhD fellowships in different areas of study. Each fellowship describes the area of study, the faculty member(s) in that area, research foci, mentoring opportunities, and financial support available.

5. *Does a national database for doctoral applicants/programs sound like an idea worth exploring?* **Yes=12.**

Roundtable Discussion. Ten program representatives attended the roundtable and the discussion topics were wide-ranging, but with general agreement that a national database could be useful, and that stronger recruitment efforts and paired faculty/potential student contacts at the ASHA National Convention need to be enhanced. Ideas included teaming with funding opportunities for the top 5 (or some number of) applicants to go wherever they chose for a PhD program. A question was asked about who would contribute the money and an idea of matching funds was proposed. Janis Ingham talked about an idea that she had proposed when she was ASHA Vice President for Research and Technology for ASHA to commit to a corpus of \$2,000,000 for PhD student funding. She talked about the attitudinal shift that would have to take place, but it might be the right time to ask for a renewed effort for this proposal. An added contribution by members when they pay annual dues (a check mark designating a dollar a year) could help contribute to the fund. ASHA Leader and NSSLHA coverage could help with the marketing of this idea.

The new HES system should be able to track doctoral applicants and programs could also contribute information about their faculty with research expertise and potential funding for PhD students. A question was asked if programs know about and use collaborative resources in their state or region. Linda Petrosino talked about the ten programs in Ohio and how they share information. Another idea was put forward to look at the model of adjunct faculty across the country who are willing to serve as dissertation chairs, such as those programs at Nova Southeastern University and similar EdD and SLPD programs. Patty Prelock mentioned that she was now serving as a Co-Chair for a dissertation at McGill University.

The group conclude that strong advocacy efforts are needed, as well as “looking out of the box” when trying to attract students to enter PhD programs. One suggestion was that the PhD to MA may be a better route for some promising undergraduate students. Added to this was the idea of finding creative ways for students to earn the CCC as they are working on a PhD.

A final conclusion was that we need to work with ASHA to “do more” to enhance PhD education opportunities. A proposal was put forward to ask on the Council List Serve if other members are interested in serving on a task force. Follow-up to this idea will be provided by the Roundtable facilitator, Ro Scudder.