

75 Questions

Every Graduate Program Must Ask and Answer...to Successfully Recruit Students

By

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Introduction

Welcome to the ninth edition of *75 Questions Every Graduate Program Must Ask and Answer ... to Successfully Recruit Students*.

Since 1981, I've had the wonderful opportunity to work up-close and in-person with hundreds and hundreds of graduate programs throughout the U.S. and Canada. And what an amazing 2,500,000 mile plane ride it has been!

Experience has taught me that whether you work for a large research university, or a small graduate program which serves its local community, your job is still the same. Recruiting graduate students is a challenge for all institutions, not just small ones.

I'm often asked the question: Why are some recruiting programs so successful and why do other graduate schools fail? One of the major keys to your recruiting success partly lies in your ability to ask the right questions – especially in today's highly competitive and rapidly changing world of recruiting graduate students.

75 Questions Every Graduate Program Must Ask and Answer ... to Successfully Recruit Students is about success. Your recruiting success! But today, it's no longer 75 questions. Over the past 27 years, this document has grown and grown to well over 200 questions. YIKES! And somehow, after all these years, it just keeps chugging along.

To advance and thrive, every graduate program must come up with a steady stream of talented new students. So, whether you work for a large school with tons of money, or a small graduate program on a tight budget, recruiting quality students is a top priority. I hope this document helps you in your work. As you proceed through each question, I'm certain that new ideas will crop up, new doors will open, and old doors will shut. I wish you success!

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P.S. The best place to start is at the beginning. So what are you waiting for!

P.P.S. I welcome your feedback. Plus, I'm always looking to add fresh new questions. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thanks in advance for your pearls of wisdom.

Mission

1. Does your mission statement clearly describe why your graduate program exists, the academic programs and services you offer, and who you attempt to serve?
2. Are your enrollment objectives closely tied to your mission statement?
3. Are your recruiting and admission practices in sync with your graduate program's mission statement?
4. Are you engaged in any activities now that are out of sync (do not support) with your graduate program's mission statement?

Enrollment Goals and Objectives

1. Do you have specific, written enrollment objectives?
2. Are your enrollment goals realistic (achievable)?
3. How many students do you want to recruit?
4. What quality of student are you looking for?
5. How do you want to shape your incoming class in terms of mix and diversity?
6. What might keep you from reaching your goals?

Recruiting Responsibilities and Organizational Structure

1. Who, or which office, in your graduate program is responsible for recruiting graduate students?
2. Is there agreement among key administrators and faculty members as to where the recruiting function belongs in your graduate program?
3. Are you satisfied with your graduate program's current recruiting efforts? If so, why?
4. If not, what would your graduate program do? Why?

Recruiting Personnel

1. **Do you have enough people (administrators, faculty members, clerical, and work-study students) to meet your graduate program's enrollment objectives?**
2. **Does each person involved in your recruiting program have the experience and proper training necessary to meet your graduate program's desired enrollment objectives?**
3. **Are training and professional development opportunities readily available to people in your graduate program who recruit students?**

Recruiting Budget

1. **Is your recruiting budget adequate to meet your graduate program's enrolled objectives?**
2. **Typically, what goes into your recruiting budget? Excluding salaries and benefits, what are your five biggest recruiting line-items?**
3. **Are you spending too much, or too little, on recruiting graduate students?**
4. **If given more money, how would you use it?**
5. **Are you using your graduate program's recruiting dollars wisely?**

Admission Policies & Entrance Requirements

1. **What are you looking for in graduate students? How do you evaluate an applicant's file?**
2. **Are your admission requirements in harmony with your graduate program's enrollment objectives?**
3. **Are they in writing and posted for prospective graduate students to see?**
4. **Do you have an admissions committee? What are its responsibilities? How does it operate?**
5. **Is your committee too slow in getting admissions files read and getting decisions out the door?**

6. Does your graduate program also have a separate recruiting committee or marketing committee that works independently of your admission committee?
7. In general, are you satisfied with the current process you use for evaluating and admitting students to your graduate program?

Markets and Market Analysis

1. Who are your target markets?
2. How big is each market segment?
3. In term of geographics (cities, counties, states, regions, and counties), where is your primary market located?
4. What about demographics (age, gender, ethnic background, education, religion, income, etc.), who are they?
5. What common characteristics do your current graduate students share?
6. Have you segmented your markets? Have you broken them out into subgroups or separate categories?
7. Have you created a profile of your secondary and tertiary markets? Who are they? Where are they?
8. How well do you know your markets? Do you really know your markets?

Academic Programs and Recruiting

1. Are you offering the right mix of graduate programs?
2. Should you add any new graduate programs to your portfolio of academic offerings? If so, which new programs are you planning to offer?
3. Do you need to alter or change any of your existing graduate programs? If so, which ones and why?
4. Do you need to discontinue any of your present academic programs? Why?
5. Are your academic programs in high demand by your target market? Do they meet the needs of today's graduate student?

6. From an academic programs standpoint, what can you do to help recruit more top-notch students?

Recruiting Plan

1. Do you have a written, well-thought-out, recruiting plan?
2. Specifically, what's included in your recruiting plan?
3. What are your graduate program's three (3) biggest strengths?
4. What are your three (3) biggest weaknesses?
5. What are the most important opportunities your graduate program faces today?
6. What are the most dangerous threats you face now?
7. How is your graduate program perceived by your target markets?
8. Does your graduate program enjoy a special "position" in the marketplace?
9. Have you carved out a unique selling position (USP)? How are you different?
10. What's the relationship between your graduate program's long-term strategic plan and your recruiting plan? Are the two tied closely together?
11. Does your recruiting plan assure you that you'll meet or exceed your desired enrollment objectives? Do you discuss your plan on a regular basis? Do you work your recruiting plan? Is your plan used?

Institutional Graduate School Marketing Efforts
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1. Who else, besides your graduate program, is involved in your institution's overall marketing efforts (president, provost, graduate school dean, institutional advancement, etc.)?
2. Specifically, what role does each play?
3. What are the three biggest marketing issues on your campus affecting graduate enrollments? What marketing challenges do you face?

4. In addition to prospective graduate students, who are the top five audiences your graduate program wants to influence (administrators, donors, alumni, employers, etc.)?
5. How is your graduate program involved in your school's overall marketing decisions? Are you included? If not, should you have a place at the table?

Recruiting and Marketing Research
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1. Does your graduate program regularly gather marketing information from prospective students and third-party influencing agents?
2. Is marketing research included in your annual recruiting budget? If so, is this item adequately funded?
3. How do you collect information from your target markets? Specifically, what simple, low-cost, do-it-yourself, research methods do you use (online surveys, focus groups, telephone interviews, informal conversations, etc.)?
4. What is the image of your graduate program in the eyes of prospective students?
5. Is this image similar to -- or different from -- the perceptions of your own faculty, administration, students, and alumni?
6. Why do students enroll in your graduate program? How do they benefit? What do they expect from you?
7. Can you list the top 3 reasons why students choose to attend your graduate program?
8. Why do some students decide not to enroll in your graduate program? Why do they go somewhere else?
9. In terms of advantages and disadvantages, how are you perceived by prospective graduate students? What do they think? Are their perceptions different from yours?
10. Overall, is your recruiting program based on solid marketing research?

Competition and Competitive Analysis

1. Do you know who you compete with for prospective graduate students?
2. Who are your two (2) leading competitors?
3. Are they really your competition, or are they graduate programs you would like to be like some day?
4. What do your 2 biggest competitors do better than you? What advantages do they have over you?
5. What do you do better than them? What advantages do you enjoy?
6. How are your 2 major competitors different from you? What sets your graduate program apart?
7. Do you “Mystery Shop” each of your competitors on a regular basis? Specifically, what do you know about each competing graduate program?
8. How does your graduate program use competitor information to its recruiting advantage?
9. Why would a student prefer to attend a major competitor’s graduate program rather than your own?
10. How can you compete more effectively for students? Is your recruiting program competitive enough to meet your graduate program’s enrollment objectives?

Building a Large and Qualified Inquiry Pool

1. Do you have a successful recruiting program for building a large and qualified inquiry pool?
2. Do you have enough qualified inquiries to achieve your recruiting objectives?
3. How does your graduate program build its inquiry pool? Specifically, how does it “get the word out” and acquire the names of prospective students?
4. What works best (Internet, Direct Mail, Advertising, Travel, etc.)? In rank order, what’s proven to be the best methods of identifying large numbers of prospective graduate students?

5. What doesn't work? In rank order, what's proven to be the most disappointing things you've done?
6. In terms of cost-effectiveness, what works best? What are the three most cost-effective things you do to build your inquiry pool?
7. What are the three least cost-effective? Where are you throwing your money away?
8. In general, are you generating sufficient numbers of qualified inquiries to meet your graduate program's enrollment objectives?

Managing Prospects and Converting Inquiries Into Applications
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1. Does your graduate program have a proven follow-up communication *system* for converting inquiries into applications?
2. Specifically, how does it work? Who gets what (follow-up emails, phone calls, mailings, etc.) and when? Why?
3. Have you designed separate follow-up systems for specific target markets (men, women, older, younger, full-time, part-time, online, on-campus, master's, Ph.D., minority, majority, domestic, international, high GPA, average GPA, high standardized test score, average test score, etc.)? Or, for the most part, do most prospective graduate students receive the exact same thing?
4. Do you grade and qualify prospective graduate students at this phase of the recruiting process? How?
5. Are your faculty, students, alumni, and administration actively involved at this point in the recruiting process? Specifically, what role does each play in helping you to follow-up on prospective students?
6. Is your inquiry follow-up communication *system* powerful enough to convert sufficient numbers of inquiries into applications? Is it strong enough to meet or exceed your graduate program's enrollment objectives?

Processing and Managing Applications for Admission

1. Does your graduate program do a good job of processing, tracking, and completing applications for admission?
2. Is there a well-thought-out *system* for following-up and completing admission applications?
3. Specifically, how does it work? Which applicants get what (emails, phone calls, letters, etc.) and when? Why?
4. What percent of your applications for admission get completed each year? Is it higher than 90%?
5. What percent go incomplete? Is it higher than 10%?
6. How is funding and financial aid tied into your *system* for processing and following up with students who apply for admission?

Sealing the Deal and Converting Admits Into Enrolled Students

1. Does your graduate program have a tried and true *system* for converting accepted students into enrolled students (*sealing the deal*)?
2. Specifically, how does it work? Who gets what (emails, phone calls, letters, etc.) and when? Why?
3. What are your faculty, students, administration, and alumni doing to help you improve your yield? Specifically, what's each group doing to help convert more accepted students into enrolled students?
4. What is your current yield rate? What percent of your accepted students enrolled last year? Is this up or down from last year and the year before?
5. Is your graduate program having a hard time sealing the deal? If so, why? What do you need to do to fix it?
6. Are you doing a good job of *sealing the deal*? Is your post-acceptance follow-up *system* potent enough to generate plenty of new students? Is it hard-hitting enough to meet or exceed your graduate program's enrollment objectives?

Advertising and Promotion

1. Do you have high-impact publications and recruiting materials?
2. Do they do a convincing job of telling your graduate program's story?
3. Are your messages on target? Do they matter to prospective graduate students?
Are you talking to yourself or to prospective students?
4. Do you field-test your recruiting materials on your target markets?
5. Do your recruiting materials enhance your graduate program's position and brand?
6. Are you missing key recruiting pieces? Do you have what you need? What other materials do you need in order to do a better job of recruiting students?
7. What about advertising (print, electronic, and broadcast)? Are your recruiting ads effective? Are you pushing the right hot buttons?
8. Are your ads targeted to target markets or do you use a shotgun approach?
9. How do your ads differentiate your graduate program from your competitors?
How do they "position" your graduate program?
10. What about frequency? Do you run a strategic advertising "campaign" over a four to ten week period or do you waste your money by running only one ad?
11. Do you track results? Do your ads work? Are they cost-effective? Specifically, what is your bottom-line cost per inquiry, application, and enrolled student?

Online Recruiting and the Internet

1. What about online recruiting strategies and techniques? How do you use the Web in your recruiting efforts (promotion, information, tracking, processing, communication, research, etc.)?
2. In terms of design, does your Web site appeal to your target market? Do prospective students find it attractive, hip, friendly, helpful, and easy to use?
3. What about content? Is it relevant? Does it engage prospective graduate students or does it bore them? Does it meet both their expectations and needs?
4. How does your Web site stack up against your 2 biggest competitors?

5. Is your Web site a generation ahead -- or a generation behind -- your target market?
6. Is your Web site optimized? Can the search engines find you, or is your graduate program invisible?
7. How much time and money do you spend on search engine optimization (SEO) each year?
8. Do you do a good job of marketing your Web site to prospective graduate students?
9. How much time and money do you spend on search engine marketing (SEM)?
10. Are you using online pay per click (PPC) advertising to build your brand; enhance your images; gain first-page traction; and, encourage more prospective graduate students to click through to your Web site?
11. What about social networking? Are you using various social channels to improve your search rankings, drive traffic to your Web site, get your message out, and communicate with prospective students?
12. Do you use *web analytic software* to track online traffic, activity, conversions, and results? If not, how do you know if your Web site works?

Information Systems and Database Management
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1. Are you aware that the power behind any successful recruiting program is a super-smart database?
2. Have you given careful attention to the importance of the database in your graduate program?
3. Does your database do what you want and need to do? Specifically, what can your database do today?
4. What can't it do? Why can't it do it?
5. Is the database in your graduate program a no-brainer? Is it easy to learn, effortless to use, and simple to add fields and make changes?
6. Does it include the latest online Web tools and gadgets?

7. Do you have the right tool to get the job done? Bottom line, do you have the right database to meet your graduate program's enrollment objectives?

Recruiting, Admissions, and Enrollment Reports

1. What kinds of recruiting reports does your graduate program produce?
2. How often do you run each enrollment report (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.)?
3. What other recruiting-related reports would you like to see added in the future?
4. Are your recruiting reports distributed to key faculty and administrators? Does your graduate program director regularly discuss these recruiting reports with your graduate program's leadership team?
5. How do you use enrollment reports? What do you do with the information?
6. Do your recruiting reports provide vital information for making sound, cost-effective management decisions?
7. Are you happy with these recruiting reports? Are your reports adequate to meet your graduate program's enrollment objectives?

Alumni Recruiting Program

1. Do you have a formal alumni recruiting program?
2. If not, why not?
3. If so, how is it structured? Who runs it and where is it housed?
4. What are your alumni doing now to help you recruit more blue-chip graduate students? Specifically, what kinds of things are they doing (emails, letters, phone calls, blogs, interviews, etc.)?
5. Do you have a comprehensive training program for your alumni recruiters? Do you have a recruiting handbook -- or online training manual -- for your alumni volunteers?
6. Do you maintain a steady flow of communication with your alumni recruiters?
7. How do you recognize and thank alumni volunteers for their help and support?

8. Do you have funds in your graduate program's recruiting budget specifically earmarked for alumni activities? How much? Is it enough?

Funding and Financial Aid

1. Does your financial aid program support your graduate program's enrollment objectives?
2. How can you better utilize your funding to recruit more graduate students, attract better students, and enroll more underrepresented minority students?
3. Is your financial aid program competitive? How can you get a leg-up on your biggest competitors?
4. Do you accurately inform and effectively promote your financial aid programs to prospective graduate students?
5. Are you making it too difficult for graduate students to apply for funding?
6. How can you package and award aid to recruit and retain more graduate students?
7. Should you offer funding aid based only on merit, or should you also offer need-based financial aid? Are you doing both, now?
8. Where should you direct most of your financial aid dollars (high need, high ability, minorities, etc.)?
9. How much loan can you realistically expect your graduate students to borrow each year? What's too much? What's too little?
10. Should only full-time graduate students be eligible for funding? What about part-time graduate students?
11. When should you make your financial aid awards? Are you making them too early? Are your awards going out too late?
12. Do you need to increase your funding levels for graduate students? If so, by how much? What's the right amount?