Building Bridges to Attract and Support Underrepresented and First-Generation Students

Laura Moix, University of Arkansas, Graduate Student Support
Romona West, University of Arkansas, Diversity and Inclusion
Why Attract and Support Underrepresented Students and First-Generation Students?

- Diverse World
  - United States of America is projected to become majority-minority by 2043, U.S. Census Bureau
  - Important that our classrooms reflect diversity
    - Navigation of cultural
    - Critical thinking = Diverse Perspectives
- Enrollment Cliff
  - By 2026, 15% Decline of typical college going population
- Diverse Teams = Better Teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year When Whites Become Minority, by Age Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age Under 18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 18-29</td>
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<td>Age 30-44</td>
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<td>Age 45-64</td>
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<td>Age 65+</td>
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Resources for Attracting Underrepresented and First-Generation Students:

- **Campus Community Support and Partnerships**
  - Diversity and Inclusion Office
  - Multicultural Center
  - Registered Student Organizations
  - TRIO/McNair Programs

- **Department/Program Funding**
  - Recruitment
  - Other campus community support

- **Publications**
  - *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*
  - *Southern/Northern Diversity Journal*

- **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

- **Grants**
The Graduate School and International Education at the University of Arkansas

- 18% International Students
- Fastest growing public doctoral institution in the country (13th in the country)
- 4,025 Graduate Students Enrolled
- 130+ Graduate Programs
- 50:50 ratio of male to female graduate students enrolled
- 1,569 Graduate Assistantships Awarded
- 265 International Scholars
- 51 Fulbright Scholars Enrolled
- 1,491 Graduate Degrees Awarded in 2017
- 115 Countries Represented

Chronicle of Higher Education - 2017
Creating Pathways To Graduate School

- Graduate Research Opportunities Forum (GROF)
- Attracting Intelligent Minds (AIM)
- Razorgrad Institute for Success and Engagement (RISE)
Graduate Research Opportunities Forum (GROF)

- Diversity recruitment initiative, primarily funded by the Graduate School
- Target audience is faculty, administrators or staff at Minority Serving Institutions (MSI)
- Allows partnerships with counterparts at MSI
- Occurs once a year, typically in March
- Participants are selected via nominations and/or graduate school partnerships
- About 12 participants
- Educate participants on graduate programs, funding and research opportunities at the University of Arkansas
GROF Enables Strong Relationships

- Builds Strong Connections with your Institution
- Enables Partnerships Across Campus and Beyond
- Research Opportunities and Collaboration
Attracting Intelligent Minds (AIM)

- Diversity recruitment initiative sponsored by the Black Graduate Students’ Association (BGSA) and the Graduate School and International Education (GSIE).

- Prospective students interact with other graduate students, faculty, and department administrators.

- Prospective students are exposed to support resources and the NWA community.

- Cost-effective option to host students who have pre-qualified for admissions
  - All graduate coordinators review the CV, transcript, GRE scores and statement of interest PRIOR to extending the invitation.
AIM Program Components

Program Features

- Is the University of Arkansas Graduate School right for me?
- A look at the 130 graduate programs and research opportunities
- How the admissions process works
- How to develop a competitive application
- U of A funding and fellowship opportunities
- Graduate student support services
- Meet U of A faculty and students, including those who align with the student's program interests
- Tour our beautiful campus and our community

Requirements

- Classification of Undergraduate Junior, Senior, or Master's Student seeking a PhD
- Completion of AIM application
- Copy of transcripts that confirm a 3.5 GPA
- Copy of resume
- Statement of purpose
We “AIM” to make a positive difference!

- Registered Student Organization Involvement
- Department Collaboration
- Exposure to Campus and Community Resources
- Alumni Engagement
- Belonging
Effective Communication Plan

- Emails
  - Student Relationship Management System – Slate
  - Student Ambassadors
  - Registered Student Organizations
- Phone Calls
  - Recruiter
  - Student Ambassadors
- Special Department Meeting Visits
- Social Media
Graduate Student Support: It’s about more than money (but that helps)

Assumptions about graduate students:

• They know what resources are available to them and how to access them.
  • We put a lot of information on the web site, but is it easy to find and understand?
  • Do they know that the Quality Writing Center, the Career Development Center, and other offices are there for them, too? ...Or, are they?
  • Do they know where the money is???

• They are all coming in with the same level of knowledge and same skill sets.
  • Students come from institutions of different sizes, and a larger or smaller university may be new to them.
  • Students may be pursuing a graduate degree in a discipline different from the one they pursued as an undergraduate.
  • Students may be non-traditional.

• They all want the same outcome from their graduate degree.
  • Professional development/job placement.
Brainstorming for Knowledge Gaps: Common Roadblocks to Retention

- Navigating financial aid – loans, scholarships, fellowships, external funding
  - Graduate assistantships – how do they work?
- Personal budgeting – too much month left at the end of the money
- Health & Wellness – and anti-imposter syndrome
- Time management – meeting the demands of graduate school
- Learning about campus – outside the department
- Learning about Northwest Arkansas – the outside world exists?
Our Plan

- To provide a bridge for underrepresented, including first-gen, students entering graduate school at the U of Arkansas

- Students identified and nominated by advisors across colleges

- 5 day intensive program prior to the start of August orientation

- Focusing on:
  - Professional Development
  - Community Building
  - Health and Wellness
Our Goals

- Help new graduate students from underrepresented groups build a strong community network
- Provide resources, mentoring and tools for a successful transition into graduate school
- Identify areas of knowledge and professional development that we could offer to all graduate students
- Build peer mentors/influencers from the participants
Student Goals

- I wanted to meet people who weren't just in my program and I really wanted to find ways to create a community with other people of color.

- My adviser recommended it and I thought it would be a good opportunity since my parents did not go to college traditionally.

- No brainer. This is all new for me. I needed a helping hand in the door.

- Although I completed my undergraduate degree at the U of A, I found the RISE program to be an extremely valuable week of learning and networking. There were resources in the library and others that we learned about through the week that I had not heard of before. Additionally, it was an amazing experience being able to meet colleagues from different disciplines and make connections with them.
Our Students

- **2018 Inaugural Class**
  - 14 total participants with 2 graduate student mentors
  - 54% Masters : 46% Doctorate
  - 62% Male : 39% Female
  - 39% First Gen Status

- **2019 Class**
  - 18 total participants with 3 RISE alumni mentors
  - 57% Masters : 43% Doctorate
  - 57% Female : 43% Male
  - 29% First Gen Status
Our Students

Ethnicity:

- Native American or Alaskan Native: 46.2%
- Asian: 15.4%
- Black or African American: 30.8%
- Hispanic: 7.7%
- Pacific Islander: 21.4%
- White or Caucasian: 7.1%
- More than One Ethnicity/Race: 64.3%
- Prefer Not To Answer:
Focus on Professional Development

- Climbing the Academic Ladder
- Innovation & Commercialization
- Professionalism & Success in the Classroom and Workplace
- Lunches with Select Faculty
- (2019) Personal Pitch Practice
Focus on Community Building

- Mornings with DIY Human Cards
- Strengths Quest & Lenses of Introspection Exercises
- Current Student & Faculty Panels
- Dinners & Social Activities
- Visit to Crystal Bridges Museum
Focus on Health and Wellness

- Resiliency and Mindfulness
- 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
- Not Knowing What You Don’t Know & How to Find Out
- Stress Management
Outcomes

After the RISE program, how confident are you now... that you’ll succeed in your coursework?

93% confident or most confident

In your skills for future employment?

93% confident or most confident
Outcomes

After the RISE program....
how aware of the tools & resources provided by the U of A?

100% confident or most confident

How would you rate your familiarity with the U of A?

100% confident or most confident
Outcomes: Advice to Future RISErs

- The best advice would be to make time to hang out with the people in RISE, they will be a great support once school starts and will be a nice break from your department.

- The information during RISE is quiet intensive but worthy, take notes, ask questions and do not leave the program with unanswered questions. Be prepared to get out of your different barriers.

- Pay attention, I know the days are long, but they are worth it.

- Take good notes with people's names. That way if you ever need to refer back you can or if the info isn't there, you know exactly who to reach out to. If you drop the RISE name they'll be happy to help!

- JUST COME
Ultimate Motivation

"Thanks to the resources provided, I truly feel like I belong here," said Cayla Jones, RISE 1 participant and communication master's student.

"Students like these remind me why I work in higher education," said JD DiLoreto-Hill, RISE 1 mentor and public policy doctoral student. "I've never looked forward to a new semester as much as this one."
RISE Higher

❖ Organic Collaboration
  • Studying together in the graduate student lounge
  • Checking out activities together and supporting each other on social media
  • Interdisciplinary academic conversations and collaborations
RISE Higher

- Structured Check-ins
  - 2+ meetings per semester

- Connecting with other campus offices
  - Let’s talk counseling
  - Career planning

- RISEgiving
Reaching The Larger Community

❖ Getting involved!
  • Mentors for RISE, Orientation and TA Orientation
  • Active Membership in Student Orgs and Graduate Student Government
  • Admissions and Departmental Ambassadors

❖ Passing on knowledge about available resources
  • Especially exciting when centered around health and wellness!

❖ Creating Change and Discussions
  • Navigating Life as a Female Graduate Student Event

❖ Adopting new students into their social groups and communities

❖ Student referrals to my office for support
Future Planning

During the Summer Program:
• Allow for more unstructured time
• Add more financial focus
• Add more cultural discussions

Beyond August:
• Maintain & expand semester touch points
• Offer a graduation recognition ceremony
• Add a second year bootcamp for RISErs
Questions?

Thank you for your attendance today.

Laura Moix, gradsupport@uark.edu
Romona West, romona@uark.edu