QUICK TIPS FOR DOCTORAL PROGRAMS:
RECRUITING FOR DIVERSITY AND RETAINING FOR SUCCESS

The following tips are activities proven to be useful in securing diverse applicants who accept offers and go on to successful program completion. The suggestions outlined here, used by graduate programs at U-M and by our peers across the nation, are consistent with the law and University policy. These practices have been shown to attract excellent graduate students who will contribute to the University's diversity imperative.

The deans and staff at the Graduate School can assist with funding to facilitate recruiting efforts and provide other resources, information and advice. Contact Pat McCune (phmccune@umich.edu or 647.2655) in the office of Graduate Student Success for more information about these resources and related research or go to our website, http://www.rackham.umich.edu/faculty/staff/recruit/.

Recruiting Target Prospects

- Talk to those who know
  Consult with other U-M departments that have a successful record of recruiting a diverse community of students and faculty. Involve your underrepresented students, staff, faculty—and faculty who have been successful at attracting diverse students or whose work may attract those students—in each phase of recruitment. This includes identifying prospects, encouraging applications, and persuading those you admit to accept. Determine if there are aspects of your program that may signal an unwelcoming climate to prospects and if so, how to make your environment more welcoming and supportive.

- Use available data
  Use the GRE Search Service to identify students who are interested in your field and who have taken the GRE. Employ the specialty lists of contact data from those large organizations designed specifically to work with underrepresented students who are interested in graduate school; e.g., National Name Exchange, McNair Scholars, CIC-SROP participants. All of these resources are available to you from Rackham's office of Graduate Student Success (GSS). We'll also show you how to use them. Your own staff can request recruiting reports from M-Pathways on a regular basis.

- Identify and develop networks
  Contact your Ph.D. alumni who are members of underrepresented groups, and ask them to refer prospective students to your program. Look for U-M alumni who are now faculty colleagues at HBCUs, MSIs and other institutions that are top producers of underrepresented students with relevant undergraduate degrees; encourage them to refer prospects to you. When visiting campuses for your own work, ask if you can meet with faculty to discuss recruiting interests, or meet with undergraduate student groups who may be interested in graduate study. Ask current underrepresented students in your program and find out where and with whom they studied with as undergraduates.
- Look for undergraduates with research experience
  Applicants who have participated in academic enrichment programs—such as McNair Scholars, NSF’s Research Experience for Undergraduates, and CIC summer research programs—will be better equipped with academic skill sets and research experience necessary for success in graduate school. Take part in one of the many undergraduate research programs on our campus. The Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) and Rackham’s Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP) are among dozens of programs on campus that provide the opportunity to mentor outstanding students from underrepresented groups.

- Maximize personal contact
  Encourage faculty and advanced graduate students to take advantage of every opportunity to recruit formally and informally at relevant professional conferences, informal campus visits, and during research travel. Activities led by underrepresented graduate students often have the best outcomes in terms of impressing prospective students with the potential of U-M. Engage graduate student organizations in identifying and talking to prospects. Involve alumni from underrepresented groups in your recruitment events. Respond promptly to inquiries, by phone if possible, and do not simply refer prospects to brochures and websites. Personal connections make a difference.

Reviewing Applications

- Use a holistic review of applications
  Give careful consideration to all the credentials presented by the student, not just the quantitative factors. Look for a range of indicators that the applicant has the skills, experiences and resilience for the program. Resist using a single factor to select or exclude the applicant from admission. Be aware of unconscious bias in the letters of recommendation that you receive. By carefully weighing strengths, achievements, and promise you increase the likelihood of offering admission to those most likely to succeed.

- Consider the data
  Putting the applications in a long-term and/or comparative perspective can help to indicate unconscious or institutional biases. Provide committee members with demographic data that were shared during Rackham’s Program Review. This should encompass applicant, admission and enrolled graduate student data for the past 10 years if possible (minimally 5 years) in each department.

- Build the cohort
  Think in terms of building cohort strength based in diversity, thereby enhancing varied interests, experiences, and perspectives in the department. Consider the promising applicants in relation to others in the pool and to those currently in your program. Remember that next year’s top applicants will look at your program’s students as well as the faculty strengths when they consider which offer to accept.
Encouraging Admitted Students to Accept Your Offers of Admission

• Host a campus visit
Once you have made offers of admission, invite these underrepresented students to campus in the winter term—and fund their visits if possible. Engage them in activities that allow an in-depth preview of both your program’s academic and wider campus resources. Make certain to include the opportunity for candid discussions with current underrepresented graduate students about potential mentors, department climate, and life in Ann Arbor.

• Contact them personally
Focus on converting admitted students to matriculated students during the winter term. Follow through on your offer with e-mail and personal calls from both faculty and the grad chair, offering to discuss any additional questions. Respond to their concerns and questions honestly. Offer to put them in touch with underrepresented students and faculty for a personal view of graduate student life at U-M.

• Clarify the funding
Don’t assume that all students are familiar with the variety of ways in which they might fund their graduate education. Make certain they understand exactly what you are offering and clearly state the details of the funding package in the offer letter. Provide a written guide to other forms of funding available, how to apply, and when they should seek this type of funding. Nominate eligible students for available fellowships.

Supporting Student Success

• Assign advisors early
Practices vary widely among graduate degree programs when it comes to matching students with research and dissertation advisors, but underrepresented students should never be in doubt about who will assist them from the outset with understanding options, essential milestones, requirements, and deadlines.

• Facilitate changing advisors
Make it clear from the outset that students can change advisors when appropriate; include this topic routinely in orientation, handbooks, and general advising sessions. Unfortunately, students may assume that if the advisor is not a good match, for academic or other reasons, this indicates failure. Foster an understanding that there is no penalty for recognizing the need to change advisors in order to make the most of the degree program.

• Encourage mentoring
All students benefit from multiple sources of guidance. In addition to the formal advisor there are others who can share advice based on experience. Suggest to students with diverse backgrounds the faculty both inside and outside the program who may share overlapping research interests, life experiences, and/or career goals. More advanced graduate students, if reliable, can also provide the valuable support of peer mentoring.
• Provide Research Opportunities
Ensure that underrepresented students are able to conduct research in their fields of study as early as possible. Their prior experiences may not have included the opportunity. In addition to providing the student with an in-depth orientation to the norms of research activity in the program, closely working on a project with faculty and other students can help to acclimate the students to department life and encourage a sense of belonging.

• Review progress annually
Each year the student should meet formally with the advisor and/or the grad chair to discuss progress toward the degree. Students can complete in advance a form detailing which requirements are fulfilled and plans for the coming year. The advisor can solicit input from faculty who work directly with the student. A detailed summary should be provided in writing to the student and a copy placed in the file. If necessary, a student making insufficient progress should be given a set of concrete goals, resources, and deadlines.

• Encourage professional development
Share information with all students about the many venues for developing professional and personal skills that facilitate success. Suggest they take part in workshops and seminars that provide additional training in subjects such as grant-writing, oral presentation, time management, dissertation strategies, networking, etc. See P-L-A-N [www.rackham.umich.edu/plan] for options. When money is an issue, do your best to direct them to likely sources of funding.

• Identify funding opportunities
Make sure that all underrepresented students are provided the same information as other students when you promote funding opportunities for travel, summer support, research grants, etc. Make certain they understand their funding packages and provide guidance if supplementary support is needed.

• Promote awareness of student support
Our campus has a wealth of opportunities for diverse students to find personal support and community through staff in U-M offices and with their peers in student organizations. Encourage them to take advantage of student activities and organizations in the departments, campus wide, and nationally. When providing any type of orientation, make certain to include listings of U-M support offices such as Trotter House, the Center for the Education of Women, Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate, and the Spectrum Center.

• Facilitate an inclusive environment
Be attentive to the ongoing need for a welcoming environment. At the start of the school year make an effort to greet those who are new and make them feel welcome. For example, invite incoming students to attend and take part in departmental seminars and brown bags. Remind students how important it is to become part of cohorts inside and outside the department. Develop and maintain an environment where all perspectives are valued—in the classroom, in research groups, at brown bags and social events.