

Introduction by Laura Heidel

Hello! This is the first newsletter of the CRLA Graduate and Professional Student SIG, of which you are a member. Melissa Thomas and I (Laura Heidel) are the co-chairs of this new SIG. We are hoping this newsletter will give you some new ideas in working with this population. We would like our SIG to be interactive, so please feel free to email myself (lheidel@uh.edu) or Melissa (Melissa.Thomas@utsa.edu) with your ideas and suggestions. If you would like us to, we can forward your email to the entire SIG. Happy reading!

Book Review by Melissa Thomas

It's difficult to find books that support graduate and professional students as they foray into a brave new world. Robert Peters, Ph.D. has managed to write the definitive work on all things *graduate* in Getting What You Came For: The Smart Student's Guide to Earning a Master's or Ph.D. Peters has written a book that is accessible and easy to read because of its conversational tone. He is the adviser that every graduate student wishes they had.

Peters takes a look at the entire graduate process from whether you should even go to graduate school to how to find jobs after you finish your thesis or dissertation, and everything in between. This comprehensive volume, at 399 pages, does take quite the commitment to get through, but each chapter is so well broken down that many students could use it as a reference for their particular plight. Graduate students who need extra assistance in thesis/dissertation defense can read that chapter and undergraduate students who need help choosing a school can read that chapter.

The topics Peters covers include: what is graduate school like, do you need to go, should you work first, the thesis adviser, choosing a school, application and admission, improving your credentials for admission, financial aid, history and hurdles of the masters and doctorate, managing yourself, playing politics, comprehensive and qualifying exams, choosing and managing your thesis committee, the thesis topic, the thesis proposal, writing it, the defense, oral presentations, dealing with stress and depression, social milieu, minority student issues, and the job search.

How can you use this book? I would suggest including it in your resource library for students or at least recommending it to students who need assistance. A learning assistance professional can easily build a few workshops around the topics or host a thesis/dissertation support group that talks about these issues. I plan on using it as a "textbook" for a graduate student success course this fall. (I will update you, my colleagues, on how that goes.) But for now, I am sure that you can find several practical uses for Peters' book.

My only complaint is that this edition is over 10 years old (revised in 1997.) Not that it makes the information irrelevant, but Peters does talk about several aspects of graduate life that are dated. The cost of a graduate education has increased, the job market has gotten tighter, and the technologies he references are antiquated. If you choose to use this book as a resource or reference, I think you will get a lot of bang for your buck, considering it sells on Amazon.com for \$10.88.

Q&A by Laura Heidel

Q: What are some ways to market learning services to graduate and professional students?

A: At the University of Houston, these are some of the things I have done to market our services. We are a large diverse research institution of about 34,000 students. I have contacted the student services center at the Optometry School and asked to speak at their fall orientation. (I then did speak to their incoming class of about 100 students.) I have sent our semester workshop schedule and “services for graduate and professional students” brochure to the advisors and/or deans of all of the graduate and professional schools on campus. Representatives from my department met with the Dean of the Graduate School and let her know about our services. We provide individual learning strategies counseling appointments to graduate and professional students who are on academic probation and we remind advisors and new advisors of this service on a regular basis. Do you have anything else that you do? Please email us.

Q: What are the needs of graduate and professional students and how do they differ from undergraduate needs?

A: In my opinion, these are some of the needs of graduate and professional students:

- 1) Balancing school and life issues,
- 2) Understanding how to be more self-motivated than they were as undergrads,
- 3) Learning how to study in (perhaps) a new discipline and learning the corresponding cognitive schemas that go along with that discipline,
- 4) Learning how to manage a sometimes overwhelming amount of material,
- 5) Dealing with not being the “top dog” anymore,
- 6) Learning how to deal with professors on a collegial level as opposed to putting them on a pedestal as they may have done as undergraduates,
- 7) Dealing with career issues such as postponing earning an income for several years and learning how to market themselves effectively.

Do you have other ideas?

Q: What are the best methods to deliver services to graduate and professional students?

A: Some of the ways my office has delivered services to these students are:

- 1) speaking to groups of students on a particular topic (preparing for your comprehensive exams, preparing a research article for publication),
- 2) providing individual appointments, staying past 5:00pm when necessary,
- 3) speaking to students at orientations,
- 4) giving an entire class a study skills inventory and then inviting students in to go over it,
- 5) holding a “learning to learn day” in the university center and offering mini workshops, study skills inventories, handouts, etc.

7 Principles for Good Practice in Graduate Student Engagement

(Summary from Pontius, J. L., and Harper, S. R. In Guentzel, M.J. (ed.). *Supporting Graduate and Professional Students*, 115. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006.)

1. Continually strive to eradicate marginalization among underrepresented populations. Identify culturally responsive support and advising to these students, especially those from smaller, racially homogenous, and overwhelmingly male academic programs.
2. Provide meaningful orientation to the institution beyond academic units. Offering a university-wide coordinated and multiple-day series of orientation activities for new students and programs for prospective students that present the realities of graduate education constitutes good practice in graduate student engagement.
3. Invest resources in communication with graduate and professional students. Exemplary student affairs divisions invest resources in the creation of brochures, newsletters, and Web sites for graduate and professional students. These divisions partner with academic units to compile and disseminate information to graduate students about out-of-class engagement venues, leadership opportunities, campus resources, and upcoming events and deadlines, to name a few.
4. Facilitate opportunities for community building and multicultural interaction across academic units. Student affairs divisions partner with academic units to offer support, incentives, and resources (financial and otherwise) for graduate and professional students to create their own communities of engagement and support.
5. Partner with academic schools and departments to create engagement plans for students. They collaboratively develop plans and strategies for connecting students to the larger campus community and positively affecting learning and outcomes beyond the classroom.
6. Enhance career and professional development. Exemplary student affairs divisions, in cooperation with academic units and the graduate school, offer financial support for conference travel, especially for students who are presenting papers, workshops, or symposia.
7. Systematically assess satisfaction, needs, and outcomes. Assessments of how students change, what they learn outside the classroom, and the various ways in which they apply what they have learned through enriching educational experiences are deemed important and worthy of investigation.

Good luck in implementing your graduate level learning assistance!

Let us know how we can further serve you and please consider *submitting something for this newsletter*— another edition will come out in the summer!

OR present at the next CRLA Conference (deadline for proposals is extended to 4/22)
http://www.crla.net/2008_Conference/index.htm