WVU creates new initiative: Assistant VP for graduate education

A brief look at the history of graduate education at WVU

Graduate education has been an important part of WVU’s history and academic culture since the first decades after its founding. As early as 1898, President Jerome Hall Raymond began hiring graduate students to teach undergraduate classes.

In 1929, Stephen P. Burke began organizing a Graduate Council, and in 1930, the WVU Graduate School was established. Six fellowships were created for the 1930-31 academic year with support from individuals and corporations.

Within two years, the school had attracted more than 1,200 students and was organized into four subject area divisions to better educate students and serve the needs of the state.

In 1984, graduate education became decentralized when the Graduate School was officially dissolved. At that time, leadership was provided by the associate vice president for research and graduate studies. Colleges began to manage most day-to-day responsibilities, while the Graduate Council oversaw program evaluations, regulated membership of the graduate faculty and coordinated activities between programs.

Since the inception of the Office of Graduate Education in 1991, Robert Stitzel has served as its director, except for a brief period from 1994-97.

Stitzel’s involvement with graduate education began with his arrival at WVU in 1965. Prior to his appointment as director of graduate education, he also served as a member of the Graduate School Executive Committee, an original member of the University Graduate Council and special assistant to the provost for projects related to graduate education and the Graduate Council.

When Stitzel began to serve as director of graduate education in 1991, WVU graduated slightly more than 100 doctoral students a year, just meeting the minimum of 100 doctoral graduates required to maintain Carnegie designation as a research-extensive university. With his assistance, graduate education has grown in volume and diversity. In recent years, WVU has awarded nearly 160 doctoral degrees annually.

Stitzel’s dedication to graduate education during the past four decades is greatly appreciated by the students, faculty and administration of WVU.

Task force co-chairs Fred King, associate dean in the Department of Chemistry, and Lawrence Hornak, professor in the Lane Department of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering, have endorsed this leadership initiative for graduate education, stating: “Creating a vice president position is consistent with task force recommendations to position the graduate education enterprise in order to assist WVU in attaining its strategic objectives. Establishing a leadership position dedicated to graduate education at the vice presidential level reflects the growing importance of graduate studies at research universities such as WVU. This organizational change will strengthen the linkages between student recruitment, research and scholarship productivity, and faculty recruitment and retention — ultimately building a stronger research university.”

The new assistant vice president will be responsible for the oversight of graduate education initiatives and for coordinating the efforts of the colleges, research office and supporting units to improve the recruitment, retention and productivity of graduate students, as recommended by the Graduate Education and the Graduate Student Experience Task Force. Stronger central representation will provide opportunities for graduate students to engage as junior colleagues and to participate in cutting-edge, interdisciplinary research projects.

Among the duties of this position will be coordinating marketing and recruitment efforts for graduate programs; creating a graduate teaching assistant institute to develop graduate students’ skills as members of the professorate; overseeing program review; and hosting the minority doctoral program in conjunction with the Office of Social Justice.

“Our minority doctoral students program has grown tremendously to nearly 100 students since we began in 2002,” said Executive Officer for Social Justice Jennifer McIntosh, who initiated the program. “From the beginning, there has been a strong partnership between the offices of the provost and social justice. I look forward to even greater success in the coming years through this enhanced leadership.”

The search to fill the assistant vice president for graduate education position will begin this semester.

The 2010 Plan implementation team invites employees to learn more about the WVU 2010 Plan and Task Force on Graduate Education and the Graduate Student Experience at: http://www.wvu.edu/~2010plan/