



The Current State of Graduate Education: Is There a Need for an ITAA Alliance?

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Panelists: Susan Ashdown, Cornell University; Kathy Mullet, Oregon State University;
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This session was composed of a panel of speakers from ITAA member institutions who are administrators, graduate coordinators, and long-time graduate faculty—those involved in managing graduate programs and training post baccalaureate students. Panel members represented Ph.D. granting and Master’s degree-granting programs, and each discussed briefly how their respective programs are currently focused: (a) the efficacy of our graduate programs in preparing future faculty and professionals, (b) trends inside and outside our institutions that influence the future of our graduate programs, and (c) the need for repositioning or expanding the ITAA Graduate Education Committee to focus on strengthening graduate education programs in our field to assure their continuance.

We need to be strategic: What do our programs do well? What do they need to improve upon?
How do we evolve to:

1. Continue to train at the post baccalaureate level?
2. Ensure our Ph.D. programs effectively train future faculty?
3. Take advantage of the faculty expertise in those institutions that have the capacity and desire to train students?
4. Prepare first time job seekers to meet criteria of hiring institutions?
5. Accommodate students with diverse personal goals (e.g., to stay in the USA or return to their home country upon graduation; obtain the degree for the sole purpose of retaining a current position)?

Panelists spoke about trends shaping graduate education, how they are training future scholars, and the needs as they see them to sustain thriving graduate programs in our field. They discussed the state of graduate education from their perspective-- the opportunities, challenges and threats to continuing to offer graduate education at their institution. Issues discussed included setting goals, enhancing diversity, competition, effective use of dwindling resources, and the marketplace.

We think it is time to take stock of graduate education within our profession and to consider how ITAA can benefit its members by delving into issues surrounding the development of effective and vital graduate programs that train our future scholars and leaders. As we consider graduate

education, we know that while some long-time programs are closing, many have embraced strategies that have allowed them to thrive, and others are considering the expansion of their graduate offerings. With diminishing resources and the urgency of meeting the goals within strategic plans, an alliance of ITAA members focused on graduate education may be able to identify practices to keep graduate programs alive and well.

Conclusions reached from the panelists include the following:

- Universities offer a variety of content areas under a variety of names; this may cause confusion for students looking for the right graduate program. Do we offer truth in our publicity? Are students prepared for the job market that increasingly demands grant writing, publications and leadership within the field at point of entry?
- Graduate majors within a department are changing as faculty are retiring and new faculty are hired; successful programs have been able to build synergistically (increase class sizes, new research foci/directions)
- Students are changing in what they need and who they are. They are demanding more individualized programs; students are requiring more funding as the cost of graduate education rises; students with no undergraduate background in apparel related fields are applying to our programs and they increasingly desire experiential learning.
- Specializations within our programs are being shaped by external funding, i.e., areas such as sustainability, functional/wearable technology/design, entrepreneurship. Will we be able to retain areas less likely to bring in funding (e.g., history, culture)?
- Programs have found creative sources of funding e.g., endowed assistantships. However we need to work harder on exploration of new funding sources. The old model of offering graduate assistantships for teaching undergraduates may need examining as we merge with other units within the university.
- Strong programs do not thrive in a vacuum; having supportive staff, systems and practices lead to success at the program level.
- We need better recruitment programs to seek out a more diverse student population. We also need graduate programs with a sufficient cohort of students for a healthy learning environment.
- We may have healthy programs, but programs are still closing; is it because we are not meeting needs of our constituents that include students, industry, and academia? For example: Are we educating too many of one faculty type or producing graduates with “missing parts”?
- Does the industry value graduate education? Evidence from the panel is that we need to market our programs better.

- *We should not take graduate education in our field for granted. We need to produce graduates with diverse backgrounds to support the diverse needs of the field. We need to consider the impact of the trends shaping our field. For example, what effect will current efforts to establish undergraduate accreditation have on our graduate programs?*
- *An ITAA graduate education alliance can help us to come together to consider further the current status of graduate programs in our field and to cooperate with and support each other to grow our programs. We need to learn more about the state of successful graduate programs and to foster and provide recognition for those programs that are successful in definitive ways.*

