MEMORANDUM

Date: September 30, 2008

To: Deans
College Associate Deans for Graduate Education
Directors and Coordinators of Graduate Studies

Through: Nariman Farvardin
Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

From: Charles Caramello
Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School

Subject: Achieving Excellence in Graduate Education

I. OVERVIEW

The Strategic Plan puts forth a bold and transformative vision for advancing graduate education and enhancing the experience of graduate students on our campus. In accordance with Strategic Plan objectives for year one, the university community will undertake an initiative to gather and analyze information on graduate programs and to identify appropriate sizes for programs. The process will be deeply consultative, with ongoing communication, and will factor in differences between programs, disciplines, and colleges. The focus this year will be on doctoral programs; subsequently, it will shift to masters programs.

Graduate programs will identify, define, and measure quality indicators (some applying to all programs, some program or discipline specific); they will describe their financial support for students and their plans for moving toward the goal of an overall university doctoral program of competitively funded full-time students; and they will propose appropriate program sizes and target recruitment numbers for reaching them. Programs will be asked to provide comparative data from outstanding programs at peer institutions, normally our designated peers: UC Berkeley, UCLA, U Michigan, U Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, UNC at Chapel Hill.

The offices of collegiate deans will gather the information from graduate programs, with information moving from faculty, through programs, departments, and colleges, to
Graduate School and Provost’s Office (with the exception of the Mentoring Survey mentioned below). Whenever possible, the Graduate School will obtain and distribute relevant data, enabling programs to focus on individual program data, comparative data within disciplines, and qualitative information and measures. The objective is a flexible process that allows both for consistency in data reported and for the ability of programs to provide indicators and other information particular to their individual standards and goals.

**Mentoring Survey**

Prior to the completion of the Strategic Plan, the Graduate School had initiated a project to survey graduate programs to identify best practices on campus in mentoring, advising, and professional preparation. The survey instrument will be distributed directly to graduate programs during October, and returned directly to the Graduate School. Its questions slightly overlap those outlined below, and its results will contribute to this broader initiative.

**II. REPORT GUIDELINES**

Colleges are asked to submit a **two-part report** for each of their doctoral programs to the Graduate School by the deadlines given below.

**PART I**

**Part I** of the report will describe and present data on quality indicators and fellowships. Programs will provide information on quality of program, faculty, and students, including benchmarks for satisfactory progress to degree, expectations for faculty mentoring, expectations for student accomplishment, and record of student placements; they also will report Block Grant Fellowship awards and outcomes. Part I requests two kinds of information: a) quantitative information that cuts across disciplines and can be reported on spreadsheets; and b) more qualitative and program specific information that requires discursive reporting.

1) Programs should identify and describe their benchmarks to the doctoral degree and timetable for satisfactory progress to degree. They should compare both to those of outstanding programs at peer institutions.

2) Programs should provide information on Block Grant Fellowship awards and related student outcomes for the past three years.

3) Programs should provide information on first placement for each doctoral graduate for the past three years; should describe their policies and practices for success in student placement; and should compare their placement records, when possible, to outstanding programs at peer institutions.

*Templates for items 1-3 above will be distributed to Deans by October 3, 2008.*
4) Programs should describe their scholarly content and structure, the skills and accomplishments that graduates in their discipline need for professional success, and notable features of the program that help students to meet those standards. Programs should describe how they compare with outstanding programs at peer institutions.

5) Programs should describe how they currently recruit students and how they might improve their recruitment of top students. They should describe and explain their current student demographics, paying attention to diversity; should describe and explain the ratio and roles of full-time vs. part-time students in the program; and should recommend changes that would enhance student diversity and, as appropriate, the percentage of full-time students.

Additional templates, data, and guidelines will be forwarded as necessary.

The deadline for Part I is December 31, 2008.

PART II

Part II of the report will present goals for appropriate program size. Programs should describe their capacity to recruit excellent students; to provide those students with courses, advising and mentoring, and full financial support; and to place them in suitable positions. They should present a plan for shifting toward full-time doctoral study, with competitive funding for all doctoral students making satisfactory progress toward degree.

1) Programs should describe current student financial support, including types of support packages, stipend levels, commitments and time period of support made to incoming students, and length of time that students are typically being supported. They should present a plan that (a) uses benchmarks for satisfactory progress to degree (and/or other measures of achievement) as a basis for eligibility for continued financial support, and (b) funds doctoral students for the normative time to degree in the relevant discipline.

2) Programs should propose an appropriate program size based on indicators of academic excellence and on available resources (existing budget, existing levels of fellowships and graduate assistantships, and any expected changes in grant support for graduate students). The proposal should include target numbers for new enrollments for Falls 2010-12 (information on target numbers for Fall 2009 would also be appreciated).

It is understood that creating such a proposal will involve multiple variables and financial models that factor in undergraduate teaching obligation of departments, research obligations of departments, fluctuations in base budget and in available soft funds, support levels at competitor institutions, and so forth.

The deadline for Part II is February 28, 2009.

Please direct comments or questions to Charles Caramello at ccaramel@umd.edu or Cindi Hale at crhale@gradschool.umd.edu.