Transforming Graduate Admissions

A Case Study

► Process Improved: Graduate Admissions Office

► Unit(s): Graduate School Admissions Office; Graduate School Information Technology Office; Graduate School Outreach & Graduate Student Professional Development Office; Graduate Departments

► Customers of the Process and Their Needs:

Applicants - need clear & consistent instruction on the application process; need timely communication of application/admission status

Graduate Departments - need applicant information; need graduate school evaluative expertise; need a timely graduate school final admission decision; need supporting paper documents from applicants

Graduate School Admissions Office - needs applicant information; needs department admission recommendations; needs an efficient way to communicate with applicants

Registrar’s Office - need accurate applicant data

Problem/Opportunity Statement: The Graduate Admissions process at UW-Madison is a dual-review process. An applicant must apply to and be admitted by both the graduate department and the Graduate School. Prior to the current admitting term, implementation of this process meant the applicant was required to follow two sets of application procedures simultaneously: graduate department procedures and graduate school procedures. Method of application (online or paper) and method of payment (credit card, check or money order), among other factors, created a multitude of variations in procedures. The process, as implemented, created more and more confusion for applicants, the graduate departments and the graduate school itself, as complexity in procedures increased. Trends in application submission and web-based technology, along with in-house expertise, provided an opportunity for process improvement during the Fall 2003 admitting term.

► Changes Made: Elimination of duplication; Elimination of paper applications; Improved communications

► Results: Less confusion; Quicker admissions decision to applicants; Decreased costs to applicants
► **Lessons Learned:** Identify your audiences; Tailor communications to specific audiences; Get staff and stakeholder buy-in early in the planning stages; Plan in-depth to minimize negative feedback; Plan big, but implement change in manageable phases; Take some risks; Establish measures of success; Consider the ripple effect

► **Next Steps:** Evaluation of Phase I through applicant, admitted student, and department surveys. Implementation of Phase II.

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