



GRADUATE SCHOOL

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2027

Development of the Strategic Plan

The ULM Graduate School Strategic Plan (GSSP) was developed in collaboration with graduate faculty, graduate programs, Graduate School and the Graduate School Strategic Planning Committee. The committee administered an internal Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to the Graduate School staff and all graduate faculty. The results of the SWOT were compiled in a master document which the committee used in consideration for addressing all areas of focus.

MISSION STATEMENT

The ULM Graduate School will support the University's mission of transformative education with value, opportunity, and quality to meet the needs of an ever-changing workforce and advance the pursuit of knowledge.

VISION

The ULM Graduate School will support the university's vision of *Changing Lives* while maintaining equality, inclusiveness and opportunity by providing an accessible and transformative experience for all individuals who seek graduate or professional education.

GRADUATE SCHOOL SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	
1	Supportive, responsive, and caring grad school staff that is willing to help faculty and students with all issues
2	Very good communication and listening skills; both internally among grad school staff and externally with grad programs
3	Good leadership consisting of forward-thinking, dynamic planning efforts, and organizational agility
4	Graduate Council
5	Improved processes (fillable forms); policies and procedures are available online
6	Implementation of standard policies and infrastructure
7	Enhanced organization and policies
8	Implementation of graduate student training sessions
9	The Graduate School has begun to look at each program's uniqueness and is working with them in this capacity. This needs to continue in order to succeed and maintain high morale.
10	Rolling admissions for many programs
11	Fast processing time and commitment to enrollment growth
12	Great quality and variety of degrees offered
13	Willingness to offer specialized degrees
14	Commitment to diversity and fairness and culturally sensitive
15	Very good reputation among students and most faculty

WEAKNESSES	
1	Understaffed, high workload with staff turnover
2	Staffing may need to be enhanced for phone coverage, e-mail, social media and marketing
3	Communication to students/faculty about policies, deadlines, etc.
4	ImageNow and Recruit software are not easily navigated
5	ULM program webpages need updating and makeover
6	Cached materials still an issue
7	Appeals process is process-centered and needs to be student-centered
8	Prioritizing ever increasing enrollment over everything else. Quantity over quality.
9	Lack of interdisciplinary efforts
10	Cut red tape for students - for example, double work to apply to graduate school and then to their specific graduate program.
11	confusing to students that there is an application process (and fee) for the graduate school AND for the program in which they are applying
12	Marketing efforts have minimal impact for certificate programs

13	Graduate Council roles/responsibilities needs revamp - members doing activities that should be done by Graduate School - student appeals/grade changes should be handled by the dean
14	Insufficient graduate student training, for ex., understanding policies
15	limited financial resources for marketing, staffing, GA-ships
16	Extremely limited travel funding to attend professional conferences to establish reputation and recruit
17	Discomforts of change
18	Administration buy-in
19	Low paying stipends
20	Need smoother interactions with international office

OPPORTUNITIES	
1	Increase advertising
2	Increase school state/national/international visibility
3	Need to improve program web design
4	Enrollment management department can assist with marketing plan
5	Improve recruitment of face-to-face (F2F) students
6	Grow certificate programs
7	Collaboration with other campus entities on recruitment
8	Recruiting events
9	Outreach to untapped populations
10	ULM should consider using graduate programs to offset the decrease in freshman enrollment. Programs would be well served in utilizing the knowledge and experience of Graduate School personnel to implement strategies for enrollment growth.
11	Need to improve modes of communication with faculty and students
12	Electronic media allow us to disseminate information about our graduate programs like never before. Although we are using these systems to some degree, the reality is that we are barely scratching the surface in terms of their full potential.
13	Make appeals processes more student-centered
14	Increase need-based and merit base scholarships to remove barriers
15	Increase Open Educational Resource (OER) options for students
16	Growth opportunities with multiple programs
17	Advocate for new program growth and development
18	Increase number of graduate programs
19	Increase quality of programs
20	Increase collaborations with the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine (VCOM)
21	New institutional focus on interdisciplinary programs should extend to grad programs
22	Create interdisciplinary efforts across programs
23	Return of Graduate Council to oversight of graduate curriculum

24	Develop more online graduate programs overall. Online programs will attract more applicants than a face-to-face program at ULM.
25	Create mentorship training for faculty
26	GS could meet with program faculty on a periodic basis or offer a general meeting to review policies and procedures and other matters; or send out a newsletter on a periodic basis
28	community relationships/involvement with external stakeholders

	THREATS
1	Other universities lowering entrance requirements; taking students from us
2	Other institutions in the area offer more attractive degrees
3	Changing dynamics of Higher Education
4	Anti-educational sentiment in our region
5	Possible saturation of online offerings
6	Growing "gig" economy/precarity rendering traditional grad degrees less desirable for employment
7	Changing nature of the workforce
8	More employers not requiring degrees for employment
9	Online for-profits
10	Political instability may lead to funding threats
11	Declining student numbers- this is a national trend
12	Projected demographic cliff threatens future student enrollment
13	Sometimes poor quality of research and theses/dissertations
14	Resources for research need improvement (space an issue, some infrastructure in bad shape, non-functional, internal funding for research lacking)
15	No VP for research
16	Graduate education and students should be more central and visible
17	Institutional marketing and support focused on undergraduate programs and students
18	Confusion with program since we have two deans (college dean and grad school dean) Where our program falls needs to be defined
19	underutilized software and integration
20	Need more flexibility with application software
21	lack of training and access
22	Poor website design across the university
23	Lack of fillable and routable online forms
24	Uncertain economy and higher costs for students
25	Inability to attract qualified full-time faculty to teach at ULM due to below average compensation
26	Inability to attract qualified adjuncts due to low adjunct pay
27	Lack of communication about GS policies and procedures within programs

28	Lack of shared governance, communication, written policies, transparency and availability of policies, archiving of decisions via minutes, collegial collaboration, and consistent application of policies and procedures within programs re: graduate curriculum and policies
29	Lack of transparent communication across campus, from Graduate Council, and within programs (for ex., minutes) means inefficiency and sometimes a crisis- and conflict-driven approach to problem solving
30	Lack of compliance with existing GS policies and procedures within programs
31	Lack of training for graduate students within programs
32	Inadequate marketing and recruitment in some programs
33	Fixation on numbers and recruiting
34	Inadequate funding for marketing, graduate assistantships, and staff
35	Loss of funding
36	Loss of support
37	Lack of faculty available for admin work during summer months
38	Minutes to council meetings are too vague regarding policy decisions
39	Expanding the size of graduate enrollment in certain programs beyond the capacity of the faculty in those programs to provide quality instruction. Increasing graduate class enrollment beyond a certain point is counterproductive.
40	ULM should exceed SACSCOC-required minimum standards in hiring practices.
41	Lack of increase in income for teachers earning Masters in Louisiana
42	Some issues with flow of information through the chain of command/Lack of transparency within certain elements of bureaucracy
43	Some programs have problems with effective advising and graduating students in a timely manner
44	Many students do not follow advisement given to them

I

INCREASE GRADUATE STUDENT ENROLLMENT TO 2000 IN FIVE YEARS
ULM Strategic Pillar – Student Success 1.1c, 1.2 (a, b, c, d), 1.3, 1.4a, 1.5

GRAD SCHOOL (GS) STRATEGIC GOAL 1: *The Graduate School will work with graduate programs to reduce barriers to entry*

Initiatives

- a) Advocate for holistic admissions process for all programs
- b) Advocate for programs to have more entry points
- c) Enforce conditional admissions status for programs that offer lower entry Grade Point Averages.
- d) Redirect admissions criteria from program-maintained websites to the graduate school web page/catalog to maintain accuracy of admissions requirements
- e) Seek additional financial aid sources for graduate students
- f) Make the admission process more user-friendly to students
- h) Assess current application and enrollment trends by program

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 2: *The Graduate School will continue to reduce the conversion time from application to decision*

Initiatives

- a) Support programs with simplified requirements by continuing direct admissions
- b) Evaluate programs with elaborate admissions processes to simplify requirements and deadlines
- c) Remove the unofficial transcript requirement from the graduate application which creates delays
- d) Reduce the number of transcripts required for admission (pending University of Louisiana (UL) Board approval)
- e) Advocate for a universal transcript system across the UL Universities

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 3: *Simplify the onboarding process*

Initiatives

- a) Develop materials which support newly-admitted students
- b) Work with Colleges to develop a two-year rotation of classes for student use in scheduling
- c) Provide additional outreach and assistance to students admitted but not enrolled (ANE)
- d) Make new student orientation mandatory at the Graduate School and program levels
- e) Coordinate with International Student Services to improve onboarding for new international graduate students
- f) Initiate the development of program-specific handbooks

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 4: Enhance opportunities and strategies for graduate student success and welfare

Initiatives

- a) Develop a policy for separation of a graduate student from a research mentor, lab or adviser
- b) Work with Career Development to develop graduate-designated mentor and mentee workshops and/or to expand graduate participation in the existing ULM Mentorship program.
- c) Empower graduate students to have a more impactful role on campus through advocacy and participation in student governance to represent both in-person and online students
- d) Advocate for and enhance accessibility to campus resources in areas, including health, education, and welfare for graduate students on-campus and online
- e) Work with the office of Student Affairs to include graduate students in all campus events, activities, and announcements and develop events targeted to the graduate population
- f) Explore opportunities for students from underrepresented and marginalized groups to attend university events
- g) Provide additional experiences that help students discover and better understand career paths
- h) Provide additional professional development opportunities for students
- i) Provide a more robust orientation and additional professional development opportunities for graduate students
- j) Work with the Controller's office to offer an extended payment plan which spans across the semester

II

MARKETING & RECRUITMENT

ULM Strategic Pillar: Student Success 1.1, 1.2

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 5: Support new program growth and enhance new program quality

Initiatives

- a) Offer a 'no-pay' recruitment day each semester or other incentives
- b) Increase scholarship funding through the ULM Foundation
- c) Hold a Graduate Application Day with assistance for both online and in-person students
- d) Encourage each program to update their fliers and other marketing materials (include 'Why get a graduate degree?', Return on Investment, Industry trends and the answer to 'Why ULM?')
- e) Encourage School Directors to integrate the Faculty Activities Database (FAD) as part of their annual evaluation and update their faculty profiles each year so profiles are current
- f) Update Graduate faculty lists
- g) Work with Deans to ensure faculty profiles are updated to attract graduate students

III

Support new program growth and enhance program quality

ULM Strategic Pillars: Student Success 1.3d, 1.4c; Intellectual Activity 3.1 a, b, c;

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 6: The Graduate School will advocate for, promote, and support the development of new programs that fit the mission of the university

Initiatives

- a) Promote and assist programs developing Accelerated Bachelors to Masters (ABM) degrees
- b) Explore the creation of 4+1 Programs with regional institutions
- c) Promote new and unique interdisciplinary degrees across schools/colleges
- d) Explore opportunities for partnerships internationally

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 7: The Graduate School will collaborate with the Graduate Council to oversee graduate curricula and program review.

Initiatives

- a) The Graduate School Dean will serve on the University Curriculum Committee (UCC) until a Graduate Curriculum Committee is formed and will provide feedback to the UCC and programs on program proposals
- b) A new Graduate Curriculum Committee (under the Graduate Council) will review graduate program curriculum proposals that include program changes, enhancement of existing programs, and new program proposals. The committee will examine new programs for consistency with the mission of ULM, graduate education, and program quality
- c) The Graduate Council will review findings of the University Program Review Committee and provide programs with additional thoughts and strategic recommendations to enhance existing programs and eliminate moribund ones.

IV
Enhance communication with all stakeholders
ULM Strategic Pillars: Student Success 1.3e

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 8: *The Graduate School will continue to develop and improve communication*

Initiatives

- a) Create more prominent links on website to important searches (catalog, forms/webforms, appeals, faculty resources etc.)
- b) Create a student resources webpage that includes a video library
- c) Create a faculty resources webpage for appeals, policies, and workflow
- d) Develop a communication list serve for graduate faculty
- e) Create an e-mail account for Graduate Council appeals
- f) Create e-mail templates with guides for each different appeal type
- g) Revise communication workflow for appeals that is student-centered and user-friendly
- h) Revise communication workflow for Electronic Thesis and Dissertation (ETD) assistance
- i) Establish periodic meetings with stakeholders

V
Support Graduate Assistantships through advocacy and accountability
ULM Strategic Pillars: Student Success 1.1f

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 9: *The Graduate School will review and evaluate graduate student compensation and workload*

Initiatives

- a) Ensure that all Graduate Assistants (GAs) have a job description on file to support their classification beginning spring 2023
- b) Apply SB 76 to all Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Research Assistants (RAs)
- c) Address GA compensation across the board
- d) Evaluate the need for GAs in all areas
- e) Address inequities in GA workload

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 10: *The Graduate School will continue to provide oversight and management of Graduate Assistants*

Initiatives

- a) Develop an evaluation instrument for GAs for timely feedback, reappointments and dismissals
- b) Develop a policy for GA rescission
- c) Develop a template for program management of GAs

VI

Provide staff and graduate faculty with quality assistance and support ULM Strategic Pillars: University Resources 3d;

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 11: *Create a support mechanism to assist graduate faculty and staff that provides support to graduate students and ensures continuity*

Initiatives

- a) The Graduate School will work with the Graduate Council to identify the role of graduate faculty
- b) Clarify and define Graduate School functions related to all stakeholders
- c) Develop policy database and convert forms to online fillable versions, ultimately using Banner Document Management (BDM) for electronic signatures
- d) Create protocols for advising international graduate students
- e) Work with programs to identify point(s) of contact during the summer to support admissions, advisement, appeals, and continuity
- f) Create protocols or checklist for advising students who need appeals
- g) Provide assistance to graduate faculty/coordinators who are actively involved in recruiting students to their programs

VII

Support the Graduate Council effectively ULM Strategic Pillars: Intellectual Activity 3.1b,

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 12: *Provide support and clarity to functions of the Graduate Council*

Initiatives

- a) Facilitate paperwork and assist students and faculty in the following Graduate Council functions:
 - i. Curriculum
 - ii. Policy
 - iii. Faculty appointments
 - iv. Program evaluations
 - v. Student appeals
 - vi. Student welfare
- b) Address continuity of the Council during summer months
- c) Provide a mechanism for access to policy decisions and updates to all graduate faculty
- d) Simplify Graduate Faculty membership process by pulling Curriculum Vitae from the FAD

**VIII
BUDGET**

ULM Strategic Pillars: University Resources 1a, b, e, f

GS STRATEGIC GOAL 13: *Maximize existing budget allocations, develop additional revenue streams, and advocate for additional operating funds for graduate programs and GS initiatives.*

Initiatives

- a) Ensure existing financial resources are maximized to achieve strategic goals
- b) Collaborate and partner with other departments that currently provide targeted services to include graduate students and support graduate initiatives
- c) Explore the feasibility of adding a fee for thesis and dissertation enrollment
- d) Explore and identify additional revenue streams