

# GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF GRADUATE SCHOOL FUNCTIONS IN A COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

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## ABSTRACT

*Saint Louis University decentralized Graduate School functions in the fall of 2010. The primary goal of this initiative was to provide greater “academic flexibility and resources” to expand graduate programs and enhance research opportunities in colleges, schools, and centers on campus. This initiative allowed the Doisy College of Health Sciences (DCHS) to create a flexible academic environment and allocate resources toward developing a graduate education team responsible for academic programs, research support, and academic affairs. The DCHS has realized the practical implications of the decentralized model through growth in academic programs, student scholarship opportunities, and graduate assistantships. This paper examines three intertwining key components before and after decentralization at the DCHS: personnel, university administrative structure, and operations.*

## BACKGROUND

Saint Louis University remains dedicated to educating leaders who will contribute to the knowledge and skills of their disciplines, promote the discovery of new knowledge, and who will use, integrate, and disseminate this knowledge in accordance with the values, ethics, and intellectual ideals of the Society of Jesus. The University awarded its first Master of Arts (MA) degree in 1834 followed by its first Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in 1880. It was not until 1925 that the University established

a formal Graduate School(1). The mission of the Graduate School was to support excellence through teaching, research, scholarship, and community service.

The administration of Saint Louis University reorganized graduate education by dissolving the Graduate School in July 2010. The period after the decision to dissolve the graduate school and funnel administrative functions down to the college/school/center level will be referred to as the “transition” throughout the remainder of this communication. The primary goal of this initiative was

to provide academic deans greater academic flexibility and resources for expanding existing graduate programs and fostering research in colleges, schools, and centers across campus. A number of programming and financial resource issues surfaced during the transition period with regard to the university administrative structure, centralized and decentralized operations, and graduate education processing. The reorganization did not change the mission of graduate education which states:

The Mission of Graduate Education at the University and the Doisy College of Health Sciences [DCHS or the College] levels is to define and support excellence through teaching, research, scholarship, and community service. The University is dedicated to educating leaders who will contribute to the knowledge and skills of their disciplines, promote the discovery of new knowledge, and who will use, integrate, and disseminate this knowledge consistent with the values, ethics, and intellectual ideals of the Society of Jesus [emphasis added by author] (<http://www.slu.edu/x31995.xml>).

New terminology was introduced during the transition to describe the levels of education provided by the University. Prior to decentralization, each graduate program was placed in one of two categories: graduate or professional. "Graduate" was the historical term given to traditional degrees granted such as Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MS), and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Professional degrees consisted of degrees earned in specific fields such as medicine (MD), law (JD) and health science disciplines [e.g. Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) and Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT)]. The transition from a centralized Graduate School model into a hybrid model of centralized and decentralized operations resulted in the diversification and the coalescence of the graduate and professional programs into a post-baccalaureate category. All graduate programs now fall under the sponsorship of the Office of Graduate Education. A list of abbreviations can be found in Table 1.

**MAIN OBJECTIVES**

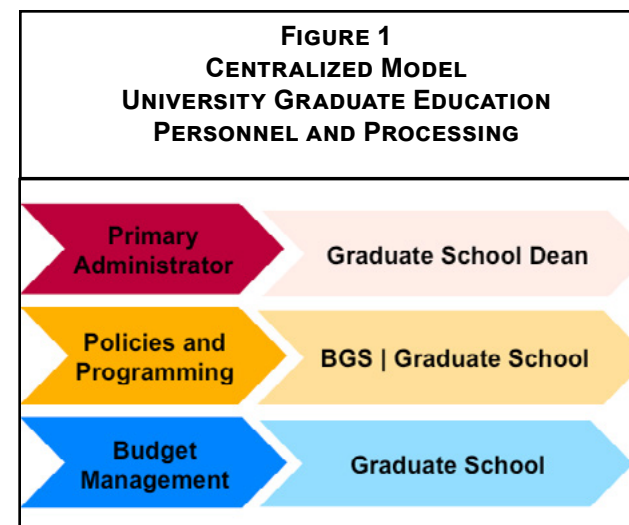
This paper explores three vital and interconnected components of the graduate education delivery system at both the university and college levels: personnel, university administrative structure, and operations. Observations of these component areas both before and after the transition are used to assess the complexities and outcomes associated with the transition. Since the University administrative structure, personnel, and operations were overseen by the Graduate School, the model in place before the transition

<b>ADD</b>	Associate Deans and Directors
<b>ADGE</b>	Associate Dean for Graduate Education
<b>AVPGE</b>	Associate Vice President for Graduate Education
<b>BGS</b>	Board of Graduate Studies
<b>BOT</b>	Board of Trustees
<b>DPT</b>	Doctor of Physical Therapy
<b>DCHS</b>	Doisy College of Health Sciences
<b>GA</b>	Graduate Assistant
<b>GAAC</b>	Graduate Academic Affairs Committee
<b>IPEDS</b>	Integrated Post Secondary Education Data System
<b>JD</b>	Juris Doctor
<b>MA</b>	Master of Arts
<b>MD</b>	Doctor of Medicine
<b>MOT</b>	Master of Occupational Therapy
<b>MS</b>	Master of Science
<b>MSHS</b>	Master of Science in Health Sciences
<b>PhD</b>	Doctor of Philosophy
<b>RA</b>	Research Assistant
<b>VPAA</b>	Vice President of Academic Affairs

is considered to be "centralized". The transition resulted in a hybrid model which decentralized a significant number of graduate education functions while other functions remained under the control of a centralized authority. For the purposes of this paper, the terms "centralized" (referring to the model before the transition) and "hybrid" are used. The growth opportunities, limitations, steps being taken to overcome those limits, and implications for practice introduced by assuming graduate education at the DCHS level are discussed as well.

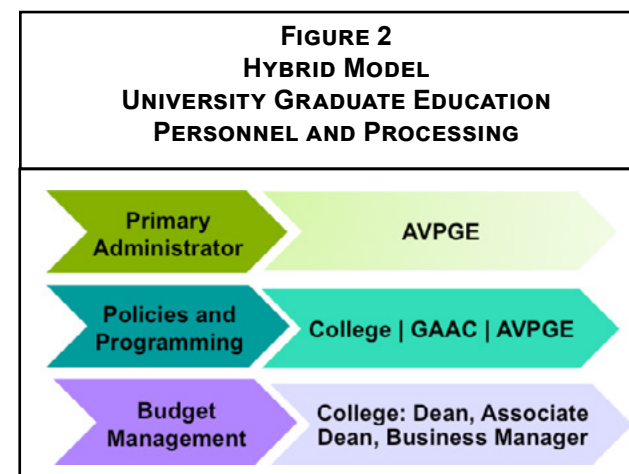
**PERSONNEL**

"Personnel" refers to primary administrators and those responsible for the policies, programming, and budget management aspects of graduate education. In the centralized model, the Dean of the Graduate School served as the primary administrator for graduate education processes (Figure 1). Representatives from each college, school, and center that facilitated graduate education composed the Board of Graduate Studies (BGS). The Graduate School assumed responsibility for all graduate education policies and programming, and management of the graduate edu-



cation budget across campus. The upper level administrators consisted of a Provost, the University President, and the University Board of Trustees (BOT).

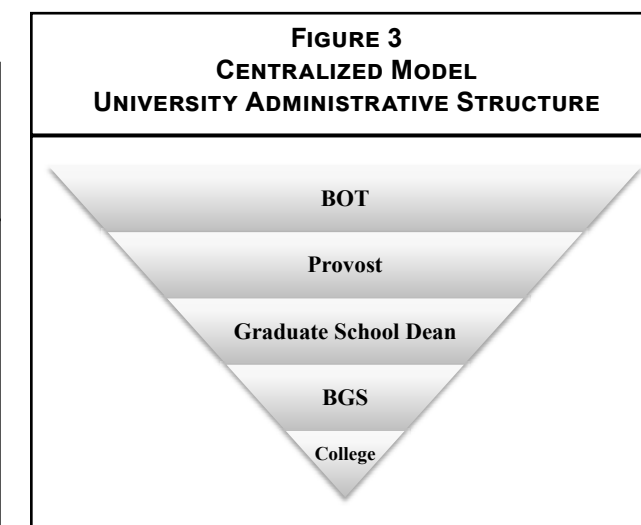
In the hybrid model, the Graduate School was replaced with the Office of Graduate Education administered by an Associate Vice President for Graduate Education (AVPGE) (Figure 2). The BGS was restructured into the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee (GAAC). The GAAC is made up of faculty and associate deans representing colleges, schools, and centers across campus that provide graduate level programming for students. The AVPGE serves as the primary graduate education administrator and provides oversight for the GAAC. Three groups of individuals participate in the policies and programming aspects of graduate education: the college/school/center, GAAC, and the AVPGE. Management of the budget now occurs at the college/school/center level. The hybrid model allows each college/school/center to appoint an individual to provide oversight for graduate education with the goal to promote graduate education sus-



tainability and growth. In the case of DCHS (Figure 2), an Associate Dean for Graduate Education (ADGE) was appointed to provide College personnel with budget management and policy as well as programming development and oversight. The position of the Provost was replaced with a Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) for the university. The role of University President and University Board of Trustees in graduate education remains the same.

**UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE**

In the centralized model, University administrative structure consisted of individuals involved in graduate education issues that required university level decisions and approvals. Examples cited here and throughout the rest of the article are specific to DCHS. One example of this model is that an approval process was required when implementing a new graduate program. The approval process began at the college/school/center level. Once an academic unit developed a proposal, a two-step process at the college level followed. The college-level curriculum committee first considered and made an appropriate recommendation to the Graduate School Dean. After the Dean supported the proposal, it was then presented to the Board of Graduate Studies (BGS). The BGS, a university level body, reviewed all such proposals (as well as student grievances) and made recommendations to the Dean of the Graduate School who was an active member on the BGS. If the BGS supported the proposal, it was then routed to the Dean of the Graduate School and the Provost. The University Board of Trustees (BOT), of which the President is a voting member (Figure 3) granted final approval. In the event that a proposal was not supported by the BGS, the Dean of the Graduate School notified the College Dean, and



the proposal was returned to the corresponding academic unit with feedback for future resubmission consideration.

In the hybrid model illustrated in Figure 4, the Office of Graduate Education replaced the Graduate School, and the BGS was restructured into the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee (GAAC). The GAAC was developed with a charge to serve as “the principal advisory body to the Associate Vice President of Graduate Education (AVPGE)” (<https://sites.google.com/a/slu.edu/graduate-academic-affairs-committee/>). This group is composed of faculty and associate deans representing colleges, schools, and centers across campus that provide graduate level program options for students with a focus on the development, improvement, and quality control of post-baccalaureate studies at the University. While the AVPGE provides oversight of the GAAC, the committee reviews academic proposals (new and substantive changes) and university graduate education policy. GAAC differs from the BGS from the centralized model in that it does not hear student grievances.

Proposals for new graduate programs now begin at the DCHS level. The hybrid model allows the college curriculum committee to examine proposals from both undergraduate and graduate programs. A new graduate program proposal is first considered by the DCHS curriculum committee and then recommended to the college Dean when indicated. Proposals supported by the Dean are routed to GAAC for review and consideration. Since the AVPGE sits on this body, this step allows for GAAC and the AVPGE to examine the proposal together. If supported, the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) reviews the proposal. If the proposal is supported at all levels and given final approval by the Board of Trustees (BOT) the new graduate program is approved for implementation. In the event that the proposal is not supported by GAAC, the AVPGE notifies the supporting unit (in

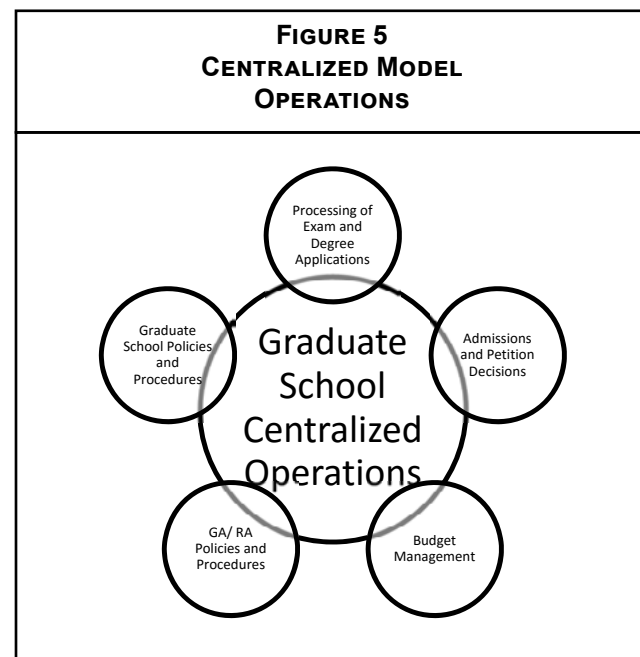
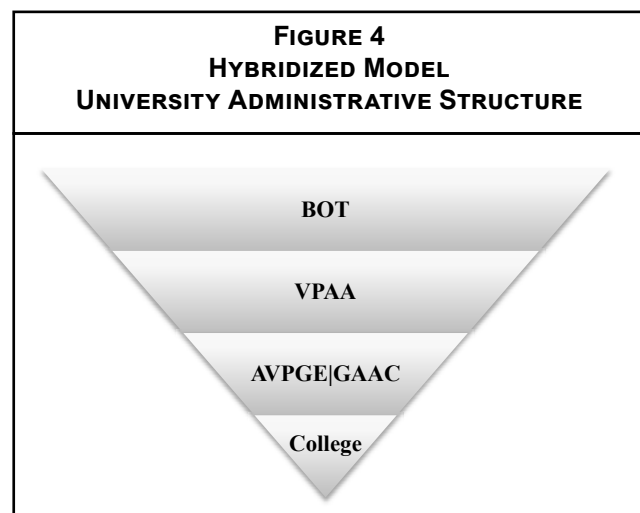
the case of DCHS the Dean) and returns the new graduate program proposal to the academic unit with feedback to be considered for future re-submission.

Shortly after the Associate Vice President of Graduate Education (AVPGE) was in place, the Associate Deans and Directors (ADD) for Graduate Education from across university campus were assembled to serve as an advisory board with regard to how graduate policies and procedures impact academic units university-wide. This group does not make recommendations to academic programs and is not part of the new program approval process. However, the group does provide support by providing to discuss issues that arise at the university and/or college/school/center levels and exchange ideas to enhance graduate education.

### OPERATIONS

Major changes to the operations aspect of graduate education included those processes associated with the admissions, comprehensive examination processing, degree applications, budget management, and policies and procedures (Figure 5). Prior to July 2010, these operations were centralized in the Graduate School, and only programs considered as “graduate” were held to them. Thus, under the centralized structure, individual colleges, school, and centers had limited control or oversight over these operations.

Dramatic organizational changes took place the after dissolution of the Graduate School in terms of operations. Some operations processes remained centralized while



others were given over to the individual units. Examples of centralized functions overseen by graduate admissions at the university level are receiving admissions materials, forwarding materials to the college/school/center for admission decisions, mailing admission decisions to applicants on behalf of the college/school/center and processing comprehensive examinations, and degree applications (Figure 6). Budget management, program admissions and decisions, and DCHS level policies and procedures (including those specific to GAs and RAs) are examples of decentralized operations (Figure 7). The DCHS has experienced many benefits as a result of the transition such as the clarification of educational program terminology (e.g., graduate, professional), the development of college-specific graduate faculty standards, autonomous budgetary decision-making and allocation, and the direct oversight of GAs and RAs.

### EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM TERMINOLOGY

Decentralization of the graduate school allowed professional programs to fall under the same post baccalaureate degree umbrella as traditional graduate degree programs. Consolidation of program terminology granted these professional programs benefits such as graduate student association representation as well as the opportunity to apply for graduate student scholarships and travel funding. Standardizing this language allows for greater alignment with external educational degree definition systems, such as the Integrated Post Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

### GRADUATE FACULTY STANDARDS

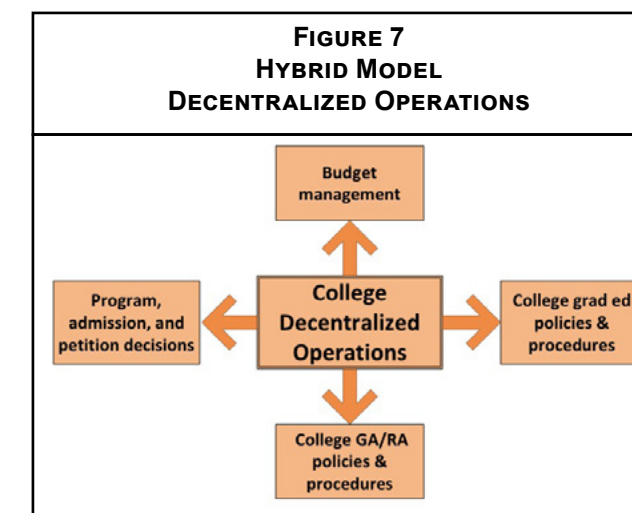
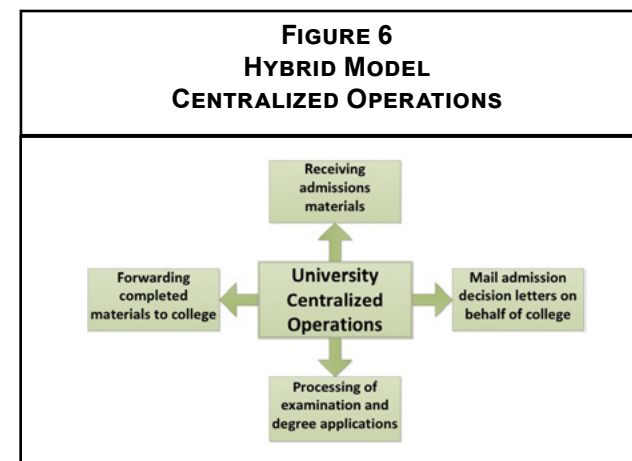
The hybrid model allows each college/ school/ center to identify specific criteria for individuals to serve on its graduate faculty. This change provides unique and diverse faculty expertise to be valued and recognized at the University graduate level. Given the variety of professional programs and the growing number of students in the DCHS, it was imperative to recognize and appoint graduate faculty members with varied clinical and professional vitae. This diversity continues to be integral to the success of the DCHS programs and their students. The result of more inclusive graduate faculty standards increased the number of graduate faculty within the DCHS and continues to provide an opportunity for faculty development through committee and advising activities with senior faculty.

### BUDGETARY DECISION MAKING AND ALLOCATION

The benefits that stem from autonomous college budgetary decision making and intentional funding allocation is essential for the success of educational programming and outcomes. The transition shifted budgetary control to the specific educational unit affording greater flexibility in support of graduate education initiatives. The new budgetary model offered an opportunity to appoint an Associate Dean of Graduate Education (ADGE) responsible for the oversight of graduate education and a staff statistician responsible for mentoring, as well as developing and promoting research within all levels of educational programming within the college.

### OVERSIGHT OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS (GAS)

The number of graduate students increased in the Doisy College of Health Sciences (DCHS) because the post-baccalaureate professional programs now fell under the





graduate education umbrella. In recognition of this growth, the University awarded a 50% increase in GAs to the DCHS during fund decentralization. Furthermore, the DCHS gained full oversight of GAs including department allocation and budgetary management of associated funds. While the increase in GAs benefited existing graduate programs, it provided a developmental platform for the launch and development of new graduate programs. For example, the DCHS implemented a new Master of Science in Health Sciences (MSHS) program in the fall of 2013 and allocated five GAs in its inaugural cohort.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE HYBRID MODEL

Although the DCHS has realized the benefits of all of these elements, such changes present challenges that must be overcome in the areas of educational program terminology, graduate faculty standards, budgetary decision making and allocation, and oversight of graduate assistants (GAs).

Although mainstreaming of terminology for post-baccalaureate education seems to align better with systems external to the university, the change presented program identity confusion across campus. Program administrators were not sure whether they fell under the undergraduate education model or the graduate education model and how these professional programs 'fit' into the traditional graduate education model.

Criteria for graduate faculty appointments were decentralized to allow the DCHS to develop and adopt its own standards. These criteria were customized in order to capture the diverse educational and professional experience required for teaching in the academic programs housed within the DCHS. Although this system streamlines the process within the College, the university lost consistent graduate faculty standards across the university as a whole. Some appointed Graduate Faculty falling into the new standards had not earned a terminal degree at the time of their appointments. Some critics may equate the lack of terminal degree with ill-preparedness as a faculty member.

Autonomous budgetary decision-making affords a greater opportunity in the allocation of resources, for example, the discretion to re-direct funding to priority initiatives as they evolve. However, this type of fiscal freedom comes with a cost to the school/college/center and the dean of the unit. The academic dean, in the end, assumes the responsible for the outcomes fiscal allocation decisions, good or bad, profit or loss. No longer can the responsibility be shifted to a source external to the school/college/center.

The increase in the number of GAs for the DCHS assisted in managing growth in undergraduate class-size and faculty workload. However, the DCHS is not only responsible for GA allocation, but is also responsible for funding GAs. Without additional GA funding in the DCHS budgetary model, there will be no new GA appointments in the college beyond those which were made available at the time of the transition.

### STEPS BEING TAKEN TO OVERCOME LIMITATIONS

Perhaps the most significant step implemented to date to overcome the limitations brought about by dissolution of the graduate school is providing regular communication between the several levels of administration. For example, a website was developed for graduate education at the University level that outlined the centralized policies and procedures and contained a section dedicated to faculty resources.

The AVPGE conducts multiple open forum presentations around campus each semester to keep faculty engaged and current on recent developments in the area of graduate education at the university level as well as at the DCHS level. Written and verbal communication complements this effort by providing information on aspects of graduate education germane to the DCHS (e.g. budgetary decision making and allocation and oversight of GAs).

Graduate faculty members without terminal degrees receive regular and continued encouragement at the Department and DCHS levels to consider pursuing further education from both an instructor and personal professional development standpoints. As a result, the College has experienced an increase in the number of faculty pursuing (5%) and completing terminal degrees (5%) since the transition.

In summary, implementation of these strategies assists the university community in becoming familiar with (or with the adoption of) the educational program terminology and graduate faculty standards and provides guidance to those responsible for budgetary decision making/allocation and oversight of GAs.

### CONCLUSIONS

Although the transition presented some organizational challenges, once the initial navigations of new processes and procedures were mastered, the benefits outweighed the limitations of this model thus far. As a result of this transition and the re-classification of professional majors into the graduate education model, students in the DCHS benefited from greater scholarship opportunity not previ-

ously available to at least 50% of the recipients because the professional department status was not recognized by the former Graduate School. Furthermore, an additional eight GA positions, five of which were made available to students in the new Master of Science in Health Sciences (MSHS) program launched in the fall of 2013 were available as a resource for educational initiatives within the DCHS.

The realignment of the administrative process for developing and proposing a graduate program under the hybrid model has yielded two new post-baccalaureate programs in the DCHS. Interestingly, under the old terminology, one of the new programs falls into the traditional category and the other into the professional category.

The autonomy afforded by the hybrid model allows for new and continued opportunities and growth in educational program terminology, criteria for graduate faculty appointments, budgetary decision making and allocation and oversight of GAs. As a result, the university continues to educate leaders of the future with knowledge and skills in their disciplines. Graduates will continue to be trained to discover and promote new knowledge and disseminate it in accordance with the Jesuit mission. With the creation of "academic flexibility and resources" at the College level, a promising future lies ahead.

### REFERENCES

- Faherty, W.B.S.J. (1968). *Better the Dream Saint Louis: University & Community, 1818-1968*. St. Louis, MO: Saint Louis University.