

PREPARING GRADUATE ADMISSIONS AND RECRUITMENT FOR EFFECTS OF COVID-19



IGEN
Inclusive Graduate Education Network

C-CIDE
California Consortium for Inclusive Doctoral Education

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ACTIONS & QUESTIONS FOR EQUITABLE ADMISSIONS AND RECRUITMENT DURING COVID-19

Crises are moments for culture building. During this time we are learning that connections, communication, and critical conversations matter more than ever. As we think about preparing our institutions for annual graduate admissions and recruitment processes, awareness about our respective institutional contexts and individual identities matter. Context and identity matter on their own, and they matter in combination by affecting the resources likely available to us, the constraints and norms we are more likely to face, and the networks of which we are part.

This document distills the collective input of 200+ attendees of a webinar held May 1, 2020 on research and emerging practices for an equitable, empathetic approach to graduate recruitment and admissions amid COVID-19. We collected actions that colleagues in the graduate education community are already taking as well as questions for administrators and faculty to ask as planning continues.

Given the incredible uncertainty and stress of this pandemic, and given that our colleagues and students with multiple marginalized identities are bearing the costs more acutely, a trauma-informed framework such as the Centers for Disease Control's six principles for trauma-informed practice in public health emergencies, may be useful for thinking through plans for engaging with students, applicants, and colleagues in ways that are mindful of COVID-19 impacts.

- **SAFETY:** Care for one another's physical and emotional safety is crucial in communicating that your organization is looking out for their wellbeing.
- **TRUSTWORTHINESS & TRANSPARENCY:** One of the signatures of trauma is trust becomes compromised transparent, direct communication builds trust -- instead of anxiety-- amid ambiguous conditions.
- **PEER SUPPORT:** Social support is critical to humans' ability to be resilient, and we see this especially clearly when physical distancing prevents usual interactions.
- **COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY:** As COVID-19 affects every corner of the higher education sector, we need local solutions for delivering information and services as well as collective, coordinated action. Collaborating within and across organizations can help ensure effectiveness and efficiency.
- **EMPOWERMENT, VOICE, & CHOICE:** Providing information to and soliciting input from stakeholders is empowering. More than ever, for example, students need to know options and limits of financial aid offerings.
- **CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, GENDER ISSUES:** Graduate enrollment management needs to be sensitive both to histories and current realities of systemic oppression, and to the cultural assets of groups that we've too long overlooked as strengths that applicants and students bring.

Crises have a way of revealing our character, and they force an assessment of our priorities. It is our hope that the questions that were raised in the webinar and the actions already being taken will help you actively account for equity, diversity, and/or power in a variety of everyday evaluations, decisions, and interactions.

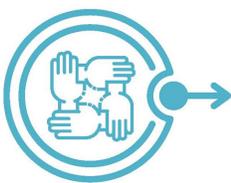
6 GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH



1. SAFETY



2. TRUSTWORTHINESS & TRANSPARENCY



3. PEER SUPPORT



4. COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY



5. EMPOWERMENT
VOICE & CHOICE



6. CULTURAL, HISTORICAL,
& GENDER ISSUES



SAFETY

Actions

- Develop a communication strategy and record keeping process for checking in with incoming graduate students regarding the impacts of COVID-19.
- Personal communication is key. Offer individual follow-up via phone or zoom to provide personal attention and support.

Questions

- How are you communicating COVID-19 related information to students in a way that is sensitive to their emotional wellbeing? Basic needs?
- How is your institution addressing the financial needs of students during this time?



TRUSTWORTHINESS
& TRANSPARENCY

Actions

- Ensure that all messages are catalogued and accessible on the web, so that communication is transparently provided to all members of the community.
- Develop messages that are catered to specific members of your community (ie. international students) to make sure they have detailed and relevant information to help them make informed choices.
- Vet important communications with multiple people to check whether tone and content will encourage trust.

Questions

- How is your program communicating with prospective applicants about the decisions and conversations that are taking place in the department or on campus regarding fall instruction, funding options, grading, and campus services?
- How may the tone and transparency of your communications encourage or compromise trust?



PEER
SUPPORT

Actions

- Create virtual spaces (ie. office hours, town halls) for students to ask questions and seek necessary support.
- Provide training to peer mentors and faculty advisors on COVID-19 resources and policy changes, as well as threats to wellbeing that many students are experiencing.

Questions

- How are you addressing individual needs of students from minoritized communities during COVID-19? What are the limitations in your current ability to meet these needs? What additional resources are needed?
- What structures are in place for you to receive feedback from students, faculty, and staff about changes that are needed for your current peer support programs to be effective during this time?

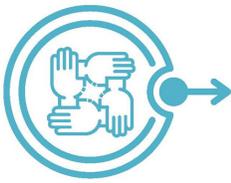
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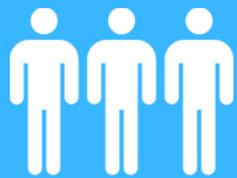
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COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY

Actions

- Collaborate with the graduate school to craft clear, consistent messaging for current and prospective graduate students about policies and procedures regarding grading and admission requirements.
- Establish timelines for decision making, and share them widely with students, faculty, and staff for purposes of shared planning.

Questions

- Given the decentralized nature of graduate admissions, how are you collaborating with faculty, staff, and administrators across campus? Throughout your discipline/ field?
- Do you sense any competing interests between your approach and that of the university? With whom can you speak to navigate this?



EMPOWERMENT VOICE & CHOICE

Actions

- Provide timely responses to students and clarify what options are available to students.
- Allow students to defer enrollment for a year without impact on funding or financial aid.

Questions

- What options are you providing for students about grades issued in courses? Is your registrar adding this information to the fine print on transcripts?
- What resources are in place to provide individual guidance and assistance for students making decisions?



CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, & GENDER ISSUES

Actions

- Create faculty learning opportunities to educate application reviewers about how the pandemic may impact students who are from minoritized or marginalized backgrounds.
- Disaggregated data (ie. by gender and race) that you will share with decision makers to inform policy and practice.
- Purposefully diversify your student ambassador, outreach, and recruitment programs.

Questions

- How are you ensuring that diverse voices are represented when decisions are being made?
- To what extent are proposed actions likely to limit or expand access and resources for minoritized groups?
- COVID-19 has highlighted inequities present in many areas of society: How are you identifying and addressing internal policies and practices that are disproportionately impacting students from minoritized groups?

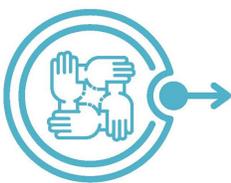
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PIVOTING RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

Actions

- Develop virtual recruitment events and campus visit programs (ie. resource fairs, information sessions), taking into account structure and timing that may affect populations differently.
- Develop a marketing strategy for outreach to graduating seniors informing them of local graduate programs that may be suited to their academic interests.

Questions

- If you typically recruit at national meetings or events, how are you altering your strategy to reach students who would traditionally learn about and/or engage with your program at these events?
- Who is responsible for communicating admissions requirements (e.g., about grades, test scores) in the absence of faculty who may be away for the summer?
- How are decisions regarding recruitment and admissions being shared or co-developed with new leaders who are transitioning into roles as admissions committee or department chair?



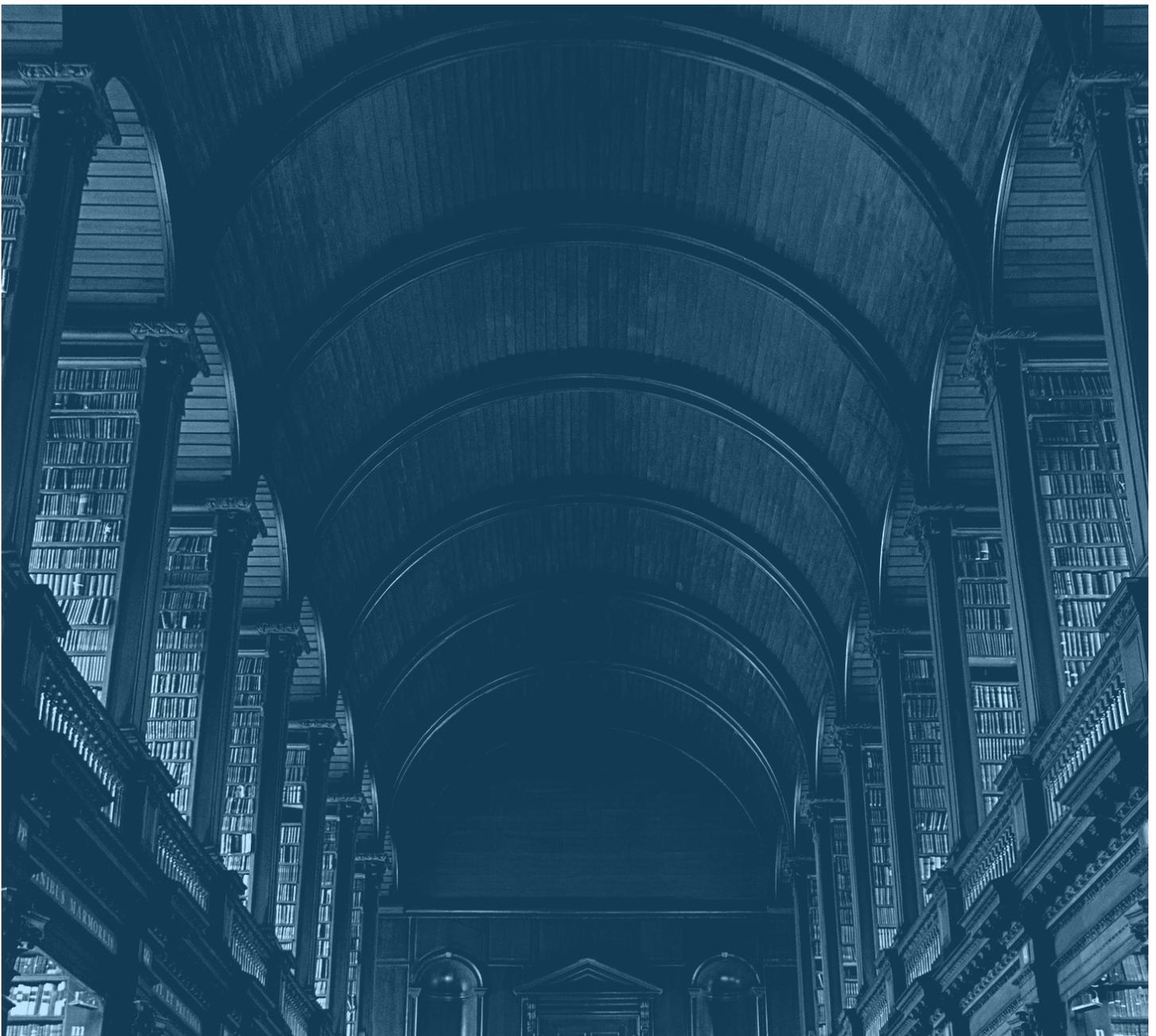
CONTEXTUALIZE INFORMATION IN MAKING ADMISSIONS DECISIONS

Actions

- For the admissions essay, consider including a specific essay prompt about COVID-19 and how it affected the applicant's coursework or research.
- Waive GRE submission requirements for academic programs.
- Develop rubrics that account for varied COVID-19 grading practices.
- Facilitate workshops with faculty and admissions committees about grading practices. These conversations allow faculty to co-construct equitable norms regarding the use of grades in admissions reviews.
- Host workshops to aid faculty in writing, reviewing, and soliciting equity-minded letters of recommendation.

Questions

- If Spring 2020 is the "asterisk semester" for many students and grades are already hard to contextualize, what does that mean for admissions reviews?
- If university responses and grading practices during COVID-19 vary significantly, how are you accounting for this in your admissions review process?
- What resources have you made available to help faculty navigate the equity issues they may encounter as they review student applications?



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