

Dear _____ (Chair) and _____ (DGS)

I am writing on behalf of the College of Arts and Sciences **PhD Excellence Initiative Curriculum and Teaching Committee**.

The PhD Excellence Initiative underscores the following key areas to drive institutional assessment practices and strategic investment: **time to degree, rates of completion, recruitment practices, employment outcomes, diversity and inclusion, and balance between research and teaching**.

Our College-level Curriculum and Teaching Committee has been asked to identify **best practices** in these areas and to make recommendations on how to support departments across the College with desirable changes **by the end of March 2020**.

As part of this process, we are inviting departments to reflect on what **an ideal PhD program** would look like in their fields and the sort of changes that would be needed in the short to medium term to move their programs in that direction. Our Committee has prepared a set of questions (attached) for departments to use as reference points, not necessarily as a questionnaire to be filled out. Departments should feel free to address any of these questions directly and/or suggest their own.

We are hoping for broad faculty participation and a significant level of student representation resulting in an **initial written response by Friday, Feb 21**. We ask that you please structure your departmental response as an **outline of actionable goals and preliminary plans addressing the key investment areas designated by the PhD Excellence Initiative and any other areas you may have identified as program priorities**.

Additionally, we ask Graduate Studies Directors to **share this letter and our proposed questions to graduate student representatives** so that they may arrange for student conversations resulting in a separate response to be sent directly to our Committee by the same Feb 21st deadline.

Upon receiving written responses, **members of our Committee will work with individual departments to schedule a follow up conversation with the Chair and DGS and a separate meeting with one or two student representatives** from each department. Following these conversations, **department chairs will be encouraged to submit updated responses by Friday, March 13**. This will give our Committee a couple of weeks to digest the information and prepare our preliminary report for submission to the Dean's office by the required due date.

We expect that this direct departmental input (as presented in our Committee's reporting) will be used by the Dean's office to inform curricular reforms and strategic investments, alongside the findings and recommendations of the Bridge Committee.

With best wishes,