

Missouri Exchange Report

Lorna Holtman

This report summarises my experiences against the objectives of the Exchange visit to UMSL and UM Columbia June 15 to July 11, 2009.

Objectives of the visit:

The major objective of my visit to Missouri was to gain information that would have direct application to postgraduate education at UWC. I specifically wanted to explore ways in which to prepare students for postgraduate study and to make sure that students adhere to time-to-degree targets. In this regard I wanted to explore best practice at UM and share with UM colleagues the lessons we have learned at UWC.

Topics to be explored included:

- A focus on postgraduate student retention and success
- Student networking across UMSL and UWC who are preparing for graduate education
- Development of resources related to post-graduate education (e.g. workshops and seminars on grant writing)
- For UWC to get ideas on how postgraduate associations work so that we can set up similar structures at UWC.
- For me to spend time in the Graduate School, office of Research and External Funding at UMSL and UM-Columbia to see how these function

Preparation for the visit and accommodation

I can report that the objectives of this visit were met. I attribute this to a few key events: the International Relations office (Professor Persens) and Prof Rod Uphoff advised me that I should visit both UMSL and UM-Columbia campuses to get a comparative view of how Graduate schools are structured and operate. In addition to this, Ms Andrews and Rod Uphoff arranged the videoconference with Prof Pat Boyer (UMSL host) and Prof Pam Benoit and Dr Tucker (Dean and Vice Dean at Columbia) to discuss the visit and my specific objectives and this allowed them to prearrange appointments with the relevant people. The accommodation at UMSL was more than adequate in the form of a self-catering apartment with wifi access. The

accommodation in Columbia was adequate and was at a Bed and Breakfast, where had access to wifi as well.

I would not change anything in terms of the way in which I prepared for this visit. UWC allowed me access to the videoconferencing facility on two occasions and that was enough to set up my visit.

Overall assessment of the value of the UM / UWC Exchange Program

The visit afforded me the opportunity to see firsthand how the Graduate School operates on both campuses. In the case of UM Columbia I was based in the Graduate School for two weeks and I got to understand the structure of the graduate school and how the different staff members support the operations of the Graduate School. At UMSL I was based in a Department and I could view the Graduate School from a completely different angle – that of faculty member. At UMSL I had access to a doctoral student and could gain some insight into her experiences. The two campuses have completely different Graduate School structures and I think that this was a good experience in that I could see the pros and cons of both systems. I was able to meet with various Graduate School staff, with the acting Dean and Provost Dr Justice at Columbia and at UMSL with Dr De Felix.

Impact of the visit

Through discussions with various Graduate School staff and allied departments at the two universities I was able to gain insight into how their ideas could be applied at UWC. It is clear that the visit has impacted already on the planning for the Division's restructuring at UWC and in this regard has allowed me to structure the operations around the following KPAs:

- i) Establish developmental programmes (workshops, seminars, etc) for postgraduate students and supervisors to strengthen student-supervisor relationships across the University. This will serve to support the successful participation of postgraduate students in the research niches and to improve completion rates.
- ii) Develop a monitoring scheme for the study programme of each student in order to expedite time for completion of the degree.

- iii) Review all relevant policies to promote Quality enhancement and work with other stakeholders in the University in streamlining administrative procedures and offer an integrated service to postgraduate students. Documents relating to processes and procedures governing postgraduate education will be readily accessible.
- iv) Improve postgraduate marketing and recruitment
- v) Improve and optimize funding for postgraduate students
- vi) Improve resources for postgraduate students on campus

I did not encounter any problems on my visit because it was so well planned. Prof Boyer my host at UMSL delayed her personal travel to accommodate me in the last week of my visit. I am grateful to her for that. We were able to draft an article for publication and she introduced me to various organizations that support both Graduate Schools and their faculty members. Ms Beverley Vaughn Executive Secretary to the Dean of the Graduate School at Columbia provided me with a lot of support and provided me with my itinerary. The Acting Dean Dr Justice spent a lot of time meeting with me and his colleagues and provided me with hardcopies of important documents relevant to Graduate Education such as the retention of PhDs, a study carried out under the auspices of the Graduate Council. I collected a number of brochures which will be useful as we streamline our marketing and recruitment efforts. I got access to a student progress software programme, a better understanding of admissions and how the Graduate School works with other stakeholders such as the Registrar's office, Dean of Research, how the Graduate Association operates etc.

I was received warmly and was never allowed to feel that I was taking up someone's time. Should I be given the chance, I would take up an exchange visit again. I would like to ask that other administrative exchanges be planned as there are mutual benefits for both the visitor and the host. The warmth and kindness of the Missouri colleagues was incredible.

Future endeavours as a result of the exchange visit

At the end of my visit to UMSL, Prof Pat Boyer submitted her exchange visit application. If she is awarded the exchange grant, I will serve as her UWC host. Some of the specific issues I would need Dr. Boyer's assistance with (which we

agreed to during my visit to her in June/July 2009) include: Reviewing the PET project and how it can improve on what it offers with a view to its incorporation into a Graduate School at UWC; Helping students access grants for post-graduate studies; Coming up with recommendations about the promotion of post-graduate enrollment and throughput in general; Encouraging faculty to publish with their students and Piloting her doctoral development programme ideas at UWC.

With the UM Columbia colleagues I envisage we will work closer on retention studies and I would like to continue collaboration with them on improving our marketing to postgraduate students and improving retention strategies. Furthermore I would like to explore with both campuses in more detail how research supervisors are assisted at to support research capacity development of postgraduate students as well as the preparation of Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Research Assistants. We are preparing for the first meeting of our Postgraduate Association and inputs from Dr Sheryl Tucker on this and the extensive coverage of the topic of their webpage will be useful to me at this time.

I would like to thank UWC and the Missouri System for allowing me to benefit from this exchange. I am sorry that I could not mention each and every person I met and learned from, but I thank you for your inputs.

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