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We should be the graduate school of choice for students seeking to diversify and amplify their educational outcomes by providing graduate students with a background and opportunities to pursue a variety of career paths in addition to traditional academic careers.

Our conception of student success has never been limited to the confines of campus nor to specific kinds of students. It's my belief that the more we can prepare students to be successful before they get here, the more they'll be able to take advantage of the opportunities they find here, and the better off they'll be when they transition to the workforce or further education - the ultimate test of their education. There's little virtue in awarding degrees to graduates who find their education and skills don't match their career goals or the current job market. We think this is equally true for graduate students as well as undergraduates, and that's why we've been giving more thought to the larger needs of our graduate students, including how we recruit them, support them, and prepare them for what's next.

We know that not every graduate wants to pursue careers in academia, nor can academia absorb every graduate, so an attractive alternative is enabling our graduate students to pursue other pathways in their area of expertise - perhaps enabling them to be creators of their own jobs as well as job creators in turn. This means we should provide more opportunities to students who have interests in entrepreneurship, commercialization of intellectual property, grant writing, idea-pitching, and career exploration outside of the academy, either through formal course work or career advising. This also means providing educational and experiential opportunities in leadership, policy, management, finances and other areas that might be helpful in assisting our graduate students along whatever career paths they choose. Our graduate students are extremely bright and hardworking — they can have a great impact on our society in a variety of areas. That's good for everyone.

One thing we want to do is restructure the 2002 gift from the Walton Family Charitable Support Foundation to create more opportunities for graduate students with special interests in careers outside the academy. This includes students interested in public policy and public service, not-for-profits, and government agencies, as well as those interested in commercialization and entrepreneurship. In this last area, we've already had some real success. Dr. Carol Reeves, through her New Venture Development class in the Walton College, has been adept at turning graduate students into CEOs and CTOs of companies based on their research by pairing them with M.B.A. students who can help create a business plan. These plans are then honed through competitions. Over the years many have resulted in new startup companies. We should look for other ways to support students and offer them incentives to commercialize their research when it is desired, as well as help them use their outstanding research skills to become successful in any career path they choose.

We could best provide this help by creating a career center focused on graduate students. Perhaps because they are older and more experienced, we tend to assume they don't need the same level of career counseling as undergraduates. While this may be true for many graduate students, others may be earning an advanced degree simply because they love the field. They may not have weighed their job prospects wholly or investigated whether there are enough jobs in their field to absorb the number of graduates. A career center focused on graduate students could help them strategize and better prepare for what's next, whether it's in academia or somewhere else where their education and research skills may be applicable and appreciated.

We should also strive to create professional master's degree programs that are innovative and relevant. The impetus behind these programs is to provide students with new professional opportunities or to help facilitate the career advancement of working professionals. Unlike traditional Master of Science/Arts programs, where students are expected to conduct research, professional programs emphasize curriculum more focused on the everyday needs and realities of their profession. The Walton College has done an excellent job of developing these kinds of master's programs. For example, a Master of Science in Economic Analytics was recently approved by the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Currently pending approval are a Master of Professional Accounting, a Master of Science in Finance, and a Master of Science in Supply Chain Management.

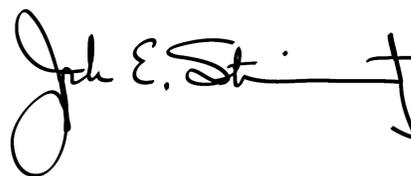
At the same time, we need to build non-academic career tracks into as many graduate programs as possible. We need to educate both traditional and non-traditional graduate students along a spectrum of residential programs, online programs, master's-level, doctoral-level, graduate certificates, or micro-credentialing. This will ensure their education is right-sized for their needs. And as we get more of these pieces in place, we need to extensively market ourselves as an institution with multiple career path opportunities. I believe this would make us unique and distinctive, an innovative leader in graduate education.

Finally, we need to create a comprehensive recruitment strategy for graduate students. Elements of this plan have already been identified by the Graduate School and International Education. They include addressing diversity by building partnerships with minority serving institutions and international partners. To facilitate increased access, we would also adopt a more holistic admissions review process that better balances things like GPA, writing samples, resumes/CVs, letters of recommendation, interviews and standardized tests. We also need to help graduate programs and their faculty

to not just attract high-quality graduate students, but also ensure they thrive. This means properly resourcing initiatives like a graduate student success office. And we need to build more attractive graduate student financial packages to include competitive stipends, tuition, benefits and fellowship opportunities. We are now working on a comprehensive overhaul of our graduate tuition structure, especially as it relates to increasing our competitiveness for recruiting students from other states. And, retaining highly educated students here in Arkansas once they have completed their U of A degree is a major goal. This is good for the state of Arkansas.

In sum, we need to expand and reframe our understanding of what graduate education is, who it serves, and what it prepares our students to do. Too often we presume our doctoral students are headed to careers in academia when there may be other equally attractive alternatives. Above all, we should encourage and not discourage our students to pursue their passions and interests even if they are outside our traditional academic world. After all, society needs these great minds in many different areas. We also need to be attentive to working professionals who may need anything from a freshening up of their skills through micro-credentialing to a full doctoral program that could lead to a complete career change. In doing so, we would be positioning ourselves to become a much desired destination for students pursuing traditional academic careers as well as a variety of other careers.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe E. Steinmetz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Joe Steinmetz,  
Chancellor, University of Arkansas