

# Instructional Impact: Growing the Graduate Program



WHEN DEAN BEVERLY ULRICH SET ASIDE SEED MONEY FOR THE GRADUATE PROGRAM A DECADE AGO, SHE KNEW FACULTY WOULD CULTIVATE ITS GROWTH AND APPEAL.

By Alice Rhein

While Kinesiology has expanded in every way possible since Dean Beverly Ulrich took the helm in 1999, the growth and increased quality of the graduate program can be traced back to one tiny seed, and a host of faculty who have nurtured it.

“In 1999, the division had only two fully-funded full-time PhD students,” says Ulrich, who made it an immediate goal to grow the program and its funded research efforts. Setting aside \$250,000 “seed money,” Ulrich provided the means for graduate faculty to recruit and mentor new doctoral students who would be funded as teaching assistants.

“The faculty worked really hard along with the graduate chair to pursue every opportunity to get funding. It was a strong team effort to build on that seed money and to take advantage of that opportunity to build the program,” says Ulrich, who has carefully cultivated the environment for the program to expand from two fully funded doctoral students to a fall 2008 enrollment of 32.

## Strong Faculty Attract Strong Students

Since 2000, when he came to U-M from his post-doctoral training at Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, MO, Dr. **Jeffrey Horowitz**, associate professor, Movement Science, says he’s seen a progressive influx of strong PhD candidates entering U-M’s program, and credits the success to recruiting very strong faculty to the Division. “I believe this is the single most important component to enhanced reputation of our graduate program that has led to the impressive rise in strong graduate students entering our program,” he says.

**Abbey Thomas**, a doctoral student in athletic training, is decidedly candid when she offers her reason why she chose U-M’s Kinesiology program. “This is where my advisor is,” says Thomas, a Penn State graduate whose research with Dr. **Riann Palmieri-Smith** focuses on the relationship between ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) injury and osteoarthritis.



Dr. Jeff Horowitz (left) talks with Lisa Locke (center) and Ming Huali (right) in his lab.

Had Palmieri-Smith, assistant professor, Athletic Training, been at any other university, Thomas would have gladly followed her there.

**Keith Gordon**, PhD '05, offers a similar testament. “My reason for choosing Michigan over anywhere else was one-hundred percent because of Dan Ferris.”

Gordon met Ferris at UCLA, where Ferris, now associate professor, Movement Science and graduate program chair, was completing

his post-doctorate in the department of neurology. When Ferris took a position as an assistant professor in Movement Science, Gordon followed him.

“I chose Michigan because of Dan’s research in understanding how people walk and how people control movement,” says Gordon, now completing a post-doctorate at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago (RIC).

## Ripe Opportunities

For Ferris, who became graduate program chair in 2006, growing the number of applicants and the number getting funded has been a main objective. “One factor I’m very proud of is our yield, or the percentage of students accepted into the doctoral program



Dr. Dan Ferris (right) talks with graduate students Sasha Voloshina (left) and Joe Gwin (center).

who actually enroll, has been 100 percent for two years. In previous years, it was around 40 percent," he says.

For many students, the commitment to faculty is the strong bond, yet Ulrich says Ferris, and his predecessor Dr. **Bruce Watkins**, also worked to increase the visibility and quality of the graduate program. One of Ferris's first projects was to create an electronic newsletter to highlight new students, faculty, research, conference presentations and funding opportunities with one simple click. He also changed the makeup of the graduate committee to include more representatives from the departments.

Dean Ulrich notes that Ferris took it upon himself to build more cohesiveness among the graduate students. "He built a one-credit course that all graduate students enroll in and talk about the research on which they're working. It's a non-threatening environment in which students can really get excited about what they're doing," she says.

Course offerings have increased for graduate students, and new ones continue to evolve as the needs of students and faculty change. To provide the most productive mentoring experience, Ferris further developed the

annual evaluation of doctoral students that gives them a chance to evaluate their mentors and determine if they are getting the support they need. This two-way street ensures that students are making adequate progress, and faculty are opening up opportunities for their students to submit papers, attend conferences and network with others in the field. Ferris has also initiated and encouraged social opportunities for students.

"Dan has made himself visible and accessible to the graduate students. He has encouraged a familial atmosphere among the graduate students within the Division, which contributes to the friendly learning and working environment we have," says Thomas.

### Funding to Flourish

Yet successful recruitment and retention also creates an additional need: How to fund these students. In 2003, the percentage of students that were Division-funded to students funded by other sources such as Rackham, research or training grants was at 50/50. This year, the Division is funding 18 full-time students, which is a bit higher than the ratio of five years ago, but now far costlier as enrollment grows.

"The challenge for the next few years is to come up with alternative funding," says Ferris. Alumni can play an important part in this through networking and by helping endow fellowships for graduate students. "We have several set up, and would like more."

While faculty incentives are built in to help fund doctoral students who are included in grant proposals, Dean Ulrich says one department that has a hard time benefiting from this support is Sport Management. The research issues addressed by Sport Management faculty members are rarely funded by federal agencies, making their capacity to support graduate students smaller than that of faculty in other Kinesiology departments. Further, most of the Sport Management students are master's students and, as Ulrich notes, the Division doesn't fund any master's students. "It's a credit to the faculty and the quality of the program that these students are willing to fund their own way," she says.

Yet development efforts are underway to create the Don Canham Fellowship program in the SM department, where former athletic director and business owner Canham had his Kinesiology ties. Specifics are still forthcoming, but the Fellowship will likely fund a core number of students in the SM department and raise its stature from a solid program to one of the premiere in the country. "We'll also build a visiting board and get leaders in the industry to share more directly with us what the industry needs from these students when they go on the job market," says Ulrich. This is exactly the kind of endowed graduate fellowships that Ferris wants to see grow so that students in all departments will have equal opportunities to flourish.

### Yielding new growth

Though more than half of the graduate students are funded as GSIs (graduate student instructors), the downside is that the time commitment involved in teaching makes it harder to complete their own studies and research training. That's why funding is such a strong component, and one that Ulrich knows will be of major importance for the next Dean of Kinesiology when she steps down at year's end.

"The research we do is focused on important societal questions. We know most of the science that allows our country to grow and progress in medicine and industry and all other areas is built on the backs of researchers in universities," says Ulrich, who has watched her \$250,000 seed grow to include millions in federal and non-federal funding each year.

And Kinesiology's vital contribution to research in the areas of movement and mobility cannot be underestimated. Whether it's research regarding the obesity epidemic, children with disabilities, elderly adults with strokes or Parkinson's, activity instruction, the business of activity and sport, or ACL injuries, Kinesiology's reach is broad and relevant.

"The graduate program is critical, and doctoral students are the future of the faculty," says Ulrich. "If we want to maintain the high quality we've established in Kinesiology, we need to nurture and support the next generation of PhDs." **M**