

Exploration and Reflection on Promoting Graduate Enrollment under the New Situation

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Abstract: Graduate enrollment is crucial for improving the quality of graduate education and building a high-quality education system. The current enrollment situation in some universities is severe, with problems such as insufficient attention to enrollment promotion and a single mode. To solve these problems, this article proposes measures such as leveraging the joint efforts of schools, formulating enrollment promotion plans at different levels, strengthening the construction of enrollment teams at both the school and college levels, enriching enrollment promotion forms, strengthening the construction of high-quality student sources, and building a quality evaluation system for student sources to attract more students to apply and continuously improve the quality of student sources.

Keywords: New situation; Graduate student; Enrollment promotion

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1. Introduction

In September 2020, the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministry of Finance jointly issued the “Opinions on Accelerating the Reform and Development of Graduate Education in the New Era,” which pointed out that the scale of talent cultivation should be reasonably expanded based on service demand while adhering to quality orientation and accurately selecting talents ^[1]. Graduate enrollment is the foundation and entrance of graduate education, an important link in improving the quality of graduate education and building a high-quality education system, and an essential part of deepening educational evaluation reform ^[2]. With the deepening of the comprehensive reform of graduate education and the expansion of the scale of graduate education, the enrollment of graduate students in universities has gradually shifted from quantity expansion to quality improvement and connotative development. The quality of student sources has become one of the critical indicators to measure the comprehensive strength of universities. As the foundation for cultivating high-level talents in key fields in universities, the increase in the number of high-quality students plays a crucial role in talent cultivation, discipline construction, and scientific research improvement. How to attract high-quality students through effective enrollment promotion

has become an important task for graduate enrollment departments and even universities.

In the past three years, the enrollment ratio for master’s students nationwide (hereinafter referred to as the admission ratio) has been approximately 4:1, with the admission ratio for “Double First-Class” universities generally above 6:1, and some well-known universities even reaching 10:1. Taking China University of Geosciences (Beijing) as an example, the annual enrollment ratio has remained at 3:1 in the past three years, with nearly 40% of secondary enrollment units reporting ratios below 2:1 (**Table 1**). In addition, the proportion of students recommended for admission, the proportion of students from “Double First-Class” universities, and the number of students admitted through the first choice program are all lower than those of domestic universities at the same level, indicating that the enrollment situation is not optimistic. Especially in 2024, the number of applicants nationwide was 4.38 million, a decrease of 360,000 compared to 2023, marking the first time since the sustained and rapid growth of applicants in 2015 that there has been a significant decline. In this new situation, it is particularly important to attract more candidates to apply and recruit more high-quality graduate students through enrollment promotion.

Table 1. Graduate enrollment statistics of China University of Geosciences (Beijing) in 2024

Year	Report ratio	Proportion of recommended students	Proportion of students from “Double First-Class” universities	Proportion of transfer students
2024	3:1	12%	31%	24%

Data source: Internal information from the Graduate School of China University of Geosciences (Beijing)

2. Problems in graduate enrollment

2.1. Insufficient emphasis on enrollment promotion

Some schools may undervalue the importance of promoting graduate enrollment, often treating it as a routine task rather than a priority. This outlook results in insufficient funding, staffing, and resources, assuming it falls solely within the graduate admissions office’s responsibilities rather than requiring a broader school-wide effort. This lack of attention can undermine the ability to attract high-quality applicants. Furthermore, without comprehensive strategic planning, communication, and collaboration among departments, enrollment promotion can become fragmented and ineffective. For example, resources and information are not always fully shared or integrated among the graduate school, publicity department, admissions office, and individual colleges, limiting the reach and impact of promotional efforts.

2.2. Problems with the enrollment promotion model

Promotion channels are limited, relying primarily on traditional methods such as the school’s official website and enrollment brochures. Emerging channels, like social media and online education platforms, are often neglected, resulting in restricted information reach and engagement. Additionally, the promotional content lacks distinctiveness, failing to effectively emphasize the unique strengths and advantages of the school. The material tends to resemble that of other universities, lacking appeal and struggling to capture the attention of prospective students.

Moreover, there is no effective feedback mechanism in place to gather and analyze students’ opinions and suggestions. This insufficient attention to students’ needs prevents timely adjustments and improvements in promotional efforts, leading to a lack of targeted, innovative strategies for enrollment promotion.

3. Main strategies for solving the problems

3.1. Integrating school resources for cohesive promotion

Graduate enrollment promotion is a shared responsibility across various departments, not solely the task of the enrollment management office. This responsibility extends to the publicity department, career services, secondary enrollment units, and academic supervisors ^[3]. Schools should actively pool resources across these departments to create a cohesive promotional strategy. In today's higher education landscape, departments have specialized roles: the publicity team manages information dissemination and public opinion; academic departments focus on research and talent development; the graduate enrollment office oversees graduate admissions promotion; and the undergraduate office manages undergraduate recruitment. Close collaboration and efficient communication among these departments are crucial, especially given the overlapping resources available for promoting both undergraduate and graduate programs. By coordinating top-down communication and aligning resources, schools can effectively highlight their academic strengths and unique qualities. This approach ensures accurate information dissemination, enhances operational efficiency, and helps attract high-caliber talent.

3.2. Developing enrollment promotion plans at the school, college, and discipline levels

Enrollment promotion should be carefully tailored to reflect the unique strengths of the school, its colleges, and individual disciplines. Each level has distinctive features that can make promotional content more compelling and relevant to prospective students. For example, the school's promotional materials should emphasize its core educational philosophy and institutional strengths. College-level plans should highlight disciplinary strengths and significant research achievements, while discipline-specific plans should focus on research areas and specialized academic opportunities. To effectively engage diverse audiences, schools should adapt both their content and channels based on target audience preferences and expectations. A well-structured, multi-tiered promotion strategy enhances the appeal and effectiveness of enrollment efforts, reinforcing the school's reputation and supporting successful recruitment.

3.3. Strengthening the construction of enrollment teams at both the school and college levels

To ensure smooth and effective enrollment promotion, it is essential to build robust enrollment teams at both school and college levels. This process includes enhancing the skills and professionalism of promotional staff through training in publicity theory, tools, and strategic planning. Such training helps boost their communication skills and service quality, enabling them to better represent the school's strengths. Additionally, schools should establish and expand a volunteer recruitment team composed of teachers, students, and alumni. These volunteers bring unique perspectives and experiences: teachers offer academic guidance, students share personal insights, and alumni provide career advice. Together, they form a valuable resource for promoting the school, helping to amplify recruitment efforts through firsthand accounts and expert guidance. Strengthening these teams boosts organizational and implementation capabilities, helping ensure effective execution and maximizing the impact of promotional activities.

3.4. Enriching the forms of enrollment promotion

With technological advances and the growth of social media, schools should explore innovative promotion methods alongside traditional ones to improve both the reach and appeal of their messaging. Social media platforms offer broad coverage, fast distribution, and high interactivity, making them ideal for engaging

potential students. Schools can leverage live streaming, social media engagement, and online seminars to cater to the digital habits of younger audiences. Additionally, unique promotional events like campus open days and graduate enrollment fairs can further attract and involve prospective students and their families. These varied formats not only extend the reach of the school's message but also improve its visibility and reputation. A well-rounded promotional strategy that combines digital and in-person approaches can significantly strengthen the school's overall enrollment efforts.

3.5. Strengthening the construction of high-quality source areas

To attract more high-caliber students, schools should enhance promotion and collaboration with high-quality student sources. Building connections with these student-rich regions through academic partnerships, research exchanges, and graduate training programs can significantly widen the school's influence. Through targeted activities such as campus visits and informational sessions at these schools, institutions can cultivate strong connections with prospective students. This strategic outreach not only enhances the school's appeal among high-potential students but also raises the quality of the overall student intake, which supports the university's growth and reputation.

3.6. Building a quality evaluation system for student sources

This requires establishing a scientifically grounded and fair assessment framework that comprehensively evaluates candidates who apply and are admitted. This system should use a range of objective, operational indicators to ensure impartiality and encompass multiple evaluation methods to fully capture applicants' potential. The quality evaluation framework can be organized into three main components: the structure of student sources (including applicant numbers, admission rates, transfer ratios, professional alignment, and regional diversity), the quality of student sources (focusing on prior academic performance, institution background, and entrance exam scores) ^[4], and post-enrollment development (tracking academic and research achievements and comprehensive growth). Throughout the process, it is essential to consider each candidate's unique qualities and potential, avoiding an overemphasis on grades alone. Implementing a systematic quality evaluation system not only informs enrollment decisions and policy-making but also supports the goal of consistently enhancing the caliber of graduate admissions.

4. Conclusion

The objective of university enrollment efforts is to attract and retain high-quality students, continuously enhancing the student body's academic level. Universities should leverage their unique strengths, continuously optimize enrollment strategies, and develop long-term approaches for more precise and efficient recruitment. This proactive innovation can substantially elevate the quality of incoming students, contributing to the overall advancement of the institution.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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