Talking Points for 2010 NRC Assessment of Research-Doctorate programs report

2010 NRC Assessment of Research-Doctorate Programs: 2000-2006 data for core research faculty and doctoral students, >5,000 doctoral programs, 221 doctoral institutions

Data reported by faculty and students in fall 2006: 20 variables in three dimensions of program quality: 1) research activity of faculty, 2) student support and outcomes, and 3) diversity of the academic environment.

Program rankings: multiple statistical testing of variables in three program quality dimensions. Programs then ranked within a range of comparable programs nationally - - e.g., between 25th and 50th in a pool of 125 programs - - rather than an absolute ranking.

2010 NRC ranking fundamentally differs last NRC study (1995): different variables and a completely different ranking scheme. The 2010 Assessment: quality of doctoral programs is a multidimensional and somewhat subjective concept. By quantifying each program’s performance in the three dimensions of program quality and then ranking programs in terms or relative rather than absolute rankings the NRC hopes to make the findings more relevant to intended users of Assessment results, including prospective students and the broader public.

The NRC did not include EdD programs or PhD programs in business, education, social work, and many other high-quality UA doctoral disciplines within its study taxonomy, so only 18 of UA’s 42 total doctoral programs were evaluated.

UA’s rankings

UA’s 15 stand-alone doctoral programs and 3 joint programs with UAB and UAH that were part of the Assessment metric received strong ratings overall in the 2010 Assessment and demonstrated significant improvement over the most recent NRC study.

In 1995: 4 of UA’s programs ranked in the 3rd quartile and 11 were ranked in the 4th or lowest quartile for overall quality.

In 2010, 5 UA research doctorate programs ranked among the top 25 to 40% nationally (Mass Communication, Chemistry, Mechanical Engineering, Physics, and Psychology).

Chemistry program, for example ranked on par with programs at Ohio State University, Clemson, Notre Dame, and the University of Virginia and ranked higher than Johns Hopkins, Florida State University, Iowa State University, Case-Western Reserve University, and five other SEC programs.

8 additional programs ranked in the middle range among national peers (Biological Sciences, Chemical Engineering, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Materials/Mechanical Engineering, English, Computer Science, Political Science, and the joint Materials Science and Materials/Mechanical Engineering programs with UAB and UAH).

In addition to strong overall rankings, 12 of UA’s programs finished high in the first quartile in the Student Support and Outcomes dimensional measure of quality, which includes measures of how well students are financially supported while at the institution, how many graduate, and their time to degree. Ten of 15 UA programs were also ranked in the first quartile for doctoral student and faculty diversity among national peers.
We are a much larger and fundamentally stronger doctoral research university now in 2010, so rankings would be even higher if they reflected 2010 data

2010 study covers the 2000-06 time frame. Since fall 2006, UA has made major strides toward becoming an even stronger doctoral research institution. These quality improvements would undoubtedly translate to higher rankings if the study was conducted using current faculty and student quality data.

In addition to an overall enrollment increase of 27% since fall 2006, UA graduate student enrollment has increased by over 20% and doctoral student enrollment, a key variable in the NRC matrix, has increased by 29% - - both of these graduate enrollment increases are among the best in the country. UA has invested resources to add 15% more core research faculty to its doctoral departments since 2006, and faculty extramural grant awards have increased by 40% over the past 3 years - - both variables are key quality indicators in the Faculty Research Activity dimension of NRC program quality.

“We are very pleased that the 2010 NRC Assessment recognizes the many high-quality doctoral programs UA offers its students, and the results will allow use to fine-tune quality improvements over the next several years”, says Dr. David Francko, Associate Provost, Dean of the Graduate School, and Institutional Coordinator for the 2010 NRC. “We are particularly gratified that the 2010 Assessment recognizes UA’s national leadership in the doctoral student support and outcomes and diversity of academic environment dimensions of program quality. Supportive, diverse doctoral programs, rapid time-to-degree, high graduation rates, high placement of graduates, and other measures of excellent student support and success are key to recruiting the best, brightest, and most diverse group of new graduate students and graduate faculty to the Capstone.”, said Francko.

Website to download entire Assessment spreadsheet, Methodology Guide, and other materials:

http://www.nap.edu/rdp