

Finnish Higher Education Experts USA Study Tour 2015

Graduate Admissions and Strategic Enrollment Management

Discussion Themes & Questions

System Level Topics

- In Finland, the higher education is steered by the Ministry of Education and Culture. How is higher education strategically planned in the U.S. at the national, state, and local levels?
- How is the impact of HE monitored regionally or nationally (other than employment)?
- How graduate and undergraduate education volumes are planned as a whole?/ How are graduate and undergraduate education intake quantities determined?
- What is the relation between higher education and research? Is it regulated by federal or state specific means?
- Is Master's and Doctoral student employment after graduation monitored by the university or national statistical authority?
- What is the procedure and documentation required for establishing a new Master's/Doctoral program?
- Course-based (taught) and research-based Master's and Doctoral degrees
- What is the role and meaning of Master's degrees in the U.S. education system?
- Fees and scholarships. Doctoral students' employment in the U.S. universities. Salary funding: from university or external sources? Do the universities provide travel grants for graduate students?
- Follow-up procedures (what types of incentives or requirements are used) and mentoring. Is mid-term evaluation common? What are the minimum requirements and what is done if these are not met?

The Basics

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- Follow-up procedures (what types of incentives or requirements are used) and mentoring. Is mid-term evaluation common? What are the minimum requirements and what is done if these are not met?
- How are the programs reviewed?
- Supervisor engagement with doctoral training
- Graduation requirements (number of credits, courses, publications, certain courses compulsory etc.)
- What type of career counselling and other transferable skills training is provided for the students?
- Rotation within/between universities/institutes
- Mobility outside U.S.
- Resources for program coordination: how are they determined and how are tasks divided?

Student Recruitment and Application Process

- Student recruitment, program marketing and partnerships e.g. with Asian universities
- Decision-making on recruitment matters: where are decisions made and by whom?
- What is the application process like?
- In case official documents (e.g. certificates of previous degrees, etc.) are required in the application stage, who verifies them? When do the accepted students have to submit originals of the required application attachments?

Student Selection

- Number of students. How is it determined how many students are accepted into different programs? Who decides this, on what grounds and which factors influence the decision?
 - Approval process for the admissions criteria. Which body/who prepares the admissions criteria and which body officially accepts the criteria?
 - Admissions criteria and review process. How are the student selection decisions made? What kinds of methods are used in the decision making and which factors are emphasized? Are exceptions possible, i.e. can a particular applicant/group of applicants be accepted on some other grounds than what is defined in the official selection criteria?
 - Is there a link between the learning outcomes set for the program and the admission criteria? Is this taken into account in the graduate admissions process?
 - Who participates in the decision making on the selections?
 - How is the job market situation reflected in the student intake in the U.S.? For example, do employment prospects affect the number of students selected for a specific program?
 - What is the timeframe for the selection process?
 - How to set the threshold for quality vs. number of students in the selections?
 - How do the universities evaluate their success in the student selections? When does the evaluation take place?
 - Are there complaint procedures? What types?
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Background on Graduate Education in Finland

Graduate education in the Finnish context consists of scientific or artistic doctoral education. In the binary higher education system only universities can confer Doctoral degrees. In the Finnish three-cycle degree system, both universities and polytechnics (or universities of applied sciences) provide education at Bachelor's and Master's degree levels. As a rule, polytechnic students are admitted to study for the Bachelor's degree and university students are admitted to study for the Master's degree. There is a separate admission procedure in place for doctoral studies.

Unlike Bachelor's (180-270 ECTS) and Master's (60-120 ECTS), the duration of doctoral studies is not regulated by legislative means. It is up to the universities to design the studies to meet the needs of the society. In most disciplines the emphasis of graduate studies is in independent research or artistic work. There is no tuition fee in graduate education.

Doctoral education lasts 7-8 years on the average after Master's degree. A national science policy goal is to restructure doctoral programs so that the duration of doctoral studies would be four years. Universities have founded a doctoral school or a few doctoral schools that host all doctoral programs. Before 2011, only 10 % of graduate students belonged to a doctoral program, which brought inequality into the education system.

The status of doctoral students is that of a student in the sense that they belong to a degree program. However, many of the doctoral students are employed by the university in which case the funding comes either from the university or from an outside funder that supports doctoral education. In these circumstances, the doctoral students are considered employees in addition to the student status. There are some national sources of funding for doctoral studies.

In Finland, in the population base of 5,4 million, around 1700 Doctoral degrees are conferred annually. The amount has tripled in 20 years. Less than 1 % of the Finnish labor force has a Doctoral degree. The number of unemployed among Doctoral degree holders is growing, even though a smaller percentage of them is unemployed than of those belonging to the labor force with other educational backgrounds.