

Access with Excellence

SUMMARY

Initial Charge

The Access with Excellence initiative will propose programs and resources to minimize or eliminate financial obstacles to enrollment, learning, international study, research opportunities, and career networking and options for undergraduate and graduate students. The aim of this initiative is to maximize every student's access to the full range of educational possibilities the University offers.

Guiding Principles

The Access with Excellence initiative will:

- Provide an environment where all students, irrespective of their background, have the same enhanced academic opportunities.
- Be grounded in a holistic view of students, recognizing and addressing differing needs of prospective students, current students and alumni.
- Eliminate financial obstacles by identifying financial needs and developing sustained financial support to address those needs.

Major Proposals

- Enhance student recruitment strategies by examining current definitions for financial need and broadening recruitment opportunities.
- Expand access to academic opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students through research, service, study abroad and other significant learning opportunities.
- Create debt-reduction programs and increase support for financial literacy.

Measuring Progress

- Increased to 100% the number of students with demonstrated financial need whose need is met.
- Increased number of students receiving grants for internships.
- Increased number of non-STEM research projects offered through the Office of Undergraduate Research and Community Outreach (UGR).
- Increased number of students in UM study abroad programs.
- Increased participation in service learning by faculty, students and number of courses offered.
- Number of students in the debt-reduction programs.
- Increased national ranking for graduate programs.
- Increased number of minority graduate students.

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Introduction

Access with Excellence is the opportunity for every student to secure and benefit from an excellent educational experience at the University of Miami regardless of their financial need. The University of Miami has an established reputation as a top-ranked university with a 92% first year retention rate and 81% 6-year graduation rate. However, in its next century the University should ensure that the breadth of opportunities on its campuses are accessible to every student, by:

- enhancing student recruitment strategies;
- expanding access to significant academic opportunities; and
- creating debt-reduction programs.

Proposal 1: Enhance student recruitment strategies

Access to an excellent UM education precedes admission and is a responsibility shared among staff and faculty. The recruitment process includes identifying resources to reduce or remove financial obstacles to admission, while recognizing that definitions for financial need vary across student populations.

Presently, the Office of Student Financial Assistance & Employment (OSFAE) requires undergraduate students requesting need-based support to submit their family's income and asset information to be assessed. The institutional methodology calculating financial need is derived by subtracting the expected family contribution from the cost of attendance. The remaining amount is the student's financial need and is addressed through scholarships, grants, and self-help aid, which includes loans and student work-study employment. The calculation also includes a minimum student contribution of \$2,000/yr.

Financial need for graduate and professional students is calculated through federal methodology via the free application for federal student aid application, also known as FAFSA.

Access with Excellence need definition

As of March 2016, UM met a large proportion of demonstrated financial need for all first year students. Included in this calculation was a fixed self-help aid level of \$6500 for most incoming first year students, which increases by an estimated \$1000 with each grade level. To increase access for all students, the UM community should consider the following options:

- Reduce the amount of fixed self-help aid from the current amount.
- Incoming first year students: Meet 100% of demonstrated financial need for all incoming first year students, from the U.S., without loans.
- Transfer students: Meet 100% of student financial need for incoming transfer students, from the U.S., without loans.
- Continuing undergraduates: Meet 100% of financial need for all continuing undergraduates after their first year, including transfer students.
- International continuing undergraduate students: Establish emergency funds to assist students who face financial challenges to help them complete program requirements. The funds should be awarded by OSFAE in conjunction with International Student Scholar Services (ISSS).
- Master's students: Provide more opportunities for graduate students to learn about personal finance and financial planning.
- Doctoral students: Provide competitive stipends for all PhD students by increasing the baseline to be in line with the [Florida living wage](#).

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The Quad recommends that the University investigate options for meeting 100% of need based on the suggested options and conduct a review 3-5 years to assess validity.

Broaden student recruitment opportunities

The University of Miami should become more deliberate about advancing college opportunities for all with additional focus on low-income students and ensuring that the UM student population reflects the local and global population. The recruitment process should, at a minimum, commence two years prior to admission for low-income students, who are often also minority students. Specific actions include:

- **UM Admission Clinics:** Establish UM Admission Clinics for students, parents, and school counselors targeting audiences, including 9th and 10th grade students, to provide knowledge on the UM application process and available financial assistance. The clinics can be in-person and virtual.
- **Enrollment Fellows:** Establish a “President’s Enrollment Fellows” program to honor current students and proactively engage them in building and maintaining relationships with potential and new students with a goal of increasing yield.
- **President’s Enrollment Council:** Establish an annual “President’s Enrollment Council”, facilitated by the Provost with faculty from each school and college as well as members from the Division of Enrollment Management and Division of Student Affairs to further engage faculty in student enrollment.

To enhance student recruitment strategies, additional staff members may be required.

Proposal 2: Expand access to enhanced educational opportunities

The University of Miami offers an array of potentially transformational academic opportunities, however, access to these opportunities may depend on your network, academic major, level of achievement and/or finances. Students select UM for the quality of education; however, it is incumbent on the institution to equip graduates with an education that defies borders and prepares them for successful careers. There are various ways UM could enhance access for its students:

Undergraduate research

The Office of Undergraduate Research and Community Outreach (UGR) currently receives about 300 applications annually with about 82% (247) of students being placed. However, a total of 857 undergraduate students are performing research, primarily as part of their core courses. In order to support, encourage and expand student participation in research, specifically in non-STEM programs, UM should:

- Create a committee, administered by the UGR, comprised of faculty from the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities as well as an undergraduate and graduate students. This committee shall review and select students for research opportunities and seek grant funding to facilitate the placement of students. The grant funding will support supplies, travel or summer stipends. We recommend that a grant of \$1500 per student be established. Federal Work Study should be used to subsidize some of these costs for students with demonstrated financial need.
- Additional personnel may be required.

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Service learning

The University of Miami should expand service learning, defined as “courses linking classroom and the community through hands-on experiential education that is transformative.” The Office of Civic & Community Engagement (CCE) oversees all academic service learning and works with the Butler Center for Service and Leadership to integrate student community service with academic goals. Annually over 400 service learning courses enroll approximately 1000 students (identified by “CIVIC” course notation) and engage them in over 146,894 hours of community service.

All first year undergraduate students should complete a service learning course and, during their upper level years, complete an independent study or a capstone project. To achieve this UM should consider:

- Increasing the number of Engaged Faculty Fellows by supporting 5 annual workshops to create and/or modify courses to include service learning.
- Providing the CCE with additional funds for student transportation, materials and capstone and independent study projects.
- Creating a staff position to oversee and administer the Civic Scholars Program.
- Creating an ongoing fund for the Alternative Spring Break program to promote increased participation.
- Creating a Faculty Excellence in Civic Engagement Award.

Study abroad

The opportunity to study abroad greatly enriches a student’s education and view. Financial concerns often preclude international study for many students. Currently, about 400 to 500 students annually participate in UM study abroad programs and an additional 400 to 500 students participate in non-UM programs which are more affordable. The rigor and structure of some UM academic programs does not allow students to participate in study abroad. To increase student participation in UM’s study abroad programs, the University should:

- Promote UM study abroad programs and emphasize the affordability of a UM program with participation from the President’s Enrollment Council, faculty, advisors, and staff.
- Develop US-based programs that are less expensive, offer high academic quality and provide an option for students whose families have safety concerns regarding international travel.
- Develop partnerships with providers to increase international learning opportunities for pre-medical students (i.e. DIS: Study Abroad in Scandinavia <http://disabroad.org/>).
- Expand the “Global Ambassadors” program for students who have benefitted from study abroad and are willing to share their experiences.
- Establish need-based funds specifically for undergraduate study abroad programs. The funds will be available to the student for the duration of their undergraduate study. The stipend can be used at any time during their sophomore, junior or senior years to defray study abroad costs during enrollment in any semester or term program.
- Recruit additional personnel in the Office of Study Abroad to coordinate the above.

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Support for Success program

It is not enough simply to offer access. The national statistics that surround the number of low-income students who gain access to higher education, but who do not finish a degree are sobering. If UM wants to support greater opportunity for all students, then the institution must be prepared to offer extra support for students who need it to navigate these opportunities and succeed. Consider a new position in the Office of Academic Enhancement to provide ongoing support for students.

Career networking

Internships offer students a myriad of benefits including experience in the labor market, mentoring opportunities, expanded network and a broader perspective on their academic endeavors. Currently, finances limit participation in unpaid summer internships, and often students with high need will take jobs that offer financial rewards and forgo opportunities to pursue a passion or interest. Financial support for summer internships can ease the transition from college into the workforce and can, some studies indicate, lead to higher paying jobs. Approximately 44% of UM undergraduate students complete internships, and UM should strive to increase this to 75%.

The University of Miami should establish a fund to provide need-based grants to undergraduate and graduate students seeking unpaid internships. The Toppel Career Center should administer this funding in conjunction with the Office of Student Financial Assistance and Employment. George Washington University offers grants to undergraduate and graduate students through their [career services office](#).

Graduate students

Continued excellence has been demonstrated in many of University of Miami's graduate programs. In 2010 four doctoral programs -- sociology, psychology, philosophy and epidemiology -- were recognized for being ranked in the top quartile of their field by the National Research Council (NRC). Ten doctoral programs were also recognized for being ranked in the top half, including the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science (RSMAS), English language and literature, chemistry, biomedical engineering, mechanical engineering, microbiology and immunology, physiology and biophysics, and molecular and cellular pharmacology. In addition, the NRC assessment ranked twenty doctoral programs in the top quartile for diversity.

Meeting financial challenges faced by graduate students will reinforce excellence within these graduate programs and encourage other programs to move into highly-ranked categories in their disciplines. To address this issue:

- UM should create a fund to assist graduate programs in attracting and supporting the highest qualified graduate students. For PhD students, the fund would provide additional annual funds during the 5 years of their PhD program.
- UM should create opportunities for summer placements through Toppel Career Center to assist students on 9-10 month graduate assistantships in finding summer support and programs which deliver skills for non-academic careers.

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Minority graduate student recruitment

Despite continued excellence in University of Miami's graduate programs, some groups continue to be underrepresented in the graduate student population. While increasing diversity is one of the keys to improving access to education, such diversification should be data-driven. Asian students, for example, have ample representation in disciplines like architecture (38%) and engineering (32%). Due to UM's unique geographical location, a large portion of its student body is comprised of Hispanic students as compared to national levels. Black students, however, are underrepresented among UM's graduate students, constituting 8% of the population overall ([UM Fact Book 2015-2016](#)), although representation in nursing and health studies (21%) and education and human development (16%) are notable exceptions. The University should develop an ecosystem that offers underrepresented students access to and success in all disciplines, with additional programs for improving access for black students. To address this inequity, UM should:

- Create a bridge program, drawing upon innovative programs nationally, to recruit highly competitive post-doctoral associates and fellows with the specific aim of developing a pipeline for recruiting highly qualified, underrepresented black faculty and black students.
- Include graduate faculty, particularly faculty of color, in graduate student recruitment fairs.
- Develop innovative approaches to graduate assistantship allotment, taking into account factors such as diversity by making the choices that increase diversity where competence, merit and capability are equivalent; and the overall placement of students in quality jobs after earning doctoral degrees.

In addition to strategies to recruit and support students, financial support is needed to ensure continued excellence in research training and career preparation. UM should:

- Build the existing Fellowship Writing Clinic into a regular summer, stipend-supported program for advanced graduate students to increase the number of participants and funded proposals.
- Ensure that the Platform for Excellent Teaching and Learning supports graduate interdisciplinary research and promotes joint efforts with other universities to recruit and train students for collaborative research.

Proposal 3: Create debt-reduction programs

The average federal student loan debt for University of Miami students graduating with a baccalaureate degree is about \$25,000. This figure does not include private education loans. Significant student loan debt inhibits students from pursuing graduate and professional education opportunities and can limit their prospects for good employment.

Financial literacy

Establish a program to enhance financial literacy for all students, especially those with student loans. This initiative should be run through the OSFAE and can include interactive workshops and webinars as well as the forthcoming Education Advisory Board (EAB) student app. Additional personnel may be required.

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Debt-reduction

In making career choices, student loan debt should not negatively distort or influence a student's decision, and the ability to repay student loans should not limit how alumni shape their careers.

Implementing the redefined financial need parameters discussed earlier in this paper will reduce loans for undergraduates (excluding any private education loans), however, further debt-reduction work should be considered, including:

- Create a loan forgiveness program for UM graduates who are interested in working in areas of critical need or shortage of essential professionals such as healthcare in rural areas for example. This will allow students whose interest may have been sparked through academic service learning opportunities to build a career with the knowledge that their loans will be reduced.
- Create a university loan fund for students offering alumni-supported short- or long-term loans with low/fixed interest rates. All participating students must complete financial literacy programs.

Reporting and measurement are key to the success of debt-reduction programs. Clear eligibility requirements and metrics must be created with partner organizations that provide employment.

Priority for funding and implementation

1. Meet 100% need for all undergraduates
2. Mandate financial literacy programs
3. Establish funds for debt-reduction programs
4. Expand service learning to all undergraduates
5. Implement Support for Success program
6. Establish funds for increased access to study abroad programs
7. Establish grants for career networking
8. Expand undergraduate research opportunities
9. Improve minority graduate student recruitment
10. Increase PhD stipends for all programs
11. Enhance student recruitment strategies
12. Establish PhD incentive funding
13. Create emergency funds for international students

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