PPMO-0054 Graduate College Certification Process Improvement [UIUC]
Executive Summary

Business Case

Successful student graduation is a priority for the University and student graduation requires degree certification. The graduation certification process (GCP) is vital to ensuring students are meeting University and Department requirements prior to being awarded degrees. For the over 10,000 graduate students on the Urbana-Champaign campus, degree certification is coordinated by The Graduate College Graduate Student Academic Services (GSAS) group. GSAS audited over 4,900 student records in academic year 2014-2015, certifying 4,133 graduate degrees. 112 department and program certifiers participate in the process every term, reviewing, researching, and certifying student records. The current process requires at least 4 reviews of each student record by GSAS auditors and 3 by department/program certifiers. Data must be entered manually into spreadsheets by department/program certifiers during each review and auditors have to check multiple systems to develop a complete picture of the student records they are auditing. The main system that supports this process is difficult to support and unstable.

Through this project, the sponsor hopes to streamline the GCP, providing a simplified online interactive experience which reduces the amount time required by both GSAS auditors and department/program certifiers.

Goal

Streamline the graduation process at the Graduate College, reducing the amount of time required by both the Graduate College staff and graduate department/program certifiers, and empower students through transparent and comprehensive access to their student degree information.

Approach

Mapped the graduate certification process with the team. Discussed issues and categorized the issues in to four main areas: technology, process, policy, resource. Prioritized opportunities for improvement and brainstormed potential solutions. Developed transition action plan to prioritize potential solutions, assign owners to tasks, and establish a timeline.

Outcome

Identified 9 recommendations, expected to result in reduction of time, rework, and inefficiencies for the graduation certification process. This will provide the staff with more time to serve their students and will also empower the student to understand and access degree information. Recommended the analysis of two systems that would result in a formal recommendation to implement the system to simplify the process.

Key Findings

- **Technology deficiencies that required manual processing and human error**
- **Process inefficiencies that produced rework and over-processing wastes**
- **Lack of resources to keep technology up to date**
- **Policies that were inaccurate or out of date**

Short-term Improvement Recommendations

1. **Create workflows to identify, communicate, and remediate issues with academic records.**
   This will identify milestones and deficiencies to help assess student progress towards milestones.
2. **Change department expectations for graduation process**
   Reduce confusion with college units and students for thesis review
3. **Reconsider how deposit review deadline process works**
   Eliminate any ambiguity around deposit deadline process.
4. **Checklist (unified) process for all steps in graduation**
   Reduce confusion and increase communication to students regarding the graduation process.
5. **Updates to GCP which includes it can be edited by departments and roll completed audits to future terms.**
   Reduce rework when student audit fails at term and re-entry needs to be made at next term.

Long-term Improvement Recommendations

1. **Uachieve/DARS Clear list of degree requirements**
   Communicate to students, faculty, and staff what requirements are needed for degree award.
2. **Portal(s)-Grad Recs or Slate**
   This is to perform analysis on both IT platforms prior to choosing preferred software. The portal will eliminate additional, homegrown, solutions and reduce rework.
3. **Extend SharePoint committee system to Master's TDA**
   Reduce disparate systems required for both PhD and Masters program
4. **Consolidate key student data in the student permanent record**
   Reduce the number of data points that are not utilized in student permanent record

Implementation of Recommended Improvements

Short- term recommendations are currently being implemented with most activities scheduled for completion in October/September 2017. Implementation of a Grad Recs or Slate is expected by August 2018. All activities are scheduled for completion by May 2018.