Going the Extra Mile to Increase the Wilder School's Student Enrollment:

The Case of the Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) degree program

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Abstract

To align with the themes and goals *of VCU Quest 2028: One VCU Together We Transform*, the Wilder School has prepared and will implement a schoolwide strategic plan to guide its development to 2028. In this strategic plan, one of the metrics of student success is student enrollment, which is of paramount importance.

After the background introduction, this report gives an overview of the student enrollment data of the five academic programs within the Wilder School during the past 5 years, and takes a snapshot of the 2022 MURP student demographic data. Afterward, it briefly introduces the enrollment management strategies in other selected universities and makes a set of recommendations on how to go the extra mile in boosting the URSP Program's graduate student enrollment through different recruitment strategies. Finally, the report proposes a budget estimate to implement this plan, lays out the implementation priorities, and draws conclusions.

1. INTRODUCTION

This year (2023) marks the 10th year anniversary of the founding of an independent L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University (hereinafter "The Wilder School" for short).

During the past 10 years, due to the effective leadership of the School Administration and efforts made by all program faculty/staff members and students, the Wilder School has made great strides on all fronts, now ranking top 15% of program specialties nationally (#16 – Social Policy; #17 – Urban Policy; #19 – Public Management and Leadership; #36 – Public Policy Analysis), according to the 2023 *U.S. News and World Report*.

In addition to these achievements, the Wilder School is aiming even higher in its new strategic plan, which was developed in alignment with the themes and goals *of VCU Quest 2028: One VCU Together We Transform*. One of the school's current top priorities is to increase student enrollment, which is one of the critical metrics of student success. As a complex system, student enrollment contains many components, such as student recruitment, admission, retention, funding, graduation, and others. Due to the length limit, this report focuses on student recruitment only.

This report explores various ways to further boost the Wilder School's student enrollment, with a particular emphasis placed on graduate student recruitment strategies of the Urban and

Regional Studies and Planning (URSP) Program. It is worth noting that the URSP Program's Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) degree Program has been accredited by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) for more than 40 years, winning the second consecutive 7-year accreditation in 2021.

The rest of this report is organized as follows. Section 2 gives an overview of the student enrollment performance of the five academic programs within the Wilder School during the past 5 years. Section 3 takes a snapshot of the 2022 MURP student demographic composition, which helps identify the targeted student markets for recruitment. Section 4 briefly introduces the enrollment management strategies employed in other universities. Section 5 makes a series of recommendations on how to go the extra mile in boosting URSP Program's graduate student enrollment. Section 6 proposes a budget estimate and lays out its implementation priority. Finally, section 7 outlines the next steps for this project and draws conclusions.

2. THE WILDER SCHOOL STUDENT ENROLLMENT: FACTS AT A GLANCE

This section summarizes the Wilder School student enrollment data for the past five years, which include one pre-pandemic year (2019), three pandemic years (2020,2021, 2022), and one post-pandemic year (2023). Only graduate and undergraduate student enrollment data are included in the analysis.

2.1 Graduate Student Enrollment

As shown in Table 1, the Wilder School's total graduate student enrollment jumped from 184 in fall 2019 to 282 in fall 2023, with a 53.26% increase during these five years.

Of the five graduate programs, the Homeland Security/Emergency Preparedness (HSEP), which is an online Master's degree, experienced the fastest growth of graduate student enrollment during the same time period (217.39%), whereas the Master of Urban and Regional Planning had a generally flat growth of student enrollment (6.25% during the five years), hovering around 50 Master students each year. The Ph.D in Public Policy and Administration Program also had a relatively stable growth pattern, hovering around 45 Ph.D students each year. HSEP's graduate student enrollment surge may at least partially be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many students to switch to online learning.

Table 1 Wilder School Graduate Student Enrollment by Programs over the Past 5 Years

Programs	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	2019/2023 change	2019/2023 % change
Criminal Justice	13	15	20	22	22	9	69.23%
Homeland Sec & Emerg Prepared	23	61	81	75	73	50	217.39%
Public Administration	59	74	94	83	91	32	54.24%
Ph.D Public Policy & Administration	41	40	40	47	45	4	9.76%
Urban and Regional Planning	48	54	50	50	51	3	6.25%
Total Wilder School	**184**	**244**	**285**	**277**	**282**	**98**	**53.26%**

The above Wilder School's graduate student enrollment picture largely mirrors the recent

national picture. According to Hanover Research (2014), the overall graduate enrollment picture was fairly positive for institutions as graduate deans indicated either flat or slightly increased applications between 2015 and 2016. In the meantime, deans also saw a decline in international student application volume.

2.2 Undergraduate Student Enrollment

In contrast to the positive growth pattern of graduate student enrollment, the undergraduate student enrollment within the Wilder School suffered a drastic decrease from 1007 in fall 2019 to 775 in fall 2023, with a 23.04% decrease.

It is surprising to note that HSEP experienced the largest decrease (-50.2%) of undergraduate student enrollment during this 5-year period, while the Bachelor of Urban and Regional Studies (BURS) had the smallest decrease (-5.83%). As the Master's program, the Public Administration Program does not have undergraduate students.

It seems that Bachelor of Urban and Regional Studies (BURS) and MURP programs within the Urban and Regional Studies and Planning (URSP) academic unit were relatively unaffected by the post-COVID enrollment trends that our other Wilder School programs experienced. Many of those other programs saw dramatic enrollment swings.

Table 2 Wilder School Undergraduate Student Enrollment by Programs over the Past 5 Years

Programs	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	2019/2023 change	2019/2023 % change
Criminal Justice	653	622	612	570	553	-100	-15.31%
Homeland Sec & Emerg Prepared	251	219	169	136	125	-126	-50.20%
Urban & Regional Studies	103	109	87	91	97	-6	-5.83%
Total WS	**1,007**	**950**	**868**	**797**	**775**	**-232**	**-23.04%**

Across the nation, overall undergraduate student enrollment has been down, especially at community colleges. Undergraduate completion fell for the first time in ten years. There are more "stopped-out" students who left college with some credits but no degrees. Fewer students are transferring from two-year to four-year institutions. Among the reasons for this declining trend, student loan debt or tuition cost and trade-off between education and employment are the most commonly cited (Meyer, 2023). Of course, the pandemic's negative impacts on declining undergraduate student enrollment cannot be ignored.

2.3 A Quick Summary

In summary, Tables 1 and 2 reveal the following two facts:

First, the change in the Wilder School's student enrollment between 2019 and 2023 was primarily caused by the change in the undergraduate student enrollment. Therefore, the Wilder School needs to make extra efforts to recruit and retain undergraduate students.

Second, in terms of both percentage and absolute figures, HSEP was the major agent in the Wilder School's student enrollment change, which was true in both graduate student enrollment (the largest positive change) and undergraduate student enrollment (the largest negative change).

Since this author belongs to the Urban and Regional Studies and Planning (URSP) Program, within which the Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) is the only accredited degree program, maintaining its quality and student enrollment is my top priority. The rest of this report will thus focus on MURP student recruitment and organize recommendations by the targeted student categories. Of note, many similar recommendations were already made in the previous MURP Strategic Plan, which was submitted to the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB), along with the Self-Study Report in the 2020 MURP Reaccreditation process.

It is possible that the recruitment strategies recommended later in the report may also apply to both graduate and undergraduate students in all programs.

3. MURP STUDENT'S DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION

In terms of the evolution of MURP student diversity, the Self-Study Report of the MURP 2020 Reaccreditation states that "our non-white student population averaged around 20% from 2013-2017, but has increased to above 30% since 2018. However, we remain short of the target identified in our 2013 strategic plan, as according to data from the VCU Office of Institutional Research and Decision Support, the non-white percentage for the VCU graduate student population as a whole ranged from 37-42% between 2015 and 2019. We also have not met the prior goal of maintaining a minimum of 25% out-of-state and international students. Our out-of-state student population has steadily decreased, from 19.6% in fall 2015 to 8.2 % in fall 2019. Likewise, our international student population has dropped from 13% in 2013 to 4% in 2019, which is consistent with the trend across most graduate programs in the U.S" (URSP, 2020). In our 2013 PAB Self-Study report, we set our benchmark of our MURP's non-white student percentage to be above VCU's graduate programs combined.

Table 3 portrays the MURP Student's demographic composition (ethnicity) in 2022, which indicates that:

First, the MURP student population in 2022 was dominated by White (62%) and African American (20%) students. We had very few Asians and other minorities, and no international students at all.

Second, MURP had slightly more female students than male students in the part-time category. Overall, the MURP students' gender composition was largely balanced. By contrast, VCU had a total undergraduate enrollment of 20,958 (fall 2022), with a gender distribution of 37% male students and 63% female students. Therefore, the MURP student gender balance is much better than VCU's overall student gender balance.

Table 3 MURP Student Ethnicity in 2022

Race	Full-Time Male	Full-Time Female	Full-Time Non-Binary	Part-Time Male	Part-Time Female	Part-Time Non-Binary	Total
White	15	8	0	1	7	0	31
Black or African American	1	3	1	3	1	1	10
American Indian or Alaska Native							0
Asian		2					2
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander							0
Some Other Race Alone		2			1		3
Two or more Races	1	2					3
Unknown				1			1
Sub-Total (Citizens and Residents)	**17**	**17**	**2**	**4**	**9**	**1**	**50**
International Students							0
Total	**17**	**17**	**2**	**4**	**9**	**1**	**50**

Therefore, in order to further boost the MURP student enrollment in the future, we need to:

- Keep recruiting in-state students, who form our main clients;
- Make extra efforts to increase the number of out-of-state and international student applications and admissions.

4. ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN OTHER SELECTED UNIVERSITIES

4.1 The University of North Carolina - Charlotte

UNC Charlotte's Graduate Enrollment Management (GEM) plan is designed as a collaborative process by an academically diverse group of representatives. Decisions are informed by data collection and analysis and aim to produce measurable improvements in recruitment, admission, retention, funding, and graduation. The committee collects longitudinal data on graduate student enrollment and retention and has a publicly available list of peer institutions based on the data.

4.2 University of Illinois

In summer 2016, each University of Illinois System university created an enrollment management strategic plan, with the end goal of increasing system enrollment by approximately 15% in the next five years. The universities followed strategic enrollment principles, such as maintaining education quality, increasing opportunities for Illinois residents, and benchmarking with peer institutions to understand the competitive landscape. Additionally, each campus created their own strategic enrollment plan to reflect their different strengths and weaknesses. For example, based on its already strong freshman class, Urbana-Champaign is focused on growing graduate and professional programs.

4.3 George Washington University

George Washington University is increasingly trying to reach students through the social media platforms they currently engage in, targeting their advertising through YouTube and other social networks rather than traditional media such as magazines or television. This effort includes advertising specifically for graduate programs over not only Facebook, but also Spotify, a music streaming site.

4.4 University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL)

Master of Community and Regional Planning (MCRP) Program at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) has proposed two sets of student recruitment strategies. See Table 4 for details.

Table 4 UNL Actions/Strategies Related to Student Recruitment

Category	Actions/Strategies
A. Recruitment/Marketing	• A-1 Continue email recruitment efforts targeting UNL students in selected majors • A-2 Update MCRP brochure • A-3 Update/Improve CRP component of College of Architecture and Graduate Studies websites • A-4 Initiate and sustain engagement with appropriate social media (Instagram, Facebook – whatever) for program activities, etc. • A-5 Participate in graduate studies and career fairs • A-6 Recruit within the College of Architecture • A-7 Meet with and/or provide information to undergraduate student advisors and advising centers in other units (colleges/schools/departments) at UNL on a regular basis • A-8 Contact academic advisors and/or faculty in likely feeder undergraduate programs in other four-year colleges in Nebraska and other states and send appropriate letters/information to them • A-9 Reach out to city/state HR offices where prospective students may be employed to share/deliver program materials • A-10 Contact Nebraska Chapter APA members and share program materials • A-11 Contact CRP alumni to share program materials and to recruit potential students • A-12 Actively advertise the MCRP program at the NPZA/NE APA conference
B. Program Development	• B-1 4+1.5 degree option with Environmental Studies at UNL • B-2 Dual master's degree with Public Health (MPH/MCRP) at UNMC (University of Nebraska – Medical Center) • B-3 Dual master's degree with Geography at UNL • B-4 Rework undergraduate Community and Regional Planning minor • B-5 Expand connections with UNO (University of Nebraska – Omaha)

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes the following recommendations to boost the MURP student recruitment in the three targeted student markets, particularly for in-state students. Although MURP-focused, these recommendations might be adaptable to other programs in the Wilder School as well.

5.1 For In-State Students

To attract more in-state students, we need to have a competitive edge over other Virginian universities, such as University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, George Mason University, etc.

This report proposes a set of recommendations along the 3M (Marketing, Money, More outreach) + 2C (Curriculum transformation, Collaboration with other Programs) dimensions.

5.1.1 Marketing

Marketing or branding is critical to the success of student recruitment. In my opinion, we need to immediately take the following actions.

First, revamp and refine the school website.

Constructing an engaging, easy-to-navigate, and effective website improves visibility for us and attracts prospective students.

Our school website, which is the school's external face, should showcase current accomplishments such as student capstone projects, best planning practices, award-winning news, faculty publications, grants, and any other notable achievements. The URSP faculty directory page needs to show both full-time and adjunct faculty profiles.

Furthermore, this report recommends scrutinizing our website to ensure that the posted data are updated quarterly to maintain their currency.

This branding work would further enhance the school's external image and attract prospective applicants.

Responsible Parties: the School Communications Team and all Programs.

Second, update the URSP program information on social media accounts.

Social media now has many different platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, EPET Hub, Edutech, Ideaplay, etc. Social media may provide a promising platform to support institutional goals such as student recruitment (Rosenberg et al., 2016).

It is essential to foster a virtual community by posting relevant program information on social media to promote awareness and drive enrollment. Two of the most common digital paid options available are found on Facebook and Instagram.

Responsible Parties: the School Communications Team and URSP Program.

Third, timely updates on the Wilder School Youtube Channel.

For URSP Program, major planning events such as the Gulak Lecture, Plan-off and others should be videotaped and uploaded in a timely manner to Youtube Channel, or even have livestreams advertised beforehand.

Responsible Parties: the School Communications Team and URSP Program.

Fourth, develop MURP handbook and brochure.

The MURP handbook and brochure need to be developed and updated annually for external dissemination. The handbook should provide quick facts about the URSP Program, faculty, students, curriculum, degrees, and other public information.

Responsible Parties: the URSP Program Chair and faculty members.

<u>Fifth, strengthen professional networking.</u>

We need to actively engage our alumni by hosting home-coming events, inviting them to serve on the Program Advisory Committee and give guest lectures. This networking will also help our internship and Wilder Fellows Programs.

Responsible Parties: the URSP Program Chair and faculty members.

<u>Sixth, beef up more internal coordination.</u>

Within the Wilder School, it is necessary for academic programs to coordinate monthly meetings or other check-ins with the Communications team, to facilitate more frequent release and news sharing of research activities, publications, etc.

Responsible Parties: the School Communications Team and all Programs.

5.1.2 <u>Money</u>

Money or financial aid is vital to incentivizing students to submit their applications. While being mindful of budgetary constraints, we should give thought to the following areas:

<u>First, pursue funding opportunities that would support new GTA positions for the MURP students.</u>

In fall 2023, all Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) positions were given to Ph.D students. While this makes sense due to many reasons such as the budgetary constraints and protection of the Ph.D program, it may run the risk of negatively impacting the MURP student recruitment in the long run.

A reasonable number of GTA positions are recommended to be set aside for the Master students of the URSP program. Once done, the URSP Program Chair can pair the GTA positions with the appropriate faculty members.

Responsible Parties: the Dean's Office and URSP Program Chair.

<u>Second, expand the Wilder Fellows program.</u>

The Wilder School's prestigious Graduate Scholars Fellowship provides top full-time students in each of our master's programs with professional work experience, in-state tuition, and about $14,500 stipend through a host employer. MURP students are top performers in the Wilder Fellows selection process.

Offering students a Wilder Fellowship as an enticement to come to VCU, particularly in March or April when top candidates are receiving their financial offers from other schools, may serve as an important recruitment tool.

Responsible Parties: the Dean's Office, Office of Student Success, URSP Program Chair, and other agencies/units.

<u>Third, provide more funding opportunities.</u>

e.g., VCU and school scholarships, federal work-study, hourly rate research assistant opportunities for faculty grant-funded projects.

We have to diversify the funding sources to attract students. Some grants provide research experience and job-market skills. Others leverage work-study. Still others are hourly but may make a difference in leveling up students' academic profiles.

Responsible Parties: The Finance Team, Office of Student Success, URSP Program.

Fourth, provide Substantial Information Resources and on-campus opportunities for prospective students.

Social activities allow students and faculty to interact and develop meaningful relationships. Additionally, holding job fairs and inviting top recruits to campus at the same time boosts positive feelings of prospective students and increases enrollment.

Responsible Parties: the School and URSP Program.

5.1.3 More outreach activities

Outreach to prospective students is critical to the success of student recruitment.

First, reach our own BURS students and other related VCU units.

Our program's undergraduate students or BURS students, and the students in related VCU units (e.g., Center for Environment Studies, Departments of Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate, African American Studies, Sociology, Political Science, etc.) should be reached through email contact, on-site presentation, open-house and other mechanisms. It is particularly important to work more closely with the URSP student associations to attract BURS undergraduate students. Personal engagement is key.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program Chair, Student Association Leaders.

Second, reach other universities in Virginia.

The targeted universities in Virginia may include: University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, George Mason University, University of Richmond, James Madison University, Mary Washington University, College of William and Mary, etc. We may develop some joint degrees with them for mutual recognition.

We may also attend their events (such as the GIS Day at College of William and Mary) or make presentations at other universities to recruit students on-site.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program Chair, the School Recruitment Director.

Third, recruit professional students from state agencies

Some Virginian agencies provide assistance that supports employees' pursuit of approved educational courses, or the acquisition of job-related degrees, professional certifications or licenses. We can provide more information sessions and workshops to these agencies to recruit their employees as professional students.

This was a big part of our pandemic recruitment strategy and a direct contributor to our gains in master's enrollment. We will continue reaching out to state agencies for recruitment sessions.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program Chair, the School Recruitment Director.

Fourth, hold more major planning events to attract students.

Examples include the Gulak Lecture, Plan-off, programmatic webinars, co-sponsoring conference/training activities with the American Planning Association-Virginia Chapter and other planning organizations, holding graduate studies and career fairs, etc.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program and the School Communications Team.

Fifth, hire more student ambassadors as representatives of our school/program to prospective students and their families.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program and the Dean's Office.

Sixth, establish the Wilder Recruitment Committee.

This Recruitment Committee staffed by all program representatives, will assist the Director of Recruitment in effectively recruiting students.

Responsibilities: The Dean's Office and all programs.

5.1.4 *Curriculum Transformation*

The curricular activities are at the core of student recruitment. Transforming curriculum entails many activities and areas.

First, transform our curricula to better fit students' interests and market demand.

Our students' quantitative analysis and writing skills need to be strengthened. This requires the concerted efforts of faculty members, Curriculum Committee members at both program and school levels to scrutinize and fine-tune the extant curricula to make them more appealing to students while better matching the market demand. To find out the market demand, a survey with the MURP alumni may be necessary.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program Chair and Curriculum Committees.

Second, design the class schedule and modality to be more convenient for students.

This includes evening classes, short classes taught on two weekdays, summer classes, intersession classes, online classes, hybrid classes, etc. Some guest lectures may be added in the class teaching.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program Chair and Curriculum Committee.

Third, improve the existing curriculum assessment mechanisms.

In the MURP Entrance Survey, we may need to survey incoming MURP students about why they enrolled, what they are looking to get of the program, etc., in order to fine-tune our recruitment strategy. The MURP Entry-Exit survey questions may need to revisited and revised if necessary.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program Chair and Assessment Committee.

5.1.5 Collaboration with other Programs

- Develop double majors or joint degrees with African American Studies, Environmental Studies, Sociology, Social Work, and other VCU programs;
- Create a true 4+1 BURS/MURP accelerated program, if VCU could allow 18 (not 12) credits to apply across both degrees;
- Explore the joint degrees with UVA, Virginia Tech, or University of Richmond.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program Chair, Program Faculty, the Dean's Office and Office of the Provost.

5.2 For Out-of-State Students

In addition to implementing some of the above strategies for in-state students, we may need to go the extra mile to attract out-of-state students by taking additional measures as highlighted below.

5.2.1 Launch more online degree programs.

Using online MPA program as a pilot, we may launch more online degree programs including online MURP program, which will offer more learning opportunities to remotely located students.

With respect to the URSP Program, we may start with the online GIS certificate as a pilot project to test the waters before formally launching the online MURP degree program.

Of course, this requires additional approvals from several stakeholder agencies, such as State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), Planning Accreditation Board (PAB), etc.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program and the Dean's Office.

5.2.2 Offer financial assistance to partially offset their relocation costs.

For out-of-state students, relocating to VCU costs additional money and time. To address this issue, especially for those out-of-state students who are economically disadvantaged, we may need to provide a certain amount of financial assistance to partially offset their relocation costs, such as moving, settling, housing, etc.

We may find out the relocation costs and economic situations from those admitted students before they decide to move to Richmond. The financial incentive to attracting out-of-state students is critical.

Responsible Parties: The Wilder School, Graduate School.

Third, improve national visibility through marketing.

We need to coordinate with the Wilder School Director of Recruitment and communications team to pursue nationwide marketing of the MURP degree program. Some examples of nationwide marketing include: hosting national/international conferences; publishing peer-reviewed journal articles and books; serving as officers or committee members in national professional societies and organizations; holding webinars or symposia to discuss important issues, etc.

Responsible Parties: URSP Program, the Recruitment and Communication Teams.

5.3 For International Students

Many factors impact international students' enrollment decisions, such as University tuition fees, university location, financial assistance, brand awareness in home countries, international recognition, National Survey ranking, etc. (Tas and Ergin, 2012).

Though more difficult, in my opinion, it is necessary to do several things.

First, coordinate with VCU Global Education Office and Office of International Admissions on university-level international recruitment through its global outreach, course equivalency evaluation, visa assistance programs.

Second, apply for Quest Global Impacts Awards or give other types of financial assistance to support study-abroad programs, which will help recruit and retain international students.

Third, set aside a certain amount of money specifically for international admission, such as waiving their application fees.

Fourth, expedite the application review in SLATE system, simplify the English proficiency testing, reference-checking, and other processes in conjunction with the VCU Office of International Admissions.

Fifth, provide timely response to the inquiries made by prospective international students.

Sixth, organize high-level delegations to directly visit a few targeted foreign partner universities to recruit international students.

Seventh, Conduct study abroad courses in collaboration with targeted international programs

that could be feeders of students to the MURP program.

6 BUDGET AND IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITY

To implement the above recommended strategies takes time, effort and money. The preliminary budget estimate and implementation priority is shown in Table 5, which is subject to further refinement.

Table 5 Budget Estimate and Implementation Priority

Action Item	Budget Estimate	Priority	Comments
Revamp the School Website	$5000/year	High	Need a part-time student worker/web designer to assist the Communications Team.
Run ads on Social Media	Facebook: $500/month Instagram: $0.95/click	Medium	It varies by ad size, time length, bidding model, etc.
Update the Wilder School Youtube Channel	No cost	low	Videotape major planning events and upload the videos to the existing Wilder

			School Youtube Channel.
Develop and update MURP handbook and brochure	No cost	High	Need all MURP Program faculty members to pitch in.
Strengthen professional networking	No cost	High	Need assistance from the Communications Team.
Beef up internal coordination	No cost	Medium	Set up regular meetings between the MURP Program and the Communications Team.
Fund more GTAs for MURP Students	$26,000/GTA/year	Medium	For 12-month assistantships, minimum stipend levels are $5,000 for 10 hours of work per week and $9,000 for 20 hours of work per week. Graduate resident tuition and Fees in 2023 are: $16,753
Expand the Wilder Fellows Program	$14,500 plus in-state tuition	Medium	The cost will be borne by host employers.
Provide more funding opportunities	NA	Medium	Consider diversified sources.
Offer more social activities	NA	Medium	Information resources, job fairs, campus opportunities
Outreach other VCU units	NA	High	Contact other units inside and outside the Wilder School.
Contact other Virginian universities	NA	Low	Need ongoing communication.
Recruit professional students from Virginian state agencies	NA	Medium	Hold more information sessions.
Hold more planning events	$5000/year	High	Gulak lecture, Plan-off, APA VA chapter conferences, etc.
Hire student ambassadors	NA	Medium	Work with the student associations.
Establish the Recruitment Committee	NA	High	Involve all programs.

Transform curriculum	NA	High	Market and alumni surveys.
Refine the class schedules	NA	Medium	Student surveys.
Improve the curriculum assessment	NA	Medium	Focus on the MURP Entry-Exit exam.
Collaborate with other programs	NA	Medium	4+1 program, double majors, joint degrees, etc.
Launch online programs	NA	High	Online degrees and certificates
Offset relocation costs for out-of-state students	Vary	Low	It depends on the circumstances and financial needs.
Improve national visibility	NA	Medium	Marketing, conferences, serving as high-profiled positions.
Coordinate with the VCU Global Education Office (GEO)	NA	Low	Join the international student recruitment activities with the VCU GEO and Office of International Admissions.
Offer financial aids to international student application	$3000/year	Low	Application fee waiver, visa fee assistance.

7 NEXT STEPS

I need to present the final report to the Wilder School's Grace E. Harris Leadership Institute and the School Administrators, further refine the report, and eventually implement some recommendations in a concerted and prioritized ways.

In addition to student recruitment, which is the focus of this report, it is essential to retain the 2nd-year undergraduates and transfer students in particular, and to boost student yield and graduation rates. While improving education quality is critical, the importance of personal engagement of these students cannot be overstated. All students should feel welcomed and engaged within the Wilder School.

In conclusion, student recruitment/retention is an important task which takes time, effort and money.

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