

QUICK TIPS FOR PROMISING PRACTICES: BUILDING COMMUNITY

- Provide opportunities for incoming students to get to know their new community informally. These can be as simple as a pizza lunch with departmental leadership or a dessert reception with advanced graduate students.
- Sponsor events for the incoming cohort that take place throughout the year. These can function as an extended orientation as you introduce first-year students to the norms and culture of your department.
- Consider a regular social activity that takes place in the same location. This serves to draw members back to a “home” point, makes faces more familiar, and provides the chance for casual conversation.
 - For example, some large departments hold tea-time or a cookie hour every Friday afternoon. Others hold informal group activities such as Frisbee matches.
- Offer a one- or two-credit team taught introductory course to serve as a roadmap to responsibilities and expectations of the degree program.
- Provide shared office space for students, especially those in the same cohort, lab or study group. This enforced familiarity can promote mutual support among the students.
- Support regular seminars, guest lectures, journal clubs or brown bag meetings. All serve to promote intellectual and professional development, enriching what students learn in the classroom and the course of research. These can be entirely student run or in partnership with program faculty.
- Involve students on departmental committees, on curriculum redesign, in job searches, and other recruiting and admissions activities, as appropriate. They will learn more about the life of the program and feel engaged with the community.
- Sponsor an annual Graduate Student Day that allows them the focus on presenting their research in poster and panel sessions. Invite and involve program alumni so that they can encourage current students and help them to see the next stages in their careers.
- Share good news that comes to the attention of faculty and staff. Send announcements to all in the program when a student receives a fellowship, has a paper accepted for a conference, has achieved candidacy, etc.
- Hold exit interviews with all students when they leave the program. Use this information to identify what has worked counter to promoting a sense of community.
- Encourage students to look to Rackham for opportunities to connect with similarly identified students (e.g., students with children, first-gen students) and to participate in social events.
- Support the activities of student organizations in your school/college and/or department/program by advertising activities, offering space for meetings and activities, and providing financial support, if possible.

For more information about the resources available through the Rackham Graduate School, contact Natalie Bartolacci at 647-2640 or nplosky@umich.edu.