

STRATEGIC PRIORITY PROPOSAL

Designing DePaul Strategic Plan

Fill out the template as appropriate for your subcommittee's initiatives. Please complete by January 19, 2026.

Initiative Title:	Near-Term Investments
Subcommittee:	Graduate Aid, Recruitment, Marketing, & Branding Subcommittee
Date Submitted:	01/19/2026

1. INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

Key Institutional Challenges:

What are the key current or future institutional challenges that your committee is tasked with addressing?

Graduate and professional programs in U.S. universities are facing unprecedented challenges driven by demographic decline, economic uncertainty, and evolving student expectations. The shrinking pool of prospective students is a direct result of fewer individuals pursuing postsecondary education overall, which intensifies competition across the admissions funnel. This contraction has created a highly competitive environment where institutions must work harder to attract and retain applicants. Compounding these pressures is growing skepticism about the return on investment (ROI) of advanced degrees, particularly in fields where wage growth has stagnated or employment pathways remain unclear. Students increasingly question whether the cost of graduate education will translate into meaningful career advancement, making value articulation critical for universities. Additionally, federal policy changes and shifting regulations have introduced further complexity, influencing both domestic and international enrollment trends. These factors collectively underscore the need for institutions to adopt innovative strategies to remain competitive and relevant in a rapidly changing educational landscape.

Private universities, which rely more heavily on tuition revenue, face acute budget constraints and pricing sensitivity, prompting many to market online and hybrid programs, increase targeted financial aid and scholarships, invest in career-aligned and shorter-term credentials, and pursue partnerships with employers to better demonstrate clear workforce outcomes and sustain demand.

Initiative Description:

Describe this initiative and explain how it could potentially address the challenges described above.

DePaul University has established a committee tasked with conducting a comprehensive review of graduate enrollment trends and identifying strategies to strengthen its position in a volatile market.

The committee's broad charge includes analyzing the full admissions funnel—from inquiry to deposit—to pinpoint where prospective students disengage and uncover opportunities for improvement. Additionally, the committee will evaluate past marketing strategies and their outcomes, assessing the current brand position of each graduate program within its

target communities, competitive landscape, and professional networks. Based on these insights, the committee will make strategic recommendations for future investments aimed at enhancing program visibility, mitigating potential student and revenue loss, and reinforcing DePaul’s graduate portfolio.

2. SCOPE

Objectives:

List 3-5 specific, measurable objectives for this initiative.

1. Increase Near-term investments and operational improvements
2. Identify additional programs for investment
3. Address systems of scale
4. Create a roadmap for branding opportunities and additional margin

Deliverables:

What tangible outputs will this initiative produce?

1. Increased enrollment high margin domestic programs in KGSB, CDM, and CSH for FY27 and FY28
2. A clear criteria for future differential marketing investment, **and a list of programs for mid-term investment**
3. Improved yield in the graduate admissions pipeline
4. Specific recommendations for 3+2 enrollment models
5. A roadmap for Graduate Program branding opportunities

Out of Scope:

What is explicitly NOT included in this initiative?

Graduate Plus Lending Alternatives
Program creation or removal

Success Metrics:

How will success be measured? Include baseline data if available.

Graduate Program Enrollment (per college/program)-inquiries and applications
Net Tuition Revenue
Inquiry to Enrollment Yield
Return on ad spend* (overall and per college/program)

3. SWOT ANALYSIS

Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of this initiative in terms of addressing the challenges described in Section 2. Discuss internal and external opportunities and threats that will increase or decrease the likelihood of achieving stated objectives.

Stakeholder Feedback:

Summarize feedback gathered from relevant internal and external stakeholders that informed this analysis.

Steering committee feedback:

- We should make sure the process for identifying the programs is clear and that all the stakeholders are aligned on the methodology
- We'll want to make sure there is a connection between this marketing work, and the work of the other committees—like programs of distinction and retention

Subcommittee feedback:

- The marketing selection processes really need to make sure they're incorporating feedback loops between EM and AA (specifically the deans).

Information Needed:

What additional information, research, or data will need to be gathered to support this analysis?

First review historical domestic efforts—previous IRMA analysis

To generate the immediate list of focus program, we are looking for:

- Programs that have effect direct marketing results—see Soumitra’s analysis here ([11826 Domestic Graduate Possible Expanded Budgets.xlsx](#))
- Programs with high activities in the funnel/High revenue generating
- Programs with market, capacity, content refresh
- Programs with lower dependencies on grad plus

[Initial program recommendations are available here](#)

To generate the mid term focused marketing list we are looking for program data about:

- Recent drops in international students
- High Yield Programs
- Third party endorsements/external recognition received
- High potential for domestic pull (e.g. accolades and awards, rankings, other recognitions of distinction)
- Capacity and ability to sustain growth
- Positive career outcomes
- Level of distinctiveness
- Limited local competition (e.g. closing of similar program in the region)
- Evidence of market potential (e.g. Lightcast data of graduates in addition to more predictive data for newer fields)
- Dependency on Grad Plus loans
- Availability of different delivery modalities (keeping in mind competition)

Expanded Funnel Yield Analysis

4. TIMELINE

Fiscal Year 2026 (Current Year)

Phase / Milestone	Target Date	Key Activities
Proceed with targeted investment in direct marketing for high capacity, high margin programs	1/30/26	Expand digital performance marketing at a program, population, and with geography-specific level to enhance enrollment, and refreshed program-level branding to close competitive awareness and affinity gaps—starting with the programs listed in the supplemental document

Align Brand Marketing efforts with EM targets	1/30/26	See Cristels activity outline here for specifics.
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Fiscal Year 2027 (Planning Horizon)

Phase / Milestone	Target Date	Key Activities
Optimize institutional scholarships and grants for targeted graduate programs	4/1/26	Review current process for scholarship and grant allocations to make recommendations for possible (re)distribution
Systematize the selection of graduate program for ongoing marketing investments	6/1/26	Review the benefits and capabilities of prior portfolio review (PPR) for graduate program analysis Conduct a university-wide program portfolio review that looks at capacity, profitability, competitive mapping, and mission
Strengthen the connection between graduate recruitment, admissions, brand marketing and academic units	5/1/26	Designate a cross-functional university graduate team (EMM, branding, alumni, Slate/IT) with rapid routing and increased efficiencies including faster response times Explore curricular modality & pricing pilots. Explore viability of online-only programs with differential pricing; stackable credentials aligned to market demand. Consider the impact of AI on online-only programs. Explore broader segmented campaigns: alumni (returners), internal undergrads (combined degrees and pathways—reduced pricing, quicker degrees), Double-Demon incentives, Chicago-based professionals (domestic), plus targeted national niches where DePaul has advantages (e.g., nonprofit management, refugee/migration studies).
	<i>[Date range]</i>	<i>[Activities]</i>

Key Dependencies:

Instability in federal policies related to graduate education could shift priorities
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5. PROJECTED EXPENSES & REVENUE

Describe projected expenses and potential revenue associated with the implementation of the initiative. Provide best-guess estimates on the likelihood of achieving the projected revenue.

Note: FY26 should only include expenses if any are required. We do not expect any revenue impact for FY26. Please work directly with Financial Affairs through the PMO to estimate any potential finances.

Projected Expenses

Cost Category	FY26	FY27	FY28
Recruitment marketing for targeted graduate programs	3,000,000\$	3,000,000\$	3,000,000\$
Branding and awareness	700,000\$	1,300,000\$	1,300,000\$
Initiative financing cost	140,000\$	334,000\$	564,000\$
	\$	\$	\$
	\$	\$	\$
TOTAL PROJECTED EXPENSES	\$	\$	\$

Potential Revenue & Savings (FY27-FY28)

Revenue/Savings	FY26	FY27	FY28
	-3,840,000	2,207,000	4,557,000
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
TOTAL POTENTIAL REVENUE/SAVINGS		\$	\$

Likelihood Assessment:

Provide your best-guess estimate on the likelihood of achieving the projected revenue above. What assumptions are these projections based on?

Revenue/Savings	Likelihood (High/Med/Low)	Key Assumptions
New enrollment revenue	[High/Medium/Low]	[What needs to happen for this to be realized?]
[e.g., Retention impact]	[High/Medium/Low]	[Key assumptions]
[e.g., Cost savings]	[High/Medium/Low]	[Key assumptions]

Net Financial Impact Summary:

[Summarize overall financial picture: total investment needed, expected returns, timeline to break even or achieve positive ROI]

6. COLLABORATORS

Collaborating Units:

Which colleges, departments, or offices will need to be involved?

Unit	Nature of Collaboration
Enrollment Management	[What do you need from them?]
Academic Affairs (especially CSH, CDM, KGSB for FY26, all for FY27 and beyond)	[What do you need from them?]
IRMA	[What do you need from them?]
Brand Marketing	

External Partners (if applicable):

[Vendors, consultants, peer institutions, community partners, etc.]