

The Graduate College

Annual Report to the University of Delaware Faculty Senate

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Contents

Introduction.....	1
Our mission, our vision and strategic planning.....	1
Our mission.....	1
Our vision.....	2
Methods of operation.....	2
Strategic planning.....	3
Operational excellence and continuity; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.....	3
Recruiting and retaining the best students.....	5
Building a welcoming, respectful, strong, diverse and resilient graduate community.....	7
Fostering innovation in graduate education.....	7
Providing opportunities for professional development so that graduate students and postdocs can achieve their career aspirations.....	8
Supporting, developing and enhancing opportunities for graduate and postdoctoral research, scholarship and creative expression.....	9
Acknowledgments.....	10

Introduction

The Graduate College was created in 2019 to fill gaps in the needs of our graduate students and postdocs and to pursue new opportunities for graduate education at the University of Delaware. The Graduate College is still growing into its new role and has achieved a number of objectives despite the pandemic and while absorbing the same budget cuts and layoffs as other units on campus. It is important to note that Professional and Continuing Education is a part of

the Graduate College as well, and many elements of that mission, especially the delivery of online learning, overlap with graduate education. This report summarizes Graduate College activities over the last academic year.

Our mission, our vision and strategic planning

In the year leading up to the search for the inaugural Dean, Interim Dean Doren completed crucial hiring to build out the Graduate College team to achieve elements of its core mission, including recruitment, retention, professional development and administration of our graduate programs. He also established important relationships with colleges and other units on campus. Thanks to his efforts, many key resources were in place for the Graduate College to advance graduate education at the University of Delaware.

Early in the Fall semester, the Graduate College staff in collaboration with the Graduate College Council, the representative body for graduate education, examined and revised the Graduate College mission and vision statement to give it more focus.

Our mission

The mission of the Graduate College is to achieve excellence in graduate education and graduate research, scholarship and creative expression at the University of Delaware. In doing so, the Graduate College will elevate the stature of our graduate programs nationally and internationally.

Our vision

Established in 2019, the University of Delaware Graduate College is an expression of the will of the faculty and administration at the University to dedicate itself to the needs and aspirations of our graduate students and postdocs. We will advocate for our graduate students' and postdocs' success and well-being in all parts of their lives on and off campus. The Graduate College will enhance graduate experiences by:

- building a welcoming, respectful, strong, diverse and resilient graduate community,
- fostering innovation in graduate education, especially in creating and supporting interdisciplinary programs, delivering online courses and programs and extending educational opportunities to nontraditional learners,
- providing opportunities for professional development so that graduate students and postdocs can achieve their career aspirations,
- recruiting and retaining the best and brightest students,
- supporting, developing and enhancing opportunities for graduate and postdoctoral research, scholarship and creative expression.

We place the highest value on our common humanity, and therefore we will reflect and act upon issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in the decisions that we make. Operational excellence and operational continuity will be our guiding organizational principles. Best practices, data and evidence will inform all our actions, and we will maximize our impact by working harmoniously with the Graduate Council, the University's other colleges and units, as well as partners from outside the university.

Methods of operation

In addition to the five bulleted items representing the strategic directions that the Graduate College will pursue for the University of Delaware, we are also expressing a vision for *how* the Graduate College will operate. First and foremost, we are structuring our leadership team and our processes so that issues of equity, diversity and inclusion are considered at every decision point. We realize this is a departure from the approach many units are using by creating standalone DEI committees. We believe our approach is better suited for the unique composition of the Graduate College which has no faculty. Operational excellence has been essential to moving the Graduate College forward. The Graduate College team knows that we have to share and leverage resources across campus to be successful. Operational continuity means two things. First, work flows smoothly between team members so that we can efficiently help people who need our assistance. Second, we strive to put in place procedures so that members of the Graduate College team can fill in for one another as needed to handle the ebb and flow in demand for our services.

As a final note, the Graduate College team recognizes that the five strategic directions share significant overlap. For example, we might offer a workshop on mental health that would fall under our constellation of professional development offerings. However, that workshop impacts the graduate community as well. While primary responsibility for any one project will fall to a single person, the Graduate College team works collaboratively in these areas of overlap. The same philosophy applies to working with other units on campus.

Strategic planning

In late fall, the Graduate College convened five working groups, one for each of the strategic directions, consisting of faculty and graduate students to develop objectives, metrics and action items for the Graduate College. The working groups released their reports in early spring. After consolidation by the Dean, the objectives have been placed into a coherent, unified format and were returned to the working groups for comment. The next phase will involve mapping action items and metrics from the working groups reports onto the consolidated objectives.

Operational excellence and continuity; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

The Graduate College has created processes and policies that enhance operational excellence and continuity, value differences and promote access and opportunity.

- **Shared governance.**

The Graduate College Council (GCC) is and will remain the key deliberative faculty body that will work with the Graduate College. There were multiple achievements this year. Six interdisciplinary degree programs were revised or proposed to move into the Graduate College. The GCC created three new committees focusing on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Online Learning; and Data Sharing. Finally, the GCC researched and developed a vacation leave policy for graduate students.
- **Communications.**

The Graduate College team meets with graduate program directors every month to successfully share ideas on improving graduate education. These conversations have included data utilization, peer mentoring, and recruitment tools and strategies. Also, the Graduate College has moved into a regular cadence of communications with our Graduate Student Government representatives, GCC graduate student representatives and graduate student and postdoc communities via individual group meetings, monthly open town halls, and e-newsletters every two weeks.
- **Engagement with Student Life and CCSD.**

Graduate education and the needs of graduate students and postdocs are distinct from those of undergraduates. Many of our student support units were traditionally geared toward meeting the needs of the undergraduates, leaving OGPE and later the Graduate College to duplicate some of these supports. This last year, the Graduate College has pivoted. We are engaging more with Student Life and CCSD to leverage their expertise in supporting graduate students' and postdocs' life, such as housing or food insecurity and mental health needs. Student Life and CCSD are fully committed to meeting the needs of our graduate students and postdocs. Meanwhile, the Graduate College team is focusing more energy and resources on our educational and research missions.
- **Data dashboards for all graduate program decision-makers.**

Last fall, the Graduate College worked with Institutional Research to complete a project initiated by Doug Doren to provide real-time data to decision-makers on campus. The new dashboard provides program directors and dean's office staff with real-time enrollment, demographics and admissions data and trends for UD's entire graduate population all the way down to the program level. Almost as significantly, the platform provides full data transparency to all program directors. The dashboards were piloted in the fall and fully deployed this spring. Currently, demand exceeds the number of Tableau licenses we have, so chairs and program directors have to share. We hope to build out this capacity soon.
- **Weekly YOY admissions reports to all program directors.**

Similarly, the Graduate College team developed and deployed weekly Tableau

year-over-year application data reports broken out by college, degree type, funded/self-paying offers and student demographics to track graduate recruiting trends.

- **Market studies to support creation and revision of graduate programs.**
The Graduate College performed multiple market studies for proposed and existing graduate programs. These reports provide detailed information about the job market for students with that degree as well as features of competing programs in the region. The Graduate College can perform two at the same time. Each one takes 3-5 weeks, and demand has been high enough that we typically have a month or two waiting list.
- **Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) Online and OLLI merger.**
UD supports the largest OLLI in the nation, and with the outbreak of the pandemic, OLLI successfully went completely online last fall. OLLI Dover and Sussex membership totals were smaller than OLLI Wilmington's. To expand their offerings and leverage their combined memberships, the Dover and Sussex OLLIs merged together this spring.
- **Internal reorganization.**
The Graduate College team reorganized this spring around key operational functions. The team members responsible for these functions are clearly identified on our website and have been communicated to the program directors and chairs.
 - Academic affairs: Anything related to academic programs and student academic progress
 - Student engagement: Anything related to student experiences with UD from the moment we contact a prospective student until the moment they graduate and beyond. This includes recruitment, retention and special programming.
 - Professional development
 - UD Online and Professional Continuing Studies: This includes outreach to new types of learners who would benefit from a graduate education.
 - Communications and marketing
 - Business operations and budgeting
- **iThenticate roll-out.**
iThenticate is plagiarism detection software that the Graduate College has been using to scan theses for many years. Working with the Research Office, we have offered it to all faculty who want it and all program directors.

Recruiting and retaining the best students

The Graduate College has made a number of changes in the ways that we recruit and retain students over the last year. Currently, graduate admissions and the yield into our Summer and Fall 2021 programs remain very strong. For instance, on April 16, 2020, we had yielded 717 graduate students. On April 16 of this year, we have already yielded 1,024 graduate students with strong performances across all colleges, programs and demographics. Finely detailed reports are provided to program directors weekly. In this section, I will describe some of the activities that have led to this success. As I do so, I acknowledge all the efforts by colleges and departments to recruit graduate students into their programs. The role of the Graduate College is to coordinate and support university-wide efforts to bring prospective graduate students

“close” to our faculty and program directors, but the work of faculty and program directors is essential in the final steps in the recruitment of talented students.

Beginning in December 2019, the Graduate College contracted with EAB to develop an expansive thematic marketing program built around 20 data science-related programs. The program (launched in March 2020) involves regular Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Google, email, USPS mail, forms, content downloads, landing pages and surveys and proceeds to move prospective students through the funnel toward enrolling at UD. The uptake brought students to all our graduate programs, not just the data science programs. These efforts, combined with other promotional and recruitment efforts, led to 540 applications, 387 acceptances and 238 matriculations across a broad swatch of our graduate programs for the 2020-2021 academic year.

In late fall, we were offered a free new version of the campaign-related programs that will launch in mid-spring. We have opted for the overarching theme “Environment and Sustainability” to highlight the 40+ graduate programs that prepare graduate students to work in fields that fall under this umbrella.

While in-person recruiting was not possible, the Graduate College participated in virtual events hosted by the Department of State to recruit international graduate students. Graduate Admission staff recruited in the following countries in four separate October/November events before the heavier admissions cycle: Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia & Indonesia. There are six accepted offers from these countries. Undergraduate International Admissions has also collaborated with Graduate Admissions to recruit graduate students in Central and South America with 3000 graduate prospects loaded into the Slate CRM to be directed to our graduate programs. The Graduate College additionally coordinated or supported UD’s participation in various conferences for the purposes of recruiting domestic underrepresented or marginalized students (e.g., SACNAS, ABRCMS, Grace Hopper, Black Doctoral Network, etc.).

During the last admissions cycle, the Graduate College streamlined and updated the review processes for its Graduate Scholar Awards, Unidel Graduate Fellows, Doctoral Fellows and Dissertation Fellows. By adjusting deadlines, we permitted admissions committees to get offers into the hands of prospects sooner so that they could make well-informed decisions about studying at the University of Delaware.

The Graduate College created and implemented a Competitive Counteroffer program, allowing graduate programs to request one-time awards up to \$5,000 for their top prospective students who have more attractive funding offers from comparable programs. Our reasoning is that we want UD to compete on the quality of our faculty and programs. The Competitive Counteroffer program is designed to remove financial barriers so that a strong prospective student will only consider program quality (and come to UD!). During the current cycle, we made 23 counteroffers, of which 13 were accepted.

Slightly more than half of our graduate students pay their own tuition, and for these students, our graduate tuition rate structure represented a significant barrier to entry. The existing structure was too complex and needlessly overpriced many programs. To address the problem, the Graduate College worked closely with Institutional Research to perform a graduate tuition fee study based on actual enrollments. Using that data and working collaboratively and strategically with the other deans and the Research Office, we were able to realign and aggregate our graduate tuition rates so that 90% of our programs fall under one new base rate. Some programs have higher or lower rates based on various factors, including competitive market research and demonstrated success at their existing price point. The new graduate tuition base rate is \$950/credit, which is roughly half of the old published base rate, something that radically alters perception of and increases access to graduate education at UD.

In addition to reaching out to new prospective students, the Graduate College encourages and supports pipeline programs to bring talented undergraduates to campus over the summer for research experiences. Thirty-three students participated virtually in the 2020 Grad College-sponsored UD Summer Opportunities for Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors (SOURCE) program. Eleven participants completed UD graduate applications, eight were admitted, and one enrolled in spring 2021.

The Graduate College created a graduate assistant for graduate diversity programming position and hosted events geared at graduate students from underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds. These programs included the Autumn Gathering, Womxn of Color Panel series, and our diversity professional development series. We also advocated for creation of a new Black, Indigenous, and People of Color graduate student support group at the Center for Counseling and Student Development. Finally, this new position supported Graduate College efforts to incorporate more diversity-related thinking in the design and execution of our regular programming including Spring Orientation and our Involvement Fair.

Building a welcoming, respectful, strong, diverse and resilient graduate community

Graduate students represent a distinct community on campus at the University of Delaware, and the Graduate College is firmly committed to listening to that community, involving that community in the key decisions that affect them and strengthening that community through our programs and activities. The graduate community, which is well-represented by the Graduate Student Government, has concerns about the conditions under which they study and work on campus. During the last year, the Graduate College has engaged with them on these issues to improve their circumstances where possible and create a sustained, collaborative problem-solving relationship. The communication structure is discussed in the Operational Excellence section.

The national dialog on social justice had a profound impact on the graduate student population culminating in the “Petition for the University of Delaware to Take Concrete Actions in Solidarity

with the Black Community NOW.” The Graduate College worked with the deans of all the colleges, the Interim Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion and later the Office of Institutional Equity Diversity and Inclusion (OIEDI) to answer questions and share information about the concrete steps our university is taking and will continue to take to promote social justice on campus. Some of the issues and concerns will be integrated into the Graduate College’s strategic plan.

Responding to student concerns about their minimum stipends, we created a stipend task force, consisting of Graduate College team members, business officers and graduate students, to study the adequacy and structure of our minimum stipend. We have recently received their report and accepted their recommendations. We will implement them over the coming year.

Fostering innovation in graduate education

The Graduate College is committed to graduate innovation in many forms. One of the most important of these is the support and development of new interdisciplinary programs. Next fall, we will welcome six interdisciplinary programs into the Graduate College:

- Community Engagement Certificate
- Sustainability Certificate
- M.S. in Data Science
- M.A./Ph.D. in Education and Social Policy
- M.S./Ph.D. in Microbiology
- Ph.D. in Neuroscience

Three of these are existing programs that were envisioned to move into the Graduate College once it was established. The others are newly created this year. These interdisciplinary programs hold the promise of attracting especially strong students who want to earn their degrees in a cross-disciplinary program of study drawn from faculty from departments across different colleges. The Graduate College will provide administrative and logistic support similar to what a department would provide to a disciplinary program. We will also coordinate teaching and other activities across college boundaries to ensure the smooth operation of the program.

Another key element of our mission to innovate is reaching new populations of learners who would benefit from a UD graduate education. Helping graduate students balance work, family and advanced education responsibilities, the UD Graduate College offered 23 completely online graduate programs during the 2020-2021 academic year through our UD Online channel. With 879 students enrolled in online master’s programs and 37 students enrolled in online graduate certificate programs, the Graduate College online enrollment grew by 15% over the previous year and 695% since 2016.

The Graduate College is also supportive of initiatives to repackage graduate education. The most common of these approaches is to develop stackable credentials that allow students to

earn a certificate and then combine distinct interconnected certificates to earn an advanced degree.

Providing opportunities for professional development so that graduate students and postdocs can achieve their career aspirations

The Graduate College provides two kinds of professional development to graduate students and postdocs. First, we provide integrated, holistic professional development for graduate students to help them thrive during their time on campus and beyond. These focus on core competencies:

- Leadership & Management
- Effective Communication
- Teaching & Mentoring
- Wellbeing & Personal Growth
- Career Navigation

Although the Graduate College could not hold in-person professional development programs over the past year, Grad College leaders partnered with other University organizations to prepare, organize and host eight virtual events focused on students' professional growth. The Graduate College hosted "How Grant Reviewers Read" workshop and a two-part "Building Resilience Beyond Graduate School" workshop series. We also worked with UD's Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning (CTAL) to present "How to be a Successful Teaching Assistant Online!", delivered three UD Career Spotlight for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences presentations, and hosted the Graduate Student Involvement Fair in conjunction with graduate student organizations and University Services.

Second, we provide career development programming that supports individual students and postdocs, graduate student organizations, and academic departments. Graduate students and postdocs now have access to one-on-one career advising appointments with the Assistant Dean for Graduate Professional Development. Graduate student organizations and academic departments can also request tailored career skill building workshops for their groups. This last year, we launched our Accelerate to Industry (A2i) program. The A2i program is a national workforce development program to help students navigate into non-academic career pathways by leveraging our alumni network. In our first year, we offered a 10-part series of live-online workshops led by alumni speakers from the computer software, biotechnology, information technology and pharmaceutical industries holding positions in the data science, communications, project management, and research and development fields.

The GA for graduate diversity programming has additionally organized professional development events that are focused on the needs of graduate students from underrepresented

or marginalized backgrounds. Some of these have been in partnership with the assistant dean for graduate professional development and Career Services, highlighting similar topics as described taking into consideration unique experiences and concerns that non-majority students may have. Panelists in the Womxn of Color series have also shared academic and professional tips for attendees in ways that provided mentorship and supported students' development.

Supporting, developing and enhancing opportunities for graduate and postdoctoral research, scholarship and creative expression

The Graduate College recognizes that research is not a zero-sum game. Graduate students extend the reach of our research programs, and research opportunities enhance and augment graduate experiences. The Graduate College provides substantial internal resources to support graduate research. During the last year, we awarded 149 competitive fellowships consisting of roughly 35% of our overall budget. During the last year, we have partnered with other units to leverage some of these assets in support of large graduate training grant proposals such as the NIH T32.

The Graduate College provided an engaging pathway for sharing research, insight and expertise from students and postdoctoral researchers by creating a new Graduate Student Seminar Series. The seminar has a unique format where students and postdocs are asked to address a general educated audience. With seminars covering topics in arts and humanities; biological and health sciences; business and economics; math, physical sciences and engineering; and social sciences, students and postdoctoral researchers honed their crafts while enlightening others.

The Graduate College also recognizes its special role at UD as being a unit specifically dedicated to supporting interdisciplinary research. We are currently refining a pilot project to directly support new cross-college interdisciplinary graduate and postdoctoral research activities.

Finally, recognizing that student success is enabled by mentorship, the Graduate College has led efforts around improving the mentoring skills of faculty, especially from a cross-cultural perspective. To that end, we identified an opportunity for UD to be one of the sites participating in the Culturally Aware Mentoring study led by mentoring experts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Twenty-four faculty members from biomedical research departments on campus participated in these workshops and we are exploring opportunities to introduce these and other mentoring promising practices to a larger set of faculty in the coming months.

Acknowledgments

The Graduate College and graduate education at UD had an excellent year despite the double pandemic and challenging budget landscape. Much of that success happened through the intense and often unseen efforts of the many Graduate College team members, including Michael Alexo, Elizabeth Hagovsky, George Irvine, Steve Kendus, Cindy King, Mary Martin, LaRuth McAfee, Cindy Rechsteiner, Suprawee Tepsuporn, and many others on the Graduate College/Professional Continuing Studies teams as well as Mark Parcels, Paul Laux, Rich Braun, Amy Griffin and all those who answered the call to serve on the GCC.