

Annual Report of the Graduate School 2020-21

Examples of the Graduate School's Advancement of the University's Strategic Plan

This has been an unprecedented year in that not only was there was the impact of COVID-19, but also a heightened awareness of systemic racism and growing economic disparity. These elements have made this an incredibly unique year and one that has challenged all of us across the university as well as in the Graduate School to develop a range of responses in an attempt to deal with a range of different issues. Overall, the Graduate School very successfully migrated the vast majority of our operations to the virtual environment and have been effective in offering graduate students, post-doctoral scholars, and the broader graduate community across the university the full range of services that we are known for.

1. Enhance the success of our students through educational innovation

Graduate Student Issues Task Force

This newly established task force was developed to examine a range of issues experienced by graduate students. Its composition included graduate students, staff, faculty, and administrators and was co-chaired by the GSA President Lexie Malico and the Dean of the Graduate School Peter Harries. During the course of the past year, we focused on three issues: 1) flexibility and constraints for international students; 2) students fees; and 3) a rights and responsibilities document for graduate education at NC State.

In terms of the first item, we discussed a range of issues led by the Director of the Office for International Services, Elizabeth James, who discussed in detail the various federal limitations on international students with a focus on issues related to Curricular and Optional Practical Training. The existing federal guidelines place significant constraints on these elements and showed the constraints under which NC State must operate to stay in compliance.

The issue of student fees engendered significant discussion about which fees were relevant to graduate students. After a careful consideration of the various fees, a consensus was reached that most fees provide important resources to graduate students and should be maintained. That said, there was a strong sense that the Athletics Fee is not widely used by graduate students and should be excluded, although the sense was that there should be an 'opt in' ability for those graduate students that would like to attend athletic events. There was also agreement that graduate students should be included in committees and have a voice in determining how of some fees, such as the Union Activities Board and the Student Publication and Media fees, are utilized.

Most of the Spring semester was spent crafting a draft of a rights and responsibilities document similar to those that exist at other institutions (e.g., <https://grad.ucla.edu/academics/graduate-study/graduate-student-academic-rights-and-responsibilities/>, <https://grad.ucla.edu/academics/graduate-study/graduate-student-academic-rights-and-responsibilities/>). After reviewing a range of these documents, the task force concluded that the document should encompass graduate education more broadly and be used as a means of creating a common set of values and expectations around the topic. Furthermore, a consensus was reached that the document should be as streamlined as possible. The expectation is that the current draft will be commented on and ultimately endorsed by various groups across campus, including the Graduate Student Association, Student Government, Faculty Senate, the Administrative Board of the Graduate School, the Graduate Operations Council, Deans Council hopefully during the Fall semester.

International Enrollment: The enrollment area that was most negatively impacted by the pandemic were international graduate students due to a combination of travel bans, issues associated with ability to procure visas, as well as a combination of the uncertainty and the perceptions related to the previous federal administration. In response to these issues the Graduate School partnered with OIS to develop a series of town halls specifically for admitted international focused primarily on

issues related to visas, quarantines, but also an overview of various elements of NC State.

Attendance has typically been over 400 admitted students and it is clear that they are very motivated to attend if they can overcome the various barriers to their arrival in the US.

Professional Development: 300 students took part in 23 synchronous offerings that focused on the basics of academic writing and included the Engineering Cafes. This represents a 50% increase in attendance from 2019-2020 suggests that word has spread about our writing support workshops but also suggests that trainees find the synchronous interactive online workshop format accessible and useful for their goals especially in the one-off writing workshop. We also held an “Online Writing Retreat” with ~90 attendees. As part of the rebrand, the virtual writing retreat maintained a focus on helping students make progress on milestone writing projects, such as dissertations and theses, while offering opportunities to integrate writing into broader professional goals. The Graduate Writing Certificate also was developed as a transcript notation to help document ability in transferable writing skills.

During 2020-2021, Accelerate to Industry’s (A2i) Job Search Strategies module was offered in every semester was both A2i’s first virtual session and our first collaborative module with our academic partners. Summer 2020 JSS registered over 880 students from across 18 universities representing 9 states. In the second year of our NSF grant, we recruited with 9 additional institutions. On April 21-23, A2i held its first virtual Training Institute. We registered 60+ trainees and on average 55 participants attended each session including Deans and individuals that work on professional development, career services, marketing and communications, and corporate engagement from across our academic partner network.

Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA): Many of the offering of the office were moved to a virtual environment including the Postdoctoral Research Symposium. In January 2021, OPA launched a new program to walk graduate students and postdocs through the informational interview process to learn more about particular career paths. The office and the NC State Postdoctoral Association’s

efforts to support our community during COVID-19 were highlighted in the National Postdoctoral Association's *POSTDOCKET* newsletter and the ImPACKful blog.

Recruitment: The Graduate School managed interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary fellowships, traineeships, and award programs (~\$6.3 million). A total of 196 top applicants were recruited using fellowships funded by the Office of the Provost and administered by the Graduate School. We also partnered with graduate programs to fund 50 department-level recruiting initiatives through competitive recruiting proposals. Four Innovation Recruiting Grants were awarded to programs to promote a comprehensive overhaul of recruiting processes to increase the quality of students applying and enrolling at NC State.

Outstanding Graduate Faculty Mentor Awards: The awards for this year were in two areas: Social Sciences, Business and Education, and Biological and Life Sciences. To date, twelve graduate faculty have been selected for awards. In addition, the faculty awards for the Alumni Association's Outstanding Graduate Faculty were overseen by the Graduate School.

4. Enhance organizational excellence by creating a culture of constant improvement

Improvements in Graduate School Processes:

- The Graduate School, in collaboration with the Office of Assessment & Accreditation (OAA) has restructured the external review process which is now focused on: 1) increased and intentional use of program and assessment data during completion of the self-study to provide clarity and focus and encourage data-driven decision-making; 2) increased focus on strategic program development; 3) reorganization of the review schedule so that programs within departments are considered simultaneously and, where applicable, to ensure that the reviews mesh with other types of accreditation. The Graduate School has initiated, in collaboration with EMAS, the creation of a dashboard to consolidate and facilitate access to data pertaining to graduate programs. The underlying new program data profiles will be instrumental in the

implementation of the new strategic program reviews and will also make it easier to access critical data for faculty and programs seeking external funding

- The Graduate School and OAA has worked with the colleges to determine the proper workflow for each academic program. Work still needs to be done with the Institutional Strategy and Analysis office (ISA) and its APA software expert so that these changes are implemented.
- In collaboration with the OAA, nine graduate programs were selected for recognition in the inaugural Excellence in Assessment Award. This recognition is for degree and certificate programs that meet NC State's expectations for quality of assessment and additionally incorporate multiple best practices in their assessment processes aimed at improving student learning.
- Further work has continued in developing CIM Catalog at the graduate level. This has included the implementation of a comprehensive graduate catalog that contains all program requirements, faculty listings, and the graduate handbook. This has had a positive impact for both recruiting purposes, mentoring, and academic planning in that it helps assure that students know what courses they need to take to complete their program.
- In conjunction with the new CIM Catalog, we have also been initiating CIM for Programs. The aim of this is to create an online routing system for program development as compared to the current 'paper process'. This will allow much more ready access of all involved in the development of new programs where the position of a given proposal can be determined in the process.
- In collaboration with IT, the Graduate School have also begun to initiate a Graduate Degree Audit, which to a certain degree mirrors the process that exists at the undergraduate level, although the increased flexibility at the graduate level, especially for doctorates, makes this more challenging. At this point, we have implemented a graduate degree audit focused on

programs that have relatively defined curricular. It has been put in place for all graduate certificate programs and for several programs, including Architecture, Advanced Analytics, and Environmental Assessment. We are in the process of working with other non-thesis masters programs to implement their audit. We are in the process of rolling out an audit, committee page, and student course planner tool for all graduate programs.

- Triggered by COVID, we have begun the process of moving or various forms to an on-line process that should result in significant streamlining and increasing the efficiency of this process. Currently, we have moved the form related to the final defense to the environment, which has made it much more efficient to gather the signatures of various committee members.
- We also updated and adjusted a range of policies in response to COVID. This included incorporating S/U grading, allowing late withdraws, and allowing international students to start programs in the virtual environment. Although most of these elements will likely not continue going forward, one policy change that was necessitated by COVID that will likely be incorporated into the future is the use of remote preliminary and final oral exams as the engagement in these by a much broader audience speaks to the value of this format.
- We also worked with Donor Services to develop more uniform processes and approaches to funds that support graduate education.

Program Development: The Graduate School assisted faculty and departments with the planning of new programs and revision of existing ones. It also coordinated responses with the Provost's office to UNC SO and SACSCOC on proposed new degrees for NC State and coordinated responses to the UNC SO Graduate Council on proposed new degrees at other UNC universities. The Administrative Board of the Graduate School reviewed 32 actions for graduate degree programs and approved almost 200 course actions.

Fellowships and Awards: In 2020-21, The Graduate School administered interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary fellowships, traineeships, and award programs estimated at \$6.6 million across 32 projects. This included \$1,145,490 for 12 matching commitments being provided by the Office of the Provost. Provost's Fellowships and University Graduate Fellowships were used to recruit a total of 231 newly admitted students to our doctoral programs. In addition, The Graduate School awarded 35 Diversity Recruiting Fellowships (\$69K). A total of 149 applications from students requesting support under the Diversity Enhancement Grant program were received -- 59 grants averaging \$2510 each were awarded using UNC Campus Scholarship funds designated for in-state doctoral students with financial need and another 21 grants averaging \$1071 each were awarded to students using Diversity Graduate Assistance Grant funds. Finally, two PhD students were recruited using funds provided by the Office of the Provost for the SREB Doctoral Scholars Program. There are currently 20 SREB Doctoral Scholars, and to date two have received their PhDs.

Outstanding Graduate Faculty Mentor Awards: The awards for this past year were in two areas: Mathematical Sciences, Physical Sciences and Engineering *and Humanities and Design*. Since 2015-16, fourteen graduate faculty have been selected for awards.

Recruiting Proposals: The Graduate School partnered with graduate programs to fund 40 department-level recruiting initiatives through competitive recruiting proposals. Four Innovation Recruiting Grants also were awarded to programs to promote a comprehensive overhaul of recruiting processes to increase the quality of students applying and enrolling at NC State.

Another element that was added during COVID to enhance the recruitment was the development in collaboration with STEMbrite 5- and 10-minute videos focused on individual programs.

University Fellowship Office (UFO): This office reports jointly to DASA and The Graduate School and is directed by Courtney Hughes. In 2020-21 the UFO held 412 student appointments and hosted 26

in-class/specialized workshops via Zoom. There are 35 total documented externally-funded fellowship winners.

5. Enhance local and global engagement through focused strategic partnerships

Agreements with Other Countries: The Graduate School working with the Office of Global Engagement developed a new model of cost sharing with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. This model involved a funding formula that involved the partnering of the GSSP resources as well as HEC and departmental funding to provide a robust, shared support package. The hope is that this can serve as a means to expand the engagement of NC State with the specific graduate funding sources available through a range of different countries.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Recruitment: In addition to offering fellowships and grants designed for URM recruitment and retention, the Graduate School engaged in other efforts as well. Graduate School representatives participated in 26 diversity-focused recruiting fairs and conferences. While all in-person Campus Visit Programs were cancelled in 2020, David Shafer met with prospective students via Zoom one-on-one, and also made numerous virtual presentations.

Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness (DEI) in Graduate Education: The Graduate School continued to organize the DEI committee comprised of representatives from a number of colleges and units to develop collaborative activities to recruit and retain graduate students from underrepresented groups. Bridget Foy sets up the meetings and takes the minutes. The chair of this committee rotates periodically. The DEI Committee now jointly hosts the “Crosstalks”, previously organized solely by The Graduate School. These events are designed to promote diversity in graduate education and to build a stronger community by giving students the opportunity to network with other graduate students from diverse backgrounds. The DEI Committee is currently working on two “best practices” documents – one for URM recruitment and one for URM retention.

International Recruitment: The Graduate School in collaboration with the Office of Global Engagement has engaged in a number of activities throughout the last years to increase the diversity of our international student population. In 2020-21, webinars and virtual seminars were given to prospective students across the world primarily via events organized through EdUSA and at virtual conferences. We participated in 10 international [recruiting fairs/events](#) and made the six presentations to prospective international students in coordination with the Office of Global Engagement. We have also expanded the role of our International Specialist to develop recruitment efforts aimed at diversify the range of countries of our international students.

Future plans: The Graduate School is also working on a proposal for a Summer bridge program for diverse doctoral students focused on demystifying graduate education, building and promoting communication and a sense of belonging among these students, and allowing them to gain experience with graduate coursework and the research environment. This is modeled, in part, after the very successful Florida Education Fund's McKnight Fellowship.

Administration: Changes and Achievements

Changes: The Graduate School had two new hires necessitated by the retiring of two staff members: Shiela Thomas, Admissions Processor, and Denise Wesselow, International Admissions Specialist. They were replaced by Jasmyn Rochester and Hayley Hardenbook, respectively.

Selected Achievements:

- Dean Peter Harries continues to chair the Grants in Aid of Research Committee of Sigma. He also made a number of presentations at several Council of Graduate Schools meetings, for the Council of Southern Graduate Schools, and also at a NORC conference focused on COVID impacts on graduate education.
- Associate Dean Pierre Gremaud has given several research presentations; he was one of the leaders of the SAMSI program on numerical analysis in data science and served on NSF panels.

- Assistant Dean Laura Demarse received the Blackburn Award for Exemplary Program from the AAU and served on the Cary Economic Development Board.
- Assistant Dean Lian Lynch served on a variety of COVID related committees, on top of those that she has traditionally taken part in. Of note are her work on the Student Support and Digital Transformations Innovation Task Forces.
- Assistant Dean David Shafer has given many virtual presentations over the past year as well as serving as a reviewer at various levels for graduate fellowships and as a member in professional organizations. These include serving on: the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Next Quarter Century Advisory Committee, Conference of Southern Graduate Schools Membership Committee, and the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program Review Panelist.

Recommendations: As we begin the repopulation of campus following COVID, we need to continuously evaluate the changes that were made largely around the move to a virtual setting back into a repopulated campus. It is clear that office effectively pivoted the vast majority of our operations and offering to the virtual environment, but there are clearly elements that are more effective in person.

Concerns: The impact of COVID has been and remains a critical element impacting how we function and what we need to consider going forward. Although the office functions and numerous other aspects of our offerings to constituents have very successfully moved to a virtual format, we know that there are other elements in terms of certain services and offerings that have not. We also need to rebuild the sense of community within the Graduate School and although there will always be required functions that are transactional, we need to focus on innovations and new approaches that we must develop to make the office as effective, impactful, and collaborative as possible.