

Graduate Student Affairs

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Graduate Student Affairs

Enhancing the Quality of Graduate Student Life

Mission

The central mission of the Office of Graduate Student Affairs (GSA) is to enhance the quality of graduate student life by working closely with individual students, student organizations, faculty, and other campus offices. The aim is to provide a broad array of programs on issues related to graduate student life, such as health, safety, housing, mentoring, and professional development.

GSA also has a particular role in establishing support services that address the specific needs of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, international students, gay and lesbian students, students with disabilities, women, and other groups. This office is committed to helping students become active participants in the Duke University community.

Located at 2127 Campus Drive, Graduate Student Affairs serves as a principal point of contact for all graduate students wishing to express their comments and concerns about the quality of graduate student life here at Duke. We urge you to take full advantage of the services offered by our office. You are welcome to come by at any time to talk about your experiences as a student or just to say hello. You can also consult us by telephone at **684-2056** or by e-mail at grad-gsa@duke.edu.

Goals

- To assess the academic, financial, social, personal, and cultural needs of graduate students
- To develop programs that encourage faculty and student participation in student affairs
- To assist departments in creating supportive environments for their students
- To support departments in identifying and recruiting applicants from traditionally underrepresented groups

Program Components

GSA provides institutional leadership in helping to improve the lives and experiences of graduate students through four central components: Landmark Programs, Professional Development, Social Programs, and Initiatives for Underrepresented Students. Major programs include **New Student Orientation**, the **Graduate Student Information Session**, **Professional Development Workshop Series**, the *Dean's Awards for Excellence in Mentoring*, **Graduate Student Appreciation Week**, **Family Fun Fairs**, and the **Ph.D. Hooding Ceremony**. The Graduate School's commitment to its students carries on past graduation through GSA's program collaborations with Alumni Affairs and the Career Center.

Landmark Programs

GSA hosts programs that mark students' progress throughout their graduate career. **New Student Orientation** aids students in their transition to Duke by providing crucial information about the academic community, policies, and resources. The **Graduate Student Information Session** takes place during **New Student Orientation** and features representatives from various university offices and Durham businesses. A **Ph.D. Candidates Reception** honors those who pass preliminary examinations each year. During Commencement Weekend, GSA hosts the **Ph.D. Hooding Ceremony and Reception**, which celebrates the culmination of doctoral study.

Academic and Professional Development Programs

Graduate Student Affairs cooperates with other campus groups and offices to co-sponsor many events that contribute to the professional development of graduate students, such as career exploration workshops co-sponsored by the Career Center and the Office for Postdoctoral Services, presentation skills workshops, and research presentation opportunities. The Graduate School cultivates a culture of good mentoring practices essential to students' professional development by highlighting the recipients of the *Dean's Awards for Excellence in Mentoring* and their accomplishments at a reception held during the Fall semester. Professional development events are also included as part of **Graduate Student Appreciation Week**. All these opportunities are posted on co-sponsors' Web sites and announced in e-mail messages from GSA staff.

Social Programs

GSA coordinates activities designed specifically to encourage social interaction among graduate students. Several events during **New Student Orientation** help new students become acquainted with fellow students and Duke faculty. **Graduate Student Appreciation Week** recognizes graduate students' contributions to Duke's academic climate with a roster of enjoyable social events and practical workshops on student life issues such as funding, housing, and dissertation support. To provide regular networking opportunities for graduate students with children, GSA also hosts several **Family Fun Fairs** each year.

Diversity Initiatives

The Graduate School has a long-standing commitment to increasing the diversity and quality of its graduate student body. Our primary goals are to increase the enrollment of students from underrepresented groups, to provide underrepresented students with sufficient funding to complete their graduate studies in a timely manner, and to promote an academic and social environment where all scholars can flourish.

A key mission of the Office of Graduate Student Affairs is to coordinate, supplement, and expand the recruiting efforts of graduate departments and programs. Aggressive, targeted recruiting strategies are vital to these efforts, and the involvement of Duke's graduate faculty is central to these strategies. Each year GSA participates in recruitment fairs across the country that enable us to meet potential graduate students and to answer any questions they might have about Duke's graduate programs. GSA assembles a recruiting team of students, faculty, and staff to attend these fairs. Duke also collaborates with UNC-Chapel Hill and NC State University to arrange regional visits for groups of schools that bring their most promising undergraduate student researchers from underrepresented groups. Other mechanisms the Graduate School employs in the recruitment of students from underrepresented groups include participation in national consortia designed to promote graduate education and targeted recruitment visits to various historically black colleges and universities and other institutions that serve students from historically underrepresented groups. GSA also helps to initiate and develop the external and institutional funding to support various summer research opportunities that identify potential graduate students early in their college careers.

Program Support

GSA's programs are developed, supported, and enhanced through four program support elements: Advocacy, Communications, Student Group Support, and Program Evaluation. These elements ensure that GSA develops its programs and resources in such a way that they are accessible, inviting, and responsive to the needs of all segments of the graduate community.

Advocacy

Graduate Student Affairs makes every attempt to assess and to respond to the concerns of Duke graduate students. The **Child Care Subsidy, Childbirth and Adoption Accommodation Policy**, and efforts to recognize and promote best practices in graduate student mentoring are examples of initiatives that arose from GSA's response to students' expressed needs and concerns. In many instances, GSA is the initial point of contact for graduate students, offering informal counseling and advising.

Furthermore, GSA acts as the liaison between the Graduate School and the Career Center; Counseling and Psychological Services; the Office for Institutional Equity; the Student Disability Access Office, the central university Office of Student Affairs; and other campus offices. The Office of Graduate Student Affairs works to create linkages with Duke's graduate departments and the university administration. In addition, GSA representatives are members of national committees, graduate consortia, and professional associations concerned with issues related to graduate student life.

Communications

GSA works to enhance communication within the graduate community. GSA staff members serve on a variety of committees that explore and evaluate new models of communication with students. Targeted e-mail announcements keep students informed about GSA events and other university programs. Additionally, the repository of helpful information in the Resources for Current Students section of the Graduate School's Web site (<http://gradschool.duke.edu/student/>) continues to grow.

To strengthen communication among graduate students, faculty, and staff, GSA also sponsors a number of resource publications, many of which are now available online at <http://gradschool.duke.edu/gsa/publications/>. The *Graduate School Newsletter* is posted online four times per year. This publication highlights particular student issues, features student profiles, and identifies university resources. The *Prescription for Persistence* series is an archive of articles, which gives current students strategies that will help them throughout their graduate careers.

Student Group Support

GSA advises and assists several graduate student organizations, including the Black Graduate and Professional Student Association (BGPSA), the Bouchet Society, Duke Chinese Students and Scholars Association (DCSSA), DukeOUT, the Graduate and Professional Student Council (GPSC), Graduate and Professional Parents (GAPP), the Graduate and Professional Women's Network (GPWN), the Native American Student Alliance (NASA), the Society of Duke Fellows (SDF), and Women in Science and Engineering (WiSE). These groups help GSA to invest a portion of its time and resources in programming that addresses the specific needs of many important segments of the graduate community that don't get addressed when looking only at needs based on academic discipline.

Program Evaluation

Developing formal and informal mechanisms for program evaluation is crucial in assessing the effectiveness of GSA services and in instituting new programs. Formal evaluation of GSA's programs is carried out through surveys of major activities, followed by analysis and progress reports. Assessment of GSA's effectiveness is also supported by collaborating with the Graduate School Office of Finance and Enrollment Services to track students throughout the admissions process and to prepare retention data. Informal evaluations of GSA events are conducted with individual students, student groups, and graduate faculty. Additionally, GSA regularly seeks feedback from its Graduate Student Affairs Advisory Committee. Composed of faculty, students, and staff representing each broad disciplinary area in the Graduate School, the Graduate Student Affairs Advisory Committee's role is to serve as an evaluative resource in program development and to help in adopting specific strategies to meet program goals.

Prescription for Persistence: Strategies for Staying the Course in Graduate School

Jacqueline Looney, Senior Associate Dean and Associate Vice Provost

By now, many of you have probably heard about or actually experienced first hand “the good, the bad, and the ugly” of pursuing a graduate degree. The truth is that whether you are a newcomer to Duke’s graduate community or a returning student, there are many challenges you will face at each stage of your study: course work, preliminary examinations, and dissertation. The key, however, is finding useful ways of navigating this difficult, but mostly rewarding, terrain of graduate study. Here I offer a few suggestions for staying the course. Ultimately, it is my hope that you will be a success here at Duke and will find Duke a rewarding place to pursue your graduate work.

BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK

Your perception about how you are or are not supported by the university community will greatly influence your experiences (academic and social) while here. A first step for you is to take ownership of and to recognize the fact that you are an important part of what makes Duke University a world-class institution. Second, get involved with the Graduate and Professional Student Council (GPSC) or other graduate student organizations. These groups serve important advocacy roles by helping the University to identify and to address the needs of its graduate students. Third, interact with students inside and outside your academic and professional disciplines; seek out or create your own support groups (e.g., writing and dissertation groups); share works in progress for feedback from peers; and participate in campus-sponsored intellectual activities.

EXPLORE EXPECTATIONS

To start, make sure you take time to read *Best Practices: Core Expectations for Graduate Education at Duke University* (available in the Academics section of the *Graduate School Student Handbook* and at <http://gradschool.duke.edu/academics/standards/bestpractices.php>). This document summarizes the expectations of graduate students, faculty, departments and programs, and the Graduate School in creating a productive graduate research environment. In addition, you should ask your director of graduate studies (DGS) or other departmental faculty and staff to provide written guidelines for completing each stage of your departmental degree requirements: course work, preliminary examinations, dissertation prospectus, and the writing of the dissertation. Keep all this information in an accessible spot at home or on campus. Also take time periodically to think about your own expectations for graduate school and communicate with your mentors, advisors, and fellow students as these expectations develop and evolve.

ASSESS YOUR FUNDING

Review your admissions material again to make sure that you fully understand the terms of your graduate fellowship: What is the stipend amount? Are tuition and fees covered? Are there teaching, research, or other requirements? How many years of support are guaranteed? What are the academic requirements for keeping the award? At the appropriate time, you should consider entering departmental, graduate school, and national competitions for additional funding such as travel grants, teaching and research fellowships, and dissertation support.

SEEK MENTORS

It is important to establish mentoring relationships with faculty early in your academic career. Good mentoring will ensure that you are well trained in your discipline, successfully complete your degree, and have adequate job opportunities.

Mentors are essential in helping you to learn about unwritten rules and informal networks in your department. Because of the variety of roles that mentors serve, we encourage you to seek out multiple mentoring partnerships (inside and outside the department). One mentor might be good at coaching, teaching, and advising; another at helping to identify potential job placements; and another at giving insight about balancing your personal and professional lives.

USE YOUR RESOURCES

Take full advantage of the resources and services, such as those that you will find in the *Graduate School Student Handbook*, provided by the University to help you to accomplish your academic, personal, and professional goals. For more information about these resources, visit the Graduate School Web site (<http://gradschool.duke.edu/>).

CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Graduate school is a time to explore your deepest interests and discover what you are capable of accomplishing. Use these years to explore your field, take challenging coursework, and engage fully in research. Also consider becoming involved in community service, taking a course outside your field, or doing something to develop other interests outside the lab and classroom.

CARE FOR YOURSELF

Carefully review and make sure that you understand the guidelines for your health and insurance benefits. As best as you can, try to maintain a healthy lifestyle by getting adequate sleep, eating healthfully, getting plenty of exercise, and staying in touch with family and friends. If you're not in good health (physical and mental) chances are you won't have a productive course of study.

ENGAGE SOCIALLY

Although your main reasons for being here are intellectual, social outlets play an important role in enhancing your academic life. Isolation is a natural part of graduate student life. One way of stemming this isolation is by taking time to participate in social events sponsored by your department, the graduate school, GPSC, and other campus organizations. (This social involvement can also help to strengthen your intellectual networks.)

SHAPE YOUR CAREER

Your success here will also be determined by your own motivation, your perseverance, your discipline, and your ability to organize your time, as well as by how you prioritize and how you choose to use your resources. You are your own best advocate!

STAY SAFE

Do your part to protect yourself, others, and your belongings. Learn about the environment in which you live and work. Is it safe to walk alone or to leave your belongings unattended at a particular place at a certain time of day? The University provides a variety of resources to enhance your crime prevention skills and awareness. Be sure to identify and taken advantage of these resources, many of which are covered in the Safety and Security section of the *Graduate School Student Handbook*. More information on safety can be found at <http://www.duke.edu/web/police/services/>.

BE A SUCCESS. ...ASK FOR HELP

It is my hope that you will find Duke a wonderful place for your graduate study. Please also know that you are encouraged to ask for help to make this happen. Let someone know when you need help with academic or personal issues. Remember, all departmental faculty and many staff members were graduate students once. According to the National Association for Graduate-Professional Students, major areas of concern for graduate students nationwide include health, mentoring and advising, job preparation and placement, and mental well-being. I urge you to take full advantage of the services provided in the Graduate School, the Career Center, Counseling and Psychological Services, and other campus offices. I also invite you to challenge us to serve you better.