

Chapter 5
Graduate Student Affairs
Enhancing the Quality of Graduate Student Life

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A. Vision

To create an environment of support that inspires Duke’s graduate students to achieve their professional goals.

B. Mission

To enhance the quality of graduate student life by working closely with individual students, student organizations, faculty, and other campus offices through seven core components: advocacy, communications, diversity, evaluation, outreach, programs, and student groups.

C. Core Objectives

The core objectives of Graduate Student Affairs (GSA) are to assess student needs, build student support and resources, and identify, recruit, and retain a diverse student population. This is accomplished through comprehensive programming developed after evaluating students’ needs, partnering with student groups, and actively recruiting and preparing underrepresented students to be fully engaged as Duke graduate students. GSA staff combines these program components with innovative outreach, high levels of communication, and advocacy to enhance the quality of graduate student life.

D. Program Components

GSA hosts various programs that mark students’ progress throughout their graduate careers.

- New Student Orientation aids students in their transition to Duke by providing information about the academic community, policies, and resources.
- The Graduate Student Resource Fair takes place during New Student Orientation and features representatives from various university offices and the local community.
- A Milestone Recognition Reception for PhD candidates honors those who pass preliminary examinations each year.
- During Commencement weekend, GSA hosts the PhD Hooding Ceremony, which celebrates the culmination of doctoral study.

E. Professional Development Programs

GSA provides strategic leadership to ensure that Graduate School students can identify the full range of career options available to them and develop the transferable skills to succeed in those careers. The Graduate School sponsors and partners with groups and offices across campus to provide programs, resources, and professional development events to help students with every step along the way—from identifying potential career paths, to developing skills to compete for them, to managing their career. These offerings help prepare students for success in the full range of careers open to master's- and Ph.D.-prepared professionals. For an overview of Graduate School professional development programming, consult our [one-page handout](#) and [video introduction](#). For more information, visit The Graduate School’s professional development website, gradschool.duke.edu/professional-development.

F. Mentoring

GSA recognizes that mentoring is vital to graduate students' success, and The Graduate School is committed to cultivating a culture of mentoring in graduate education at Duke. Students with strong mentoring relationships are more productive, more involved in the campus community, and more satisfied with their graduate school experience. Mentoring support ensures that students are well trained, successfully complete their degrees, and obtain promising job opportunities. A dedicated [mentoring resources website](#) ensures that graduate students and the university community have the necessary tools to succeed.

G. Social Programs

GSA coordinates activities designed specifically to encourage social interaction among graduate students. Several events during New Student Orientation Week help new students become acquainted with fellow students and Duke faculty. Graduate and Professional Student Appreciation Week recognizes graduate and professional students' contributions to Duke's academic climate with a roster of social events, practical workshops, and talks that highlight the research contributions of graduate students to the Duke community. To provide regular networking opportunities for graduate students with children, GSA also hosts several GradParents Group events each year. In addition, GSA coordinates the annual Homecoming Celebration and other special events to promote community, such as gatherings for faculty and students of color as well as LGBTQ and allies.

H. Diversity and Inclusion

The Graduate School is dedicated to and benefits from a student population diverse in background, culture, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and work and life experiences that contribute to a fuller representation of perspectives within the academic life of the university. The Graduate School encourages applications from all those sectors of society, including prospective students whose life experiences may include the challenge of access due to a disability.

As part of Duke's long-standing commitment to increase the diversity and quality of its graduate student body, The Graduate School works to:

- increase enrollment of students from traditionally underrepresented groups,
- provide students with sufficient funding to complete their graduate studies in a timely manner, and
- promote an academic and social environment where these 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. Targeted recruiting strategies are vital to these efforts, and the involvement of Duke's graduate faculty is central to these strategies. Each year, GSA staff and faculty 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. Other mechanisms The Graduate School employs in the recruitment of students from diverse backgrounds include participation in national consortia designed to promote graduate education and targeted recruitment visits to institutions that serve students from historically underrepresented groups. GSA also

supports the [Summer Research Opportunities Program](#) (SROP), which identifies potential graduate students in the biomedical sciences in their undergraduate years, and the [Duke University Center of Exemplary Mentoring](#), which recruits and supports Ph.D. students from underrepresented minorities in the physical sciences and engineering.

Visit gradschool.duke.edu/about/commitment-diversity for more information on The Graduate School's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

I. 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. GSA is committed to giving students access to resources needed to achieve their scholarly, personal, and professional goals by recognizing the importance of student wellbeing, students with families, and student groups.

J. Advocacy

GSA makes every attempt to assess and to respond to the concerns of Duke graduate students. The [Child Care Subsidy](#), 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, advising, and follow-up.

Furthermore, GSA acts as the liaison between The Graduate School and the Career Center, [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS), [Duke Reach](#); the Office for Institutional Equity, the Disability Management Office, the central university [Office of Student Affairs](#), and other campus offices. The Office of Graduate Student Affairs collaborates 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.

The Graduate School makes a conscious effort to solicit and incorporate input from our graduate students as we work to enhance their experience. This is done in many ways, including standing meetings between the school leadership and various student organizations, particularly the Graduate and Professional Student Government, the official representative body for Ph.D. and master's students in The Graduate School. Aside from those meetings, there are several other ways we receive input from our students: the Graduate Student Affairs Advisory Committee, the GSA Graduate Student Liaisons, and the Council of Presidents. To learn more about those channels and how you can get involved, visit <https://gradschool.duke.edu/student-life/get-involved-share-your-ideas>.

K. Communications

GSA works directly with The Graduate School's senior director of communications to ensure cohesive communication within the graduate community and the university. GSA

staff members serve on various committees that explore and evaluate new models of communication with students.

GSA also uses a number of online resources to foster ongoing communication among graduate students, faculty, and staff:

- The Graduate School's listserv and social-media platforms deliver timely, targeted, and relevant information to keep students informed about GSA events and other university programs.
- The Graduate School's newsletter shares relevant and current information with students, alumni, faculty, and staff.
- The newsletter highlights student issues, features student profiles, and identifies useful resources. Visit <https://gradschool.duke.edu/about/newsletters> to subscribe to the newsletter.
- The online Student Handbook and Student Resources sections of The Graduate School website help students quickly find the information they need.

L. Student Group Support

GSA advises and assists a number of [graduate student organizations](#), including but not limited to: the Black Graduate and Professional Student Association, the Bouchet Society, Duke Chinese Students and Scholars Association, DukeOUT, the Hurston-James Society, the Graduate and Professional Student Government, GradParents Group, Duke FIRSTS, the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos Native Americans in Science, the Society of Duke Fellows, and Women in Science and Engineering. Graduate student groups help GSA invest its resources into programming that addresses the specific needs of various segments of the graduate community that may not be addressed within academic disciplines.

M. Program Evaluation

Developing formal and informal procedures 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 other Graduate School offices 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 (GSAAC). Composed of faculty, students, and staff representing each broad disciplinary area in The Graduate School, GSAAC's role is to serve as an evaluative resource in program development and to help in adopting specific strategies to meet program goals.