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**
- **Assess student needs:** To assess the academic, cultural, financial, personal, professional, and social needs of graduate students through the development of program-targeted surveys and through the review of comprehensive surveys conducted by the university.
- **Build student support and resources:** To create supportive environments for students by developing—and encouraging student, faculty, and departmental participation in—programs that foster personal and professional development.
- **Identify, recruit, and retain a diverse student population:** To supplement and expand the efforts of Duke’s graduate departments to establish a diverse community of scholars through development of targeted recruitment strategies. Further, to actively prepare and recruit undergraduate students from underrepresented groups to ensure that they become fully engaged members of the university community.

D. **Program Components**
Graduate Student Affairs (GSA) provides institutional leadership in helping to improve the lives and experiences of graduate students through four central components: Signature Programs, Professional Development, Social Programs, and Initiatives for Underrepresented Students.

The Graduate School’s commitment to its students extends beyond graduation through GSA’s program collaborations with Alumni Affairs and the Career Center.

1. **Signature Programs**
GSA hosts programs that mark students’ progress throughout their graduate careers.

   a. **New Student Orientation** aids students in their transition to Duke by providing crucial information about the academic community, policies, and resources.
   b. The **Graduate Student Information Session** takes place during **New Student Orientation** and features representatives from various university offices and Durham businesses.
   c. **Milestone Recognition Reception** for Ph.D. candidates honors those who pass preliminary examinations each year.
   d. During Commencement weekend, GSA hosts the **Ph.D. Hooding Ceremony and Reception**, which celebrates the culmination of doctoral study.
2. 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. To provide regular networking opportunities for graduate students with children, GSA also hosts several GradParents group events each year.

3. Diversity Initiatives

The Graduate School has a long-standing commitment to increasing the diversity and quality of its graduate student body. 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. Our primary goals are to: (1) increase the enrollment of students from underrepresented groups; (2) to provide all students with sufficient funding to complete their graduate studies in a timely manner; (3) to encourage applications from all sectors of society, including those whose life experiences may include the challenge of access due to a disability; and (4) 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. 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 participate in recruitment fairs and conferences across the country that enable us to meet prospective graduate students and to answer any questions they have about Duke’s graduate programs. Other mechanisms the Graduate School uses in the recruitment of students from diverse backgrounds include participation in national consortia designed to promote graduate education and visits to institutions that serve students from traditionally underrepresented groups. GSA also supports the Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP) that identifies potential graduate students in the biomedical sciences in their undergraduate years.

4. Professional Development

Graduate Student Affairs cooperates with other campus groups and offices to co-sponsor events, programs, and opportunities that contribute to the professional development of graduate students, from identifying potential career paths, to developing skills to compete for positions within them, to managing their careers. These offerings help prepare students for success in academia, business, entrepreneurship, government, and nonprofits. Visit our website for more information about programs, opportunities, and upcoming events.

E. 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.

1. Advocacy
Graduate Student Affairs makes every attempt to assess and to respond to the concerns of Duke graduate students. The Child Care Subsidy (CCS) 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 Disability Management 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.

2. Communications
Graduate Student Affairs works directly with The Graduate School’s senior public affairs officer to ensure cohesive communication within the graduate community and the university. GSA staff members serve on a variety of committees that explore and evaluate new models of communication with students.

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

- The Graduate School’s social-media platforms deliver timely, targeted, and relevant information to keep students informed about GSA events and other university programs.

- The Graduate School’s e-newsletter shares relevant and current information with students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The e-newsletter highlights student issues, features student profiles, and identifies useful resources.

- The Student Handbook and Student Resources sections of The Graduate School website help students quickly find the information they need.

3. Student Group Support
GSA advises and assists several graduate student organizations, including but not limited to, 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), Grad Parents, the Graduate and Professional Women’s Network (GPWN), the Society of Duke Fellows (SDF), and Women in Science
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 may not be addressed when assessing needs based only on academic discipline.

4. 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 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.

F. Staff
The GSA staff comprises five full-time professionals who, in addition to their other duties, advise and counsel students on a variety of professional and personal issues: the senior associate dean, who is the administrative manager of the unit; an assistant dean responsible for creating mechanisms for developing and coordinating The Graduate School’s diversity initiatives, including the daily administration and development of recruitment and retention initiatives; an assistant dean who is responsible for the organization, development, implementation, and evaluation of professional development services for graduate students; a senior program coordinator, who manages and implements student programs; and a program coordinator, who manages communications networks and provides administrative support to staff.