

Graduate Student Assembly
Ensuring a vibrant graduate student life

STRATEGIC PLAN
2015-2025



Carnegie Mellon University

Acknowledgments

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We could not have done this without you!

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Letter from the GSA President



In the fall of 2013, I attended a conference of the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students (NAGPS) where I saw a presentation about a strategic planning initiative from Cornell's Graduate and Professional Student Assembly. It was then that I realized many of the key issues graduate students were facing here at Carnegie Mellon were also issues for graduate students across the country: growing student loan debt, shrinking federal research funding, visa problems for international students, and the need for expanded mental health services, child care, and professional development for graduate students.

When I returned from the conference, our GSA voted to make a strategic plan to address these shared issues. Our effort became a two-year inquiry into the day-to-day intricacies of graduate student life here at Carnegie Mellon. This inquiry also led us into the archives of GSA's history where we discovered not only meeting minutes and budget reports (there were a lot of those), but the untold story of how graduate students at Carnegie Mellon have organized to create positive change for decades—how we created a campus coffee house in the 1990s as a common meeting space for students; how we organized a volunteer babysitting network for graduate students with children; and how we helped inform important campus decisions related to PhD stipend levels and student health insurance. GSA has a legacy for being the graduate student voice, but as our graduate student body grows and diversifies—especially internationally—we are left with a difficult question: how can we ensure that the distinct needs of all graduate students, both PhD and Master's, are met?

This graduate student question has never been more important. As of fall 2015, our graduate student population—predominantly Master's students—has grown to over 7,000. More than 60% of our graduate student population is international. These graduate students are not only the majority of our student population, but they will also be our largest alumni community, too. Given this growth and diversity, our GSA strategic plan is an attempt to re-envision the way we have approached graduate student life here at Carnegie Mellon and to consider both the challenges and opportunities we face for creating a world-renowned graduate education experience.

The external challenges for graduate education are great, but if there is one thing our GSA history shows, it is that we have an incredible capacity to solve problems when we work together as a campus community. I invite those of you reading this strategic plan to see it as a touchstone for a conversation that we need to keep having about graduate student life at Carnegie Mellon—a conversation that is fundamentally about our collective future as a university.

On behalf of the GSA, I welcome you to join us in this endeavor.

“On behalf of the GSA, I welcome you to join us in this endeavor.”



Yours in the service of graduate students,

Carolyn Commer,
President of the Graduate Student Assembly, 2014–2016
PhD Candidate in Rhetoric, Department of English

Connecting Communities

Carnegie Mellon's Graduate Student Assembly

Our Vision

A culture of cross-disciplinary community and collaboration that enhances the Carnegie Mellon graduate Student experience.

Our Mission

To advocate for and support the diverse needs of all Carnegie Mellon University graduate students in their personal, professional, and public lives.

1. Improving quality of life on and off campus.
2. Supporting academic and professional goals.
3. Encouraging civic and public engagement.

How We Work



A Decade of Growth

Carnegie Mellon's Graduate Student Body Breakdown

2005
Graduate Student Population

4,274



2015
Graduate Student Population

7,141



74%
Master's
Students

26%
Ph.D.
Students

67% Growth

So Who's Who?

60%

International

Today, international students make up over half of the graduate student population.

Compared to

40%

in 2005

66%
Male

34%
Female

Our largest international populations for 2015 grad students are from...

China
1,932 grad students

India
1,281 grad students

Executive Summary

Early in our Strategic Plan process we realized that in order for GSA to do effective advocacy, we needed better training, mentoring, and support for our graduate student leaders. This realization inspired a 2-part structure for our overall plan: the first section focuses on GSA's organizational development and infrastructure (**Section A**) while the second section focuses on the core issue areas impacting graduate students where we need partnership and better connection to existing resources on campus (**Section B**).

Organizational Development & Infrastructure

This section focuses on the internal workings of our GSA and a re-evaluation of how we recruit, train, and support graduate student leaders.

1

Strengthening Executive Leadership

Recommends new models of training and support for the GSA Executive Board as they lead the graduate student community.

2

Engaging & Training Representatives

Outlines how to train Representatives and engage them in opportunities for more leadership through GSA.

3

Cultivating Support Networks

Focuses on how GSA can cultivate support networks and communicate effectively with predecessors and the GSA Executive Advisory Board.

4

Creating Institutional Memory

Draws attention to the importance of our GSA history and sharing our past work in ways that will help future students learn from our failures and successes.

B Advocacy, Partnership, & Connection to Resources

This section outlines four themes that characterize graduate student life and recommendations for how GSA and university partners can work together to improve the graduate student experience.

1

Holistic Graduate Student Experience

Focuses on improving aspects of the graduate student experience that have major impact on student success and support. Key areas include: Health & Wellbeing, Sense of Community, Financial Security, and Family Support.

2

Relationship to Campus Environment

Details how graduate students relate to the campus environment and how the geography and location of services impacts their sense of community. Key areas include: Grad Commons, Housing, Dining, Transportation & Parking, and Fitness Facilities.

3

Supporting a Diverse Community

Recommends supporting the needs of our growing international student population, as well as our underrepresented students: women, domestic minorities, students of varying abilities and capabilities, LGBTQ, and first-generation students. Key Areas include: International Student Support and Diversity & Inclusivity.

4

Development Beyond the Classroom

Re-envision the professional needs of graduate students, including how to leverage leadership and public engagement opportunities as professional development. Key areas include: Professional Development and Leadership & Public Engagement.

2-Year Strategic Planning Process

The GSA's 2-year strategic planning process was characterized by an experimental and participatory approach to facilitating campus-wide conversation about graduate student life at Carnegie Mellon. Given the differing experiences of both Master's and PhD students across many programs, we were intentional about engaging differing perspectives in the campus community.

Our methods for public engagement included: face-to-face meetings, "pop-up" lunch feedback sessions, online surveys, Open Space sessions, focused interviews, and three workshop retreats with GSA Representatives from every college. Our process reflects the overarching theme and guiding question of our plan: how can GSA and the rest of the university work together to improve the graduate student experience over the next decade?

Stage 1: Groundwork (Fall 2013–Late Spring 2014)

Fall 2013 – Initial Inspiration

The idea for our GSA Strategic Plan was initiated by members of the GSA External Affairs Committee at the NAGPS National Conference, inspired by Cornell's Graduate and Professional Student Community Initiative.

Early Spring 2014 – Deciding our Approach

GSA's VP of External Affairs Carolyn Commer and President Patrick Foley began convening the GSA Executive Board and Advisory Board for Strategic Planning Meetings, conducting the initial "notecard survey" with GSA Representatives to determine the most important issues graduate students face. Based on the survey, the Strategic Planning Committee identified eight campus-wide issue areas and drafted a proposal for a planning process.

GSA opted for a long-term, collaborative approach in order to develop a effective strategic plan for the next decade of graduate student growth.

Late Spring 2014 – GSA Commits to the Project

The GSA voted to approve the Strategic Plan project, including a budget for the project. The GSA interviewed and elected a Strategic Plan Coordinator—Sarah Tedrow-Azizi, (MBA; Tepper 2016).

Stage 2: Gathering Input (Summer 2014–Early Spring 2015)

Summer 2014 – Historical Review of GSA’s Advocacy Efforts

The GSA conducted a historical review of its advocacy work and core issue areas since 1980.

Fall 2014 – Re-defining our GSA Mission and Scope

Under Sarah Tedrow-Azizi’s leadership, the Executive board refined GSA’s Vision, Mission, and Values at their first retreat and solicited feedback from Representatives at the September assembly meeting. At a GSA Representative Retreat, we conducted an “Open Space” brainstorming session to develop goals for each of the eight issue areas. From this planning, the GSA Executive board launched eight working groups with GSA Representatives.

Early Spring 2015 – Engaging the Community through Planning, Surveys, & Interviews

Our eight working groups began to meet, conducting interviews with graduate students to gather student–experience insights.

We surveyed GSA Representatives on “What makes the graduate experience unique at CMU?” and held a GSA Strategic Planning Retreat to plan recommendations in each issue area.

Stage 3: Conversation (Spring 2015)

Spring 2015 – Presentations to the Campus Community

Presented a draft of the University Strategic Planning Pillar 2: The Transformative CMU Experience, other university leadership councils, and graduate students across the colleges at eight “pop-up” lunches hosted by the GSA Executive board and Representatives.

Stage 4: Final Report (Fall 2015–Spring 2016)

Summer 2015 – Final Revisions to the Plan

The GSA Strategic Planning Committee implemented suggestions and feedback into a working draft of the plan.

Fall 2015 – Document Design

A document designer helped revise our final report.

Spring 2016 – Official Launch

Formal announcement and circulation of the plan to the campus community.

Organizational Development & Infrastructure

As part legislative body, part advocacy organization, and part social facilitator, the GSA provides graduate students with multiple opportunities for leadership development and community engagement. In our Strategic Planning feedback sessions, many graduate students were surprised to learn about the broad reach of GSA's involvement—locally and nationally—and excited about our vision for the graduate student experience.

In feedback from our GSA Representatives, we learned that they were most invested in their graduate work when they felt a strong sense of community; for many, their deepest sense of community was felt in GSA. This left us with the question: how can we create more opportunities for Representatives to lead initiatives in the GSA?

This section focuses on improving the visibility of GSA's work. In particular, we focus on opportunities for leadership and community-building, and making these opportunities visible to our Representatives and graduate students throughout the university. We hope to attract graduate students who can provide GSA with the energy, diversity of perspective, and civic commitment it needs to fulfill the mission and the goals of this strategic plan.

In **Section A**, we focus on four core areas that we believe will fundamentally improve GSA's organizational development and infrastructure:

1

Strengthening Executive Leadership
to lead the vision for GSA

2

Engaging & Training Representatives
to help carry out the vision

3

Cultivating Support Networks
to help guide GSA's future

4

Creating Institutional Memory
to inform advocacy efforts and smooth transition between leaders

Strengthening Executive Leadership

The GSA Executive board is not only the backbone of the GSA, it also represents one of the most unique leadership opportunities for graduate students at Carnegie Mellon. It provides an opportunity to become deeply involved in university affairs, learn about graduate education and life, and work with a team from multidisciplinary backgrounds. As the graduate population grows, this has meant greater leadership responsibility for GSA. This section outlines how to train and strengthen the Executive leadership in a way that best aligns with our values of creating a diverse, inclusive community and equipping the team with the leadership and managerial skills needed to build a strong community.

Vision

A diverse, representative Executive board that communicates effectively (internally and externally), maintains work–life balance, regularly connects with GSA advisors, and has public visibility of their leadership and service to the University.

Goals

1. Create professional and leadership training opportunities for GSA Executive board.
2. Build relationships with current advisors, staff in student affairs, and campus centers for leadership and professional development.
3. Increase visibility of the unique leadership opportunities that are available for the GSA Executive board.
4. Develop indicators of effectiveness that measure:
 - a. Diversity of board representation.
 - b. Successful completion of projects and programming activities.
 - c. Engagement and cohesion (one-on-ones with advisors, time spent with Executive team).
 - d. Management success (360–degree performance review, time spent communicating and delegating tasks to the administrative coordinator, and GSA committee work).

The Executive board represents one of the most unique leadership teams for graduate students at Carnegie Mellon.

Recommendations

1. Recruit graduate students from diverse backgrounds and disciplines for best representation.
2. Include GSA Advisory Board in transition of Executives to strengthen visibility of support.
3. Formalize GSA Executive board transition process for each VP, including:
 - a. "Exec Orientation" with topics related to: Policies and Protocols, University Organization and Hierarchy, Working as an Effective Team, Key Campus Issues, GSA Role in Student Government.
 - b. End of year report summaries.
 - c. Transition documents in shared Google Drive.
4. Train the GSA Executive board on the following:
 - a. Adapting to different communication styles, including intercultural communication and conflict resolution.
 - b. Unconscious bias training.
 - c. Best practices for management (emotional intelligence, organizational skills, change management, and coaching).
 - d. Financial, event planning, and policy trainings available to Student Organization leaders
 - e. Healthy work–life balance and stress relief.
5. Build stronger peer support network for graduate students in leadership roles.
 - a. Establish GSA Executive board alumni group.
 - b. Invite previous GSA Executive board members to serve on the Advisory Board or play an ex–officio role.
6. Distribute Executive board workload as evenly and fairly as possible (e.g., use a chore chart for cleaning office, helping to set up GSA meetings, social hosting responsibilities).

Engaging & Training Representatives

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges that GSA faces is recruiting graduate students who represent the diversity of graduate students at CMU and are able to assume the full responsibilities of being a GSA Representative.

When recruiting graduate students for GSA, many Representatives assume that downplaying the effort involved in GSA is key, since graduate students have such busy schedules; however, as we discovered at our 2014 Representative retreat, many Representatives are pleasantly surprised to discover the many opportunities for engagement through GSA. Improving visibility of GSA's committee work and initiatives, in addition to providing recommended protocols for electing or appointing Representatives, may help in recruiting the graduate students who are best prepared to fulfill GSA duties.

In addition to recruiting, we find it crucial to provide more explicit support for new Representatives, especially in helping them understand their roles as leaders within their departments who are in charge of GSA social funds. Providing training in institutional policies regarding issues like alcohol at social events, how to work with departmental business managers to access GSA funds, and how to connect with campus resources is key for all new Representatives.

This section focuses on how to engage and train GSA Representatives so they are better equipped to serve their departments and the university community well.

Many GSA Representatives are pleasantly surprised to discover the many opportunities for engagement the GSA provides.

Vision

Engagement from a diverse community of GSA Representatives, stemming from a consistent and public elections process, clarity of role and responsibility, access to appropriate training and development, personal connection to other Representatives, and policies that promote a broad spectrum of involvement.

Goals

1. Advocate for consistency across departments in election or appointment of GSA Representatives in accordance with GSA best practices and guidelines.
2. Build relationships with graduate program coordinators, CMU graduate student organizations, and graduate students across all departments to communicate the work and importance of GSA activities.
3. Increase visibility of GSA on campus, committee leadership opportunities, and GSA Representatives' service to the University.
4. Collect data on individual department timelines for GSA Representative appointments, process for appointing or electing Representatives, and levels of satisfaction and engagement.
5. Develop indicators of effectiveness that measure diversity, participation levels, and Representative-reported satisfaction with personal GSA involvement.

Recommendations

1. Establish Best Practices Guide for election of GSA Representatives.
2. Write and publish "Why You Should Become a GSA Representative" on website, framing GSA's work in accordance with organizational values and mission.
3. Institutionalize the GSA Representative Awards to acknowledge the many ways Representatives can serve their departments and the GSA.
4. Formalize the "New Representatives Workshop" and run at least once a semester or in better conjunction with departmental election schedule.
5. Develop communications protocol for working with department business managers and share with Representatives.
6. Create more opportunities for Representatives to socialize and build community (e.g., gathering at least once per semester in addition to the retreat).
7. Establish regular opportunities for Representatives to provide feedback on:
 - a. Sense of GSA community.
 - b. GSA Representative trainings.
 - c. GSA-Departmental connection.
8. Establish reporting systems for Representatives' involvement and participation, including:
 - a. GSA meeting attendance.
 - b. Committee involvement.
 - c. Representative-initiated efforts and advocacy in their departments.

Cultivating Support Networks

The expanding scope of the GSA requires a vast and dedicated support network. The GSA is fortunate to have an Advisory Board that includes mentors from multiple offices on campus, including the Office for the Assistant Vice–Provost for Graduate Education (AVPGE), the Division of Student Affairs (DoSA), the Office of Student Activities, and the Office for International Education (OIE). In addition to this advisory board, the GSA employs a full–time Administrative Coordinator who assists in the daily operation of GSA, helps execute our social events, handles purchasing and financial paperwork, and supports our seven internal committees.

Although GSA has a broad network of dedicated mentors and advisors, it can be challenging for the Executive board—especially new Executive members—to know who to seek out for support, depending on the type of issues or initiatives for which they need help. Since graduate students often work independently in their own coursework or research, they may tend toward working independently when it comes to their GSA responsibilities as well. Learning to work effectively as an Executive team, delegate responsibilities to committee members, and use the currently–available support network is key to fulfilling Executive duties while maintaining a good work–life balance.

This section focuses on how to help the GSA Executive board strengthen their support network in order to fulfill their GSA duties and balance coursework, research, and teaching responsibilities.

Learning to work as an Executive Board, delegate responsibilities, and use the currently–available support network is key to maintaining healthy work–life balance.

Vision

A strong, visible support network for GSA, comprising advisors, administrative support, GSA Executive board and representative alumni, and broader connections throughout Student Government and the campus community.

Goals

1. Continue to build relationships with GSA Advisory Board, Student Activities staff, GSA alumni, Faculty Senate, Staff Council, and Student Government.
2. Increase visibility of existing GSA support networks and individual contacts.
3. Collect and compile data on hours worked by GSA Executive board and Administrative Coordinator to regularly assess level of additional support needed for GSA operations.
4. Establish indicators of effectiveness to measure the number and strength of ties with contacts outside GSA, and create outreach efforts to expand and strengthen networks (e.g., number of new contacts, number of new activities and programs as a result of new contacts, level and quality of interactions).

Recommendations

1. Engage with the GSA Advisory Board and former Executives in planning transition process.
2. Profile the Advisory Board and the GSA Coordinator on the GSA website, making clear how they support the GSA.
3. Set up regular one-on-one meetings with Advisory Board members to discuss leadership goals and receive guidance on committee issues and projects.
4. Manage relationships with GSA Executive board and Representative alumni by creating an alumni board email list.
5. Invite GSA Executive board alumni to advise or support specific projects or initiatives.

The expanding scope of GSA requires a vast and dedicated support network, including an advisory board and a full-time coordinator.

4 Creating Institutional Memory

The GSA has existed as an organization at CMU for almost 35 years, but our history and past accomplishments could be better documented and used as a resource. Currently, there is limited documentation and visibility of our meeting minutes, surveys, and past GSA projects and events. Of the records we do have, they are mostly in hard copies stashed away in unlabeled binders or filing cabinets in the GSA office.

By developing stronger institutional memory and record-keeping practices, GSA can better learn from past accomplishments and challenges. For example, when we attempt to tackle issues that have been addressed in the past (e.g., childcare, campus safety, stipend levels) we can better identify the key players who worked on these initiatives, including former Executive board members who may offer important insight into current efforts.

In this section we focus on how to improve not only the technicalities of our record-keeping, but also the regular practices of developing our institutional memory so that future generations can learn from our work.

Vision

Continuous process of developing institutional memory, as well as sustainment of well-maintained (organized, updated, digitized) records and files, to promote smooth transition among the GSA Executive board and Representatives, improve visibility of GSA history, and enable year-on-year progress-tracking.

Developing stronger institutional memory and record-keeping practices, GSA can better learn from past accomplishments and challenges.

Goals

1. Prioritize the development and maintenance of systems that preserve historical GSA information and enable its effective use:
 - a. Document procedures for day-to-day operations, including instructions for performing tasks and schedules of who will do what and when.
 - b. Develop documentation that support strategic initiatives by tracking progress, action taken, and key leaders and stakeholders.
2. Build and maintain relationships with GSA Executive board alumni, GSA Advisory Board, and University Archives.
3. Increase visibility of GSA's history, leadership, past achievements, and progress on current initiatives.

Recommendations

1. Formalize descriptions of all GSA Executive board and committee positions, clearly outlining roles, responsibilities, historical activities, and predecessors.
2. Formalize meeting minutes template.
3. Present annual updates to provide more consistent progress towards goals (e.g., "State of the GSA").
4. Plan time to reflect regularly on what has worked in the past to improve future advocacy
5. Create an online archive of documented GSA work and history.
6. Scan and organize the hard copy files in the GSA office, and make searchable by issue and keywords.
7. Compile and publish GSA history on our website.
8. Assemble list of GSA Executive board alumni with updated contact information.
9. Recommend at least one GSA member to serve on national NAGPS board each year.

Advocacy, Partnership, & Connection to Resources

One of GSA's primary responsibilities is to be the voice of graduate students on campus and advocate effectively for graduate student needs. Many of the key areas of need for graduate students cannot be solved by GSA alone though—they require partnership with other stakeholders at the university.

We have organized our goals in this section according to four types of actions GSA will need to execute in order to achieve this strategic plan: Advocacy, Relationship-Building, Visibility, and Data Collection.

Advocacy

Although GSA has wide representation across the university on more than twenty university committees, we found that our GSA Representatives need clearly-articulated points for what they should advocate for. One of our key goals in each section focuses specifically on what graduate student Representatives should prioritize in their role on these university committees.

Relationship-Building

In many cases, GSA has been most effective in advocating for graduate students when we build relationships with the appropriate organizations, staff members, or offices on campus that are trying to address similar issues. For example, working with staff in transportation and parking was a key way to build momentum and support for the biking committee and mobilized university efforts to improve campus infrastructure.

Visibility

In other cases, the university or GSA provides resources to graduate students that simply need greater visibility. For example, some students requested access to an emergency loan fund (one is offered through the Division of Student Affairs) or help understanding the intricacies of the student health plan and medical bills (University Health Services can assist with this). We realized that GSA could have a major impact by helping to increase visibility of currently-existing resources.

Data Collection

Lastly, there are some issues that require us to collect more information before we can pinpoint areas of need and plan courses of action. For example, when it comes to issues like financial security and making support for PhD students more equitable across programs, it would help to gather both internal and external data on how PhD's are funded and what funding packages include (elements like health care stipends, technology provided, and travel funding). We have pinpointed areas where further data collection is key for taking action.

In **Section B**, we provide an in-depth look at four broad issue areas that characterize the graduate student experience and how university partners can help meet GSA's vision for the future.

1

Holistic Graduate Student Experience

Health & Wellbeing
Sense of Community
Financial Security
Family Support

2

Relationship to Campus Environment

Grad Commons
Housing
Dining
Transportation & Parking
Fitness Facilities

3

Supporting a Diverse Community

International Student Support
Diversity & Inclusivity

4

Development Beyond the Classroom

Professional Development
Leadership & Public Engagement

Holistic Graduate Student Experience

While graduate education has traditionally focused on professional development, there are many factors that impact a graduate student's holistic experience at Carnegie Mellon. GSA has a long history of improving the holistic graduate student experience, particularly in terms of negotiating affordable health insurance rates, creating a sense of community through our events, advocating for financial resources, and providing family-friendly campus facilities, such as the Wean Hall lactation room and changing tables in campus bathrooms.

As the graduate student population continues to grow, there is need to expand the resources and support services currently offered. Given the rise in student debt nationally, CMU's growing international student population, and the need for more mental health resources, it is imperative to develop campus resources that are geared for the unique needs of our graduate students. Graduate students tend to be older, may have families of their own, and may also have mental health issues requiring different support services.

In this section we outline how the Carnegie Mellon community can work together to support the holistic experience of graduate students in the following four areas: Health & Wellbeing, Sense of Community, Financial Security, and Family Support.

Health & Wellbeing

Vision

A campus environment that supports the holistic well-being (mental, physical, and spiritual) of all its graduate students.

Goals

1. Advocate for increased access to health-related services and resources, including mental health resources and affordable student health care.
2. Build relationships with key partners and groups in the development of programs that improve health literacy, healthy lifestyles, and communication flow between students and University Health Services.
3. Increase visibility of programs and services, both on-campus and locally, that support graduate students' wellbeing.
4. Collect data on graduate students' health needs, access to resources, and efficacy of existing programs and services.

As the graduate student population continues to grow, there is need to expand the resources and support services offered.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Develop and effectively promote mental health workshops for graduate students.
2. Provide affordable student health insurance plans with dependent coverage.
3. Better promote:
 - a. S-CHIP resources for dependents.
 - b. Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) resources.
 - c. Mental health resources for graduate students.
4. Schedule health info sessions organized for graduate students at key times covering healthcare topics such as:
 - a. Deadlines regarding health insurance registration.
 - b. How the U.S. healthcare system works (what is a deductible, referral, etc.)
5. Benchmark financial support given to graduate students across CMU for health insurance.
6. Train and do outreach to at least five graduate student liaisons per college in Survivor Support Network (SSN) and Safe Zone.
7. Publicize resources for sexual assault and relationship violence prevention in graduate student spaces, at graduate student program orientations, and through graduate student channels.

For GSA

1. Charge a GSA committee to document ongoing issues with student health insurance policies and communicate these issues to University Health Services.
2. Create a GSA policy for reviewing health insurance plans and voting on any major changes to student health insurance plan.
3. Advise University Health Services on the development of mental health workshops.
4. Collaborate with other graduate student organizations to promote health care options and educational opportunities.
5. Make visible the Survivor Support Network (SSN) & Safe Zone graduate student liaisons.
6. Help publicize resources for sexual assault and relationship violence prevention.

Sense of Community

Vision

A graduate student community that is connected in multiple social and professional ways (more than disciplinary identity) and is empowered to enrich the community through a variety of events, forums, and organizations.

Goals

1. Advocate for more social and professional events that foster interdepartmental interaction.
2. Build relationships with administrative offices, Student Activities, and student groups that already promote interaction between graduate students from different programs.
3. Collect data on existing social and professional programming that helps to foster interdepartmental interaction.
4. Increase visibility of existing on-campus social and professional programming that fosters interdepartmental interaction.

A strong sense of community is key for improving mental health and well-being for CMU's graduate student population.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Provide more explicit support for the development of graduate student organizations.
2. Revise campus policies to make it easier and more affordable for graduate student groups to have events on campus:
 - a. Adjust policies on food and alcohol in Cohon University Center to make events more affordable for graduate student organizations.
 - b. Develop alcohol policy that is more conducive to graduate student socialization needs (e.g., allow GSA Representatives to complete the university's alcohol training program and serve as social hosts).

For GSA

1. Create regular events that provide continuity and opportunities for graduate students to meet other graduate students.
2. Make social events more inclusive—sensitive to timeframe, food, and drink offerings (e.g., many students do not drink alcohol).
3. Continue advocating for a bar or space on campus with more flexible food and alcohol policies.
4. Plan and promote Graduate & Professional Student Appreciation Week (GPSAW) as a time for unifying graduate student activities across campus.
5. Advocate for allowing GSA Representatives to become university-trained social hosts.

Financial Security

Vision

Every graduate student has adequate funding, support, and access to resources for financing their education and professional career at Carnegie Mellon.

Goals

1. Advocate for more graduate student fellowships and scholarships based on need.
2. Build relationships with alumni and donors to increase fellowship funds, as well as our representatives in Congress to reduce interest rates on student loans.
3. Increase the visibility of PhD funding across the university and seek to correct funding inequities between graduate programs.
4. Collect data on graduate student funding levels, stipends, scholarships, and loan debt.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Collect data on the PhD funding packages offered in each graduate program.
2. Ensure that all funding packages and stipends meet minimum cost of living, with 12-month annual support.
3. Dedicate new funds to departments and individuals with the most unmet financial need.
4. Increase the availability of Master's scholarships and fellowships.
5. Create financial aid and literacy workshops for grad students.

For GSA

1. Advocate for :
 - a. 12-month stipends that meet the minimum cost of living for all PhD students.
 - b. Increased scholarships and research assistantships for Master's students.
 - c. New fellowships dedicated to programs and individuals with the most need.
 - d. New university guidelines requiring a minimum of a semester's advance notice regarding funding availability.
2. Help publicize the emergency loan programs through the Division of Student Affairs.
3. Continue advocacy for reduced student loan interest rates.

Family Support

Vision

A welcoming campus culture that supports all graduate students as people who have families.

Goals

1. Advocate for increased financial support for graduate students with dependents.
2. Build relationships with alumni and donors to create a childcare grant fund.
3. Increase visibility of the needs of graduate students with dependents (children, partners, and aging parents).
4. Collect data on the number of graduate students with dependents.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Develop university-wide family accommodation policy, including birth of child and care of sick family member or domestic partner.
2. Start fundraising campaign for childcare grant fund.
3. Provide workshops on “How to discuss a family accommodation with an advisor.”
4. Better publicize lactation room locations and access.
5. Better publicize university benefits for domestic partners.

For GSA

1. Continue advocating for university-subsidized childcare grants.
2. Fund and provide programming support for family events.
3. Create social and professional networking events specifically for partners of graduate students.
4. Better publicize domestic partner benefits available through University.

There are important intersections between health, financial security, sense of community, and family support.

Relationship to Campus Environment

Graduate students' relationship to the campus environment has a significant impact on their educational experience and overall mental health and wellbeing. We found that the geographical fragmentation of our graduate students across campus and the city of Pittsburgh, coupled with a lack of designated graduate student common areas, pose a significant challenge when trying to build a graduate community here at Carnegie Mellon.

Through our surveys and public discussions, we identified four challenges with how graduate students currently relate to the campus environment:

1. Graduate students who do not work on the main campus report a significant sense of disconnection from the campus community (e.g., students whose primary academic environments are on Craig Street, Mellon Institute, or the Pittsburgh Technology Center). The expansion of graduate degree programs in other cities and countries means that some graduate students have little to no connection to the main Pittsburgh campus at all.
2. Graduate students who are located on the main campus report rarely leaving the one building or floor where their lab or office is located, since even the common spaces on campus are crowded (e.g., Cohon University Center, Hunt Library, Gates Cafe).
3. When students are given department–designated offices or communal spaces, they are sometimes scattered across campus, resulting in a lack of cohesion at the departmental level.
4. Space for Master's students to study, collaborate, and socialize is particularly limited.

This section outlines the five key areas of campus life that can positively impact graduate students' relationship to the campus environment and overall sense of community, by improving: space for study, socialization and collaboration (Grad Commons), residential life (Housing), the availability of healthy and affordable food options (Dining), accessible modes of transportation to and from campus (Transportation & Parking), and resources for exercise and relaxation (Fitness Facilities).

Grad Commons

Vision

Every graduate student has space to study, research, collaborate and socialize on campus.

Goals

1. Advocate for more university common areas that promote grad student interaction.
2. Build relationships with people who are in charge of campus design and space allocations.
3. Increase visibility of where graduate student spaces are located.
4. Collect data on location and condition of departmental grad lounge spaces.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Ensure that grad common spaces are a top priority in future campus planning.
2. Forge partnerships with local businesses to create near-campus social spaces, with particular focus on the Craig Street corridor.
3. Benchmark and report on departmental graduate lounge spaces.

For GSA

1. Ensure graduate student Representatives on university committees focus on space allocation and campus planning (e.g., Design Review Committee, Public Art Committee, Craig Street Corridor Committee) and represent our advocacy points.
2. Publicize on GSA website where graduate student spaces are located.

We need to ensure that grad common spaces are a top priority in future campus master planning.

Housing

Vision

Every graduate student has access to resources for securing quality, affordable, and safe housing.

Goals

1. Advocate for graduate student rights to quality, affordable, and safe housing.
2. Build relationships with CMU Housing services, local legal services, campus multicultural organizations, and regional student governments working on housing and tenants rights.
3. Increase visibility of existing resources (e.g., CMU off-campus housing website).
4. Collect data on where graduate students live and their rent prices.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Continue expanding on-campus or university housing for graduate students, specifically for international students and Master's students.
2. Partner with preferred local management companies to make housing transitions easier.

For GSA

1. Appoint graduate student representatives to the university housing committee each year that represent our advocacy points, including, but not limited to:
 - a. University-sponsored housing for graduate students that competes with market rates.
 - b. Furnished options with flexible 9-month leases.
 - c. Legal support for students dealing with difficult landlords and poor living conditions.
2. Continue to collect stories and issues international students face with housing issues.
3. Collaborate with Pittsburgh Student Governance Council (PSGC) to provide legal help to students dealing with difficult landlords and poor living conditions.

Dining

Vision

Every graduate student has access to affordable and healthy food options within proximity to where they work and study.

Goals

1. Advocate for affordable and healthy food options at all campus dining locations.
2. Build relationships with campus dining operations and nearby external vendors.
3. Increase visibility of existing dining options and historical GSA efforts to improve graduate student dining experiences on campus.
4. Collect data on graduate students' dining needs, access to affordable and healthy food options, and satisfaction with existing dining options on and near campus.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Create quality, healthy meal options in \$5–6 range.
2. Establish healthy, more diversified food options in areas not close to central campus.
3. Expand dining hours in strategic ways to meet graduate student schedules, especially summer, weekends, and breaks.
4. Continue to collect data on dining usage patterns for graduate students.

For GSA

1. Appoint graduate student representatives to the university dining committee each year that represent GSA advocacy points:
 - a. Healthy, affordable dining options.
 - b. Strategic locations that better serve graduate students.
 - c. Hours of operation that align with graduate student needs.
2. Offer graduate student access to coupon books offered by student groups.

Transportation & Parking

Vision

Every graduate student has access to multiple kinds of reliable transportation that allow for safe, direct commutes to and from campus.

Goals

1. Advocate for safe, reliable, and accessible transportation options that meet students' needs.
2. Build relationships with campus police services, shuttle drivers, and local transportation organizations to support and develop new programs and future infrastructure.
3. Increase visibility of existing public transportation, including bike and pedestrian resources.
4. Collect data on biking and transportation issues.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Expand shuttle routes to areas with more affordable housing (e.g., Bloomfield, East Liberty, Regent Square, Greenfield).
2. Consult the Bike Advocacy Committee for addressing bike infrastructure needs (bike racks, lanes, repair support) in all future campus master planning.
3. Provide parking discounts to graduate students who carpool.
4. Install signs at all shuttle pick-up locations and bike parking areas.
5. Add bike parking areas to all campus maps.
6. Publicize where to report bike and shuttle ridership issues.

For GSA

1. Support biking education and awareness with the Bike Advocacy Committee.
2. Continue to improve CMU Shuttle and Escort services through ongoing work with Ride Systems shuttle tracking (a current resource) and collecting data every two years on student satisfaction of these offerings.
3. Help publicize biking resources and maps on GSA website.

Expanding shuttle routes can improve housing for graduate students by allowing them to live in more affordable areas.

Fitness Facilities

Vision

Every graduate student has access to fitness facilities for exercise and recreation.

Goals

1. Advocate for expanded fitness and recreation resources to non-central locations.
2. Build relationships with fitness staff and intramural coordinators.
3. Increase visibility of available fitness resources, classes, and discounts.
4. Collect data on where and when graduate students exercise, as well as the types of classes that are most useful to graduate students.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Expand fitness and recreation resources to non-central locations.
2. Provide more free Group-X classes for graduate students.

For GSA

1. Better communicate:
 - a. Fitness d-list.
 - b. Live calendar options for reserving basketball courts.
 - c. GSA Intramural options.
 - d. Historical budgets and GSA funds spent on Group-X.
2. Expand and promote GSA intramural sports leagues.
3. Overhaul GSA sports management, including leadership transition and finances.
4. Increase funding for discounted Group-X passes and initiatives that support graduate student fitness opportunities.

Supporting a Diverse Community

As the graduate student body has grown, so has the diversity of our graduate student population. In terms of nationality, international students now comprise the majority of the graduate student population at around 60%, primarily from China and India. Our international students face unique challenges transitioning to life in the United States, including communication and cultural barriers, navigation of complex legal regulations, and employment concerns post-graduation. Additionally, we found that while they sometimes have the greatest support in enclaves of students from the same country, this can also lead to “siloeing” that makes it difficult for international students to go beyond for support or sense of community.

While the overall graduate student population has seen major changes in terms of the international student population, we could do more to increase the diversity and support of historically underrepresented groups in our campus community, specifically: domestic minorities, those of differing ability and capability, first-generation college students, women, and LGBTQ students. Our plan seeks to balance both awareness about the challenges these students face, with concrete initiatives for making our community culture more inclusive.

This section focuses on ways to make our academic community more attuned of the unique needs in our graduate student body and provide the tailored resources that are necessary for all students to thrive.

International Student Support

Vision

A campus community where international students thrive and feel supported through ongoing advocacy, transition resources, and opportunities for connecting to diverse communities.

Goals

1. Advocate for international student concerns, including:
 - a. Domestic revalidation of student visas.
 - b. Making it easier to find housing in Pittsburgh (e.g., 9-month, furnished leases).
 - c. Cultural primers (What is the Super Bowl? A healthcare deductible? How do I get my security deposit back from my landlord?).
2. Build relationships with other international student groups, the Office of International Education (OIE), and the Intercultural Communication Center (ICC).
3. Increase visibility of the unique and various needs of international PhD and Master's students.
4. Collect data on international student participation in graduate student life.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. With relevant on-campus offices, develop cultural talks such as:
 - a. How the American Healthcare System Works
 - b. Your Rights in the American Legal System
2. Make sure pre-arrival material provided by larger international student groups is available to all incoming international students.
3. Provide more legal support to international students facing immigration and visa issues.

For GSA

1. Develop a Graduate Student International Student Concerns Committee or Task Force to identify specific points of advocacy and determine viability of a new GSA VP position for international student concerns.
2. Solicit more international student perspective on GSA initiatives and resources.
3. Increase GSA involvement in International Student Orientation.
4. Coordinate with Office of International Education (OIE) and Government Relations on policy and advocacy work that impacts student visas.
5. Ensure our GSA graduate student Representatives to University committees advocate for international student needs, especially Housing, Dining, Health Services, and Career & Professional Development Center.

Supporting a more diverse graduate community will significantly impact how graduates will interact with the world outside CMU.

Diversity & Inclusivity

Vision

A campus community where students of diverse backgrounds, identities, and capabilities thrive and feel supported through ongoing advocacy and resources for building a sense of community.

Goals

1. Advocate for increased resources and support for graduate students of diverse backgrounds, identities, and capabilities.
2. Build relationships with Diversity Advisory Council, Coordinator of Gender Programs, Manager of Disability Resources, Directors of Title IX, Women in SCS, and graduate student organizations representing diverse groups.
3. Increase visibility of current support for diverse groups and differing needs.
4. Collect data on recruiting, admissions, and retention of diverse applicants.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Sponsor “How to Be An Ally” workshops and regular Unconscious Bias trainings for graduate students (see also Professional Development).
2. Establish diversity-based graduate fellowships to recruit and support diverse applicants.
3. Provide regular programming and forums supporting discussion and reflection on diversity.
4. Develop Diversity Grants (like ProSEED) for campus initiatives and diversity programs.
5. Expand leadership development opportunities for women and underrepresented minorities and extend this programming to less visible groups, such as students with disabilities and first-generation students.
6. Ensure that five graduate students from every college are trained in the Survivor Support Network (SSN) and SafeZone; develop short versions of these trainings that are open to all graduate students.

For GSA

1. Convene leadership of underrepresented graduate student groups to discuss possibilities for GSA Diversity Forum Executive meetings.
2. Ensure five grad Representatives per college become SafeZone trained per year.
3. Promote grad representation in Survivor Support Network (SSN) and SafeZone training.
4. Increase GSA leadership attendance at MLK day events and other multicultural events.
5. Promote ongoing effort to support underrepresented groups with less visibility (e.g., graduate students with disabilities and first-generation graduate students).
6. Help publicize domestic partner benefits available through the university (see also Family Support).
7. Include “Helps to Support Diverse and Inclusive Community” as metric in GSA Special Allocations funding decisions.

Development Beyond the Classroom

Graduate education is often characterized by an emphasis on professional development, with a presumption that the goal of an advanced degree is specialization. The old model for professional development in graduate school, especially at the PhD level, was an apprentice-type training with an advisor. While aspects of this model still persist, given the growth in the Master's student population, as well as a changing job market for PhDs, we found that this model does not provide the most accurate framework for meeting new needs. As Master's degrees become increasingly more expensive and the job market more competitive, students feel a great deal of pressure to develop skills for a global job market. And as tenure-track academic jobs become more scarce, PhD students are seeking alternative careers to academia. This section focuses on how to support the growing professional development needs of students beyond the classroom.

In addition to professional development, this section aims to highlight the leadership and public engagement opportunities available at Carnegie Mellon. Many PhD students express interest in these opportunities, but feel pressure from advisors to avoid "extracurricular" opportunities (e.g., joining GSA or having a long-standing commitment to a service organization) so that they can focus on research. Master's students similarly report a desire for becoming more involved in campus life, but often do not know how to make these public service connections. GSA and other university stakeholders can play a role in helping to bridge existing support networks and make these opportunities more visible to graduate students.

Navigating professional and leadership opportunities, translating them into employable skills, and leveraging the value of their graduate education can be difficult for graduate students to figure out alone. This section is entitled "Beyond the Classroom" to acknowledge the support that graduate students need in realms of professional and public engagement development.

Master's students want to be more involved in campus life, but need help figuring out how to make connections to existing resources.

Professional Development

Vision

All graduate students connected to a variety of both academic and non-academic professional development opportunities.

Goals

1. Advocate for resources that support the multiple, different professional needs of Master's and PhD students.
2. Build relationships with the Career and Professional Development Center, Eberly Center for Teaching, Global Communication Center (GCC), and CMU alumni who can help build pathways to alternate careers.
3. Increase visibility of mentorship opportunities, alternate career paths, and inter-cultural barriers to professional connection and communication.
4. Collect data on where alumni get jobs, as well as the levels of professional development support across programs.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Develop alumni networking lunch program for 2nd year PhD students and 1st year Master's.
2. Sponsor more alternate career panels for all PhD students, but especially in humanities and social sciences.
3. Create and publish an annual calendar of all university professional development workshops grouped by type.
4. Continue supporting robust mentorship programs, especially for women and underrepresented minorities.
5. Sponsor regular Unconscious Bias Trainings as part of professional development (see also Supporting a Diverse Community section).
6. Benchmark and develop a baseline level of professional development support for Master's students across the university.
7. Match GSA level of conference and research funding support.

For GSA

1. Help sponsor "How to be an Ally" workshops.
2. Advocate for increased conference funding from university partners.
3. Promote mentorship opportunities for all graduate students.
4. Appoint GSA Representatives to serve on Career and Professional Development Center advising committee to address professional development issues specific to both Master's and PhD students.

Leadership & Public Engagement

Vision

All graduate students connected to a wide range of leadership and public engagement opportunities.

Goals

1. Advocate for a more robust conception of “public engagement” that includes forms of leadership and advocacy in the university, the city of Pittsburgh, disciplinary fields, professional organizations, and beyond.
2. Build relationships with campus, local, state, and national organizations to make visible the public impact and significance of graduate education.
3. Increase visibility of resources for public engagement and professional development.
4. Collect data on graduate student groups that engage in public service.

Recommendations

For University Partners

1. Develop a university statement that encourages a broad range of public engagement opportunities for graduate students (like Stanford’s Haas Center for Public Service).
2. Seek graduate student involvement in government policy and advocacy efforts.
3. Survey departments to find out about public engagement service opportunities.
4. Provide workshops on public service and leadership in higher education.

For GSA

1. Make more visible the current pathways to public service available in GSA.
2. Connect with other graduate groups on campus to share public engagement resources and opportunities.
3. Frame GSA involvement in terms of leadership, public engagement, and professional development opportunities.
4. Continue training graduate students in policy and advocacy (e.g, send at least six students per year to be trained in legislative advocacy with NAGPS).
5. Appoint graduate student representatives to the Partners Allied in Civic Engagement (PACE) committee each year.

GSA Strategic Planning Committee

The 2014–15 GSA Executive Board served as the Strategic Planning Committee and authors of this plan.



Carolyn Commer is a PhD candidate in Rhetoric in the Department of English. Her research examines the history and rhetoric of U.S. higher education policy. Carolyn served as the GSA Vice–President for External Affairs in 2012–14, the NAGPS Northeast Regional Legislative Chair in 2013–14, and chair of the NAGPS Leadership Summit in 2014. She has served as the GSA President for two years.



Will Frankenstein is a PhD candidate in Engineering and Public Policy. His research is in computational models of nuclear proliferation. At Carnegie Mellon, he served as the 2014–15 GSA Vice–President for External Affairs, the 2015 NAGPS Northeast Regional Chair, and is a founding member of Allies Grad.



Mary Glavan is a PhD candidate in Rhetoric in the Department of English. Her research examines the intersection of language, disability advocacy, and special education. Mary served as the Vice–President for Campus Affairs from 2014–15 and as the 2014–15 NAGPS Northeast Regional Outreach Chair. Mary also serves as the Assistant to the Director of the Global Communication Center at CMU.



Hassan Khan is a PhD candidate in the Engineering and Public Policy Department studying public-private research partnerships in the semiconductor industry. Prior to CMU, he worked at a solar photovoltaic manufacturing firm, Twin Creeks Technologies, in California and Mississippi. Hassan has served as the GSA Vice–President of Communications since 2014.



Carolyn Norwood is a PhD candidate in the Materials Science and Engineering Department at CMU. Her research focuses on the development of new ultra-high strength, high toughness steels for aviation applications. Previously a departmental GSA representative, she was elected as the first GSA Vice-President of Communications in 2012. She served in that position for two years before becoming the Vice-President of Graduate Student Life in 2014.



Sarah Tedrow-Azizi is an MBA candidate in the Tepper School of Business. She specializes in product development and innovation. Sarah served as GSA's Strategic Planning Coordinator from 2014-15, helping to lead our process, facilitate feedback sessions, and provide a framework for our organizational development.



Mark Whiting is a PhD candidate in Mechanical Engineering at CMU in the Integrated Design Innovation Group. He has a design and strategy consulting background (BDes at RMIT in Australia & MSc in ID at KAIST in South Korea). Mark served as Vice President of Finance for the Graduate Student Assembly at CMU for the 2015 academic year and the Chief Financial Officer of the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students for 2015.



Brittani McKenna is GSA's full-time Administrative Coordinator. She specializes in event coordination, graduate student life programming, and finance operations. Brittani has a B.A. in Business Marketing from Eastern University and a Graphic Design degree from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh.



Campus Input & Presentation Sessions

We hosted **15 sessions** for graduate students to provide input on the content and implementation of our plan, as well as **10 presentations** of our plan to key committees of stakeholders in the campus community.

Sessions for Graduate Students

GSA Reps Survey – April 2014

GSA Reps Retreat Open Space Technology Session – September 2014

Strategic Planning Working Group Interviews – December 2014

GSA Reps Experience Survey – January 2015

GSA Strategic Planning Retreat – February 2015

Graduate Women's Gathering – April 2015

Pop-up lunch feedback sessions hosted by GSA Reps – April 2015

- Biology & Chemistry (Mellon Institute)

- Architecture & Design (CFA)

- Civil & Environmental Engineering (Porter Hall)

- Physics & Mechanical Engineering (Wean Hall)

- Computer Science & Machine Learning (Gates-Hillman Center)

- Engineering & Public Policy (Baker Hall)

- Master's in HCI & Software Engineering (Craig Street)

- Entertainment Technology Center (PTC)

Sessions for University Partners

University Strategic Plan Committees: The Transformative PhD & Master's Experiences – March 2015

Associate Deans for Graduate Education Policy (ADGP) – April 2015

Board of Trustees Educational Affairs & Enrollment Committee – May 2015

Academic Leadership Council (ALC) – May 2015

University Education Council (UEC) – May 2015

Student Government Executive Council – September 2015

Campus Affairs Leadership Forum – October 2015

Faculty Senate – October 2015

Graduate Student Concerns Committee (GSCC) – November 2015



Graduate Student Assembly
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