Strategic Plan for Graduate Studies and Graduate Education
at Kent State University
October 2021
Table of Contents

Executive Summary ............................................................................................................. 3
History and Background ..................................................................................................... 3
Process and University Involvement .................................................................................. 4
Values, Principles and Framework ..................................................................................... 5
Administrative Infrastructure and Core Practices ............................................................... 6
Student Support Services ................................................................................................ 6
Support for Graduate Assistants, Staff, Administrators and Faculty ............................... 6
Community and Philanthropy ............................................................................................... 7
Recommendations for Administrative Infrastructure and Core Practices ....................... 8
Transition Graduate Studies from a Division to a School ................................................ 8
Develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan ..................................................... 8
Evaluate the Current Staffing Model to Meet the Needs of Graduate Students ............... 8
Recommendations for Student Support Services .............................................................. 9
Holistic Graduate Student Support .................................................................................... 9
Career Development .......................................................................................................... 9
Mental Health and Wellbeing ............................................................................................ 10
Parent, Family, and Partner Support ................................................................................ 11
Financial Literacy ............................................................................................................... 11
Managing Conflicts and Navigating Grievances ............................................................... 11
Collaboration and Integration of Graduate Student Support Across the University .......... 12
Recommendations for Support for Graduate Assistants, Staff and Faculty ................. 12
Supporting Graduate Assistants ...................................................................................... 12
Supporting Faculty, Staff and Administrators ................................................................. 13
Recommendations for Community and Philanthropy ...................................................... 13
Increase Community and Sense of Belonging ................................................................ 13
Create a Central Physical Space ....................................................................................... 14
Advocate for Opportunities for Financial Support .......................................................... 14
Alumni Engagement and Mentorship ................................................................................ 15
Graduate Student Recognition ........................................................................................... 16
Table 1: Mental Health and Wellbeing .......................................................................... 17
Table 2: Financial Literacy ............................................................................................... 17
Table 3: Navigating Conflict and Grievances/Community and Sense of Belonging ...... 18
Table 4: Parent, Family and Partner Support .................................................................... 19
Appendix A: Advisory Committee ................................................................................... 20
Appendix B: Steering Committee .................................................................................... 20
Appendix C: Graduate Studies Future Planning Events List of Attendees ..................... 21
Appendix D: University Units that Participated in Planning Events ................................ 23
Appendix E: Current Functions and Objectives of the Division of Graduate Studies ....... 24
Appendix F: Template for Breakout Group Discussions at Planning Events ................ 25
References .......................................................................................................................... 28
Executive Summary

The Division of Graduate Studies prepares graduate students for success at Kent State and beyond. The division, which serves in an advisory role, strives to cultivate an inclusive, innovative and encouraging environment that enhances the Kent State graduate student experience. The division supports Kent State’s graduate students from orientation through thesis and dissertation defense, providing holistic services that address professional development, career advising, academic success, research opportunities and health and wellbeing to enhance graduate education beyond degree completion. The Division of Graduate Studies also fosters a sense of belonging for all individuals within the graduate student community. The Division of Graduate Studies was established in 2011. Throughout 2019-2021, the Division of Graduate Studies engaged in strategic planning to review current practices, identify opportunities and further enhance support for current and future graduate students at Kent State University. This report provides an overview of the recommendations from the strategic planning process. Recommendations broadly fell into three areas:

Create a Kent State Graduate Education Brand and Identity

The first recommendation is to create an engaged community of graduate students at Kent State and instill a sense of belonging. Community and engagement can be implemented through the designation of a central, physical graduate student space to become a hub for graduate students to gather, socialize and study. This space should also provide centralized services in key areas of student support including career and counseling services. In addition, we recommend the division moves to an academic structure (e.g. school or college). An academic structure would provide the opportunity for Graduate Studies to offer coursework that would serve students across academic colleges as well as interdisciplinary degree programs.

Provide Holistic Graduate Student Support

Second, we recommend continuing to expand our strategy of holistic graduate student support and development. Holistic support services should address career development, health and wellbeing, community and sense of belonging, academic success, research, support for parents, families, and partners, financial literacy and support for student organizations.

Provide Centralized Support for Graduate Faculty and Staff

Third, we recommend further enhancing and implementing a structure that provides support for graduate deans, faculty, coordinators and support staff to navigate relevant policy, workflows/processes, best practices for student support and mentorship and training/onboarding for roles serving graduate students.

Background and History

The Division of Graduate Studies was formed in 2011 after the division formerly known as Research and Graduate Studies split into the Division of Graduate Studies and Division of
Research and Sponsored Programs. Since 2011, the Division of Graduate Studies has operated with a decentralized structure with a focus on graduate admissions, student services, orientation, awards/fellowships, managing graduate forms and workflows and an advisory role to graduate deans and the provost. In Summer 2020, Graduate Admissions moved from the Division to Enrollment Management.

From 1993 through 2011, the Division of Research and Graduate Studies (RAGS) operated with a decentralized structure with a primary focus on graduate research. A graduate college with a centralized structure preceded RAGS from 1966 through 1993.

What is the Division of Graduate Studies currently?

Currently, Graduate Studies at Kent State operates in a hybrid/decentralized model where each academic college also has an administrator (generally an associate dean for Graduate Studies) who oversees graduate affairs in the academic college and is the liaison for the academic college to the Dean for the Division of Graduate Studies. Currently, the Division of Graduate Studies administers and coordinates graduate education, programs and services across the university system. See presentation on the history and current status of the Division and Appendix E for more details.

**Process and University Involvement**

The recommendations and themes from this report are driven by data and recommendations from a variety of sources including from the graduate student survey sent in Fall 2020; the graduate faculty and staff survey sent in Spring 2021; the Graduate Education planning event notes and post-event surveys; recommendations from the Anti-Racism Task Force subcommittee on Doctoral and Graduate Student Life; the Strategic Enrollment Management subcommittee on Student Services and Co-curricular Activities and Mental Health Focus Groups for First Generation Graduate Students.

In the fall of 2019, as charged by then Interim Provost Tankersley, Kent State University started a strategic planning process for the Division of Graduate Studies and also considered broadly how the university should support graduate education. Steering and advisory committees were established (see Appendices A & B for membership). These committees met regularly until March 2020 and then back again in the Fall of 2020. In December 2020, Karen DePauw (Vice President and Dean of Graduate Education at Virginia Tech University) worked with us as an external consultant to provide guidance and assist in the strategic planning process. Graduate students were also asked to complete a survey and provide input during the fall of 2020 and staff, faculty and administrators also completed a survey in the spring of 2021.

The efforts from the steering and advisory committee culminated in a series of events which were held in March 2021. The Division of Graduate Studies, in collaboration with a diverse collection of representatives from across Kent State University, held two large scale virtual planning events on March 10, 2021, and March 17, 2021, to review the current state of
Graduate Studies and foster discussions and recommendations of how best Graduate Studies should move forward to advocate, elevate and support Kent State’s community of graduate students.

The goal of the planning events was to gather recommendations from across all parts of the university and gain more clarity of the scope of how Kent State wants to support graduate student success. The planning events were each three hours long, with time allotted for breakout group discussions. The 12 breakout groups included an average of eight individuals and there was time allotted for Karen DePauw, Dean of Graduate Studies at Virginia Tech University, to provide insight and recommendations. See Appendix F for breakout session discussion prompts and template.

The attendees for the event were composed of a variety of faculty, administrators and staff from across the university (see Appendix C) including all academic colleges and a large number of divisions from across the university system. The Division of Graduate Studies also invited several graduate students from various graduate student organizations to participate in the planning events to represent the interests of the graduate student body.

Values, Principles and Framework

The recommendations in this plan are guided by the current Kent State Core Values, the premise of being a student-ready college (McNair et al., 2016), and key principles currently guiding university planning:

- We are an access institution and work to ensure access for all students.
- While we are an access institution, we are committed to ensuring degree completion for all students.
- We support and encourage the creation of new knowledge and innovation.
- We prepare students to serve the community and closely work with the community in all we do.

In addition, guided by the Council of Graduate Schools (2019), discussions with Provost Tankersley and Karen DePauw, and meetings of the steering and advisory committee, we developed a framework to guide our planning process. This framework consisted of four core areas:

- Administrative Infrastructure and Core Practices
- Student Support Services
- Support for Graduate Assistants, Staff and Faculty
- Community and Philanthropy
Administrative Infrastructure and Core Practices

The Division of Graduate Studies strives to be a hub for lifelong learning and serve as a resource center for graduate students, making student-centered holistic wellbeing a primary focus. Our goal is to define, create and implement a Kent State graduate education brand and identity. The Division of Graduate Studies serves in an advisory role providing university-level oversight to graduate programs and policies as well as services and programming to enhance graduate education at Kent State University. Responsible for administering and coordinating graduate education, programs and services across the Kent State University system, Graduate Studies supports graduate students, graduate assistants, faculty, staff and administrators through the administration of campus policies, standards and requirements for graduate study, while promoting the value of diversity and an inclusive environment and advocating for graduate student success within the institution level as well as locally and nationally.

Student Support Services

Mission: Graduate Student Services coordinates and partners on holistic resources, services and programming that foster academic success, professional development, well-being and community for graduate students.

Vision: Graduate Student Services strives to cultivate an inclusive, innovative and encouraging environment that enhances the graduate student experience from orientation through degree completion. We provide support to prepare graduate students for success at Kent State and beyond. We aim to provide holistic graduate student support across all areas, including academic, career development, financial, health and wellbeing – both physical and mental.

Objectives: The support services within the Division of Graduate Studies strive to enhance graduate student success and retention by providing and promoting holistic student services for graduate students. Holistic support services should address career development, health and wellbeing, community and sense of belonging, academic success, research, support for parents, families, and partners, financial literacy and support for student organizations. The division will work with campus resource areas, colleges and academic programs to promote and support graduate student support offered across the university.

Support for Graduate Assistants, Staff, and Faculty

Mission: Graduate Studies plays an important role in ensuring university-level support and training for all graduate assistants, faculty, administrators and staff working in graduate education. Graduate Studies works collegially and productively in partnership with academic colleges and programs to expand opportunities to improve knowledge of advances in graduate education, research, career development and administration of graduate student support services and co-curricular opportunities.
Vision: Graduate Studies serves as a resource center for graduate education best practices, data analysis, university policy and administrative effectiveness. Support services for Graduate Assistants, faculty, administrators and staff will include both training resources and mentoring programs.

Objectives for Supporting Graduate Assistants (GAs):

- Working to ensure that GA positions are providing sufficient financial and mentorship support to foster academic success and promote their career development.
- Providing training and support to prepare teaching assistants.
- Working to ensure that GA positions are accessible and available to students across a wide range of academic programs.
- Provide training for balancing workload with school and other responsibilities.
- Ensure teaching assistants are receiving relevant updates and information on university teaching.
- Promote best practices for mentorship and supervision of graduate assistants.

Objectives for Supporting Faculty, Staff and Administrators

- Serve as a centralized resource for faculty and staff for inquiries and guidance around university-level policies, procedures and workflows related to graduate education.
- Provide onboarding and training to graduate coordinators, graduate deans and support staff to ensure knowledge of division-level and university-level support and policies related to graduate students.
- Provide faculty training and support on working with the 21st century graduate student and effective mentorship.
- Maintain centralized resources, policies and programming for graduate students to faculty and staff in a way that is accessible and updated.

Community and Philanthropy

The Division of Graduate Studies strives to be a hub for lifelong learning and serve as a resource center to support graduate students, making student-centered holistic wellbeing a primary focus. We aim to create an engaged community of graduate students and instill a true sense of belonging, beyond traditional departmental silos.

- Incorporate opportunities to engage graduate students and alumni.
- Increase opportunities for financial assistance so that graduate students can focus on degree completion.
Recommendations for Administrative Infrastructure and Core Practices

Transition Graduate Studies from a Division to a School

In its current format, the Division of Graduate Studies is an auxiliary unit. Based on conversations from the steering and advisory committee as well as during the planning retreat, there was a clear interest to offer interdisciplinary programs at the university level. This would provide an opportunity for Kent State University to offer individualized interdisciplinary programs as well as provide administrative support to interdisciplinary graduate programs that span across existing academic colleges. Developing this infrastructure would further support interdisciplinary programs across the university system and provide a model for supporting stackable credentials (e.g. master's degree based on a combination of two minors).

Develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan

The Graduate Studies Steering Committee recommended Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) be adopted as a core practice in the Division of Graduate Studies. Consistent with Kent State University’s mission and values, DEI should be central to all activities in the Division of Graduate Studies. Furthermore, and consistent with the university’s goal for all divisions and areas, Graduate Studies will develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion action plan during AY 2021-2022. This action plan will complement action plans for academic colleges to support graduate students at KSU, and incorporate recommendations from the Anti-Racism Taskforce.

Evaluate the Current Staffing Model to Meet the Needs of Graduate Students

Based on the recommendations throughout this report, including the need for centralized support for graduate students, the need for a storefront and central office for graduate studies, and the changing and increasing needs in the areas of mental health and career services we recommend the following:

- Work closely with Counseling and Psychological Services to explore the ability of a counselor to spend a set number of hours a week in Graduate Studies to meet with graduate students.
- Work closely with Career Exploration and Development to explore the ability of a career counselor to spend a set number of hours a week in Graduate Studies to meet with graduate students.
- In the short term, we recommend that Graduate Studies work with a part-time counselor and career advisor from other units on campus, such as Career Exploration and Development, who can dedicate a certain number of hours per week to work with graduate students. Based on demand, we can reevaluate this need and service at a later date, and potentially hire both a full-time career advisor and counselor. Eventually, a full-time career advisor would be valuable to provide career advising services to graduate students. Because Kent State is home to thousands of diverse graduate students, this
role can provide direct support to those seeking careers in academia, the work force, research and more.

- Hire an administrative assistant to provide in-person support to graduate students and be a point of contact for graduate students across the university.
- Consider adopting a model to have faculty members serve as an associate dean in Graduate Studies. Given that Kent State serves over 4,000 graduate students and currently does not have a full-time dean, this position would support activities throughout Graduate Studies and would be consistent with models at other peer and aspirational institutions (e.g. Miami University, Boise State University). In addition, this model would further support leadership development for administrative leaders in the future.

Recommendations for Student Support Services

Holistic Graduate Student Support

The Division of Graduate Students currently provides programming to provide academic and career support. Based on the feedback from the committees and data we gathered, we recommend this is expanded to also include mental health and well-being, support for parents and families, financial literacy and navigating conflict and grievances. We will provide further details on action items on the following pages.

Additionally, sense of belonging/community and mentorship also were identified as areas of holistic student support but will be addressed separately in the community and philanthropy section.

Career Development

Support for graduate student career development emerged as the most cited priority related to holistic student support by those who completed the post-strategic planning event survey. Increased attention for graduate student career development, particularly in doctoral programs, is consistent with national trends in graduate education (see e.g. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/08/01/council-graduate-schools-data-show-theres-no-one-way-use-doctorate). Based on the strategic planning event, we make the following recommendations regarding career development for graduate students at Kent State University:

- Engage with the Council for Graduate Schools Ph.D. Career Pathways initiative to learn best practices for supporting doctoral student career development.
- Become a member institution for Beyond the Prof to provide support for navigating non-academic career pathways and networking opportunities.
- Engage in data collection and analysis about graduate student career outcomes
- Collaborate with Career Exploration and Development on having weekly dedicated career advising hours in the Division of Graduate Studies.
- Collaborate on a non-academic career conference and fair for students to learn more about non-academic career opportunities and outreach with businesses in the region
that are seeking employees with advanced degrees. This is particularly important as almost half of Kent State graduate students indicated they plan to live and work in Northeast Ohio.

- Develop customizable career planning action forms that could be used in career advising appointments by faculty and staff within academic programs, colleges and Graduate Studies.
- Collaborate with the Center for Teaching and Learning to develop a Preparing Future Faculty program at the university to provide intentional support and prepare graduate students who are seeking careers in academic and faculty roles.
  - The Future Faculty Fellows program at University of Georgia could be a model for us to adopt.

**Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Concerns about graduate student mental health have received increased attention nationally in recent years with surveys indicating that “graduate students are more than six times as likely to experience depression and anxiety as compared to the general population,” (Flaherty, 2018) and “63% of students reported feeling overwhelming anxiety” (Stebleton & Kaler, 2020).

Out of 550 responses to the Fall 2020 graduate student survey, 32.18% cited mental health concerns as being very challenging to complete graduate study and 35.45% cited physical health/fitness as very challenging to degree completion. See Table 1.

Support for graduate student health and wellbeing emerged as the second most cited priority related to holistic student support by those who completed the post-strategic planning event survey. The link between graduate student mental health and financial stress was noted as an area of emphasis by those who attended the planning events. “Financial security is directly tied to mental health; we cannot fix the mental health problem of our graduate students until we provide them financial security.”

Graduate students face unique challenges compared to undergraduate students with some concerns being how to navigate power dynamics in critical faculty/staff relationships, balancing assistantships or full-time employment with graduate school, and a concern about encountering undergraduate students they may teach or mentor when utilizing campus mental health resources. Based on the strategic planning event, we make the following recommendations regarding graduate student mental health:

- Promote and collaborate with the office of Counseling and Psychological Services on programming and resources that support graduate student mental health, physical health and wellbeing.
- Host workshops on managing failure/disappointments and building resilience.
- Evaluate the current leave of absence policy for graduate students.
- Review Ohio State University’s policy for personal, sick, parental and professional development leave for graduate students.
Parent, Family, and Partner Support

In Fall 2020, there were 618 graduate students who identified as parents according to those who responded to a university survey, 11.4% of the university’s graduate student population. See Table 4 for more details.

- Provide family-oriented programming to build community and provide support to parents, their partners and children. The division has established a parent affinity group and additional programming can be developed around this effort.
- Develop a policy for parental leave and other short-term leave options to avoid losing university-sponsored health insurance coverage when on leave.
- Review paid parental leave policy at Ohio University.

Financial Literacy

Financial literacy is an issue that students and faculty/staff cited as an area that the university does not provide adequate support to students on, with 41% of students and faculty/staff either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing that the university provides tools to be educated in financial literacy. See Table 2 for more details.

- Expand promotion of financial resources around budgeting, community resources and awards that are presented at Graduate Student Orientation (GSO) to current graduate students.
- Collaborate with the One Stop and Financial Aid on a resource or workshop around student loan repayment.
- Support for navigating external funding resources.

Managing Conflict and Navigating Grievances

From the Fall 2020 graduate student survey, 37.33% indicated that if they were displeased with an academic decision, they would not know where to go to resolve the issue. That survey also found that 21.72% indicated they seriously considered leaving the university with challenges with faculty/insufficient mentorship as the top reason for considering leaving. See Table 3 for more details. This action item also has come up in other strategic planning events (e.g. Anti-Racism Task Force, Great Place Initiative). Based on previous recommendations from other university efforts as well as our discussions specific to graduate students, we recommend the following:

- Creating a document or webpage that clearly outlines who a student might consider contacting to discuss conflicts they are having with faculty, staff, fellow graduate students and undergraduate students.
- Developing a grievance policy and procedures specific to graduate student and graduate assistant needs.
Collaboration and Integration of Graduate Student Support Across the University

A key takeaway from the First-Generation Mental Health Focus Groups from Summer 2020 was that there are a lot of campus resources, but it can be very challenging to navigate what is available. Another takeaway was that many campus resources and services are targeted to undergraduate students and graduate students may not be aware of or feel welcome utilizing services.

- Develop a Staff Council for Graduate Student Support to engage staff members in campus resource areas, colleges and academic programs to partner on programming to support graduate students and share best practices and updates from our areas.
- Increase collaboration with campus resource areas to encourage more targeted support of graduate students to be integrated across campus support areas.
- Work with the Writing Commons to evaluate academic writing support for graduate students.
- Develop a graduate student handbook or website to assist graduate students with navigating university resources, services and policies. This could be a companion to college and academic department handbooks.

Recommendations for Support of Graduate Assistants, Staff and Faculty

Supporting Graduate Assistants

In university surveys as well as conversations with the steering committee, advisory committee and planning event, graduate assistant stipend levels consistently have come up as an area of concern. In addition, participants spoke to the lack of central resources for graduate assistantships (particularly related to research or administrative positions) and a lack of funding during the summer – particularly for international students. For Kent State University to further grow graduate programs that also support the research mission of the university, it is critical that additional investments are made in these areas. Therefore, we recommend the following:

- Review recommendations from the GA Review committee that has been convened to explore GA stipend amounts and the GA appointment processes.
- Secure funding for and maintain a strategic GA hiring pool where Graduate Studies is able to support GA positions that promote strategic priorities of the university and Graduate Studies.
- Secure additional funding available for faculty to hire graduate assistants to support administrative functions and research.

Securing a greater investment at the university level is integral to making progress on this recommendation.
Supporting Faculty, Administrators and Staff

Administrators and staff involved in training of graduate students regularly turn-over (e.g. many graduate programs may change graduate coordinators every few years). Currently, there is no university onboarding process for administrators and staff who support graduate education. Therefore, we recommend that, in addition to onboarding processes that may be in place for academic units, we develop:

- An onboarding process for new graduate coordinators and staff supporting graduate students.

Based on conversations at the strategic planning event, participants also identified the need for central policy and resources documents pertaining to graduate education. Some of this already exists (e.g. Guide to Graduate Education) but what is missing are templates and materials that could be easily adopted by academic colleges, as well as a repository of unit handbooks that are easily available across the university, similar to faculty handbooks. Therefore, we recommend that the Division of Graduate Studies:

- Provide a policy and resources document that could be incorporated into college and program handbooks.

Mentoring is central to successful graduate education. While a number of academic units and colleges may provide some mentorship training, it is not clear what – if anything – is available to all graduate faculty across Kent State University. To ensure all faculty have access to training on mentorship we recommend the Division of Graduate Studies works with other areas (e.g. Center for Teaching and Learning) to develop and provide:

- Faculty training on effective mentorship and understanding the 21st century graduate student.

Recommendations for Community and Philanthropy

The Division of Graduate Studies strives to be a hub for lifelong learning and serve as a resource center for graduate students, making student-centered holistic wellbeing a primary focus. Our goal is to define, create and implement a Kent State graduate education brand and identity.

Increase Community and Sense of Belonging

Results from the Fall 2019 student survey demonstrated staggering statistics regarding the importance of community and a sense of belonging for graduate students. When asked “Why did you seriously consider leaving Kent State?” 41.97% of graduate students stated that they considered leaving for financial reasons, while 85.17% of respondents indicated that their consideration to leave was due to a lack of sense of belonging, a lack of group support or an unwelcoming campus culture (34.56%, 28.39% and 22.22% respectively). See Table 3.
Assistance with building networking and breaking down barriers of loneliness and isolation were also key takeaways from a first-generation mental health focus group. Recommendations include:

- Expanding programming of underrepresented students, such as first-generation graduate students, graduate student parents, international students, etc.
- Provide more opportunities for virtual engagement with programs in addition to in-person engagement for students in online programs, students working full-time, parenting students and other students unable to attend programs.
- Develop a cohort-based community-building and graduate school preparation program for underrepresented students starting graduate school. (Potential cohorts could be Graduate Dean’s Award recipients and first-generation students.)

Create a Central Physical Space

Community starts with a physical place, and creating a visible, easily accessible, central, physical space that can holistically support Kent State’s graduate students is the first step to providing graduate students with a sense of community. The location, which will ideally be a hub specifically designated for graduate students, will offer areas for students to study, socialize, find resources and meet with faculty/advisors, greatly assisting with the division’s efforts to build community and sense of belonging, breaking departmental silos, as well as barriers of loneliness and isolation. Creating a ‘graduate student home’ was a key takeaway from the planning events.

The location can serve as a storefront to house Graduate Studies, offering graduate student resources and career advising services all in one place, making holistic support accessible to Kent State’s diverse graduate student community. There is a need for a visible, central, physical unit. Through developing an identity through a physical space, Graduate Studies can look ahead to poise itself to offer interdisciplinary programs across campus.

The suggested timeline for this recommendation is to have a physical space available to graduate students by Fall 2021. A physical location will assist with the transition back to pre-COVID learning, breaking the isolation brought about by COVID. This initiative places a strong emphasis on community, as it will be a hub where graduate students can learn, interact, socialize and find support and resources.

Advocate for Opportunities for Financial Support

One of the recurring themes from the Graduate Studies planning events was the importance of providing students with more options for financial support and security, as there is often limited funding beyond loans for graduate students. According to the students’ survey from Fall 2020, 62.5% of respondents said that financing their education was either challenging or very challenging.
With a heightened focus on scholarships, Graduate Studies strives to provide more opportunities for financial support to graduate students. Currently, part-time students aren’t allowed to have graduate assistant positions, and international students do not have the option to find jobs off campus to supplement their income or support their families.

Increased financial support of graduate assistants and increased opportunities for graduate assistantships was cited as the number one priority (22 attendees, 36%) on the survey of Graduate Studies planning event attendees.

- Advocate for more funding for international students who do not qualify for financial aid and may not be eligible for certain financial awards. International students are restricted to 20 hours a week and cannot work outside their study area. Many of those without graduate assistantships need more assistance to find appropriate work.
- Explore opportunities to connect graduate students with corporate partners for networking and career opportunities. Engage corporate sponsors, companies and foundations who may be interested in research as a potential source for funding.
- Increase funding on campaigns like Giving Tuesday, as well as identifying other areas for graduate student support.
- Work with the university to advocate for the creation of more graduate assistantships, fellowships and post doc opportunities. Expand opportunities for administrative graduate assistant positions that could be centrally offered to a wider pool of applicants.
- Advocate for recommendations around graduate assistant financial support and equity that come from the GA review committee.

Alumni Engagement and Mentorship

Engage with the alumni community beyond solicitations for donations to create opportunities for collaboration, mentorship and networking. Facilitate mutually beneficial relationships for graduate students and alumni. Creating a more individualized connection will be a worthwhile investment so that alumni are more apt to contribute when asked.

- Collaborate with the Division of Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement, colleges and academic programs to identify graduate alumni who want to be engaged in mentorship of current students or to share their experiences with current students.
- Encourage alumni engagement through more thoughtful coordination of reunions and networking opportunities.
- Investigate to see if alumni would be interested in volunteering their time to give career presentations, resume reviews, panels, etc.
- Conduct exit interviews to establish future connections with the growing Kent State graduate student alumni network.
Graduate Student Recognition

Highlight various success stories from the diverse graduate student community. Featuring various students will acknowledge their hard work, as well as inspire and encourage other graduate students in their academic pursuits, while at the same time creating a sense of community, virtually. Ensure that graduate students are represented at the university level, as the majority of content currently features undergraduate students. Encourage graduate student inclusive language and communications. In addition to highlighting graduate student success stories, also incorporate examples of resilience – communicate the experiences of Kent State graduate students who have overcome various types of adversity. Recognize underrepresented students (first generation students, international students, veterans, students with disabilities, male students in female-dominated fields (as well as vice versa) and other key populations from planning events).
Tables

Table 1: Mental Health and Wellbeing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>To what extent has mental health has presented challenges to completing graduate study.</th>
<th>To what extent has physical health and fitness has presented challenges to completing graduate study.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very challenging</td>
<td>32.18%</td>
<td>35.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>30.18%</td>
<td>28.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildly challenging</td>
<td>28.91%</td>
<td>25.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not challenging</td>
<td>10.73%</td>
<td>10.91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 550 responses from the Fall 2020 graduate student survey.

Table 2: Financial Literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The university offers the tools for graduate students to be better educated in financial literacy.</th>
<th>Student Survey Results</th>
<th>Faculty and Staff Survey Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree or strongly disagree</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree or strongly agree</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The university offers graduate students the resources that they need to navigate student loan repayment.</th>
<th>Student Survey Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree or strongly disagree</td>
<td>25.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree or strongly agree</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>54.45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Navigating Conflict and Grievances/Community and Sense of Belonging

“Why did you seriously consider leaving Kent State? (Mark all that apply.)”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Graduate Students</th>
<th>Master’s</th>
<th>Doctoral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenges with faculty/insufficient mentorship</td>
<td>46.91%</td>
<td>47.05%</td>
<td>45.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial reasons</td>
<td>41.97%</td>
<td>41.17%</td>
<td>43.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reasons (medical, mental health, family emergency, etc.)</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>26.47%</td>
<td>47.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of sense of belonging</td>
<td>34.56%</td>
<td>38.23%</td>
<td>30.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support group</td>
<td>28.39%</td>
<td>23.52%</td>
<td>30.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not like academic program</td>
<td>24.69%</td>
<td>29.41%</td>
<td>21.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason not listed</td>
<td>24.69%</td>
<td>29.41%</td>
<td>21.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus culture not welcoming</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>26.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework was too difficult</td>
<td>12.34%</td>
<td>17.64%</td>
<td>6.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not meet the selected criteria for my academic program</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>6.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homesick</td>
<td>6.17%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>6.52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Out of 81 graduate students who indicated that they seriously considered leaving the university.
Table 4: Parent, Family and Partner Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Very challenging</th>
<th>Challenging</th>
<th>Mildly challenging</th>
<th>Not challenging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balancing studies and family/personal life</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>55.77%</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>0.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing work with school</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>32.69%</td>
<td>13.46%</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>36.54%</td>
<td>34.62%</td>
<td>22.12%</td>
<td>6.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic load/coursework</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>48.08%</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>5.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financing your education</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>36.54%</td>
<td>25.96%</td>
<td>20.19%</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health and fitness</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>27.88%</td>
<td>27.88%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
<td>25.96%</td>
<td>34.62%</td>
<td>14.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
<td>28.85%</td>
<td>17.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social life</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>20.19%</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>24.04%</td>
<td>32.69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A mean of 1 is the minimum and aligned with very challenging and 4 is the maximum and is aligned with not challenging. From a sample of 104 students who identified as parents on the Fall 2020 graduate student survey.
Appendices

Appendix A: Advisory Committee

Jennifer Abate, Research and Evaluation Project Manager, Office of the Provost
Salma Benhaida, Director of International Recruitment and Admissions
Sean Broghammer, Associate VP, Enrollment Management
Lique Coolen, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Laura Doncaster, Communications and Marketing Specialist, Division of Graduate Studies
Manfred van Dulmen, Associate Provost of Academic Affairs & Dean of Graduate Studies
Mary Hogue, Professor, Department of Management and Information Systems
Lamar Hylton, Vice President for Student Affairs
Claire Jackman, Executive Chair, Graduate Student Senate
Valerie Kelly, Associate VP, Continuing and Distance Education
Tiffany Lewis, Special Assistant, Division of Graduate Studies
Rui Liu, Associate Professor, Architecture
Stephen Mitchell, Associate Dean, College of Education, Health and Human Services
Pacifique Niyonzima, Graduate Student Representative
Megan Odell-Scott, Graduate Student Representative
Wesley Raaeb, Associate Professor, Department of English
Kyle Reynolds, Director of Graduate Student Services, Division of Graduate Studies
Therese Tillett, Associate VP, Curriculum Planning and Administration
Robin Vandezande, Professor, School of Art
Jonathan VanGeest, Professor of Health and Policy Management
Lana Whitehead, Director of Enrollment Management & Strategic Initiatives

Appendix B: Steering Committee

Jennifer Abate, Research and Evaluation Project Manager, Office of the Provost
Salma Benhaida, Director of International Recruitment and Admissions
Sean Broghammer, Associate VP, Enrollment Management
Lique Coolen, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Laura Doncaster, Communications and Marketing Specialist, Division of Graduate Studies
Manfred van Dulmen, Associate Provost of Academic Affairs & Dean of Graduate Studies
Lamar Hylton, Vice President for Student Affairs
Tiffany Lewis, Special Assistant, Division of Graduate Studies
Stephen Mitchell, Associate Dean, College of Education, Health and Human Services
Megan Odell-Scott, Graduate Student Representative
Kyle Reynolds, Director of Graduate Student Services, Division of Graduate Studies
Therese Tillett, Associate VP, Curriculum Planning and Administration
Lana Whitehead, Director of Enrollment Management & Strategic Initiatives
Appendix C: Graduate Studies Future Planning Events List of Attendees

Jennifer Abate, Office of the Provost
Noor Agustina, College of Education, Health and Human Services
N.J. Akbar, Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Sue Averill, Office of the Provost
Salma Benhaida, Office of Global Education
Ivan Bernal, College of Architecture and Environmental Design
Brittney Braydich, Division of Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement
Sean Broghammer, Division of Enrollment Management
Ken Burhanna, University Libraries
Brenda Burke, Division of Enrollment Management
Melissa Celko, Division of Student Affairs
Roberto Chavez, College of Business Administration
Lique Coolen, College of Arts and Sciences
Haley Corley, Division of Graduate Studies
Clarissa D'Angelo, Graduate Student Senate
Jef Davis, Office of Global Education
Nichole Decaprio, Office of General Counsel
Douglas Delahanty, Division of Research and Sponsored Programs
Ken Ditlevson, Division of Student Affairs
Laura Doncaster, Division of Graduate Studies
Alexa Doutt, Division of Philanthropy and Alumni Advancement
Talea Drummer-Ferrell, Division of Student Affairs
Cathy Dubois, College of Business Administration
Manfred van Dulmen, Division of Graduate Studies
Tameka Ellington, College of the Arts
Evan Faidley, Division of Graduate Studies
Amanda Feaster, Division of Student Affairs
Amoeba Gooden, Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Pam Grimm, College of Business Administration/Faculty Senate
Suat Gunhan, College of Architecture and Environmental Design
Jeffrey Hallam, College of Public Health
Joycelyn Harrison, College of Aerospace and Engineering
Nzinga Hart, College of Communication and Information
Jay Hays, College of Nursing
Julie Hild, Graduate Student Representative
Mary Hogue, College of Business Administration
Jody Holbrook, College of Communication and Information
Angie Hull, Athletics
Claire Jackman, Graduate Student Representative,
John G. Jewell, Academic Student Support Services
Sydney Jordan, Division of Student Affairs
Will Kalkhoff, Department of Sociology, College of Arts and Sciences
Valerie Kelly, Office of Continuing and Distance Education
Derek Kingsley, College of Education, Health and Human Services
Amy Kittle, College of Business Administration
Cheryl Ann Lambert, College of Communication and Information
Tiffany Lewis, Division of Graduate Studies
Rui Liu, College of Architecture and Environmental Design
Jennifer Marcinkiewicz, Center for Teaching and Learning
Miriam Matteson, College of Communication and Information
Klaire Matthews, College of Education, Health and Human Services
Jennifer McDonough, College of Arts and Sciences
Eron Memaj, Division of Student Affairs
Stephen Mitchell, College of Education, Health and Human Services
Mark Mistur, College of Architecture and Environmental Design
Jill Morrow, Division of Enrollment Management
Pacifique Niyonzima, Graduate Student Representative
Phaedra Norrell, Graduate Student Representative
Jennifer O’Connell, Division of Student Affairs
Ken Visocky O’Grady, College of Communication and Information
Megan Odell-Scott, Graduate Student Representative
Lisa Onesko, College of Nursing
Mike Pasquarella, Division of Philanthropy and Alumni Advancement
Cassandra Pegg-Kirby, Division of Student Affairs
Susan Perry, Office of Accreditation, Assessment and Learning
Eboni Pringle, University College
David Putman, College of Podiatric Medicine
Amy Quillin, Division of Student Affairs
Wesley Raabe, College of Arts and Sciences
Jim Raber, Division of Information Technology
Rouzbeh Razavi, College of Business Administration
Kyle Reynolds, Division of Graduate Studies
Joshua Rider, Division of Student Affairs
Daniel Scheibe, Graduate Student Representative,
John Schell, Division of Student Affairs
Peggy Shadduck, Regional Campuses
Amanda Shah, University College
Cheryl Slusarczuk, College of Education, Health and Human Services
Deb Smith, College of Arts and Sciences/AAUP
Anna Solberg, Graduate Student Representative,
Elliot Sommer, Graduate Student Representative
Linnea Stafford, Institutional Research,
Rob Sturr, Regional Campus
Therese Tillett, Office of the Provost
Michael Tubergen, College of Arts and Sciences
Appendix D: University units that participated in planning events

Philanthropy and Alumni Advancement
Student Accessibility Services
Division of Student Affairs
Center for Teaching and Learning
Kent State of Wellness
Research and Sponsored Programs
Student Ombuds
Office of Global Education
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Enrollment Management Operations and Administration
University Libraries
Faculty Affairs
Counseling and Psychological Services
Center for Student Involvement
Academic Student Support Services
LGBTQ+ Center
Career Exploration and Development
Office of Continuing and Distance Education
Academic Success Center
One Stop for Student Services
Center for Adult and Veteran Services
Center for Sexual and Relationship Violence Support Services
University College
Human Resources
Student-Athlete Academic Services
University Scholarship and Student Financial Aid
Division of Information Technology
Office of General Counsel
The College of Aerospace and Engineering
The College of Architecture and Environmental Design
The College of Arts and Sciences
The College of Business Administration
Appendix E: Current Functions and Objectives of the Division of Graduate Studies

Graduate Studies is a division that administers and coordinates graduate education, programs and services across the university system.

- Administers campus policies, standards and requirements for graduate study.
- Serves an advisory role on graduate programs and policies.
- Provides services to enhance the quality of life for graduate students.
- Supports graduate assistants, faculty, staff and administrators.
- Promotes the value of diversity and an inclusive environment.
- Advocates for graduate student success within the institution and externally.

Objectives and Functions

- Coordinate, partner and collaborate on student support services that enhance the graduate student experience and academic success.
- Serve as a resource center for graduate education best practices, data analysis, university policy and administrative effectiveness.
- Provide centralized communications and important updates to stakeholders in graduate education including students, faculty, staff and administration.
- Provide university-level oversight to graduate programs and policies.
- Promote and maintain centralized award processes for recruiting and retaining graduate students, advancing diversity, equity and inclusion and recognizing excellence in research and academic achievement.
- Advance the marketing of Kent State as a destination for graduate education.
- Celebrate and recognize the success of our graduate students and graduate alumni.

Graduate Student Support Services

- Orienting new graduate students and teaching assistants to the university through Graduate Student Orientation (GSO).
- Hosting events for graduate students to gain experience presenting their research to interdisciplinary audiences including Three Minute Thesis, FlashPitch and supporting the Graduate Student Senate (GSS) Graduate Research Symposium.
- Hosting events to support academic writing and research goals including Dissertation Boot Camps and virtual writing accountability groups.
● Coordinating events to celebrate and recognize students during Graduate Student Appreciation Week.
● Provide professional development workshops, recorded presentation video libraries and assessments to earn certifications for research fundamentals and career planning essentials.
● Provide career advising appointments for graduate students.
● Provide advising and support to the Graduate Student Senate.
● Coordinate affinity groups for first-generation graduate students and parenting graduate students.

Marketing, Communications and Philanthropy

● Manage social media accounts for the Division on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn.
● Send monthly Grad Chronicle newsletter with updates and news on awards, programming, student spotlights, policy updates and campus resources.
● Coordinate Giving Tuesday campaigns to raise funding for Division initiatives.
● Maintain the Division website including the forms library and guide to graduate education.

Administrative Support

● Administer awards and fellowships for current and prospective students.
● Manage graduate student workflows including the leave of absence requests and requests for additional employment.
● Process of graduate student forms including application for graduate re-enrollment and exception for full-time enrollment.
● Maintain records of graduate faculty status.
● Provide support to the Chancellor’s Council on Graduate Schools (CCGS).

Appendix F: Template for Breakout Group Discussions at Planning Events

Breakout Group Instructions

● Please list the names of all team members on the template document.
● Specify who is your team lead and team recorder.
● Breakout groups are comprised of people from various divisions, departments, colleges and areas of the Kent State community. To get things rolling, please choose an icebreaker activity from the list below so that your team can get to know one another.
● The recorder should keep detailed notes of your team’s recommendations and populate the template accordingly. Once finished, your notes can be sent to Laura Doncaster at ldoncast@kent.edu.
Following the Graduate Studies future planning events, you will be sent a short Qualtrics follow-up survey. Please be sure to complete the survey so that we may review your recommendations and feedback of the event.

**Icebreaker Activity** – Please choose at least one of the three icebreakers listed below to get to know the different members of your group.

- If you were a sandwich, what would you be? And why?
- What is your superhero name?
- What is the best piece of advice you’ve ever been given?

**Recorder:**
**Reporter:**
**Group members:**

**Objectives:** Objectives varied depending on the topic. Four different areas were covered, each with their own set of objectives.

**Initial Considerations**

- What do you see as the ideal state for this area?
- What do you see as potential barriers?
- What do you see as potential opportunities?

**Questions to consider for breakout sessions:**
(We understand you may not have enough time to address all questions, and that your conversations may generate additional questions that you would like to answer.)

- What are the profiles and needs of the 21st century graduate student? What can be done to ensure faculty and staff are prepared to support the 21st century graduate student? How do we ensure faculty are providing the necessary mentorship to promote student success and retention?
- What kind of support do our post docs need? How are the needs of post docs different from graduate students?
- What areas do faculty, staff and GAs need training on? What could training look like for faculty, GAs and staff? Is this a centralized process?
- What support should faculty and staff expect related to recruitment and graduate admissions?
- What processes could be implemented to ensure GAs are set up for success in their roles? How are GAs assessed throughout their time in this role? How should GAs be mentored in these roles?

**Areas of Recommendation to Consider:**
- Graduate assistant support
- Faculty support
- Administrator and staff support
References


Stebleton, M. J. & Kaler, L. (2020, January 20) *Promoting graduate student mental health: The role of student affairs professionals and faculty*. NASPA.  
https://www.naspa.org/blog/promoting-graduate-student-mental-health-the-role-of-student-affairs-professionals-and-faculty