

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS CONSULTATION REPORT

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Introduction

The University of Alaska Fairbanks

The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) was founded in 1917 and has a Carnegie Classification of Doctoral University – High Research Activity. The University offers programs in locations across the state of Alaska and is America’s northernmost Land, Sea, and Space Grant institution. The current graduate enrollment is approximately 1,000 students, which includes 300 doctoral students pursuing traditional, research-based degrees. Fields of interest span the life, physical, and social sciences; engineering; arts; humanities; and indigenous studies. The interdisciplinary doctoral degree provides research opportunities at the intersections of climate/climate change and the physical/social aspects of communities, education, and politics. There are also robust management, business administration, education, and counseling degree programs at the master’s level. The University’s graduate degree programs align with attracting Alaskan Natives to meet the state’s and nongovernment sectors’ workforce demands.

The strategic consultation was coordinated by the Graduate School and Interdisciplinary Studies Office (GSISO) Director, Dr. Richard Collins. The three-day site visit was well-organized and allowed the team to meet with a wide variety of stakeholders: executive administrative leadership; deans, associate deans, and research center directors; senior leadership in enrollment management, marketing, communications, and institutional research; graduate program directors, faculty, and students. The consultation team appreciated the openness of everyone, their engagement in the review process, and their contributions in identifying opportunities for future success of the University’s graduate-education enterprise.

The past three years at UAF have been ones of transition and budgetary contraction. There is hope that the next few years will bring stability or recovery, and there is broad recognition of the need to reset graduate education and other functions of the institution. Recent challenges followed reduced resources from the state of Alaska, which engaged in a cost-reduction process that decreased state appropriations for the state-system universities by approximately 25% since FY2020. Not surprisingly, these reductions led to significant faculty attrition that has had a disproportionate impact on graduate education. More recently, a new Interim President has initiated university-wide conversations that focus on “right sizing” the University to align its academic mission strategically with current resources and faculty expertise.

All these challenges offer an important leadership opportunity to the GSISO to help shape the future of graduate education at UAF. Dr. Collins asked for a Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) Strategic Consultation focusing on three areas. These were enrollment management, development of a portfolio of future focused degree programs, and development of a series of professional development opportunities aligned with workforce and professional competencies that will prepare graduate students to compete for advanced careers.

Overarching and Structural Issues

Throughout our meetings, the consultation team heard very positive comments about the dedication of the GSISO leadership and staff. It is the opinion of the consultation team that UAF currently has the appropriate leadership group in place with Dr. Richard Collins and Ms. Shelly Baumann to move the graduate-education enterprise forward for the University. During his short tenure, Dr. Collins has enhanced the UAF graduate-education infrastructure to ensure graduate student voices are heard. The creation of the Graduate School Student Advisory Board (GSSAB) composed of students and routine town halls with students are two example initiatives. Additionally, the interdisciplinary doctoral program is a significant strength for UAF and fits with the national trend of degree customization.

The change in the title of UAF's chief academic officer for graduate education from dean to director does not reflect the institutional identity and negatively impacts the graduate-education and research enterprises. Throughout our meetings, the consultation team heard repeatedly that UAF is the state's research institution. The University of Alaska Fairbanks is the only institution in the University of Alaska (UA) System that has Carnegie doctoral and research classifications. However, the title dean is used at the University of Alaska Anchorage (Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs) and University of Alaska Southeast (Master's Colleges & Universities: Medium Programs) for the person who leads graduate education. These intrastate comparisons, as well as the existence of a robust interdisciplinary PhD degree program that resides within UAF's GSISO, led the consultation team to question UAF's choice of the title director for Dr. Collins.

The Membership Directory of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) documents the titles aligned with leaders of graduate education. Graduate research institutions that are CGS members use titles including dean or associate/vice provost to lead their graduate enterprises. These titles

are important because they signal to both internal and external communities about the importance of graduate education and research at UAF. The University's current use of the title "Director" creates significant barriers to achieving the University's mission and vision for graduate education. Graduate education leaders need to have an equitable seat at the table as a "Dean" or "Vice Provost" when important institutional-level decisions are being made. The University offers a good example of this practice based on the leadership model used for Enrollment Management. Concern for the limitations of the title "Director of the Graduate School and Interdisciplinary Studies" was raised by constituent groups throughout the consultation team's visit.

Staffing of the GSISO is inadequate. As additional resources become available, the staffing level needs to be increased to reflect a modern research university. For example, the GSISO leadership needs to be able to make data-informed decisions, and there needs to be central tracking of career outcomes, routine climate surveys, etc. Currently, there are only two to three full time equivalent (FTE) staff associated with the GSISO beyond the director and assistant director, and these individuals are taking on numerous responsibilities typical of multiple positions. A review of how UAF's consolidated fee is being utilized might provide additional resources, as the consultation team was led to believe that graduate students pay this fee, but there is no transparency on how graduate students benefit, nor on the fraction of fee revenue used to support graduate vs. undergraduate students.

In addition to the staffing level for the GSISO, UAF would benefit from a more centrally coordinated approach to graduate education. Currently, UAF is very decentralized in its policies and practices that pertain to graduate education. This may not reflect best practices. For example, any four faculty members with PhDs may constitute a doctoral committee. At many other institutions, a certain fraction of members (typically at least 50%) must be from within the student's department or graduate program, and at least one member must be from other units to add diversity of perspective, and to examine on declared areas of minor study. GSISO leaders need to be empowered and supported if changes to policies on committee structure are pursued. Other areas that would be enhanced by having consistent policies and practices include institutional-level data on topics such as structured dual degrees (e.g., 4+1) to recruit UAF undergraduates, timely action on graduate applications by programs, graduate student time to degree, graduate program handbook requirements, new degree program development across units, collaboration on external training grant submissions, and risk management for training and fieldwork.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks Consultation Assessment Profile and Recommendation

Assessment Profile 1

Consultation on Enrollment Management

The consultation team commends UAF for identifying the need to examine the management of enrollment in its graduate programs. Enrollment management comprises a broad set of considerations and functions at the institution. These include decisions on areas of scholarship in which to credential, credentials to offer (e.g., degrees, majors, minors, certificates), recruitment, price points, and scholarship/financial aid.

Profile 1

Consultation Team Findings

Graduate admission processes are spread out across many units. This undermines the ability of UAF to attract top talent to their graduate programs. Currently, the Admission Office, GSISO, individual graduate programs, colleges, and research institutes are all involved in the application-admission process, and many times there are unintentional, overlapping efforts that may lead to confusion for prospective students, staff, and faculty.

Prospective graduate student recruitment is the first step in successful application-admission processes. UAF's geographical location is both a competitive advantage and a challenge. The institution can rightly claim to be the best, perhaps only, place to study issues unique to Alaska or the Arctic region, offering students and scholars a unique opportunity and experience. Yet, travel to UAF is relatively cumbersome and costly. This makes it difficult to host prospective students for visits.

Retention and timely degree completion are other important aspects of graduate enrollment management. Currently, there does not seem to be any centralized effort to prevent, understand, or broadly address graduate student attrition. Also, it is unclear whether institutional-level data are available for these national, best-practice metrics concerning attrition and time to degree. The consultation team noted that GSISO's longstanding program to provide degree-completion funding to late-program graduate students clearly is appreciated by students and faculty. However, there are no data to support the effectiveness of the program, as many students still do not graduate at the expected time. Additionally, the GSISO is doing important work to retain and promote the continual progress of current graduate students. For example, the consultation team heard that

annual evaluations are done for each graduate student, which is a highly commendable best practice.

Retention of graduate students can be directly enhanced by Graduate Program Directors (GPD). At UAF, this position needs to be defined and aligned with best practices. It appears that many department heads are serving a dual role, which is not in the best interest of the program students. The consultation team could not determine if there is a point of contact, a GPD or supporting administrative professional, affiliated with each program.

Another aspect of enrollment management is the ability to support graduate students with teaching and research assistantships (TA/RA). As director of the GSISO, Dr. Collin's portfolio also includes seeking grants to further support graduate students, although what this responsibility entails appears ill defined. With respect to grants, currently, UAF faculty pay resident and non-resident tuition for RAs paid from grants. This is inconsistent with many research institutions and does not appear to be sustainable. The higher cost of an assistantship affects the funding available for the research project and makes it more difficult for UAF faculty to compete with their peers in terms of productivity and new grants. Additionally, the consultation team was very concerned to learn that international students may be awarded TA positions without meeting the institutional requirements for English proficiency.

Profile 1

Recommendations

1.1 Align Graduate Application Lifecycle with the Graduate School and Interdisciplinary Studies

The consultation team believes that significant gains can be made by streamlining how prospective graduate students navigate the process of applying to UAF. In the present state, the GSISO does not oversee critical phases of the process, which instead reside in Admissions. In the discussions about graduate admissions, the various groups on the schedule agreed that it would make sense for it to move to the GSISO. In fact, Admissions personnel stated that the Admissions Office is a "competent but unnecessary unit in the [admissions] process." Moreover, many individuals noted during the visit that they did not understand who on campus had responsibility for the admission processing *versus* the admission decision. Making this change would reduce the frequency of potential graduate students being confused about the point of contact for information and questions. This would also reduce incidents of conflicting

information being offered by different offices. Currently, prospective students can be transferred around, which undermines recruiting efforts.

Another serious issue identified by the consultation team was that, at the end of the recruitment cycle, there may not be any action taken on some graduate applications. This is deadly for recruiting and more importantly for institutional reputation. The fragmented system that is currently in place does not allow for accountability and would be resolved by shifting responsibility *and* resources to the GSISO.

The recruitment of graduate students has never been more competitive. For UAF to attract talented, well-prepared applicants, the institution must ensure that applications are processed quickly, using best-practice holistic approaches, and decisions communicated in a timely manner. Personal contact from those who understand the nuances of graduate education often is highly effective with graduate prospects. For these reasons, the GSISO should have the authority and responsibility for managing the graduate-application lifecycle (communication, submission, review, and admission). It is essential to recognize that the GSISO also will require additional staffing and resources to take on these vital roles.

1.2 Adopt Best Practices for Graduate Candidate Recruitment

There are several ways to improve the recruitment of graduate students. The consultation team recommends a multipronged approach to address the recruitment challenges. State-of-the-art website tools (i.e., those broadly categorized within the immersive web) should be used to provide a sense of the Fairbanks campus and community, along with outlying research stations/venues. More funding should be invested in bringing select prospective students to campus, and a small subset of current graduate students who are funded to travel to conferences should be incentivized/rewarded as trained UAF GSISO ambassadors/recruiters. In addition, the institution should develop a strategy to ensure that Salesforce is much more broadly used by graduate programs and the GSISO for engaging with prospective students. For example, automated communication flows should be put in place to be sent out throughout the application-admission cycle, as well as campaigns that are customized for specific graduate programs. Prospective student lists, like the CGS McNair directory should be utilized.

1.3 Assess Degree Completion Funding Program for Informed Reinvestment

During the consultation team's visit, concerns were expressed that the degree-completion funding is underutilized. Additionally, there were several comments that indicated that a significant fraction of students who receive such awards did not graduate on the anticipated schedule. Therefore, the consultation team recommends that data be collected and assessed on the effectiveness of these awards. The program may need to be discontinued, scaled-back, or redesigned based on the assessment outcomes. Depending on what the data show, resources now channeled to this program might be invested in better ways. For example, the consultants heard a suggestion that grants to initiate dissertation and thesis research early could be offered when a researcher learns a grant award has been approved but the funds will not be received for a few months.

1.4 Offer Multi-year Funding Packages

Many graduate students are funded throughout their graduate studies with a combination of TA and RA appointments. Therefore, it is recommended that UAF capitalize on this fact and make multi-year offers upfront. This will make UAF offers much more attractive to prospective students, and the consultation team noted that there appears to be program capacity for additional enrollment in many degree programs. With multi-year offers, it is important to include the qualifying language in the letters about the necessity of remaining in good standing to continue to receive financial support.

1.5 Realign English Language Policies with the Graduate School and Interdisciplinary Studies

With respect to TA positions, the consultation team recommends that the GSISO be responsible for determining the policies and procedures for meeting UAF's institutional English language requirements. Relatedly, the GSISO needs to work with UAF's Human Resources to develop policy and procedures for terminating TA and RA positions. Neither of these assistantship issues should be managed on an ad hoc basis as they appear to be done now.

1.6 Clearly Define the Roles of Graduate Program Directors

It is recommended that the graduate program directors' roles and responsibilities be clear in each graduate program, and ideally, graduate program directors would not be department

heads. There should be a clear point of contact in each program with the same title, even if these individuals hold other administrative positions. Once the GPDs are identified, they should meet regularly with the GSISO. At many other institutions, these are group meetings held on a regular schedule (monthly or once/twice per semester). These meetings are excellent opportunities to share information, best practices, new initiatives, data, etc. This will improve communications across units and the campus.

1.7 Seek Training Grants to Diversify Graduate Student Support

The consultation team recommends that the GSISO director's role in institutional-level training grants be formalized and broadly communicated. GSISO should be the lead for the submission and oversight of training grants like National Science Foundation Research Traineeship (NRT) and Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP), Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) or National Institutes of Health Graduate Research Training Initiative for Student Enhancement (G-RISE). This coordinated, collaborate approach by the GSISO with units throughout the university will allow the institution to leverage human, physical and fiscal resources to provide more competitive applications and garner additional support for graduate students. Also, GSISO should provide continuity by being responsible for the awarded projects.

Assessment Profile 2

Consultation on Demand, Career Pathways, and Student Experience to Inform Graduate Study Sustainability and Reinvestment

As the administrative unit overseeing and supporting all UAF's graduate programs, the GSISO should have a leading role in shaping the UAF graduate-education landscape, including central involvement in regular academic program reviews that harness transparent, consistent, and reliable data regarding demand, student progress, and career outcomes. Such program reviews, combined with these metrics, will allow UAF to consolidate, eliminate, or reorganize existing programs effectively, reinvest in others, and develop new programs in response to market demands and needs of the state.

Profile 2

Consultation Team Findings and Recommendations

2.1 Align Program Reviews with the Graduate School and Interdisciplinary Studies

With recognition that UAF Academic Affairs conducts regular program reviews, and that the Provost and Vice Provost continue to improve the review process, the consultation team recommends that the GSISO play a role in shaping the format and process of, as well as the conducting of, academic program reviews involving graduate programs. There are a few specific recommendations regarding these program reviews: (1) either regularly or periodically, the program reviews should involve external reviewers; and (2) a standard dataset that includes key graduate data should be communicated well in advance to programs under review, and UAF needs to provide consistent and reliable data. The datasets should include standardized data on program demand, student progress, time to degree, and career outcomes. See recommendations on data and analysis below.

2.2 Streamline and Align New Program Development with the Graduate School and Interdisciplinary Studies Office

The consultation team recommends that the GSISO play a key role in collaborating with the academic units to develop and review proposals for new graduate programs. The consultants were told that the new program proposal process takes approximately three years. Recognizing that there are multiple and necessary approval steps within UAF and in the general UA system, the consultants recommend streamlining the new proposal review process as much as possible, especially in the cases of certificate programs and accelerated 4+1 programs. For 4+1 programs, which are a combination of two already approved degree programs, perhaps a limited internal review may be possible as it is in other state systems.

2.3 Invest in Graduate Data Acquisition and Interpretation

Effective assessment of graduate program sustainability and realization of resources for reinvestment in existing or new graduate programs depend on easy, transparent access to reliable and consistent data about UAF's graduate programs. Most institutions struggle, to some degree, with achieving this, but the consultants believe that UAF can take some

immediate and some long-term steps to develop and harness the sorts of graduate data that are crucial for the health of UAF's graduate-education enterprise

2.3.1 Short-term Recommendations

- a. *Establish a Research Assistant to Support Graduate Data Collection.* The University needs a dedicated effort for improving, standardizing, collecting, and reporting graduate data. The consultation team recommends that, in the short-term, the GSISO should reallocate some funding, perhaps from its underutilized student completion fellowship pool or previous carryover funds, to support a full-time graduate research assistant (RA) dedicated to graduate data efforts. Such a position will be most effective if it is funded by the GSISO but placed within UAF's Planning, Analysis, and Institutional Research (PAIR) unit. Responsibilities, supervision, and evaluation for this RA should be governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the GSISO and PAIR.
- b. *Create a Graduate Data Dashboard.* Short-term efforts should focus on using existing institutional data to develop a simple graduate student and graduate program data dashboard. Initially, this dashboard could focus on student information system and application/admission/enrollment data. Using such a dashboard as a pilot to be shared with graduate programs for feedback could help pave the way for a more fully developed graduate dataset and dashboard.
- c. *Focus on Graduate Data Integrity.* Initial efforts could also be made regarding "cleaning up" graduate data and making it more consistent.
- d. *Develop a Graduate Alumni Impact Program.* Building upon recent collaboration such as the Three Minute Thesis[®] competition, GSISO and the UAF Alumni Association would both benefit from developing and maintaining an accurate graduate alumni list. This work could lead to a variety of positive impacts well beyond outcome data and fundraising. Graduate alumni can be partners in developing experiential learning and mentoring opportunities for UAF students, undergraduates and graduates, networking employment pathways for graduates.

2.3.2 Long-term Recommendations

- a. *Invest in an Information Specialist Position.* The consultation team sees the above RA position as a means to jump-start a graduate-data effort. However, this effort will only become sustainable and extensible across UAF's graduate programs with more permanent staffing. The consultants recommend that UAF invest in an information specialist position dedicated to graduate education. This is especially important given UAF's research focus. Administratively, this position could work well positioned as a direct PAIR report with dotted-line reporting to the GSISO or vice versa. This position's duties would support the roles and responsibilities that follow.
- b. *Develop Comprehensive Graduate Dataset.* Design and develop an appropriate graduate dataset with variables that provide useful information about the past and present state of graduate education at UAF. The dataset should be integrated into the institutional dataset rather than be a separate entity (e.g., under the GSISO), and having the information specialist in PAIR should help facilitate this. By way of example, the University of Wyoming's internal *Powerbase* graduate data dashboard¹ captures and illustrates data from the institutional level down to the level of degrees, certificates, and concentrations. These dashboard data include not just enrollment and degree information but also key metrics of student preparation, progress and success, and strategic plan key performance indicators. Such a dashboard can be the go-to source for graduate data for faculty, staff, and administrators leading to more transparency when it comes to data and decisions.
- c. *Promote Data Integrity.* Identify and rectify areas of inconsistent and erroneous data.
- d. *Maintain Career Demand and Outcomes Data.* Develop and implement standards and a means of recording data on student and employer demand and student outcomes. This information is best collected at the graduate-

¹ Although this is an internal tool, the University of Wyoming School of Graduate Education would be pleased to provide a virtual tour of the dashboard to any UAF personnel upon request.

program level. For example, many UAF graduate programs already maintain career outcome data on their graduates and can access discipline-specific demand and outcome data from professional organizations and state and federal agencies. The information specialist can help develop and implement standard data collection by academic units.

- e. *Invest Resources in Data Sources.* Accessing and harnessing external datasets regarding graduate demand and outcomes, including those available already or free (e.g., Emsi, IPEDS, Bureau of Labor Statistics, CGS). Furthermore, as resources allow, UAF should consider investing in other data services such as Burning Glass and/or Gray Associates for demand data and Academic Analytics' Alumni Insight for graduate outcomes information. These tools can have broad impact beyond the GSISO and may be worth purchasing.
- f. *Develop a Graduate Community Survey.* Implement periodic surveys of graduate students, graduate alumni, and faculty. Such surveys can be used to understand the graduate student experience, including challenges to degree quality and completion, as well as career outcomes and program climate.
- g. *Develop a Key Constituent Survey.* Implement periodic surveys of other key constituents: employers, undergraduate students (e.g., What do they know about graduate school? What graduate programs are of interest?).

2.4 Enhance Research Institutes and Graduate Education Relationships

UAF's many excellent research institutes are already integral to graduate education. There are potentially many constraints on the administrative structure, funding, and academic personnel of the research institutes. Nevertheless, the consultants recommend that, where possible, some enhancements to graduate program – research institute relations be made.

2.5 Expand Research Institute Academic Personnel Graduate Mentoring

According to the Research Institute directors, a recent and positive change has allowed Institute faculty to chair graduate committees. Furthermore, many Research Institute faculty have

academic homes in the colleges. Although this may create some issues with faculty tenure and promotion and faculty development, in general, this arrangement is very positive for the graduate programs in that these personnel are enculturated into a graduate academic environment while also maintaining a foot in the Research Institute world. The consultants recommend expanding such dual appointments as they will help align priorities across the institutes and colleges. This will, in turn, mean that these faculty would have graduate teaching and mentoring as part of their job expectations, thus recognizing those many institute faculty who already are working with graduate students.

Further improvements to graduate education at UAF could be realized with administratively realigning the research institutes. In some cases, such as Fisheries, a research institute lies within a college, meaning that the research and teaching missions are well-aligned. In other cases, the institutes exist completely outside of Academic Affairs and report to the Vice Chancellor for Research. This is not necessarily a problem for graduate education if there is alignment of the goals of Academic Affairs and Research. There does seem to be collaboration between the GSISO and Research; however, it appears to be largely relational because there is no administrative connection between the two. Administrative structures that further support these natural collaborations should be examined.

2.6 Communicate Graduate Student Success

Enhancing UAF's communication of its graduate programs' demand and career outcomes to its broader constituency is crucial. The consultation team heard from the colleges and research institutes that their public information officers are stretched too thin, so thin that it can be difficult to communicate regularly about graduate students and programs. As resources become available, the consultants recommend making investments in marketing and communication, particularly in the GSISO. A public information officer dedicated to the GSISO would be able to advocate for graduate programs across the University and be able to help communicate the benefits of graduate education to internal and external constituents.

Assessment Profile 3 Consultation on Professional Development

The UAF leadership team seeks an assessment of the University's current professional development portfolio to determine if programs and policies are aligned with best practices. Professional development programs for graduate students often focus on the acquisition of transferrable competencies, such as leadership, instruction, interdisciplinary collaboration, communication of scholarly work, teamwork, and networking, that support timely degree completion and are valued in the workplace.

The consultation team was asked to identify the strengths associated with current programming and determine what adjustments are required to create a strong professional development portfolio, identifying the roles and responsibilities of the GSISO and/or departments/colleges/institutes. UAF noted that some development programs are available at the University for faculty to strengthen their mentoring expertise required for the support and supervision of graduate students; however, professional development programming for graduate students is primarily decentralized.

The consultation team was asked to verify that graduate students have access to the workshops that support degree completion and career launch. In addition, the team was asked to make recommendations to guide the University toward strategically developing the programs and processes essential for excellence in professional development programming that complement and strengthen their disciplinary competencies. Among the outcomes of the consultation will be an outline of the distribution of responsibilities for PD that recommends those that should be managed centrally by the GSISO and those that should be distributed to other institutional units.

Profile 3 Consultation Team Findings

The UAF leadership team requested an assessment of the current professional development programs available for graduate students at the University and their alignment with best practices. Given the decentralized nature of UAF graduate ecosystem, the extent of graduate student professional development programming, program participation rates, program efficacy and comprehensive nature of such programming is not known. From the various meetings throughout the visit, the consultation team was able to verify that there was no obvious evidence of a robust,

coordinated professional development program that is inclusive of students in the various programs at either the master's or doctoral levels.

The consultation team was pleased to learn that the GSISO is perceived by its constituents to be offering some relevant professional development programming, especially in thesis and dissertation preparation, and this past year, the GSISO added new offerings, such as the Three Minute Thesis[®]. However, the team also recognizes that the extremely low level of GSISO staffing severely limits what can be offered. During the visit, it also was noted that effective communication about professional development offering continues to be a challenge, along with getting students and their faculty advisers/supervisors interested in programming, services, etc. beyond degree requirements. These challenges are common in graduate education, and some suggestions to address them are below. The recently created student GSSAB is commendable and should result in a better ecosystem for graduate education at UAF that will address these challenges.

Another challenge identified by the consultation team is that members of the faculty with whom consultants met seemed skeptical of the need for investing in career services for graduate students. While the consultants do not know how prevalent this attitude is, the strongest sentiment heard was that individual graduate advisers can and should assist their students with exploring career pathways, with preparing their students to apply and interview for positions and with negotiation options and skills. However, the lack of centralized professional development programming leaves many students without professional development options as individual faculty mentors will provide or encourage this critical training to various extents. Moreover, many advisers may lack knowledge about contemporary career-building skills needed to succeed in the diversity of career opportunities that are available to new graduates, particularly those outside of academia. Building support among students and faculty for professional development programming in the GSISO will be important for success.

Profile 3 Recommendations

3.1 Create a Professional Development Inventory of Current Offerings

Professional development is critical for graduate students' timely degree completion and career success. Given the varying needs of graduate students in graduate and professional programs, the consultation team recommends the following:

- a. *Inventory Professional Development Offerings.* Systematically examine the professional development offerings for graduate students by all units on campus including central units, e.g., the GSISO, Career Services, Library, as well as colleges, institutes, departments, and programs. The inventory also should collect any program-expansion capacity and assessment information, when available.
- b. *Invest in Professional Development Offerings.* It was mentioned that the GSISO has some carryforward funding available and while the desire is to use it for student support, to date those programs are undersubscribed. Therefore, one way to rethink "student support" is to make investments in professional development program planning.
- c. *Provide Support Personnel.* Consider engaging a faculty fellow or graduate student RA to create the inventory and executive summary of the status of such programming at UAF. This personnel model is common for handling discrete, shorter-term projects. There are numerous faculty fellow compensation models from a course release, to summer salary, to an overload stipend. For example, one could provide a \$500-1,000 monthly administrative add-on to a faculty member's current compensation over the academic year or 1-2 months of summer salary.
- d. *Guide New Programming.* The inventory report would be foundational to identifying the gaps in professional development activities, the opportunities to expand existing programming, and the creation of new initiatives within the proper units.

3.2 Survey Graduate Students

Consider a survey of graduate students and faculty to identify professional development programming needs and frequency of offerings. GSISO's response to the survey results will strengthen the support for the professional development program.

3.3 Design Comprehensive and Future Focused Programs

Use the report and inventory to design a comprehensive professional development program, determine the breadth and depth of the professional development programming elements under a comprehensive theme, and determine major pillars of competencies. With student mental health being a national focus and the historical concerns about graduate student mental health, consider having health and wellness as one of the focus areas in any professional development program in partnership with the UAF University Student Health & Counseling Center. The program structure will have to reflect whether offerings are mono- or multi-level with entry through advanced levels.

It is recommended that initial efforts focus on the most critical needs. For example, the consultation team recommends the development of communication and classroom-management skills for those appointed to TAs be a priority. Such professional development programming needs to support instructional best practices, as this was a concern raised during the site visit.

3.4 Foster Partnerships

Encourage the partnership of GSISO with institutional units to broaden the availability of travel grants for graduate students. One of the most important ways that graduate students can develop professionally is to participate in national and international meetings of their professional societies.

3.5 Engage in Collaborations

Identify the most appropriate and/or relevant unit(s) to offer the specific professional development programming elements. The identification of partnerships and synergistic opportunities for collaboration throughout the institution are critically important. Such units are Career Services, which needs additional staffing, Writing Center, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, Student Health & Counseling Center, and Student Affairs. However, it is important that units do not place unusual burdens on program participants. For example, the consultants were told that E-campus has become the unit for faculty professional development but only if one is willing to adopt their practices. This is inconsistent with best practices as faculty should be allowed to take the training and determine if it fits with their course content, objectives, etc.

3.6 Integrate Professional Development into Individual Development Plans

Integrate the new professional development program into Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for doctoral students. In graduate education, IDPs are becoming the norm, especially for doctoral students with longer engagement times in comparison to one-, two-, or three-year master's degree programs. Importantly, the use of IDPs provides individualized student frameworks for professional development activities. To create early wins, IDPs could be piloted with a specific group, which also can have the added benefits of testing the professional development rollout and generating an early group of advocates for the professional development programming. Using some carryover funding, the GSISO should consider carving out small stipends for the pilot group of graduate students to create buy-in and have a requirement for outreach and advocacy efforts by participants. Given the breadth of professional development programming available, graduate students should work with their faculty advisory committees to develop an IDP.

3.7 Promote Micro Credentialing

Consider embedding micro credentialing, such as digital badges, in the professional development program to provide tangible outcomes that can be shared on professional profiles (e.g., LinkedIn) and with future employers. To demonstrate the value of any professional development programming, plan to incorporate participation and assessment metrics. Also, it will be important to have a mix of in-person and virtual offerings, as attendance can be enhanced with the optimal learning modality.

3.8 Strengthen Communication

Develop an effective communication strategy for professional development offering with UAF communication professionals to ensure students and faculty are aware of opportunities. Strategy options could include a weekly or monthly newsletter, or a professional development virtual announcement board embedded in course-learning software or GSISO form-submission site.

Having such a comprehensive roadmap for professional development will contribute to the graduate-education-enterprise ecosystem and enable the GSISO to focus on interdisciplinary programming activities or those that require a critical mass that cannot be achieved in individual programs, research institutes or colleges. The roadmap also will serve as a clearinghouse for programming across the campus and will document the costs associated with professional development for graduate students and determine if a separate fee is appropriate in the future. It is possible that the roadmap will identify and possibly eliminate redundancy in professional development offerings and provide a mechanism for accountability through robust assessment, safeguard that appropriate and relevant programming is available to all graduate students, ensure efficient marketing of professional development opportunities to target populations, and facilitate the development of individual development plans to ensure that graduate students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to complement their degree requirements and ensure career success.

Concluding Remarks

The Consultation Team gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance of the many students, faculty, and staff at the University of Alaska Fairbanks who made our visit to the University so productive.

Acknowledgements

The Council of Graduate Schools acknowledges Dr. Richard Collins, Director of Graduate School & Interdisciplinary Studies, for his leadership to advance best practices in graduate education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The Council of Graduate Schools further acknowledges the leadership of Dr. James Ahern, Vice Provost for Graduate Education at the University of Wyoming; Dr. William Graves, Dean of the Graduate College at Iowa State University; and Dr. Sheryl Tucker, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate College at the Oklahoma State University for providing the University of Alaska Fairbanks with multiple pathways for advancing graduate education. The recommendations have been developed to achieve the institution's overall mission, vision, and strategic plan for graduate education.

Appendix A Professional Development Resources

Michigan State University. PREP: Planning, Resilience, Engagement, Professionalism. Available at: <https://grad.msu.edu/career-planning>.

- Note: This program is an example of one of the earliest and most established professional development programs in the United States. It is a comprehensive approach. Many institutions are now offering these activities as micro credentials and/or digital badges.

Oklahoma State University. Professional Development Programs. Available at: <https://gradcollege.okstate.edu/professional-development/about-the-program.html>

University of Arizona. Professional Development Programs. Available at: <https://grad.arizona.edu/policies/academic-policies/graduate-microcredential-badge-approval-process>

University of Colorado Boulder. Professional Development Programs. Available at: <https://www.colorado.edu/graduateschool/professional-development/career-resources/digital-credential-badges>

University of Minnesota. Professional Development Programs. Available at: <https://grad.umn.edu/academic-career-support/digital-badging>

Appendix B
Additional Resources

Baker, M., Carter, M., Larick, D., King, M. (2011). *Assessment and Review of Graduate Programs*. Washington, D.C. Available from the Council of Graduate Schools at: [assessment_and_review_2011-2.pdf \(cgsnet.org\)](https://www.cgsnet.org/assessment_and_review_2011-2.pdf)

Council of Graduate Schools. (2019). *The Organization and Administration of Graduate Education*. Washington, D.C. Available from the Council of Graduate Schools at: [CGSOrgAdminweb.pdf \(cgsnet.org\)](https://www.cgsnet.org/CGSOrgAdminweb.pdf)

Council of Graduate Schools. (2010). *Ph.D. Completion and Attrition: Policies and Practices to Promote Student Success*. Washington, D.C. Available from the Council of Graduate Schools at: [112535_CGS_PhD_bdyREV.indd \(cgsnet.org\)](https://www.cgsnet.org/112535_CGS_PhD_bdyREV.indd)

Council of Graduate Schools: The University of Alaska Fairbanks Consultation Report Executive Summary

As released to Chancellor's Core Cabinet, October 24, 2022

Richard L Collins

Graduate School Director

November 10, 2022

On behalf of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), James Ahern (Vice Provost for Graduate Education, University of Wyoming), William Graves (Dean of the Graduate College, Iowa State University), and Sheryl Tucker (Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate College, Oklahoma State University) conducted a consultative review of the Graduate School and Interdisciplinary Studies Office (GSISO) and graduate practices at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Their review was based on an in-person institutional visit (March 27-30, 2022) to the Troth Yeddha' campus and institutional data provided by GSISO.

The CGS team focused their consultation on three areas;

Enrollment management,

Demand, Career pathways, & Student experience,

and

Professional development.

1. Enrollment Management

1. Graduate admissions should be consolidated to provide a cleaner, more efficient, and responsive process for applicants. Provide resources for GSISO to have authority and responsibility for admissions communication, submission, review, and admission.
2. Combine web tools, student ambassadors, and Salesforce to improve recruitment. Offer multi-year support packages to applicants upfront.
3. Review priority of funding for degree completion versus degree initiation.
4. Continue annual student reviews.
5. Establish institutional policies and procedures for teaching assistant English language requirements and termination of graduate assistantships.
6. Establish cohort graduate program directors (GPD) to oversee individual programs and coordinate with GSISO.
7. GSISO lead efforts to diversify support for graduate students through federal funded programs at NIH, NSF, USDofEd.

2. Demand, Career Pathways & Student Experience

1. Align review process of graduate programs with GSISO.
2. Streamline and align new program development with GSISO.
3. Invest in data acquisition, integrity, and interpretation. Create GSISO data analyst position in collaboration with university Planning, Analysis, and Institutional Research (PAIR). Publish data dashboards; communicate demand and impact of graduate programs, impact of graduates; develop community and constituent surveys.
4. Enhance relationships between institutes and graduate programs. Promote participation of research faculty in graduate advisory committees and programs. Develop structures to enhance collaborations between GSISO, Provost, and the Vice Chancellor for Research.
5. Communicate success of graduate students.

3. Professional Development

1. No robust coordinated comprehensive professional development program offered at campus(es)-wide level. Conduct inventory of current professional development offerings.
2. Survey graduate students for needs. Address questions of mental health in collaboration with Student Health & Counseling Center. Develop broader programs in collaboration with Career Services, eCampus, Library, Student Health & Counseling, Student Affairs, and Writing Center.
3. Address needs of teaching assistants in communication and classroom management.
4. Establish use of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for doctoral students, start with GSISO pilot project in one discipline.
5. Promote microcredentialing with real participation and assessment.
6. Communicate success of graduate students.

4. Overall

1. Consultants appreciated engagement of university community (students, faculty staff, administration) in face of recent challenges and faculty attrition.
2. Infrastructure has been created to modernize the student experience by supporting graduate student voices through the Graduate School Students Advisory Board (GSSAB) and regular townhalls.
3. Interdisciplinary studies program is an institutional strength and fits with national trends in degree customization.
4. Three Minute Thesis is important tool in creating UAF graduate student identity.
5. GSISO can play role of integrator/coordinator of graduate studies so that the graduate whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
6. GSISO can reduce uncertainties for graduate students in student processes.
7. Manage both the pros and cons of location in Alaska.
8. Review position title of director.
9. Review use of graduate students consolidated fee to support programming and professional development activities.