

GRADUATE COLLEGE 2025 Annual Report



BOLDLY ILLINOIS 2030

Our work is driven by six guiding principles:

Support success at all stages of the student lifecycle

Our commitment to student success begins from day one. Understanding and adapting to the evolving needs and demographics of graduate learners, we foster supportive experiences and create resources that empower graduate students to achieve their goals and make a lifelong impact beyond our institution.

Promote excellence and innovation in graduate education

As education evolves, so do we. By recognizing the changing needs of people and society, we support academic programs in exploring innovations and reimagining academic experiences while fostering excellence in graduate education.

Foster inclusive opportunities and experiences

Our commitment to diversity is unwavering. We foster a sense of belonging by creating opportunities and pathways for a diverse and inclusive graduate community to contribute a wide array of perspectives and to thrive.

Strengthen partnerships and collaborations

Our success is driven by collaboration and robust partnerships. Our goal is to enhance interaction, teamwork, and work experiences both within our college and externally. We are committed to offering and broadening opportunities for staff to engage in learning that enhances their skills and supports their professional growth.

Provide efficient administrative services and guidance

We lead through service. We embrace state-of-the-art systems and technologies, and we model best practices in graduate education to provide efficient administrative processes and services to campus.

Be a leader in graduate education

We are a leader among peers. Through our partnerships in the broader network of educational entities, we forge new pathways, shape the future of graduate education, and grow Illinois' global reputation.

Part 1: Mission

Our mission is achieving and sustaining excellence in graduate education in a manner that recognizes the changing reality of higher education. With graduate programs in more than 100 disciplinary areas, the Graduate College fosters a vibrant intellectual environment that reaches across the arts, engineering, humanities, sciences and social sciences. We provide centralized expertise and operations that allow for efficiency and cost savings for our campus that span from admissions to degree certification with many critical services in between. In doing so, we ensure quality and consistency that contribute to Illinois' reputation of excellence.

Deeply committed to the success and wellbeing of our entire graduate community, we deliver services and resources to promote student-centered graduate education and to support the success of the growing number of graduate students who choose Illinois to further their education, be it via traditional programs or newer offerings. Toward these goals, we provide resources to empower our graduate programs and guidance around important and timely issues that shape the future of graduate education.

We are also committed to ensuring inclusive excellence across all of our programs, recognizing the benefits of diversity and inclusion to our institution and our society. This past year was marked by the complexities of the Supreme Court ruling on race-based admissions, and we have renewed our efforts to promote holistic admissions and programming practices to ensure educational access for students from many educational, socio-cultural, geographic and familial backgrounds.

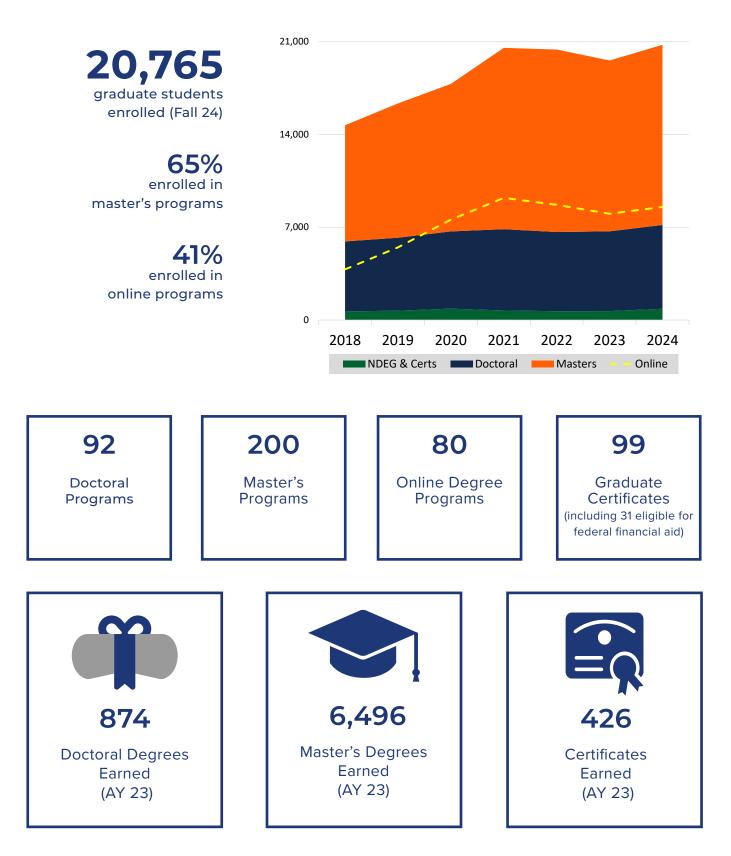
Graduate student enrollment at Illinois has grown from 11,475 in 2015 to 20,765 in 2024. We are experiencing a substantial increase in demand for innovative professional master's degree programs, coupled with a growth in non-degree programs and credentials designed to provide an Illinois education to currently employed individuals wishing to update their knowledge, skills and abilities. Many of these new degrees and credentials are offered entirely online, bringing the benefits of an Illinois education to a new cohort of students who are not able to relocate physically to our campus. The increasing number of applications and enrollments has elevated the demand for our services and expanded the workload for our staff. However, the college faces substantial staffing challenges, both in terms of the number of personnel required to accommodate enrollment growth and the provision of competitive salaries. These factors have made it challenging to retain qualified staff members across various departments within the college.

Despite these challenges, the Graduate College continues to work diligently to embody the university's values, mission, vision and goals expressed in Boldly Illinois 2030 in all of our activities.

Part 2: Actions and Accomplishments (including Opportunities, Threats and Strategic Priorities)

In this section, we highlight some of our activities and accomplishments during the past year organized by <u>six</u> <u>guiding principles</u> that we developed using the Boldly Illinois 2030 framework. They are: 1. Support success at all stages of the student lifecycle, 2. Promote excellence and innovation in graduate education, 3. Foster inclusive opportunities and experiences, 4. Strengthen partnerships and collaborations, 5. Provide efficient administrative services and guidance, and 6. Be a leader in graduate education. We also identify strategic priorities we plan to implement in AY 25-26 and discuss these priorities in the context of the opportunities and threats facing graduate education at Illinois and beyond.

BY THE NUMBERS



Based on DMI 10th-day enrollment data. JD, DVM, and Carle MD students are not included in reported totals.

1. Supporting success at all stages of the student lifecycle

Providing structured support at critical junctures

The Need: To provide students with tailored support throughout their educational journey. For example, the needs of a first-year student while getting acclimated to graduate school are not the same as a student nearing completion who is focused on writing and the job search. At such a large institution, it can be challenging for students to find resources and support when they need it.

Our Response: Our approach to providing students with timely information happens through several means. First, through our Student Service Team, we are able to manage a wide range of graduate student questions and help them get the information and support they need, whether that is through the Graduate College or another unit on campus. We serve as a central hub and starting point for students in need of assistance. Second, we have implemented several micro environments to provide students with structured support at various crucial phases. Our <u>GradMAP canvas community</u> and newsletters help first-year students, while <u>GradPLAN</u> is a tool to create individual development plans for reaching milestones and goals. Our National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Summer Writing Lab and Canvas course along with other proposal writing services help students applying for fellowships, and our <u>Thesis Writing Canvas space</u> provides support for students in the thesis writing stage.

The Impact: Providing students with timely information helps resolve issues early. By creating tailored information for different stages, we help students find and focus on what they need to reach their next milestone.

Fostering wellbeing and community building

The Need: To foster wellbeing and community support for graduate students in order to pursue their goals at their highest capacity, without burnout and isolation, and to ensure a positive Illinois experience that enables them to thrive during and beyond graduate school.

Our Response: In Fall 2024, we coordinated the inaugural Graduate Student Welcome Week and launched several community building events throughout the year. We also increased wellness and wellbeing related resources in our <u>GradLINKS</u> and <u>GradLIFE</u> publications. We established the Graduate Student Wellbeing Working Group in collaboration with Student Affairs units and campus partners. Through these collaborations we are developing a Wellbeing Toolkit for departments, expanding online student support, and have plans to implement Mental Health First Aid training in graduate education spaces in partnership with campus mental health leaders. We look forward to institutional involvement in the Health Promoting Universities Network and the ways it will strengthen wellness programming.

Impact: These events provide opportunities for students to take breaks, while connecting with peers and the wider campus community and create awareness of resources to support graduate student wellbeing. Through these efforts, we have strengthened connections with Student Affairs units, student groups, cultural centers, and McKinley Health Center to create a more comprehensive support network.

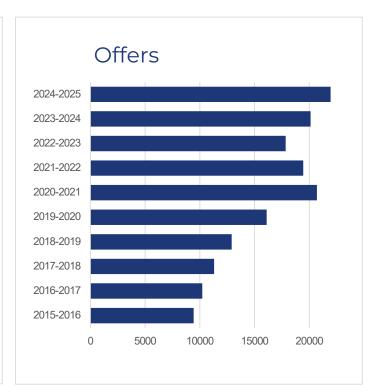
Implementing responsive policies for academic success

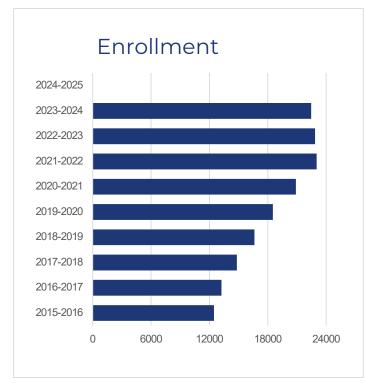
The Need: To promote clear communication about progress and timely completion in order to avoid unnecessary financial and emotional burden for the student.

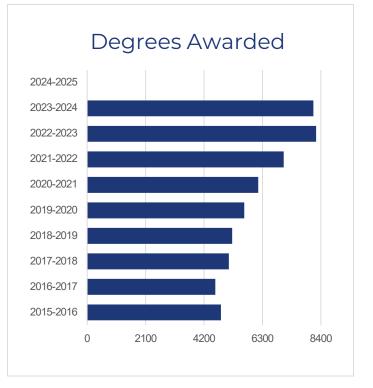
Our Response: After extensive consultation with departments, we implemented the Time-to-Degree/ Preliminary Exam Policy to monitor and support students achieving degree milestones. This required coordination between our Student Success unit, which provided comprehensive outreach and support to affected students, and our Academic Affairs unit, which managed degree audits, deadline tracking, and petition processes. Other policy changes we have in progress to benefit students include amending grading

10-YEAR TRENDS

Applications 2024-2025 2023-2024 2022-2023 2021-2022 2020-2021 2019-2020 2018-2019 2017-2018 2016-2017 2015-2016 0 10000 20000 30000 40000







More Data and Dashboards https://grad.illinois.edu/data

policy for 599 courses to provide students with feedback on their progress and to supply more complete information on the student's transcript by including information about thesis and dissertation deposits.

The Impact: This coordinated approach has significantly increased preliminary examination completion rates and improved student progress monitoring.

2. Promote excellence and innovation in graduate education

Supporting new models of graduate education

The Need: To assist departments in exploring, developing and deploying new programs and credentials.

Our Response: The Graduate College works with programs who seek to develop new models of graduate education while simultaneously supporting more traditional degree programs. In the past two years, twenty-five graduate certificates have been approved, with several more in progress. Online enrollment has increased dramatically in recent years and represents 43% of all graduate enrollment. Non-degree enrollment has also grown substantially from 99 students in Fall 2016 to 1,700 students in Fall 2022 as programs develop "stackable", non-traditional pathways to an Illinois education. In a partnership with the Office of Professional Education, we have developed an Online and Professional Education Opportunity Analysis which provides academic colleges with actionable market intelligence and peer comparisons regarding potential new program opportunities in the online and professional space. In Spring 2024, the Graduate College helped facilitate an innovative new course offering that brought together three universities (University of Pretoria in South Africa, Federal University of Pelotas in Brazil, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign) for a transnational course on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Impact: It is important for us to explore different options for credentialing student achievements in the form of micro-credentials, certificates, and stackable credential options for students. Our ability to provide customized applications and admissions processes for these growing programs has helped to enable their growth in enrollments, which has the added benefit of increasing revenues for the campus

Expanding resources for mentors, advisors and program directors

The Need: To provide mentoring resources for faculty and staff who guide and support graduate students.

Our Response: Because mentoring is an essential aspect of graduate education, we charged a campus-wide committee on faculty mentoring and developed a white paper on the mentoring landscape for our campus. The work of this committee informed the roll out of a regular series of mentoring workshops and resources for faculty mentors. In conjunction with this programming, we are continuing to expand our online resources related to mentoring and communications to faculty and staff about best practices and training opportunities, including toolkits and our GradMENTOR newsletter and blog. We collaborated with the College of ACES Research Office to provide mentoring training for mentors from 6+ REU programs across ACES, Grainger, and the iSchool, creating efficient shared services across campus units. While reaching faculty is critical, reaching students is also important for fostering expectations and successful mentor/mentee relationships. To that end, we partnered with the Office of the Provost to facilitate a student-focused track as part of the 2-day Mentoring Matters Summer Institute and we are developing evergreen resources for students. We are also looking at better ways of addressing poor mentoring conduct and are consulting with faculty and administrative stakeholders to develop additional options and processes. Similarly, we have restarted programming to support directors of graduate study, particularly new DGSs in their roles. These programs, particularly the ability to engage with other DGSs have been well-received, and we plan to continue this work as well as expanding online resources in a new mentoring focused Canvas site.

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

\$ 9M

Block Grants Illinois Distinguished Fellowships Illinois Distinguished Arts & Humanities Fellowships Equity Fellowships Aspire Fellowships Dissertation Completion Fellowships Master's and Dissertation Research Travel Grants Creative and Performing Arts Grants Career Exploration Fellowships

1,600 Fellowships listed in our Fellowship Finder Database

2,308 Students supported through fellowship and grant programs

395 Students supported by Conference Presentation Awards **The Impact:** Mentoring is an important element of graduate student success but one that is often less recognized. Our resources and programming bring faculty and staff together to share best practices and peer-to-peer learning. Graduate faculty engagement strengthens mentoring culture through structured support systems.

3. Foster inclusive opportunities and experiences

Facilitating inclusive programs and pathways

The Need: To recruit and retain students from diverse educational and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Our Response: The Graduate College offers a variety of long-standing and new <u>recruitment and retention</u> <u>programs</u> to foster inclusive opportunities and experiences. Through the Enduring Transfer Pathways to Graduate Education in STEM Initiative, which is a SLOAN funded partnership with Wilbur Wright College, part of the City Colleges of Chicago, Illinois has hosted 20 Wilbur Wright students in the Summer Exploration Program and supported 18 Wilber Wright students in SROP and GearUP, meeting our goals for both programs. This past year, we also welcomed our first participant in the Illinois Post-baccalaureate Research Program. While continuing the successful SROP and SPI summer research programs, we expanded our summer offerings to include a 2.5 week Summer Emerging PhD program to help entering doctoral students who are not able to participate in full summer program acclimate to campus.

The Impact: The development of new pathways with community colleges and other partnerships for recruitment programs expands educational access.

Promoting holistic review practices

The Need: To share best practices in graduate admissions and fellowship selection that are equitable and transparent and comply with the Supreme Court decision on race-conscious admissions.

Our Response: We continue to offer resources and training for review committees and workshops that share best practices for holistic review, understanding that there is no one-size solution across all programs. This past year, we launched a <u>Holistic Admission Training course within Slate</u>, our admissions system, that is now available online to all graduate faculty and admissions staff. This training provides guidance in best practices for graduate admissions, including definitions and benefits of holistic admissions, strategies for mitigating bias, and techniques for reviewing applications. This training is required of all admissions committee chairs, or they may opt to designate a faculty member or diversity advocate serving on the admissions committee to complete the training on their behalf. Since its implementation, 358 faculty and staff have participated in the online or in-person admissions training opportunities. In addition, adaptation to the Supreme Court decision on race-based admissions necessitated careful review and modification of fellowship criteria and processes.

The Impact: Assisting programs in the development and deployment of equitable and transparent admissions practices is central to ensuring a diverse and representative cohort of students.

4. Strengthen partnerships and collaborations

Enhancing career support through campus partnerships and outreach

The Need: To provide academic departments with information tailored to their students that can be integrated into unit programming.

Our Response: Many graduate programs and campus units rely on the Graduate College to deliver information specific to graduate education through outreach and partnerships. Last year our Student Success unit alone facilitated more than 70 outreach workshops for 36 different departments/units in 9 colleges and 3 institutes,

FELLOWSHIP SUPPORT

"

The Graduate College's fellowships and grants are invaluable in helping us attract and retain exceptional graduate students, enabling them to dedicate themselves fully to groundbreaking research that enhances our department's academic reputation and societal impact.

- Graduate faculty member

"

Both the Graduate College's Equity and Distinguished fellowships have been invaluable in recruiting the most sought-after and diversely equipped students across the country and internationally. These awards have ensured recipients' fiscal well-being during their time in our graduate programs and have been crucial to us staying competitive with our peer institutions.

- Graduate faculty member

"

The Graduate College Fellowship has been invaluable to my career and graduate experience. It enabled me to be substantially more productive in my research and the financial support allowed me to select the best advisor for my work. It would not be a stretch to say the fellowship was the primary reason I chose and continue to choose [Illinois].

- Graduate student fellow

"

I consider myself extremely fortunate in having received the Graduate College Fellowship. With the support of this fellowship from my very first year at [Illinois], I have been able to focus primarily on my research to publish a paper in my third year and to complete my preliminary exam soon after. The GCF has made it possible for me to explore being an educator and to focus on my studies and research. It is an amazing privilege that I hope the university continues to offer to its students.

- Graduate student fellow

plus 22 all-campus workshops. This strategy encourages departments' efforts to incorporate student success and career development into their curricular and co-curricular activities. We also enhanced the Graduate College Mentoring Certificate for graduate students through collaboration with the Anthropology Department, broadening eligibility to better serve master's students and those in fields where collaborative research is uncommon. We piloted an Exploring Careers in Research curriculum in collaboration with the OVCRI, helping students understand the research ecosystem. After several successful years of our <u>Career Exploration Fellowships</u>, we are refining and enhancing the Career Exploration Fellowship, including ongoing improvements and expansion to other kinds of host units. We also presented to Grainger corporate relations community about best practices for engaging with and recruiting doctoral students, serving as experts and consultants for other campus units, thereby expanding collaborative approaches to Career & Professional Development across the broader ecosystem of graduate education on our campus.

The Impact: These important partnership and outreach activities enhance resources and services, while also increasing their reach and tailoring information to students in different degree programs as needed.

Leveraging technology and communication collaborations

The Need: To leverage campus technology and communication resources and services as part of Operational Excellence @ Illinois.

Our Response: We have collaborated closely with the Office of Strategic Communications and Marketing, AITS, Technology Services and other campus technology communities (i.e. the Web Implementation Guidelines Group, Accessibility Liaisons and .NET group) to coordinate, rather than duplicate, technology and communications efforts. In developing our Drupal 10 website, we followed campus branding and accessibility guidelines, and we both integrated and contributed to the building of common web components that can be used by units across campus.

The Impact: These coordinated efforts not only align our look and navigation, making sure they meet accessibility and branding standards, but also save considerable time and money and reduce the need to contract with external vendors.

5. Provide efficient administrative services and guidance

Providing centralized processing

The Need: To ensure consistency, efficiency and compliance for campus through centralized processes, including admissions, academic record services, REU processing, and tuition reimbursement processing.

Our Response: Graduate enrollment continues to grow. Last year we saw a 6% increase in graduate enrollment while managing over 47,600 applications through collaborative efforts between admissions processing teams and graduate programs. This increase in enrollment impacts all aspects of Graduate College services. The increase has nearly doubled the number of degree certifications. We have continued to expand our use of Slate, our application system, to incorporate fellowship nominations and DEI program applications, to send notifications to students about academic standing, and to offer customizable admissions services to fit the marketing and enrollment needs of many different programs and degree types offered by academic programs. Summer Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REUs) have also been growing since the centralization. We partner with departments to ensure smooth stipend payments and processing deadlines. The Graduate College is responsible for ensuring that programs designated as reimbursable receive their partial tuition payment when another college hires their students. Every year over a million dollars is transferred to departments, relieving departments of establishing MOUs and seeking reimbursements by themselves.

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https://grad.illinois.edu

The Impact: These centralized services ensure compliance with funding agency, university, state, and federal policies and procedures, including IRS guidelines. These services also save academic units considerable time and money reducing departmental workload; however, managing them centrally without additional staffing has been a challenge.

Improving fellowship processing

The Need: To improve fellowship processing including timeliness, transparency and communications.

Our Response: We gathered feedback from 125 stakeholders to address challenges that occurred in the Fall 2023 fellowship processing cycle affecting timely stipend disbursement. Through collaborative problem-solving between the Fellowship Office, Student Service Team, and AITS, we devised policies and procedural changes to our operations to address those areas, and then communicated the new policies and procedures to campus in a way that would make fellowship processing easier and more efficient for all involved.

The Impact: This endeavor was successful, resulting in a dramatic decrease in fellowship processing-related difficulties in Fall 2024.

Utilizing new technologies to enhance service

The Need: To leverage existing and new technologies to improve service for stakeholders.

Our Response: We continue to explore using new online platforms and technologies to improve service for campus. With the implementation of our <u>Student Service Team</u> and launch of our <u>new website</u>, we have been exploring ways to implement chat/chatbot functionality through partnerships with campus IT groups. Additionally, we have been exploring opportunities for expanding the current student module within Slate, which has greatly increased efficiencies in multiple processing services. We believe we can further expand this module, enhancing real-time data and communications with students via the Graduate College Student Portal. Overall, we are making progress in eliminating legacy systems by moving some functions into Slate and others into a more widely campus supported .NET. We have begun the work to transition graduate programs from GradApps to Slate for their application review process, starting with the Computer Science program. Engineering has notified us that they will be sunsetting GradApps within the next five years and has requested that we work with Computer Science as the first program to transition, given the size and complexity of their review process. This will serve as a model for other programs. Over the next several years, we will expand this effort, with plans to move additional programs into Slate, completing the transition by 2027.

The Impact: These actions reduce our reliance on legacy systems, streamline systems, eliminate duplication and improve service for stakeholders.

6. Be a leader in graduate education

Providing knowledge and guidance around critical topics

The Need: To share expertise with peers and learn best practices to share with campus stakeholders.

Our Response: As leaders among peers, our staff regularly contribute to a number of national forums on graduate education. We have worked closely with our peers in the BTAA and have served as a leader in responding to the US Supreme Court ruling on race in admissions, in embracing and encouraging holistic admissions review practices, and in providing advising and leadership to our peers on admissions best practices and policies. This year, we also hosted a <u>Holistic Admissions Summit</u> engaging over 150 participants and featuring our partnership with the Council of Graduate Schools. We also co-launched a Community of Practice within the Graduate Career Consortium for those working with master's students, establishing leadership in master's education within graduate career and professional development.

The Impact: These activities contribute to Illinois' reputation of excellence in graduate education.

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Strategic Priorities for AY 24-25

Continue to monitor federal directives in order to understand the potential impact. While there is much uncertainty, our commitment to our graduate community has not changed. We will continue to work in partnership with campus and graduate programs to provide and promote excellence, integrity, and equity across all aspects of graduate education. We will continue to think strategically and provide resources such as our <u>federal funding dashboard</u> to help graduate programs make informed decisions for the wellbeing of our graduate students and community.

Focus on wellbeing program development to create reliable structures for student support, a Wellbeing Toolkit for departments and expansion of online student support through collaboration with Student Affairs and academic units. We will also implement Mental Health First Aid training in graduate education spaces in partnership with campus mental health initiatives and are excited to be part of the Health Promoting Universities Network.

Provide competitive stipends and benefits that will enable programs to recruit and retain the best and brightest graduate students. We will work collaboratively with academic colleges and other campus units to prepare for forthcoming contract negotiations with the GEO.

Expand professional development resources for students by leveraging new GradPLAN/Individual Development Plan resources to provide comprehensive support for student success during and beyond graduate school. We are also refining the Career Exploration Fellowship, including expansion to other host units.

Reaffirming our commitment to inclusion via the launch of a new mentoring program to replace Sloan UCEM while developing reciprocal recruitment relationships with UIC Graduate College through multi-institutional collaboration. We will also continue to assess our holistic admissions training for admissions committees and continue to enhance trainings around holistic admissions and implicit bias. We will also continue to pursue strategic partnerships and external funding opportunities.

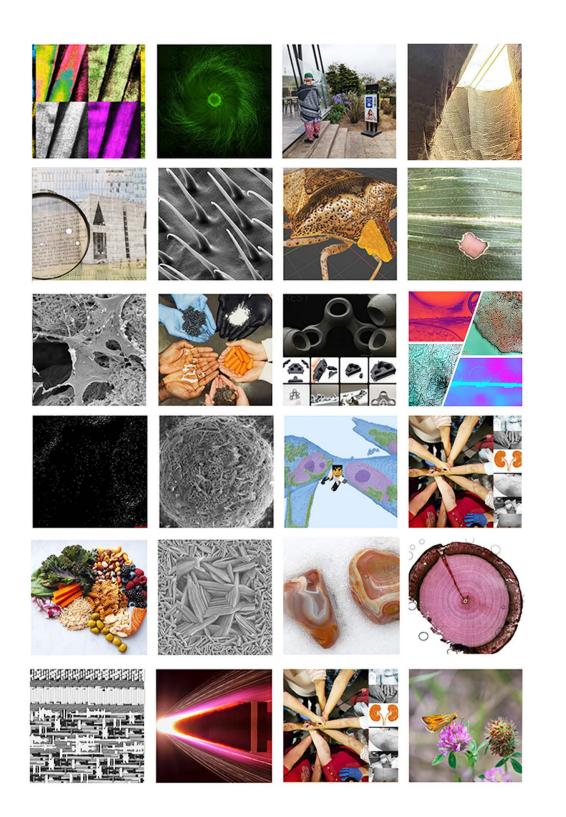
Enhance resources and trainings for faculty mentors and administrative staff via evergreen resources in Canvas and facilitated workshops, both scheduled and as a requestable service. We will also continue work to establish practices for addressing poor mentoring conduct through consultation with faculty and administrative stakeholders.

Refine academic warning policy implementation to better support student progress. Our plans include expanding student resources for mentoring and developing more comprehensive support systems through cross-unit collaborations. We will also develop targeted messaging for students at different program phases to enhance progress monitoring and support.

Implement technology upgrades including the transition of GradApps to Slate, additional enhancement to our Slate student portal, adoption of chat/chatbot on our new website, and upgrades to degree certification and other older legacy systems.

IMAGE OF RESEARCH

celebrating the breadth of innovation and impact



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GradLINKS

weekly notices for graduate students



GradMAP guidance and resources for first-year graduate students



GradFELLOWSHIPS fellowship highlights and opportunities



<u>GradLIFE</u> blog, newsletter & podcast about the graduate student experience



GradCAREERS

career information for graduate students



GradMENTOR

e-newsletter for faculty and staff



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