



GRADUATE COLLEGE

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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THE GRADUATE  
COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



# A Tradition and Future of Excellence

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The year 2017 marks the 150th anniversary of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and 125 years of graduate education on our campus. Established in 1892, the then-called Graduate School was created to ensure the high quality of an Illinois graduate degree and to provide fellowship support for graduate students. While much has changed since then, our dedication to delivering world-class graduate education has not.

Throughout the past year, the Graduate College underwent a comprehensive strategic planning process that included Graduate College staff as well as members of the Graduate College Executive Committee and our student advisory group, SAGE. Together, we considered how best to continue providing excellence in graduate education in the 21st-century landscape of higher education. We identified strengths and areas for change, and we explored all possible ways to increase efficiency without adversely impacting service.

These conversations helped us to realign our organizational structure in order to better address our core service functions and to lay out a series of eight action areas that will guide our work in the coming months.

What follows on these pages gives an overview of how we envision taking excellence in graduate education beyond the first 150 years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wojtek J. Chodsko-Zajko'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Wojtek J. Chodsko-Zajko, PhD  
Dean, Graduate College  
Shahid and Ann Carlson Khan Professor in Applied Health Sciences



## Samantha Knoll

PhD, Mechanical Science &  
Engineering ('16), recipient of the  
2015 Graduate College Leadership  
Award and former student member  
of the Graduate College Executive  
Committee

The Graduate College provides campus-wide leadership for the advancement of graduate education; promotes **excellence, integrity, and equity** in all graduate programs; and serves the scholarly and professional needs of prospective and current graduate students, from **recruitment and admission through graduation**. We work with graduate faculty and staff to establish academic policies and programs designed to **assure quality and support student progress**.



**11,613**

Degree-seeking  
graduate students  
(Fall 16, excludes Law JD  
& Vet Med DVM)



**44%**

International  
students  
(from 100+ countries)



**8%**

Underrepresented  
minority students  
from the U.S. and its  
territories



**\$3.8M**

Awarded in Graduate  
College fellowships



**3,392**

Master's degrees  
earned (AY 15-16)



**731**

Doctoral degrees  
earned (AY 15-16)

**140+**

Master's degree  
programs

**90+**

Doctoral degree  
programs

**20+**

Fully online  
graduate degree  
programs

## ACADEMIC SERVICES

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### **PROVIDING EXPERTISE & EFFICIENCY**

Graduate admissions & registration, records & petitions, thesis deposit

## PROGRAMS & POLICY

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### **SUPPORTING QUALITY & INNOVATION**

Degree requirements, new programs, academic policies

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT

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### **SECURING FUNDING FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS**

Graduate College fellowships and grants, external fellowships

## STUDENT SUCCESS

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### **OFFERING TAILORED PROGRAMMING & RESOURCES**

GradMAP, professional & career development, proposal writing, problem solving

## COMMUNICATIONS

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### **ENGAGING WITH STUDENTS, FACULTY, & STAFF**

E-bulletins/newsletters, website, social media, blog, student/alumni stories



## Eric L. De Barros

PhD, English ('11), Summer Pre-  
doctoral Institute (SPI) fellow

# Our Commitment

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## *Excellence, Integrity, & Equity*

The Graduate College is committed to promoting excellence, integrity, and equity in graduate education. In addition to our five core functional areas, we address three cross-cutting themes that impact all aspects of our services and programs.

Our **Educational Equity Programs** partner with departments, faculty, staff, and students to provide a comprehensive approach to recruiting, admitting, supporting, and retaining students who have been traditionally underrepresented in graduate study in an effort to increase their access and inclusion in our graduate programs and to support our campus goals for diversity.

Our **Graduate College Ombudsperson** helps to foster positive student experiences and works with students and departments to navigate problems and conflicts and to identify options for resolution.

Finally, through our **AIDE doctoral program review**, we explore all aspects of doctoral education on our campus. AIDE focuses on program effectiveness and students' experiences, satisfaction, and sense of preparation for employment.

# Eight Action Areas

Through a series of strategic planning activities with Graduate College staff, the Graduate College Executive Committee, and our graduate student advisory group, the following eight areas were identified as priority action areas for continued excellence in graduate education.

**Metrics & Dashboard**  
compile data and present metrics related to graduate education



**Innovative Academic Programs**  
assist academic units in developing and revising degree programs



**Diversity**  
broaden participation in graduate education



**Student Experience**  
enrich student experience and promote student wellness



**Student Success**  
prepare students to thrive in and beyond graduate school



**Coordination with Campus Units**  
support efficient administration of graduate programs



**Staff Development**  
promote professional growth and expertise in graduate education



**Visibility**  
improve the visibility of the Graduate College and our graduate students





# Metrics & Dashboard

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## Establish core metrics and develop a dashboard

Working with the Office of the Provost and academic units across campus, the Graduate College is compiling a succinct set of core metrics that are fundamental to understanding graduate education. These metrics will provide information at the campus, college, and unit level for the wide array of rigorous and quality graduate programs across our campus.

In addition to establishing a common set of metrics focused on the health of graduate education, we are developing an interactive dashboard that will help units recognize trends, strengths, and areas for growth. Our goal is that the dashboard will make the activity of graduate education more visible and will aid units in future planning and benchmarking.

The following metrics are among those identified as being central to the mission of graduate education:

- Admission selectivity and yield
- Enrollment demographics
- Retention rates
- Time to degree
- Distribution of assistantships by type
- Sources and types of funding for students
- External fellowships
- Career placement

***Creating and sharing a centralized source of data related to graduate education will help programs maintain excellence while identifying opportunities for growth.***



# Innovative Academic Programs

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***Applying our land-grant mission to the 21st century, we support programmatic innovation and refinement to maintain the strengths of our existing programs and respond to emerging societal needs and global challenges.***

## **Increase the reach of graduate education through online degree programs**

The Graduate College has actively supported the creation and delivery of innovative new online graduate programs that partner with the Coursera platform for Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs). These programs – the iMBA, the Master of Computer Science - Data Sciences degree, and others to come – help the university achieve its land-grant educational mission. Great care has been taken to ensure that these programs adhere to the quality standards and policies of our institution.

**IMPACT:** These valuable degree programs serve a larger and more diverse community of eager learners at a more affordable tuition rate while generating increased revenue for the campus.

## **Facilitate development and growth of new and innovative graduate degree programs**

Being responsive to the needs of emerging intellectual and professional fields, we work in collaboration with our partners across campus to develop and grow innovative graduate programs. The Illinois Professional Science Master's

programs that are coordinated by the Graduate College are an example. Working with our campus partners we have increased enrollments and added a new program in Geographic Information Science (GIS). In the coming years, we hope to establish several additional programs.

**IMPACT:** Growth in the number of high quality self-supporting master's degree programs is critical to the economic stability of graduate (and overall) education at Illinois.

## **Streamline processes for program development and approval**

We are continually looking for ways to support programs in their educational goals. In the past year, the Graduate College has implemented significant changes to the process for review and approval of new and revised degree programs.

**IMPACT:** The overall effect provides increased flexibility for departments to develop and more rapidly implement new and revised degree programs. The changes have also resulted in a decrease in staffing, creating a cost savings for the institution.



# Diversity

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## Establish the Sloan University Center of Exemplary Mentoring (UCEM)

With a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, we provide support for underrepresented minority (URM) doctoral students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. During this three-year grant, fifty Sloan UCEM Scholars will be recruited and fully funded. Additionally, these scholars will receive mentoring and programs to help them thrive.

**IMPACT:** This initiative helps attract and retain URM students in STEM fields.

## Protect funding for URM graduate students

We are developing a sustainable strategy for protecting mission-critical funds that have supported our Education Equity Programs since 1998.

**IMPACT:** The loss of these funds would have a catastrophic impact on our ability to attract and retain URM graduate students, leading to the elimination or drastic reduction in key programs such as the Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP), the Summer Pre-Doctoral Institute (SPI), and greatly reduce URM fellowships for outstanding doctoral students.

## Help programs recruit URM students into graduate programs

In addition to the campus visit programs that we currently offer to help academic programs recruit URM students, we will collect data related to recruitment, application, admissions, and enrollment to share with graduate programs on campus.

**IMPACT:** Collecting and sharing this information with graduate programs can help increase the population of URM graduate students.

## Diversify international graduate student recruitment

To diversify our international student populations, the Graduate College has initiated discussions with representatives from Brazil and Indonesia about how we can assist with the recruitment, retention, and funding of international graduate students with the goal of increasing applications from well-qualified students from these countries.

**IMPACT:** Broadening the pipeline for international students decreases the risk associated with over reliance on international recruitment from China and India and increases the diversity of the student body.

*We are committed to broadening participation in graduate education, which is integral to excellence in higher education.*



# Student Experience

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*Because the physical, mental, emotional, and financial wellness of our students is of utmost importance, we are creating new resources and services to promote the overall wellbeing of graduate students at Illinois.*

## Enhance first-year orientation experience

The Graduate College is developing a strategy for a comprehensive first-year orientation experience. Upon the recommendation of an ad hoc committee charged with examining orientation for graduate students, the college is developing a communications strategy for onboarding graduate students. Through partnerships with other campus units, we are developing a full year of programming tailored to the first-year experience.

**IMPACT:** The first-year orientation experience will improve the acclimation and transition into graduate school. It will also reduce duplication of services with other campus units and fill gaps where previously little or no programming existed.

## Creation of an ombuds position

An ombuds position was created to work with students, faculty, and staff across campus. Our ombudsperson offers individual assistance with sensitive issues, questions, and problems affecting a graduate student's academic career and advocates for the needs of graduate students.

**IMPACT:** Having a dedicated ombudsperson provides a knowledgeable resource with expertise in problem solving, who provides guidance in avoiding and resolving academic conflict.

## Promote student wellness

The Graduate College partners with a number of campus units to promote the wellness of graduate students. We define wellness broadly and inclusive of mental, physical, emotional, and financial wellbeing. Through many different campus partnerships, we are enhancing resources and communications to raise awareness of factors that impact student wellness.

**IMPACT:** Providing information and support to students is critically important to students' academic success and overall wellbeing.



# Student Success

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## Exploring career paths and connecting with employers

The Graduate College provides support for both traditional and alternative career pathways for students in all disciplines. Through tailored workshops, advising, and online resources, we teach students to set goals, explore careers options, and connect with potential employers in a wide range of employment sectors.

**IMPACT:** These resources help students seeking and applying for a variety of careers. By making these tailored resources available centrally to all graduate students and postdocs we are enabling academic departments and colleges to reduce their expenses in this area.

## Translating and communicating graduate-level skills

While academic programs train students to be well versed in their areas of academic expertise, we teach students how to translate their skills and communicate their ideas. Whether it is highlighting transferable skills on a resume or communicating research to a general audience, we help students learn to hone their skills in these areas.

**IMPACT:** By organizing and hosting events that engage students in the process of translating their skills and communicating their scholarly activities, we are preparing them for success in graduate school and beyond.

## Seeking and applying for external fellowships

As state funding sources decrease, the need to help students secure external funding sources is becoming ever more important. Our newly launched Fellowship Finder database makes it easier for students to find available external funding opportunities, while our proposal writing workshops and advising help students apply for external fellowships to support their graduate study.

**IMPACT:** Since the inception of the external fellowship unit, we have seen a four-fold increase in the number of active National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellows and an overall increase in the amount of funding to our students from external agencies. Expanding the level of funding for graduate students from external sources benefits both students and departments, and allows internal fellowship dollars to go further.

*By providing resources tailored to the specific needs of graduate students, we help them develop skills to succeed in graduate school and thrive in their future careers.*

# Coordination with Campus Units

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*We work with academic programs to provide centralized expertise on graduate programs that allows for efficiency and cost savings for our campus while ensuring quality and consistency.*

## **Streamline graduate admissions process**

Adjustment of staffing distributions has significantly decreased turnaround time for domestic (8 days to 1 day) and international admissions (13 days to 2 days) relative to two years ago.

**IMPACT:** The decreased turnaround time increases our ability to compete with peer institutions. This is reflected in a 6.2 % increase in graduate student enrollments in Fall 15 relative to the previous year. This reduces costs within the college and increases the yield of graduate student enrollments.

## **Facilitate admissions redirects**

We facilitate agreements between related degree programs to enable high-caliber students who were not admitted in their first program of choice to be referred to another program for consideration. A successful pilot between Computer Science and Information Management provides a model for additional redirect opportunities in the future.

**IMPACT:** Admissions redirects connect high-achieving students with programs with capacity to grow, generating revenue for the institution.

## **Reformulate internal processes**

To operate with maximum efficiency, we continue to analyze our business processes and make improvements to save time and money. One recent example is the improved turnaround time for change of program and re-entry petitions.

**IMPACT:** By making these changes and providing these services centrally, we reduce costs and decrease duplication of services at the departmental and academic college level and ensure consistent application of policies.

## **Consolidate program review**

The Graduate College currently conducts programmatic reviews through Assessment of the Illinois Doctoral Experience (AIDE) that assesses doctoral programs, and the Committee for Extended Education and External Degrees (CEEED) that evaluates online programs. To avoid duplication, we are working with the Office of the Provost to integrate AIDE and CEEED with the campus-level program review.

**IMPACT:** Consolidation will increase efficiency, better utilize departmental resources, and realize a cost savings for the Graduate College.

# Staff Development

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## Ensure expertise and leadership in graduate education

The Graduate College represents Illinois in national and regional organizations for graduate education. Through engagement with these professional organizations, we ensure that our staff are at the forefront of emerging trends and policies in their respective areas of expertise in graduate education.

**IMPACT:** Ensuring the expertise of our staff allows us to better serve campus and to remain a leader in graduate education.

## Provide training for departmental staff

The Graduate College provides professional development opportunities for faculty and staff across campus who work with graduate students. Our staff share their expertise via training sessions and consultations. One example is our Partnership for Success training series, which offers a certificate for graduate departmental staff.

**IMPACT:** These training sessions help departments serve their graduate students in the best way possible while realizing efficiencies related to administrative costs. Providing these services centrally avoids unnecessary duplication and is often beyond the scope of many mid-sized and smaller colleges.

## Invest in professional development for Graduate College staff

The Graduate College has made a concerted effort to cross-train staff where it makes sense within the college in order to better inform our staff about different areas. We also promote staff training to further professional development and increase knowledge of campus.

**IMPACT:** Cross-training of staff allows us to be a better resource for campus and to serve our students and programs more effectively and efficiently.

*Our specialized knowledge in graduate education allows us to participate in the national conversation and share our knowledge to support Illinois students and programs.*



# Visibility

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***We are uniquely situated to communicate with graduate students, programs, and faculty about relevant services and resources and to celebrate the accomplishments and contributions of graduate students to our campus.***

## **Create and promote a unified identity**

As part of our evolving communications strategy, we have unified branding on all media platforms and print collateral to help increase awareness and visibility of the college. We continue to look to new ways of reaching our many stakeholders across and beyond campus to inform them of our services and resources.

**IMPACT:** The increased recognition of our services and resources continues to boost event attendance, student advising appointments, and overall awareness of our functions.

## **Increase reach through the use of video and new media**

Responding to the communications styles of our stakeholders, we have incorporated new media platforms into our communications strategy. Our social media presence continues to grow, as demonstrated by a steady increase of engagement with students, with campus units, and national organizations.

**IMPACT:** Increasing the reach of our tailored services better accommodates the needs of our audiences.

## **Engage more stakeholders**

We have developed a more comprehensive communications strategy which includes the addition of several new publications to our repertoire of well-established e-publications and brochures. Over the coming months we will continue to develop new communications that reach prospective students, current students, postdocs, graduate faculty, and staff with timely and relevant information.

**IMPACT:** Targeted communications provide relevant and timely information to benefit our stakeholders.

## **Collect and tell more stories of graduate students and alumni success**

Through media and events, such as our Grad Life blog, the Graduate College shares stories that celebrate the accomplishments of our outstanding graduate students and alumni.

**IMPACT:** Sharing stories increases the visibility of the contributions of graduate students to the teaching and research of our campus. It also helps promote the accomplishments and success of our graduate community.

## Social Media

 /GradCollegellinois

 /GradLifeLL

 The Graduate College at Illinois

 /GradLifeLL

## E-Bulletins / Blog



[grad.illinois.edu/GradLINKS](http://grad.illinois.edu/GradLINKS)  
(for graduate students)



[grad.illinois.edu/GradCAREERS](http://grad.illinois.edu/GradCAREERS)  
(career opportunities)



[grad.illinois.edu/PostdocPost](http://grad.illinois.edu/PostdocPost)  
(for postdocs)



[grad.illinois.edu/GradMENTOR](http://grad.illinois.edu/GradMENTOR)  
(for grad faculty)



[go.illinois.edu/GradLIFE](http://go.illinois.edu/GradLIFE)  
(about the grad experience)

## App



[go.illinois.edu/GradLife](http://go.illinois.edu/GradLife)



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