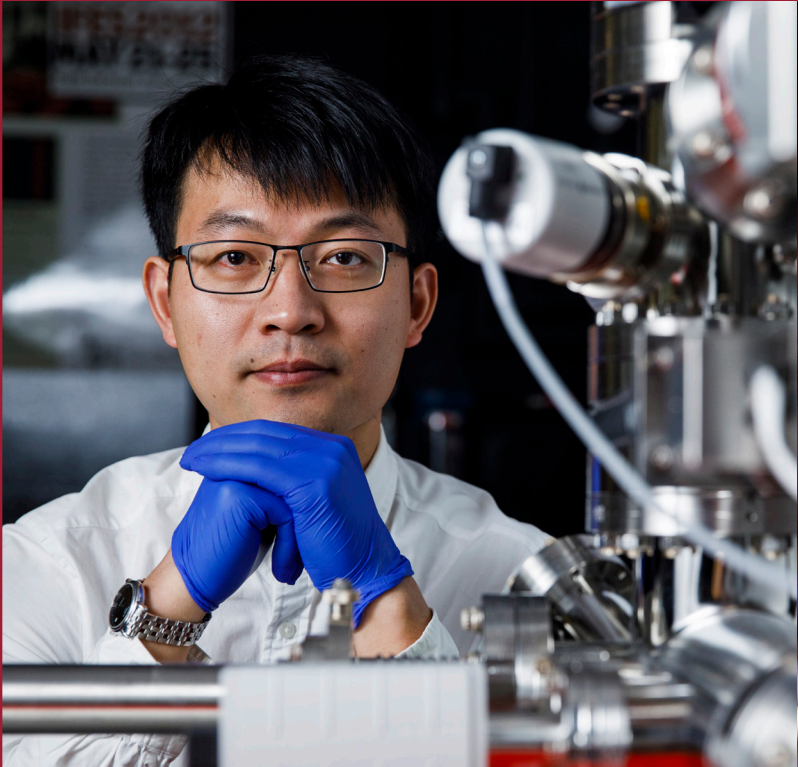


Graduate School

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION 2022-2026

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA®



Advancing Graduate Education at UA

During the 2021-22 school year, the UA Graduate School engaged with a broad group of faculty members who were focused on graduate growth and excellence, to develop the attached Strategic Plan for Graduate Education. The Strategic Plan's Executive Committee articulated the following aspirational vision for the graduate dimension of The University of Alabama:

By engaging in world-class research, creative activity, and teaching, and leveraging the support of the entire institution and all university constituents, The University of Alabama (UA) will be the nation's leader in innovative graduate education programs that deliver public-facing and academically impactful outcomes. These programs, and the surrounding professional development environment, will provide students with both short- and long-term educational and professional opportunities through collaborative, cross-disciplinary, creative, and immersive learning experiences. UA will expand doctoral enrollment and graduate-level programming to reinforce the institution's focus on research and creative activity, and grow its master's and certificate programs to bolster the state's and nation's workforce. As the graduate community of choice for students seeking academic success, research opportunities, and well-being, UA will foster a graduate experience where all students, including those who have been historically underserved in graduate education, feel supported and valued, and experience a sense of belonging.

This Strategic Plan is designed to articulate campus-wide goals that will guide initiatives and investments across the Office of Academic Affairs – centrally as well as by departments and colleges – in concert with the Graduate School and in line with the broader goals of The University of Alabama.



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- D.2. Provide resources for external reviewers, from aspirational-peer institutions, to participate in the five-year Academic Program Review (APR) of departments that offer graduate programs.
- D.3. Expand funding for graduate support programming at all levels, to potentially include external speakers, alumni panels, mentorship training, or other investments in student support and success.

Strategic Plan for Graduate Education (full version)

I. Increase the size of the graduate student population at UA.

A. Expand effective and efficient strategies to recruit highly qualified applicants to UA.

Graduate student recruitment is inherently a team effort, involving multiple stakeholders on The University of Alabama (UA) campus. Many UA departments have developed strong relationships with their counterparts at other universities. In research-oriented programs, these are often based on current or historic research collaborations. Other programs may have built up pipelines of well-qualified students through other intentional collaborations or simply through word of mouth. The Graduate School should be an effective partner in the recruitment process when university-wide approaches become necessary. Two areas of graduate recruitment, namely diversity-focused recruitment and international recruitment, most benefit from a university-wide approach. Multi-disciplinary national diversity-focused programs, such as the McNair Scholars program and the National Name Exchange, are notable examples of the benefits of a university-wide recruitment initiative. Broad university-level partnerships with minority-serving institutions, international institutions, and recruitment agents offer another example. Both areas benefit from broad digital and in-person recruitment strategies.

A.1. Harness the benefits of digital marketing to increase the visibility of the UA graduate education brand and the number of qualified prospective students.

- A.1.a. Expand digital lead nurturing (follow-up messaging, via text and/or email, to prospective students) and social media outreach, in ways that reduce faculty workloads in recruitment. This includes targeting the messaging to the individual's career goals and particular programs of interest. Engage faculty and staff in the design and implementation of digital lead-nurturing activities.
- A.1.b. Continue to broaden digital marketing strategy (e.g., Google ads and other promotions) and assess effectiveness. This will include digital marketing (including social media) focused by geofencing in areas where UA will hold in-person events.
- A.1.c. Embed into the colleges' web culture the need to focus web pages on recruitment by communicating the differentiating factors and competitive advantages of UA's graduate programs, including attractive areas of specialization and the careers to which they lead.

A.2. Expand initiatives for in-person recruitment, and enhance their impact with digital follow-up strategies.

- A.2.a. Provide support to faculty who attend recruitment fairs and ensure that leads collected at all events are integrated into digital lead-nurturing campaigns at the college and Graduate School level.
- A.2.b. Incorporate recruitment effectively and intentionally into visits, when faculty give talks at other universities.
- A.2.c. Enlist alumni effectively as part of the recruitment strategy.
- A.2.d. Maintain continuous communication with faculty who have recommended their students to UA graduate programs in the past.



- A.3. Strengthen the recruitment of students from underrepresented groups/institutions.**
- A.3.a. Schedule regular face-to-face visits to historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and minority-serving institutions (MSIs), to build relationships at the department and institutional level.
 - A.3.b. Expand opportunities for students from historically underrepresented groups to visit the UA campus.
 - A.3.c. Involve UA groups that can facilitate recruitment of underrepresented students (e.g., alumni associations, student associations, Greek organizations, Black Faculty and Staff Association [BFSA]).
 - A.3.d. Assess which current recruitment and application practices inadvertently inhibit access for underrepresented students, both at the institutional level and the program level.
 - A.3.e. Create pathway programs and encourage Direct Admission programs for students from targeted institutions who meet/exceed minimum qualifications.
- A.4. Strengthen the recruitment of prospective international students who are both qualified and most likely to attend.**
- A.4.a. Focus on high-yield markets such as South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. For regions where an in-person presence is not possible, utilize strategic social media campaigns.
 - A.4.b. Support faculty visits to potential international partner institutions and international fairs, both for the immediate impact and to foster faculty awareness of the cultural specifics of international student applications.
 - A.4.c. Nurture relationships with international partners, including recruitment agencies and international organizations that administer robust government scholarship programs for highly qualified students. Attend virtual and in-person fairs offered by these organizations and offer virtual training sessions.
 - A.4.d. Identify departments that wish to set academic quality thresholds at which applications should be forwarded to them from the Graduate School (for such departments, any applications below these thresholds will be rejected by the Graduate School, allowing the departments more time to focus on admissible applicants).
 - A.4.e. Seek opportunities to develop 3+2 or other formalized partnerships with international universities.
 - A.4.f. Create a recruitment council comprised of current international students, that will focus on social media effectiveness.
 - A.4.g. Offer opportunities to academics from targeted regions to visit UA to work on research and learn about UA graduate programs (e.g., as Visiting Scholars), so that, when they return home, they can act as UA recruiters in their nation and help potential students feel more comfortable about pursuing their degrees at UA; additionally, this can contribute to the reputational dimension of UA's international rankings.



A.5. Strengthen the recruitment of UA undergraduates to UA’s graduate programs, with an eye toward likely yield as well as retention of national talent within the state.

- A.5.a. Promote both online and on-campus graduate programs to graduating UA undergraduates and academic advisers.
- A.5.b. Promote and expand “Early Start” graduate pathways such as AMP (Accelerated Master’s Program) and Path to the MBA, and increase participation by underrepresented students.
- A.5.c. Create “Direct Admission” initiatives for UA undergraduates whose qualifications exceed specific thresholds (such students would be automatically admitted by the Graduate School).
- A.5.d. Create a pre-doctoral advising track in colleges, designating specific advisors or other mentors in this area (similar to pre-law or pre-med advisement), to connect top undergraduate students to research opportunities and other steps that enhance their competitiveness as doctoral applicants; these advisors/mentors would track the outcomes in terms of UA graduate programs or other national graduate programs.

I.A. Key Performance Indicators

- A. *Aggregate and program-specific data related to new enrollments, to assess online marketing as well as in-person return on investment*
- B. *Enrollment of students from underrepresented groups, institutionally and at the college level*
- C. *Number of UA undergraduates enrolling in graduate programs*
- D. *Number of “Early Start” programs*
- E. *Number of formal strategic graduate partnerships established*

B. Develop new graduate programs that are aligned to faculty expertise and emerging areas of opportunity.

To attract the world’s top graduate students to UA, as well as to serve the workforce needs of the state of Alabama, UA’s graduate credentials must continue to evolve in ways that best harness the expertise of our faculty and the potential of our top-notch facilities. The priorities of graduate credential-seekers are changing as well, with a trend toward flexible delivery, micro-credentials (certificates and micro-certificates), and combining the pursuit of graduate education with full-time employment. UA’s graduate faculty must be equipped and empowered to create new credentials, design minors and concentrations within existing credentials, and market these programs effectively to prospective students with a high probability of successful completion. In the design and continuous evolution of such programs, attention needs to be given to emerging professional areas, industry partnerships, flexibility in the way we design programs, efficient and effective approval processes, and strategic hiring of graduate faculty.

- B.1. Determine the feasibility and desired reach of new master's/professional/certificate and doctoral programs.**
- B.1.a. Identify emerging areas of opportunity that align with faculty expertise, incorporate these into the process for requesting new faculty lines, and align faculty growth with graduate growth.
 - B.1.b. Assess the capacity of the University to develop, market, and deliver new graduate programs.
 - B.1.c. Increase the number of new programs (degrees and non-degree credentials) that are aligned to industry-relevant skills, as well as the number of competency-based education options.
 - B.1.d. Partner with HBCUs and MSIs in the development and design of potential new programs, including several types of pathway programs.
- B.2. Encourage the development of alternative models for creating new graduate programs and credentials.**
- B.2.a. Examine the concept of implementing a cost-per-program or variable-tuition model (as opposed to a cost-per-credit-hour model).
 - B.2.b. Increase the number of focused interdisciplinary degree pathways and develop interdisciplinary programs within particular colleges, that cross department lines and address complex problems and/or industry/workforce/global needs.
 - B.2.c. Institutionalize the concept of micro-certificates and develop clear standards for the process of stacking multiple credentials towards a degree.
- B.3. Smooth the path for the timely development, approval, promotion, and launch of new programs, by reviewing processes and improving transparency.**
- B.3.a. Review the program proposal/development/approval/implementation processes of aspirant peer institutions, to learn best practices and identify areas where UA's process efficiency can be increased. Ensure that new processes are lean to facilitate curricular innovation.
 - B.3.b. Develop a clear communication structure that includes all relevant institutional offices and academic programs. This process will be initiated at the onset of discussions and continue through the phase of incorporating the new program into all systems and websites. The process map will include information about calendar deadlines for approvals beyond the campus level.
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I.B. Key Performance Indicators

- A. Number of new masters, professional, certificates, and doctoral programs*
 - B. Number of concentrations in the Interdisciplinary master's and PhD degree program*
 - C. Number of pathway programs developed in collaboration with HBCUs and MSIs*
 - D. Reduction in time for internal approval of new programs, certificates, and concentrations*
-



C. Align current and future resource investments with strategic goals.

As a Carnegie R1 research university, The University of Alabama must be positioned to compete for top students from across the state and around the world. At the same time, the limitations inherent in today's higher education funding model must be acknowledged. In addition to maximizing central resources (fellowships, scholarships, assistantships) to enhance graduate growth, UA must look creatively to external sources such as research funding, industry partnerships, and models for self-funded graduate studies.

C.1. Increase graduate assistantship and fellowship funding to competitive levels (defined initially as the discipline-specific 50th percentile for Southern University Group (SUG) institutions that contribute data to the Oklahoma State annual stipends survey).

- C.1.a. Improve base-level student stipend competitiveness vis-à-vis our peers to at least the 75th percentile of the Oklahoma State University study, in all fields.
- C.1.b. Mobilize Advancement, centrally and in each college, towards enhancing opportunities for graduate education as a core component of the Advancement mission.

C.2. Design new student funding mechanisms to support strategic goals.

- C.2.a. Establish a scholarship formula specifically for students in master's/professional/ certificate programs.
- C.2.b. Examine current federal financial aid regulations regarding financial support of students in certificate programs, and strengthen our institutional infrastructure to accommodate such support.
- C.2.c. Survey current master's and certificate program students to determine how they are funding their education; segment this data by age, race, gender, and full-time/part-time status; use the data to develop targeted scholarship programs that expand enrollment and access to these programs.
- C.2.d. Increase financial support to prospective and current underrepresented students (e.g., fellowships/scholarships or summer bridge/research experience/immersive programs) to broaden participation in graduate education.

C.3. Seek avenues to appropriately resource UA's graduate growth objectives.

- C.3.a. Invest some portion of indirect-cost returns from research grants into graduate stipends at the college level, to enhance graduate growth and competitiveness.
- C.3.b. Increase external support of graduate education (both in number of lines and in stipend levels) through externally sponsored research, to support doctoral degree attainment.
- C.3.c. Continue to increase Graduate Council Fellowship support and GRA matching lines.
- C.3.d. Explore additional funding mechanisms for expanded graduate student support, including federal training grants, foundations, and other models.
- C.3.e. Create mechanisms to reduce GTA workload where appropriate, to enhance both program quality and competitiveness.
- C.3.f. Align graduate growth with faculty growth, including hiring faculty in areas where future graduate programs can be developed or where growth is expected.

I.C. Key Performance Indicators

- A. Graduate student stipends relative to the 75th percentile of SUG schools that contribute to the Oklahoma State annual stipends survey
 - B. Variety of partial- and full-funding mechanisms to support graduate students
 - C. Number of graduate students supported by external funding
 - D. Number of graduate students supported for 12 months
 - E. Number of tenure-track or tenured faculty overall, and particularly in areas of potential graduate growth
-

II. Provide the highest quality of research and instruction in UA's graduate programs, with specializations that reflect faculty expertise and market directions, and with strong support to faculty, staff, and students.

A. Continuously improve UA's graduate programs to provide a transformative, high-quality education to all students.

The University of Alabama's Graduate School has seen a significant increase in enrollment over the past five years. The graduate student population has increased by 33%; within that group, the population of underrepresented students (not including international) has increased by 37%, and the population of international students has increased by 35%. This growth is a result of a concerted effort to increase the percentage of the total university population that is enrolled in graduate study. While this enrollment increase should be commended, it also makes this an ideal time to look at the structure of our graduate programs and determine if there are opportunities to increase the quality and diversity of our offerings. Graduate programs can accomplish this by conducting external and internal evaluations of what modern graduate degree programs should look like and what they should prepare students to do. Graduate programs should specifically consider how well they are preparing their students for the breadth of career outcomes available to those who complete a post-bachelor's degree program, and the societal challenges and issues we want our graduates to be able to help solve.

A.1. Ensure that graduate degree and non-degree programs remain up to date with emerging trends in their professional or academic fields.

- A.1.a. Expand the number of concentrations or cognates within program curricula, where appropriate, to reflect emerging areas of expertise, utilizing external advisory boards as appropriate to guide this discussion.
- A.1.b. Strengthen the intersections between centers and institutes on campus and the existing and new graduate degree programs, to include graduate opportunities.
- A.1.c. Continuously review all policies of the Graduate School and all academic policies and student- and faculty-facing processes, involving faculty, staff, and students in the review process, to ensure that we continue to lower barriers to student progress.

A.2. Ensure that doctoral programs reflect the realities that today’s graduates will face in their professional careers.

- A.2.a. Periodically update program requirements and curricula in ways aligned with contemporary trends in doctoral education: preparing students for a breadth of career outcomes, bringing real-world skills into doctoral-level programming, and aligning program requirements with the needs of today’s graduates.
- A.2.b. Encourage doctoral programs to include external Academic Program Review advisors in their five-year program reviews to ensure that the programs remain at the forefront of their field in terms of innovation, rigor, and career breadth.
- A.2.c. Expand industry partnerships to link doctoral students to real-world research problems, and potentially to include funded graduate positions.
- A.2.d. Increase the integration of internships within doctoral programs.
- A.2.e. Connect the scholarly expertise of graduate programs to the needs of our local and global community.

II.A. Key Performance Indicators

- A. New concentrations, updated degree names and formats, and other market-driven innovations
 - B. Improved tracking of internships and graduate career outcomes, and assessment of those outcomes
 - C. Number of graduate students involved in internships
-

B. Ensure that the structures and resources of UA’s graduate programs support success for all students.

The ultimate marker of a high-quality graduate school is that graduate student success is the paramount priority. Admission of students to a graduate program is an expression of confidence that those students can complete their degree requirements. Admission of a graduate student also obligates the graduate education community to provide the resources and support necessary for all students to reach their potential. We should strive to provide all graduate students with a transformative educational experience that leads to rewarding professional lives and attainment of personal goals.

Significant work needs to be done to ensure that students from all backgrounds receive a high-quality experience while in graduate school at UA. This is especially true for students coming from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in graduate education. These populations may differ on a program-by-program basis, but the fact remains that a concerted and intentional effort must be made to address the barriers that hinder progress for certain students.

B.1. Make inclusive excellence a part of the culture of all graduate programs.

- B.1.a. Identify and address barriers to students’ successful and timely completion of graduate programs, with attention to any gaps between specific demographic populations.
- B.1.b. Determine whether there are barriers between international students and available resources, and address those barriers.
- B.1.c. Create access to mentorship training for all graduate faculty, and mentee training for graduate students, with particular attention to meeting the needs of underrepresented students.



- B.2. Foster a culture of belonging and connection for graduate students, both distance learners and on-campus students.**
- B.2.a. Increase and enhance support resources (e.g., attention to the needs of graduate students who are parents, mental health services, professional development/career development).
 - B.2.b. Create ad hoc committees of the Graduate Council, when needed, and partner effectively with the Graduate Student Association and other graduate student groups, to hear and address recommendations on specific issues related to graduate student success and inclusive excellence.
 - B.2.c. Support the development and visibility of student groups to help build community among graduate students.
 - B.2.d. Continue to support the hiring of faculty from underrepresented groups, in all graduate programs, as evidence that UA is a welcoming community, and to provide diverse role models for students.
 - B.2.e. Identify and allocate (or build if necessary) a physical “home” for the University-wide graduate community to socialize with peers, graduate faculty, and alumni as well as to seek academic and work-life balance support.
 - B.2.f. Create communal space on an e-platform to strengthen the sense of a UA-wide graduate student community.
 - B.2.g. Reframe and maintain a student-centered Graduate School website focused on providing an inviting and comprehensive platform of student information and resources for current graduate students, in addition to a robust communication plan that connects students to available resources and support.
 - B.2.h. Create an annual graduate student survey for current and recently inactive students, asking for feedback (both qualitative and quantitative) on program progress or reasons for leaving; disseminate the data and analysis, and utilize the data for future planning.
 - B.2.i. Advocate for affordable on- and off-campus graduate student housing.
- B.3. Provide robust professional development opportunities for graduate teaching assistants (GTAs).**
- B.3.a. Enhance year-round GTA training and support, building this into the structure of a future Office for Teaching & Learning.
 - B.3.b. Continue progress towards documenting compliance with accreditation expectations regarding oversight, qualifications, and evidence of regular in-service training of GTAs.
- B.4. Expand the range and impact of career development resources for graduate students seeking non-academic career paths.**
- B.4.a. Improve data collection and analysis regarding career outcomes for graduate alumni, including systematic tracking of alumni career paths.
 - B.4.b. Provide campus-level and unit-level programming and electronic resources to support student exploration of a full range of career paths.

II.B. Key Performance Indicators

- A. Improved master's and doctoral retention, reduction in time-to-degree, and reduction in differential outcomes among demographic groups
 - B. Increase in graduate students' sense of belonging, as measured by current or future exit surveys as well as campus climate surveys
 - C. Number of professional development offerings and increased attendance at professional development events
 - D. Usage of and participation in career development resources designed for graduate students
-

C. Create appropriate support structures for faculty and staff to improve graduate education.

The excellence of UA's graduate programs is predicated on the expertise and involvement of its graduate faculty, who already face multiple and competing demands for their time and attention. It is important to ensure that faculty have the resources to meet the expectations of the growing and evolving graduate population, as well as to build mechanisms to recognize and reward the effort involved in such improvements. Peer universities with longer R1 trajectories may have models to offer in this regard. Central support mechanisms as well as college-based and Graduate School-based initiatives can be constructed in ways that foster continuous investment in graduate education on the part of UA's faculty.

C.1. Ensure that faculty and staff have the resources to meet the demands associated with all phases of a graduate program.

- C.1.a. Collaborate with campus partners to assess the ability of each unit to meet the demands associated with proposing, developing, marketing, delivering, and assessing current programs.
- C.1.b. Support the technology-based training needs of faculty and staff involved in the development and delivery of online graduate programs.
- C.1.c. Ensure that discussions about change, and how it will be implemented, involve close collaboration between the Graduate School and all its partners in graduate education.

C.2. Expand mentorship programming for incoming and current faculty and staff involved in graduate education.

- C.2.a. Build faculty development programming, specific to graduate mentorship, into the structure of the (future) UA Teaching Academy.
- C.2.b. Create a distinguished doctoral mentor corps.
- C.2.c. Develop and implement an orientation/panel-session/training-session specifically for new faculty hires, particularly those who will mentor graduate students, covering best practices for mentorship and research advising. Invite full and associate professors to share their strategies for helping graduate students achieve a successful graduate school experience.



C.3. Appropriately recognize and reward the work that faculty invest in graduate programs.

- C.3.a. Provide mechanisms at the university-wide, college-level, and department-level to recognize, value, and reward faculty members who mentor graduate students successfully, develop programs, or commit to other graduate improvements.
- C.3.b. Ensure that faculty who teach online, modular, or other flexible graduate courses have that work appropriately recognized in their annual teaching load.
- C.3.c. Identify and implement mechanisms for incentivizing faculty involvement in the development and delivery of new graduate programs.

II.C. Key Performance Indicators

- A. Faculty participation in graduate-oriented professional development programming at the central or college/department level*
- B. Broadened formal incentive models for faculty who design and participate in online as well as on-campus programs*

D. Align current and future resource investments with strategic goals.

Investment in graduate student success and in our faculty includes continuous improvements in our systems, support structures, and mechanisms for listening to student concerns. The Graduate Student Association is an important partner in identifying priorities that can bolster success for both on-campus and distance-learning students. The Graduate School, individual colleges, the Division of Student Life, and other units of the university need to work together to address the needs of the whole student, incorporating mental, emotional, and physical well-being in addition to academic and financial support, as outlined in the above recommendations. To do this effectively, investments will be needed in physical, staffing, and financial support structures.

- D.1. Identify a graduate services coordinator or graduate student recruitment and retention liaison at the college level, to implement recruitment and student support strategies akin to those that operate on the undergraduate level.**
- D.2. Provide resources for external reviewers, from aspirational-peer institutions, to participate in the five-year Academic Program Review (APR) of departments that offer graduate programs.**
- D.3. Expand funding for graduate support programming at all levels, to potentially include external speakers, alumni panels, mentorship training, or other investments in student support and success.**

II.D. Key Performance Indicators

- A. Identification of a graduate services coordinator in each college*
- B. Assessment of graduate mentorship success in annual faculty review*
- C. Number of student support and success offerings*

Strategic Planning Process

The Graduate School expresses its thanks to the many faculty members and colleges who contributed to the Strategic Plan for Graduate Education. Five faculty committees worked throughout Fall 2021 in five thematic areas that were then interwoven into the current structure of the Plan. Members of the committees were either nominated by the Faculty Senate, nominated by a college dean, or elected to the Graduate Council. Members of the Graduate Student Association also participated in committee discussions. During Spring 2022, the five committee chairs worked as an executive committee to refine the rationales and objectives. The plan was finalized in Fall 2022.

Committee Members

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