

## Report of the Graduate Education Working Group

4-25-22

### Members of the Working Group

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The Working Group (WG) received its charge from Mónica Bugallo, Interim Provost, and Richard Larson, President of the University Senate. We were asked “to review the current programs and services the graduate school is providing to the community, come up with new proposals for extending the services and programming, and reevaluate the structure of the unit to make it more efficient and effective.”

To achieve that goal, we undertook several types of data collection and analyses (see the Appendix). Our analyses led us to several conclusions and recommendations. In this report, **bold type** indicates statements on which the WG conducted formal votes. The report indicates the results of those votes.

I. The first question we addressed is whether graduate services should remain as a centralized unit at Stony Brook.

**The Working Group unanimously (17-0) recommends that the graduate unit remain a coherent centralized unit.**

Rationale:

A. Our graduate students reported that they value the graduate unit as a coherent unit. They noted that the graduate services they find more difficult to navigate are those that are administered outside the graduate unit.

B. The majority of AAUs have centralized graduate units. This generalization applies to schools that do not have “Graduate Schools” such as MIT (which has a centralized “Office of Graduate Education”) and Georgia Tech (which has a centralized “Office of Graduate Studies”).

C. The Council of Graduate Schools strongly recommends that graduate units have a centralized organization (see “The Organization and Administration of Graduate Education,” 2019).

II. Although most AAUs have centralized Graduate Units, some have Graduate Schools whereas others have other administrative models. In that context, the WG voted on these two options:

A. Stony Brook should retain a “Graduate School” (so that the Grad Leader would be both the Vice-Provost and Dean).

B. Stony Brook should have, e.g., an “Office of Graduate Education” (administered by a Vice-Provost).

Based on our vote, **the WG recommends (13-2) that SBU retain a “Graduate School” led by both the Vice-Provost and Dean.**

Rationale:

A. As the data in the Appendix show, most AAUs include Graduate Schools. Although we examined other models, we were not able to discern advantages that accrued with structures that did not include Graduate Schools. We did not wish to recommend a change without being able to articulate the benefits of that change.

B. In their conversations with the WG, the students consistently reported that they feel that SBU is mostly an undergraduate-oriented institution. They indicated that the existence of a Graduate School, with a Dean at the helm, provided reassurance that the university was attending to the welfare of its graduate students and offered them a centralized location to which they could bring their concerns.

C. The data we collected reinforced the importance of the Grad Leader’s two roles as Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Graduate Education. The dual title makes plain that the Grad Leader is firmly grounded in academia but also will have a strong voice for long-range planning and budgetary decisions.

III. The WG considered other administrative changes that will enhance graduate education at Stony Brook. We arrived at a series of recommendations.

**A. We recommend (in both cases, 15-0) that the Graduate School have an Associate Leader for Student Support and an Associate Leader for Program Development.**

*1. Associate Leader for Student Support*

We learned from the graduate students that they often face difficulties navigating graduate services that are outside the Graduate School. We envision an Associate Leader who would serve as a liaison to those services to advocate for grad students and assist with problem solving. That liaison could work with other areas on campus (HR, VIS, Bursar, etc.) to ameliorate reoccurring obstacles and work to create more efficient systems. That central help would also be a boon to GPCs and GPDs because some types of problems would be solved centrally. This Associate Leader would also serve as a liaison to the Dean of Students' office and also focus on broader aspects of student well-being (e.g., mental health issues).

*2. Associate Leader for Program Development*

Graduate Program Directors need more support in developing proposals. That support has come, in the past, and in this current year, from an Associate Dean. In addition, we envision that the individual in this role would assist with the development of grants, fellowships, and training grants. We note that Stony Brook lags far behind other public AAUs with respect to Institutional Training Grants (T32 funding). The WG envisions an Associate Leader who would coordinate central assistance with preparation of T32 grants.

**B. The WG recommends (13-0 with two abstentions) that the Graduate School have a staff-member who serves a global managerial function for the graduate unit.**

Rationale: Our analyses of other AAUs found instances in which Graduate Units had positions like "Director" who were full-time managers for the Unit. In that context, we believe that SBU could profit from a model in which more of the Dean's effort could be expended on conceptual issues (rather than managerial issues) related to graduate education. (In section VI, we provide our concrete suggestions for conceptual issues with which the Dean might engage.) One new function for this Grad Unit manager would be to ensure that processes are converted to an online workflow that can be tracked and optimized.

With respect to this recommendation, the WG voted on this series of options:

1. The Grad Unit should have an administrative manager/director as a new position who would oversee the operations of the Grad Unit. (7 votes)
2. The Assistant Grad Leader for Finance should be given an amended job description that included a higher-level managerial role. (6 votes)
3. The Grad Unit does not need a full-time manager. (0 votes)

4. Abstain (2 votes)

As the number of votes indicates, we have general consensus that the Grad Unit would benefit from a formal manager. However, we do not have a clear recommendation for how that role should be instantiated.

**C. The WG recommends (14-0, with one abstention) that the Grad Leader create an advisory panel that would represent the range of programs across our Colleges and that this panel have a direct reporting structure (e.g. through a ‘panel chair’) to the Grad Leader and/or Associate Grad Leaders.**

Rationale:

The process in which the WG has engaged has provided strong reminders that there are myriad models for graduate education within the different programs and different Colleges. The WG’s goal is to ensure that the Grad Leader understands the unique challenges and financial structures of different models (humanities/arts, CEAS/STEM), and that these models are represented at the level of budget meetings. We acknowledge the great importance of the Graduate Council, particularly with respect to shared governance in decision making. Still, we suggest that the Grad Leader would do well to bring a somewhat smaller, focused group of voices to bear on conceptual innovations in Graduate Education.

IV. The WG reflected on changes to the provision of graduate services that have occurred over the last year.

As a group (12-1), we offer this assertion: **In the last year, several administrative changes have been made that have major implications for graduate students and graduate programs (e.g., changes to the admissions process). Those changes were made outside the awareness of the graduate community without appropriate vetting by the Graduate Council. The committee recommends that any further changes only be made through processes of shared governance.**

#### A. Graduate Admissions

The WG addressed the move of Graduate Admissions from the Graduate School to Enrollment Management. We arrived at this conclusion (12-1):

**Through its survey of Graduate Program Coordinators and Directors, the WG obtained information about community responses to the change in the administration of graduate admissions. The survey showed widespread dissatisfaction with the SLATE product, its rollout, support, and SLATE training. If the goal was to fold graduate admissions into a unit that already manages undergrad admissions well, that is a good idea, but one that has not proved effective in practice. Perhaps over time the new infrastructure of Admissions will create better processes and efficiency, but the change has been highly problematic.**

The group considered the particular proposal that “Graduate Admissions should be moved back to the Graduate Unit.” We opted to have three responses to that proposal:

1. Yes (5 votes)
2. No (1 vote)
3. We should argue for stability (7 votes)

The vote tallies indicate a slight preference for a **recommendation for stability**. As we noted, our survey data indicated that the move of Graduate Admissions has been problematic for the community of GPCs and GPDs. Still, the WG worries that another move could bring about new disruptions. In the context of the hope for stability, the WG makes three recommendations:

1. **We unanimously (13-0) recommend that the Grad Leader and staff remain highly involved in ensuring that graduate admissions processes are managed in a way that reflects the needs of the programs that fall within the Grad Unit’s purview. There should be clear paths of communication from the programs to the Grad Leader that enable flexible responses to problems that emerge.**
2. **We strongly (11-1, with one abstention) recommend that the Graduate Leader play an official administrative role (perhaps “dotted lines”) for graduate admissions.**

**3. We unanimously (13-0) recommend that one of the individuals moved from the Graduate School, who has specific expertise on graduate admissions, be installed as the point of contact for the GPCs and GPDs administering graduate admissions.**

Rationale: Our recommendations flow from the survey of GPCs and GPDs. We need to ensure that individuals who have expertise with respect to the admissions processes for the wide range of graduate programs have an on-going impact on decision making.

#### B. Graduate Recruitment

The WG unanimously (13-0) makes this suggestion: **The graduate community has not been informed about the new model for graduate recruiting. The working group recommends that a concrete plan be shared as soon as possible to allow feedback from the Graduate Council as well as Graduate Program Coordinators and Directors.**

Furthermore, **we unanimously (13-0) recommend that the Grad leader and staff play a role in shaping the activities of professional recruitment staff members. We recommend that the Graduate Leader play an official administrative role (perhaps “dotted lines”) for graduate recruiting.**

Rationale: In our conversation with the Turner Scholars, the working group learned how effectively the graduate school’s DEI recruiters collaborated with programs to recruit students to SBU. We assert that on-going collaboration, with direct involvement of the Grad Leader, is essential to preserve past routes to successful recruitment.

#### C. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

**Given the importance of DEI initiatives, as well as practices at graduate units of other AAU institutions, we strongly recommend (12-1) that the graduate unit retain staff focused on DEI issues specific to graduate students. These staff members could work closely with DI3 to provide complementary expertise and services.**

**In particular, we strongly recommend (11-1 with one abstention) that the Graduate Unit continue to have an Assistant Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.**

Rationale: Our recommendations are shaped by the manifest importance of DEI initiatives, as well as practices at the Graduate Units of other AAUs. It is important to the graduate community that we still obtain focused assistance with recruitment and retention. In addition, the Turner scholars collectively affirmed that the community fostered by DEI efforts in the Graduate School had attracted them to Stony Brook and, in several instances, convinced them to remain in their programs. They also noted the value of the academic programs through the Graduate School that enabled them to establish connections across disciplinary divides. Finally, many grant proposals focused on graduate education require diversity plans. The graduate community requires the expertise represented by DEI presence in the Grad Unit to help develop successful grant proposals.

In this domain, the WG offers this conclusion (10-2, with one abstention): **We acknowledge that an Assistant Dean for DEI may prove to be unnecessary once the new version of the Center for Inclusive Education is fully in place. However, we recommend that DEI functions remain represented in the Graduate Unit until the new CIE is fully developed.**

## V. Current Graduate School functions

A. We unanimously (13-0) offer this statement: **An important part of the working group's process was to compare SBU's graduate administration and services to those of other AAU institutions. SBU has fewer staff members dedicated to graduate services than the majority of schools in our sample.**

For example, Arizona lists about 40 staff members who play roles in graduate education for a graduate population of 10,900 (thus, 20 staff per 5000 students). UC Davis lists about 40 staff members for a graduate population of around 7000 students. The Graduate School at SBU has 15 staff (including positions recently moved to other areas and vacant positions) for roughly 5000 graduate students.

**We strongly recommend (12-1) that open positions in the Graduate Unit be filled immediately to address extant needs.**

Rationale: The survey data from the GPCs and GPDs strongly indicate that the Graduate School requires that its staff be restored. The graduate community expresses admiration for the efforts of the current staff, but recognizes that they are overburdened. At present, there is insufficient staff to adequately complete the necessary functions for students to enroll, be matriculated, change programs or levels, and so on. The lack of human resources to complete these critical tasks, among many others, leads to frustration and dissatisfaction in the graduate community.

**We unanimously (13-0) recommend that the working group's comparison to other institutions be continued (perhaps by the Graduate Council) to allow deeper analysis of staffing differences between SBU and other AAU programs.**

B. Additions to current services: The WG's comparisons to other AAUs, as well as input from the campus community, leads us to recommend additional services within existing units of the Graduate School.

### 1. Student Services

a. **We strongly recommend (12-1) that the Graduate Unit include a staff member whose formal role includes program development.**

Rationale: Given the complexities and importance of revising existing programs and establishing new ones, we believe it is necessary to have a Grad Unit staff member directly assigned to these tasks. We envision that this individual would coordinate with the Associate Leader for Program Development.

b. **We strongly recommend (12-1) that the Graduate Unit include a staff member who focuses on marketing and communication in collaboration with experts in other areas of the university.**

Rationale: The Graduate Unit needs to provide more effective communication with potential applicants, current students, GPCs, and GPDs. The Graduate Unit also needs to market the strengths of graduate education to the campus community and beyond.

## 2. Graduate & Postdoctoral Professional Development

a. **The WG strongly recommends (12-0, with one abstention) that, to reflect the increasing size SBU's community of postdoctoral fellows, Postdoctoral affairs should obtain additional staff.**

Rationale: The growing population of postdocs require more attention to facilitate their progress at Stony Brook and their professional development.

b. **The WG strongly recommends (11-0, with two abstentions) that the Graduate Unit obtain resources to facilitate students' writing training as part of professional development. That training should assist with both core competencies and discipline-specific aspects of successful writing.**

Rationale: Increased support for writing at the graduate level could have a positive impact on graduate education in several fashions. For example, students who are able to improve their writing could have better success publishing their work. In addition, improved writing abilities could help students complete their theses and dissertations in less time. Finally, access to writing support could help international students improve their ability to write academic prose in English.

## VI. An agenda for the next Graduate Leader

The Working Group hopes that the next Graduate Leader will have the opportunity to focus more attention on conceptual aspects of graduate education (rather, that is, than on logistical matters). As we conducted our conversations and analyses, we collected suggestions for how the next Graduate Leader might function effectively to facilitate progress and introduce innovations in graduate education.

For each potential agenda item, the WG voted (1 = high priority; 5 = low priority) to indicate the suggestions that we believe are most pressing for our community. Thirteen members of the working group voted. This report gives our average rating in parentheses after each statement.

### A. Leadership for the Graduate Community

1. The Grad Leader should be knowledgeable about innovations at peer institutions. The Council of Graduate Schools (the national organization for Graduate School Leaders that supports graduate education and research) provides abundant guidance in such areas. The Grad Leader should function as a conduit of CGS guidance to educate the community and advocate for improvements. (1.31)
2. The Grad Leader should celebrate the excellence of our students, programs, and community. (1.38)
3. The Grad Leader should ensure that there are discussions on important conceptual issues. The Grad Leader might, for example, organize events/working groups that focus on topics such as holistic admissions, the welfare of international students, diverse careers, and student mental health. (1.46)

### B. The Graduate Leader should provide leadership on academic analysis, planning, and assessment, including the following:

1. The Grad Leader should work with programs to understand the needs of Master's students and generate and extend appropriate support. (1.31)
2. The Grad Leader should proactively identify programs with challenges, and work with them to identify solutions. (1.84)
3. The Grad Leader should ensure that program revisions and proposals reflect job market trends, federal research priorities, and state program priorities. The Grad Leader should work closely with the Office of the Vice President for Research, and any Vice Provosts for Research across schools and colleges, and work with the Provost's Office to ensure that our programs are at the forefront of their fields, and we are developing new programs to match new research areas and needs identified by the state. (1.84)
4. The Grad Leader should collaborate with other offices to ensure that alumni outcomes are gathered and shared. (1.92)

5. The Grad Leader should coordinate with the Office of Educational Effectiveness to support Graduate program assessment activities. (2.23)

6. The Grad Leader should ensure that programs are updated on a regular basis, record program paperwork, and then ensure that programs are not changing from their registered structure. If they are, provide support for re-registration with the aid of an Associate Dean. (2.31)

C. The Graduate Leader should provide leadership on Academic Services, including the following:

1. The Grad Leader should improve communications to and from students and to and from programs. There should be opportunities for the community to voice their concerns so that change can occur in a bottom-up fashion. (1.38)

2. The Grad Leader should collaborate with the Graduate Student Organization to improve information shared with newly admitted students as well as the orientation process. (1.46)

3. The Grad Leader should collaborate with Program Directors from all colleges and schools that house academic programs to understand the needs of their graduate students. Efforts should be made to understand what graduate services should be extended to all populations of students. (1.76)

D. The Graduate Leader should provide leadership on graduate school finances, including the following:

1. The Grad Leader and operations manager should assess the grad unit annually to identify strengths and weaknesses and evaluate staffing levels. (1.33)

2. The Grad Leader should support the optimization of processes and procedures and ensure all processes have converted to online workflow. (1.84)

3. The Grad Leader should facilitate discussions of the mechanisms of TA allocations as they apply to East Campus programs. (2.00)

4. The Grad Leader should facilitate discussions of how TORG (tuition returns on grants) are administered and deployed. (2.23)

Appendix: The Working Group's Process

A. The WG had six Zoom meetings between March 21 and April 19. Four meetings involved the whole group. Two meetings were small group meetings (with 4 or 5 members) that allowed for more fluid interactions over Zoom.

B. The Working Group's recommendations emerged from examination of several types of information.

1. Analysis of SBU vs. other AAUs

Within the AAU, there are public and private universities some of which have individuals who are Vice Provosts (but not Deans) and some of which have individuals who are Deans (and most often also Vice Provosts). This table presents the counts for each type of school.

	Vice Provost	Dean
Public	5	30
Private	9	18

Those raw counts indicate that a large majority of AAUs retain Graduate Schools with Deans.

To make our comparisons between SBU and other AAUs, the members of the WG acquired expertise on one other AAU. To facilitate comparisons, we entered the information into a Google form.

These are the other AAUs we sampled:

VP/Public

The University of Kansas  
University of Pittsburgh  
University of Virginia  
Georgia Tech

Dean/Public

Indiana University  
University of Arizona  
University at Buffalo  
UC Davis  
U Wisconsin

VP/Private

Tulane University  
Boston University  
Washington University in St. Louis  
MIT

Dean/Private

Cornell University  
Emory University  
Northwestern University

## 2. Survey of Graduate Program Coordinators and Graduate Program Directors

The survey assessed respondents' views on the range of services provided by the Graduate School. It included a mixture of Likert scales and open-ended questions.

Over 100 GPCs and GPDs provided responses to the survey.

*Product:* Quantitative and qualitative data.

## 3. Meeting with students (organized with the GSO)

*Product:* Consensus minutes circulated to the working group.

## 4. Meeting with Turner scholars (organized with help from the CIE)

*Product:* Consensus minutes circulated to the working group.

## 5. Meeting with Graduate School staff

*Product:* Consensus minutes circulated to the working group.

After the meeting, the Grad School staff also provided detailed information about the range of services they currently provide.