STRATEGIC SKILL BUILDING: A NECESSITY FOR GRADUATE STUDENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER READINESS

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A partnership between Graduate Student Life and Office of Graduate Education
“...it is critical to illuminate the pathways from graduate school into careers given the U.S. economy’s growing need for workers with advanced skills and knowledge. ... We must ensure that graduate students complete graduate school with the preparation to meet the demand.”

– Council of Graduate Schools

Preparation for graduate students to meet market demands

Preparing doctoral students for competitive academic positions

Preparing doctoral students for alt-/non-academic careers

Mason graduate students need relevant professional development support to cultivate strategic skills that complement their subject-area expertise.
Current Challenges

- Over half of graduate students report **low levels of support** for career and professional development while at Mason.
- Most graduate students report **not having a mentor** related to their educational or career goals.
- Most graduate students **have not utilized** career and professional development resources offered by their academic department and/or the University.
- Over a quarter of graduate students **are not aware** of career and professional development resources offered by their academic department and/or the University.
- The majority of graduate students believe that professional development support is important, but about a third feels that the university provides **little to no support** in this area.
CONTRIBUTING TO INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING

- **Strategic Goal #1: Innovative learning**
  - Metric example: Student satisfaction with their Mason educational experience upon graduation

- **Strategic Goal #3: Return on investment**
  - Metric example: Report a positive career outcome within six months of graduation

- **Strategic Goal #4: 100,000 Career-ready Graduates**
  - Metric example: Mason helped them grow personally and professionally

- **Strategic Goal #7: Well-being**
  - Metric example: Continue to increase student access to well-being programs by developing a portfolio of well-being noncurricular activities open to all students

Ongoing strategic planning for graduate student professional development

- **Goal:** Learn about current offerings and identify gaps and interests

- **August 2019:** Community Conversation: Mason Graduate Student Professional Development
  - ~70 faculty, staff, administrators participated

- **September 2019:** Innovations in Teaching & Learning Conference
  - Continuing the conversation: Mason Graduate Student Professional Development

- **October-November 2019:** Benchmarking study

- **December 2019 - February 2020:** Graduate student survey
PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

Well-rounded, career-ready graduate students
QEP OUTCOMES

**Overarching goal:** Develop a university-wide integrated model to prepare graduate students across disciplines for long-term success in academic and non-academic careers

- **Integrated approach:** Map existing curricular and co-curricular activities to create career-readiness pathways
- **Personalized, flexible pathways:** Allow graduate students to design a Mason experience aligned with their career and professional goals
- **Graduate student enrichment:** Complement graduate students’ subject-area expertise with strategic skills to meet market demands
- **New initiatives to fill gaps:** Create and deliver intentional programs to address professional development needs
- **Mentoring and advising:** Provide enhanced career and professional development support by training graduate mentors and advisors
QEP IMPACT

- Platform for offerings and tracking student progress:
  - Easily navigable to identify supports aligned with professional development goals
  - E-portfolio
    - Student-initiated
    - Easy to manage and track
    - One-click approval
- User-friendly and efficient
- Sustainable and scalable
- Engagement with employers
- Online learning and support
ASSESSMENT PLAN

• Student self-assessment with e-portfolio
• Participation
  • Number of students per level and per pillar
• Pre- and post-assessments of knowledge and skills based on student learning outcomes
• Ongoing surveys of graduate students’ needs and satisfaction
• Leveraging existing assessments
  • Tailored questions on Career Plans Survey, Graduate Student Exit Survey, and One Year Out Career Survey
• Survey of employers
RESOURCES

• Maximize existing resources already available at Mason

• Personnel #1 and #2:
  • Faculty engagement and outreach to units
    • Mapping curricular and co-curricular offerings
    • Content development and implementation (Curriculum Impact Grants)
  • Student engagement and outreach to partners
    • Recruitment and professional development management and guidance
    • Graduate student enrichment grants

• Personnel #3 (50%) – In partnership with Faculty Affairs & Development
  • Faculty/Staff training for mentoring and advising

• Personnel #4 (50%) – In partnership with Institutional Effectiv. & Planning
  • Evaluation and assessment

• Sustainable integrated automated platform
  • Database of offerings
  • E-portfolio for student success tracking
  • Reporting
Mason is uniquely positioned to respond to the growing need for workers with advanced skills and knowledge.

This QEP will:

- Help with maintaining our research-intensive status
- Assist with responding to the Tech Talent Initiative targets
- Support and engage students in online programs
- Build on undergraduate education initiatives and add benefits to undergraduate students
- Increase Mason graduate education visibility, quality & rigor

By strategically investing in graduate student career-readiness, this QEP will capitalize on Mason’s strengths, enhance educational quality, and most importantly, promote graduate student success.
**MORE DETAILS ON FRAMEWORK**

**Capacity Building for Self and Society**
- Career planning and development
- Community engagement
- Personal growth and inclusive well-being

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<th>Research, Scholarship &amp; Creative Activities</th>
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<th>Teaching, Training &amp; Mentoring</th>
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MORE DETAILED PROPOSED OUTCOMES

• Capacity Building for Self and Society
  • Develop awareness of self in relation to others, including values, identities, and diversity. Understand how to act ethically. Integrate well-being to build lives of purpose. Engage with local, national, and global communities. Use knowledge of skills and experiences to manage career development.

• Research, Scholarship & Creative Activities
  • Know how, when, and why to responsibly apply different methods to generate original knowledge and creative works.

• Communication
  • Communicate effectively, orally and in writing, with a variety of expert and general audiences across a range of contexts.

• Teaching, Training & Mentoring
  • Teach, train and mentor others using research-supported approaches that promote learning and ongoing development in academic and/or employment/professional settings.

• Leadership & Management
  • Influence, inspire, and motivate individuals and groups to work collaboratively and effectively toward collective goals.

• Digital Proficiency
  • Learn and apply digital foundation and innovation to non-technical fields
Beyond strategic goals 1, 3, 4, and 7:

- **Strategic Goal #2: Accessible Pathways**
  - Provide multiple pathways and delivery formats to serve the needs of different students

- **Strategic Goal #5: Innovation Engine**
  - Contribute to the economic and civic vitality of the region by driving entrepreneurship and innovation and by creating learning partnerships with private and public organizations.

- **Strategic Goal #6: Community Builder**
  - Contribute to the cultural vitality of our community through regional partnerships and commitments to the arts, athletics, and community engagement.

- **Strategic Goal #8: Diverse Academic Community**
  - Create an inclusive and diverse academic community that reflects the diversity of the National Capital Region.
• **Graduate Student Needs Assessment – Spring 2018**
  - Over 25% (n=580) are *not* aware of and over 50% (n=1,174) have *not* utilized career and professional development resources offered by their academic department and/or the University.
  - 55% (n=1253) responded no to having a mentor related to their educational and/or career goals.
  - Over 88% (n=2,012 graduate students) of graduate students said that a degree from their current graduate program is necessary for the career they wish to pursue after graduation.

• **Graduate Student Exit Survey – 2018**
  - 26% (n=201) and 20% (n=169) were dissatisfied about career counseling and mentoring (support of professional growth) services, respectively.
  - 45% (n=488) feel a great deal of support to pursue their career goals while at Mason.
Professional Development and Support Activities for Graduate Students – Spring 2020

Over 85% of respondents believe that the availability of professional development in communication, scholarly work and research, leadership, career planning and development, and personal growth is important.

An average of 26% believe the university provides little to no support in these areas.

The rest of the information collected through this survey will guide this framework’s program, design and delivery.
IF SELECTED

- The QEP team has already engaged with hundreds of faculty, staff and administrators, as well as graduate students, who are eager to be involved in this initiative

- Possible planning and implementation working groups:
  - Capacity Building WG
  - Research, Scholarship & Creative Activities WG
  - Communication WG
  - Teaching, Training & Mentoring WG
  - Leadership & Management WG
  - Digital Proficiency WG
  - Mentoring and Advising WG
  - Assessment WG
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