Graduate Program Director Guidebook

Purpose
Graduate Program Director (GPD) is the title we use to describe people who are assigned to oversee a graduate program. These individuals are key to the successful delivery of graduate education at Kennesaw State. They work alongside their teaching faculty, staff members in the College of Graduate and Professional Education, and other supporting resources such as Strategic Communications, Financial Aid, the Bursar’s Office, and the Registrar’s Office.

This document was written to describe key activities performed by GPDs and some of the options available to them. It is not intended to be policy and as such has not been approved through Graduate Programs and Curriculum Committee or any other body.

Please Note: This guidebook does not replicate resources that are available elsewhere.

- **Handbooks.** Visit [https://handbooks.kennesaw.edu](https://handbooks.kennesaw.edu) for links to the Graduate Catalog, Faculty Handbook, and Student Handbook.
- **Curriculum.** Visit [https://cia.kennesaw.edu](https://cia.kennesaw.edu) for links to the Graduate Policies & Curriculum Committee (GPCC) and Curriculum Proposal Checklists & Guidelines, Academic Standing, among other helpful resources.
- **Graduate Administration.** Visit [https://graduate.kennesaw.edu](https://graduate.kennesaw.edu) for information on TargetX and links to and forms Graduate Faculty Appointments, hiring GRAs and managing dissertations and theses.
- **The Registrar.** Visit [https://registrar.kennesaw.edu](https://registrar.kennesaw.edu) for information on registration, class schedules, graduation and other student issues.
- **Financial Aid.** Visit [https://financialaid.kennesaw.edu/index.php](https://financialaid.kennesaw.edu/index.php) for student financial aid forms, procedures, and conditions.

Strategic Perspectives
CGPE strongly encourages each graduate program to capture, in whatever format, perspectives on the factors that impact performance, as measured by student outcomes, enrollment, and any other assessments of program health and vitality.

The purpose of such a document is to clearly articulate the internal and competitive conditions that impact decision-making and projections for the program. Elements to consider include:

- **Internal Conditions:** mission/vision/goals, curriculum status/updates, student profile, availability of instructors, budget analysis, administrative processes.
- **Competitive Conditions:** student school-choice criteria, first-circle competing programs, target student profiles, program marketing.
- **Program Projections:** enrollment goals, evolution of the field, faculty initiatives, resource requests.

CGPE staff are available to facilitate the creation of a graduate program strategic plan. Your program’s or college’s Advisory Board could also contribute.
**Program Marketing**

GPDs should work with the college-based marketing staff and web developers in both their college and StratComm for program marketing. The goals of program marketing should be measurable development in the number of students, the quality of the students, or the profile of the program.

Marketing starts with excellent web sites. At the minimum, web sites provide descriptions of the program’s curriculum and faculty who will deliver it, with links to administrative functions such as graduate admissions, financial aid, and other KSU resources. Web sites also serve as promotional tools. Great web sites can encourage potential students to become interested in and apply to a program. Adding student testimonials, links to promotional videos, job statistics from Burning Glass, and placement examples may move someone who is just interested in a program into becoming an applicant.

*CGPE Staff and KSU Strategic Communications staff are available to facilitate the creation of effective program web sites.*

**Information Sessions**

CGPE highly encourages each graduate program to host Information Sessions for its programs. Information sessions give faculty the opportunity to show off the best parts of their programs, describe how the program differs from competing programs, and highlight the student experience and career benefits, all with the clear intention of generating an incentive to apply by prospective students.

The form of the Information Session should fit the nature of the program and the preferences of the GPD. In some cases, regularly scheduled, group in-person sessions will be the best format. Groups of programs may choose to hold joint Information Sessions with break-outs for each of the participants. Still others may choose to hold online sessions, synchronous or asynchronous. As long as the Information Session generates commitment and action on the part of prospective student, the format is inconsequential.

*CGPE staff are available to discuss options for developing and hosting Information Sessions.*

**Admissions Decision Processes**

CGPE Office of Graduate Admissions staff support the admissions application and decision process, but admissions decisions are solely the rights of GPDs and their colleagues. To best support your programs, CGPE encourages programs to adopt one of two methodologies.

- **Batch Processing:** Applications are held until a given date and reviewed together. A best practice is to have at least two processing dates, and at least one per month. The first date is to inform early applicants of positive admissions decisions to encourage them to commit to KSU. Marginal applications are then pushed to a subsequent batch and reviewed along with later applicants.
- **Rolling Processing:** Applications are reviewed as they are made complete and ready for review by the Office of Graduate Admissions. CGPE recommends that applications are given a decision after no more than 15 days of becoming complete and ready for review.

The choice of which methodology to adopt depends on the nature of the program. Cohort programs and programs that ask multiple faculty members to review applicants are likely to fit better with batch processing. Non-cohort programs and sole decision makers will likely utilize rolling processing.

Regardless of which methodology, GPDs should clearly inform applicants when they will learn of the admissions decision. For rolling processing, students should be informed of the number of days until they will hear back, and batch processes should state when the batches are evaluated. In no case should students be informed of the admissions decision later than 15 days after the application deadline.

CGPE can set up an automated communications plan in TargetX subsequent to a completed application that replies to applicants confirming the submission and providing information about next steps and decision timelines, and alerts GPDs that an application is ready for review.

*CGPE staff are available to discuss admissions decision processes.*
Communication with Newly Accepted Students and Orientations

Applicants who are strong enough to gain admission to a KSU graduate program are sure to have options to enroll at other schools. After a positive admission decision, GPDs should focus on cementing a commitment to enroll.

At the time a GPD officially accepts an applicant in the KSU systems, the Office of Graduate Admissions, through the CRM, sends a notice of decision and directs the applicant to the admission portal to review the letter of acceptance. This letter should create an air of excitement and inform the individual of forthcoming steps. Subsequently, GPDs should be in periodic contact with admitted students, providing them with information about financial aid, registration, and student UITS accounts, as well as optional initiatives such as the potential for participation in research projects.

CGPE encourages GPDs to hold orientations sessions within a few weeks of the opening of a semester. Orientations are the right forum for discussing first-semester expectations and available academic resources (e.g., the KSU Library, Bookstore, and Writing Center) and building networks through faculty introductions and ice breakers among fellow students.

CGPE staff are available to help you develop and implement post-acceptance communication plans and new student orientations.

Student Handbook

Many programs write handbooks for their students. Handbooks can be useful as repositories of program information and guides/link to official resources (e.g., the catalog), procedures/forms (e.g., grade appeals, transferring credits, or reinstatement) and academic issues (e.g., advice on course scheduling, study skills, and managing grievances).

Handbooks are referential, not authoritative. The information in handbooks must be consistent with policies mandated by KSU administrative bodies such as the Registrar, regulations imposed by external authorities such as those underlying Financial Aid, and official KSU documents such as the Graduate Catalog.

Retention and Progression: Advising & Scheduling

Admissions policies are in place so that only capable people are admitted into programs. This means that very few, if any, of our students drop out of programs because the material is beyond their grasp. Instead, the primary reason that students fail to complete a degree program is life interruptions from changes in their families (such as having a child) or their careers.

GPDs can minimize these disruptions by providing students with information that will help them plan their course of study. Advising resources, including through telephone/Teams communications and online publications, can help a students understand program expectations select courses. Projected course schedules for two or three semesters in the future can enable students to plan their path to completion.

Building student communities, including research/study groups, out-of-class experiences or registered student associations, also serve to connect students to KSU and their academic programs.

Graduation & Alumni

CGPE encourages GPDs and faculty members who regularly teach in graduate programs to attend graduation ceremonies. Doing so signals that we celebrate not only their completion of a course but also of the entire program. Further, GPDs should introducing soon-to-graduate students to the Office of Alumni and encourage students to provide updated contact information, especially personal email addresses to replace KSU addresses. Doing so will allow GPDs to engage in regular communications with alumni for program updates, invitations to speakers or other special events, and opportunities for follow-on education.