

University of Texas System Graduate Deans
Statement of Principles of Graduate Education
March 8, 2022 (Revised November 13, 2023)

The State of Texas acknowledges the importance of higher education and financially supports the University of Texas System and the other Texas university systems that offer undergraduate and graduate degree programs. As articulated by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), higher education in Texas is imperative, vital to upward social mobility of the state's citizens, and critical to the sustained health of the state's economy: <http://www.60x30tx.com/home/?pnum=2>

“Research shows that someone with a bachelor’s degree can earn nearly double the lifetime wages of a high school graduate.” This earning potential increases further when one earns a master’s degree and still further with a PhD. “And as wages go up, so does the state’s revenue through tax increases. Higher education also helps the state meet its changing workforce needs and spurs new businesses. In other words, when Texas students win, the state wins.”

The priority toward students and their benefit to the state (the nation and the world) is also embraced by the UT System. Consensus is that advanced degree education provides the additional training and specialized expertise that allow students to substantively contribute to improving the human condition, the economy, and the greater community. Graduate programs at UT System institutions underpin the creation of new knowledge. Graduate programs are expected to prioritize the personal career success of program graduates, help ensure that students avoid amassing excessive financial debt while in school, and prepare students to contribute substantively to society. UT System Graduate Schools are expected to commit to the highest standards of quality and be recognized externally for rigor and excellence with programs that empower students to boldly change the world for the better. To ensure graduate students reach their full potential, our programs must recognize and support the diverse backgrounds, skillsets and needs of current and prospective students. Finally, our programs are expected to be good stewards of the state investment in the UT System, evidenced by reasonable average degree completion times (nominally two years for master’s and five years for PhD programs) and high student retention. A degree candidate who does not finish represents a failure to serve that student and an intellectual and financial investment loss for the university and the state.

Consequently, UT System Graduate Schools and their degree programs are expected to incorporate proven practices—such as those reported by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) <https://cgsnet.org/best-practices>—that help guarantee the aforementioned objectives are achieved. These practices are organized under the following seven themes.

1. **Outreach and recruitment.** Many undergraduates may not know the benefits of having a graduate degree or the opportunities available for financial and academic support. Therefore, programs have an obligation to reach out to prospective students, especially those from populations traditionally underrepresented in graduate education, and encourage the best and brightest minds to apply within the state, nationally and internationally. Departments and schools should provide online access to current information about each graduate program and engage in community outreach to attract prospective students, which may include in-person events, external networking, social media engagement, and targeted emails. Campuses should encourage their own undergraduate students to consider attending graduate school by providing research experiences and graduate education preparation activities. Programs should also provide prospective students salary and placement data for recent graduates of the program.

2. **Matriculation.** Programs should seek to enroll the most talented class of new graduate students through a *holistic admissions* process that recognizes the benefits of inclusion and the value of educating students within a community of diverse scholars who embody the rich demography of the state, the nation, and the world. Programs should offer to all students competitive financial aid packages that are on par with national averages for each discipline. These competitive packages assist with recruiting talented students and removing financial barriers to attendance for low-income and underrepresented students. Programs should provide clearly written admission letters that enable students to easily compare their offer with offers received from elsewhere.
 3. **Transparency.** Given that students entering graduate school arrive with different backgrounds and levels of exposure to advance degree education, programs should clearly articulate degree requirements and expectations. To this end, programs should offer graduate student orientations for incoming students to assist new students in acclimating to campus. Additionally, programs should review existing policies to ensure equity and clarity and have graduate student handbooks accessible online and updated at least annually. Programs should provide ongoing holistic advising that begins as soon as students are accepted.
 4. **Faculty commitment to success:** Faculty supporting Ph.D. programs should have active research agendas. Faculty supporting professional programs should be engaged in applied research that informs practice. Graduate students should be mentored by engaged faculty who meet with them regularly, advise them academically and prepare them to be successful in the workforce. Faculty members should provide timely feedback on assignments/exams/milestones and monitor student behavior and progress closely. They should be prepared to teach and work with students from diverse backgrounds and to intervene immediately if issues arise to help students succeed.
 5. **Retention and completion.** Programs should take responsibility to ensure that all students are supported academically from start to finish. As part of this effort, programs should administer annual graduate student progress reviews, with the intent of providing students with clear direction about the steps needed to complete the program and the timeframe for doing so. Programs should also have an oversight process to intervene and assist in the event a student is not making satisfactory progress. To ensure they meet expectations, programs should routinely review average graduation rates and time-to-degree rates.
 6. **Career success.** Programs should have a mentoring process and professional skills development program in place for all graduate students, which may include the use of an Individual Development Plan (IDP). Together, these initiatives should instill critical social skills, cultivate leadership and teamwork skills, and develop multicultural competencies that will allow students to excel in a diverse workforce. Programs have the responsibility to track student employment and follow national employment trends within their discipline to provide training and guidance for students in their potential careers.
 7. **Promoting a Culture of Respect and Understanding.** Programs must promote diverse perspectives in research, teaching, learning and artistic scholarship because they are essential to high quality academic programs. Programs should develop and refine equitable and inclusive practices that welcome all scholars and learners, regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy, disability, genetic information, and/or veteran status. Programs should strive to remove artificial barriers to learning faced by students from historically underrepresented or underserved populations to ensure that historical injustice is not perpetuated. Faculty and administration should pay attention to the various needs of all students and provide them with affirming and inspiring educational experiences through teaching, training, and mentorship.
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