Our Vision

To serve as a model unit of support, service, and stewardship of excellence in graduate education to meet the intellectual, academic, and vocational needs of students in the region and beyond.

Our Core Values

- Support and uphold academic and research excellence
- Assure and support consistent integrity and best practices in all graduate programs, graduate student experiences, and Graduate School policies
- Collaborate with all university academic and support units
- Advocate for the value of high-quality graduate education to the university and region
- Maintain a strong customer-service ethic with all faculty, staff, and prospective, current, and former students
- Maintain efficient and responsive business operations

Our Mission

To provide leadership, resources, and support for academically rigorous graduate study.

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GRADUATE SCHOOL STRATEGIC DIRECTION #1: FULFILL THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THE STATE AND REGION AND ENSURE A HIGH QUALITY STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Rationale: The Graduate School supports the university’s fundamental academic mission as stated in the 2020 Strategic Plan’s Strategic Direction #1: Fulfill the educational needs to our state and region.

Goal 1: Assure consistent academic quality and rigor of all graduate programs and graduate student experiences
Initiative 1.1: Increase research requirements and opportunities (2020 Initiative: 6.3.7)

- Advocate for inclusion and expansion of research and responsible conduct in research in all graduate curriculum
- Promote and support faculty grant activities that include research opportunities and support for graduate students
- Institute sustainable Summer Research Assistantship program
- Increase quality and competitiveness of WCU’s Graduate Research Symposium
- Work with Director of Millennial Initiatives to create strong graduate program/student presence in research experiences and opportunities with external organizations
- Work with deans, department heads, and graduate program directors to attain applied research opportunities in businesses, industries, and non-profits in the region.
- Increase visibility of ongoing graduate student research activities and contributions to the university and region

Initiative 1.2: Develop more interdisciplinary research and learning experiences including interdisciplinary degrees and/or including interdisciplinary graduate certificates (2020 Initiative: 3.2.6)

Initiative 1.3: Develop more applied learning experiences (e.g. internships, practicums) with local and regional external partners (2020 Initiative: 2.1.5)

Initiative 1.4: Promote and develop Professional Science Master’s (PSM) and Professional Master of Arts (PMA) degrees (2020 Initiative: 3.2.6)

Initiative 1.5: Develop Graduate Research Mentoring Program to assist with undergraduate research initiatives and projects (2020 Initiative: 2.1.4)

Initiative 1.6: Develop stronger inter-institutional partnerships to capitalize on faculty, curriculum, research opportunities, and shared equipment resources (2020 Initiative: 3.2.6)

Initiative 1.7: Support program or college initiatives for maintaining or increasing professional accreditations

Initiative 1.8: Dean and Associate Dean actively seek grants to enhance graduate student academic experiences, success, and professional development (2020 Initiative: 2.1.1, 2.1.3, 6.3.7)
GRADUATE SCHOOL STRATEGIC DIRECTION #2: ENRICH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS TO GARNER SUPPORT FOR GRADUATE EDUCATION

**Rationale:** The Graduate School supports the university’s 2020 Strategic Direction # 3 to enhance our external partnerships and #6 to garner support for our vision.

**Goal 2: Strengthen integration of graduate education into the university’s academic identity and mission in the region and state**

**Initiative 2.1:** Continue increased collaboration with academic and support units across campus (2020 Initiative: 2.1.1, 4.3.4)

- Continue and increase communication and interactions with college Deans and Department Heads regarding Graduate School activities, support, policies, and needs
- Increase graduate faculty engagement with the Office of Sponsored Research
- Continue and increase collaboration with the Registrar’s Office to integrate and streamline processes to assist and expedite Graduate School processes
- Continue and increase collaborations with the Coulter Faculty Commons for faculty and student activities including Graduate Student Orientation, Program Director Orientation, Graduate Education Summit, etc.
- Continue and increase collaborations with the Office of Career Services for activities that support career guidance and placement specifically tailored to graduate students
- Collaborate with Student Affairs, Office of Residential Living, and Graduate Student Association to improve viable on-campus housing options that specifically meet the needs of resident graduate students
- Continue collaborations with the Office of Educational Outreach and Distance Programs to recruit, enroll, and support strategic, high-quality graduate online programs
- Increase collaborations with International Programs and Services
- Assume more administrative responsibility for Biltmore Park site, budget, and activities

**Initiative 2.3:** Increase all activities with and outreach to graduate alumni (2020 Initiative: 6.2.3)

- Continue initiative to track and maintain records and relationships with alumni
• Continue to work aggressively with WCU Office of Alumni Relations to be included in all alumni outreach activities, events, correspondences, publications, and data collection
• Continue to work with Office of Public Relations to highlight graduate student and Graduate School activities to alumni in university and regional publications and outreach
• Continue initiative to activate Graduate Alumni Advisory Board (active by Spring 2014)
• Continue initiative to activate Graduate Alumni Advancement Board (active by Spring 2014)

**Increase 2.4:** Engage in a more visible and active relationship with Board of Trustees (2020 Initiative: 2.3.4)

**Initiative 2.5:** Continue to meet and advocate with local, state, and federal elected officials (2020 Initiative: 6.3.4)

• Emphasize graduate student research activities and needs
• Emphasize value and importance of graduate education to the region and state
• Emphasize need for financial support for graduate students, (e.g. assistantships, tuition remissions, etc.)

**Initiative 2.6** Work with WCU External Relations Director to increase WCU advocacy at state and national levels for graduate education (2020 Initiative: 6.2.2, 6.2.3)

**Initiative 2.7:** Continue meeting with regional Rotary and other civic groups to bring awareness of Graduate School and graduate student contributions to region and state (2020 Initiative: 2.3.4, 3.2.5)

**Initiative 2.8:** Increase visibility and university-wide leadership role of Graduate Council

**Initiative 2.9** Establish recognition system for graduate faculty and programs (e.g. Graduate Program of Excellence Award, Graduate Faculty Mentoring Award, Graduate Program Director Award) (2020 Initiative: 4.2.2)

**Initiative 2.10:** Increase Dean and Associate Dean involvement and active leadership role in national and regional graduate education organizations (CGS, NC-CGS, Southern-CGS)
GRADUATE SCHOOL STRATEGIC DIRECTION #3: INVEST IN RESOURCES TO SUPPORT STUDENT EXPERIENCE

*Rationale:* The Graduate School supports the university’s mission in the 2020 Strategic Direction #2 to enrich the total student experience, and Strategic Direction #4 and #5 to invest in our people and invest in our core resources.

**Goal 3.1: Increase financial assistance for graduate students**

*Initiative 3.1.1:* Continue to work aggressively with Office of Development to pursue fund-raising and advancement activities to help support graduate students and programs (2020 Initiative: 6.3.6, 6.3.7)

*Initiative 3.1.2:* Continue to work aggressively with Director of University Scholarships and Office of Development to secure more scholarship/fellowship dollars for graduate students (2020 Initiative: 6.3.6)

*Initiative 3.1.3:* Work aggressively with academic college deans to seek alternative, additional sources of funding from external organizations (e.g. businesses, foundations, industries, etc.) for graduate program and graduate student financial assistance (2020 Initiative: 6.3.7)

*Initiative 3.1.4:* Put into place Graduate Assistantship Allocation Plan that aligns with Program Prioritization recommendations (Fall 2014) (2020 Initiative: 1.1.1)

*Initiative 3.1.5:* Institute a sustainable Summer Graduate Teaching Assistantship program

*Initiative 3.1.6:* Work with WCU External Relations Director to increase advocacy at state and national levels for financial support (assistantships, tuition remissions, etc.) specifically needed to support graduate education (2020 Initiative: 6.3.4)

*Initiative 3.1.7:* Establish Graduate School presence on financial aid committees and work more closely with the Financial Aid Office (2020 Initiative: 5.1.3)

**Goal 3.2: Increase retention and decrease time to degree completion**

*Initiative 3.2.1:* Institute 1-3-5+ year longitudinal career tracking and job placement data project for all programs

*Initiative 3.2.2:* Continue and increase initiatives for career / vocational advising, job placement, and leadership training for all graduate students to prepare them for the realities of the academic and non-academic job markets (2020 Initiative: 2.1.3)
Initiative 3.2.3: Collaborate with the Coulter Faculty Commons and Writing and Learning Center to create a Thesis Writing / Completion Assistance Group (2020 Initiative: 2.1.3)

Initiative 3.2.4: Institute “Three Minute Thesis” competition

Initiative 3.2.5: Continue collaboration with the Coulter Faculty Commons and College of Business in advocacy, delivery, and expansion of non-credit course (BA 500): “Pathways to Careers for Graduate Students” (2020 Initiative: 2.1.3)

Initiative 3.2.6: Advocate for increased awareness of career development needs and opportunities for students in humanities and arts programs (2020 Initiative: 2.1.5)

Initiative 3.2.7: Work with Graduate Student Association to increase their leadership role, membership, activities, and meaningful involvement in graduate education issues in university (2020 Initiative: 2.2.2)

Initiative 3.2.8: Collaborate with Office of Educational Outreach to create online Graduate Student Orientation via Blackboard course specifically designed for online programs and students.

GRADUATE SCHOOL STRATEGIC DIRECTION #4: FULFILL THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF OUR STATE AND REGION

Rationale: The Graduate School recognizes its role in meeting the needs of the region and seeks to provide highly qualified graduates with advanced degrees in support of the 2020 Strategic Direction #1.

Goal 4: Increase graduate enrollment at least 5% annually

Initiative 4.1: Support recruitment, retention, and growth activities, and allocate resources for programs designated for expansion by Program Prioritization and the 2020 Strategic Plan (2020 Initiative: 1.1.1)

Initiative 4.2: Increase enrollment at Biltmore Park site for targeted graduate programs (e.g. MSET, Counseling, Nursing, MBA, etc.) based on 3-year Strategic Enrollment Plan (2020 Initiative: 1.5.4)

Initiative 4.3: Increase distance and online enrollment and assure best practices in delivering online graduate curricula; support, where appropriate, alternative sources of instructional delivery (e.g. “University Partnerships”)

Initiative 4.4: Increase summer graduate course offerings, institutes, etc. at Cullowhee and Biltmore Park campuses (2020 Initiative: 3.2.3)
**Initiative 4.5:** Provide financial support for graduate recruiting and marketing initiatives as well as accountability criteria for expenditures (2020 Initiative: 6.2.1)

**Initiative 4.6:** Increase digital and social media marketing initiatives (2020 Initiative: 6.2.1, 6.2.3)

**Initiative 4.7:** Work with Director of Marketing to create multi-faceted marketing plan specifically tailored for Graduate School and graduate programs (2020 Initiative: 6.2.1)

**GRADUATE SCHOOL STRATEGIC DIRECTION #5: INVEST IN OUR PEOPLE**

*Rationale:* The Graduate School supports the 2020 Strategic Direction #4 to invest in our people, and sees itself in partnership with faculty and all other units on campus, and we seek to provide support, service, and collaboration with all members involved in graduate education at WCU.

**Goal 5:** Provide support for graduate program directors

**Initiative 5.1:** Develop job descriptions and expectations for position of Graduate Program Director/Coordinator

**Initiative 5.2:** Advocate to college deans and department heads to address role and expectations of Graduate Program Directors in DCRD

**Initiative 5.3:** Respond to 2012-13 Graduate Program Director Survey, and advocate for more consistent and equitable compensation for Program Directors (e.g. financial compensation, workload reallocation, summer stipends) (2020 Initiative: 4.1.1)

**Initiative 5.4:** Review and help create Graduate Handbooks in each program

**Initiative 5.5:** Continue Program Director Orientation and staff workshops with individual colleges / program directors (2020 Initiative: 4.2.3)

**Initiative 5.6:** Continue annual Program Director workshop on “Hot Topic” issues facing Graduate Programs / Graduate Education

**Initiative 5.7:** Maintain Associate Dean’s robust and active role as Graduate School liaison with Program Directors (e.g. problem solving with daily operations of directing a graduate program, assure transparent communication with Graduate School administration, policies, procedures, etc.)
GRADUATE SCHOOL STRATEGIC DIRECTION #6: SUPPORT AND ENHANCE CORE RESOURCES AND PROCESSES

Rationale: Efficiencies and integrity in policies, processes, and procedures within the Graduate School enable stronger support for all faculty, students, and programs in support of the university’s 2020 Strategic Direction # 5 (Invest in our core resources).

Goal 6.1: Improve Graduate School governing structures

Initiative 6.1.1: Develop systems of governing boards (e.g. Standards of Excellence Metrics, Interdisciplinary Academics, Professional Science Masters / Professional Masters of Arts, Online Programs, Strategic Planning) to engage and involve more graduate faculty (2020 Initiative: 4.4.1)

Initiative 6.1.2: Continuously review all Graduate School policies to insure that they are relevant and enforceable

Initiative 6.1.3: Perform an annual review and develop performance metrics to assess Strategic Plan goals and accountability (2020 Initiative: 1.1.2)

Initiative 6.1.4: Increase and assure graduate faculty involvement in the strategic planning process

Goal 6.2: Continue improving administrative processes for operating the Graduate School

Initiative 6.2.1: Develop Operations Process Manual (Format for template by December 2013, Operational and dynamic draft by May 2014) (2020 Initiative: 5.3.2)

- Establish office Core Values

Initiative 6.2.2: Utilize Banner to its fullest potential and increase initial and continuous training to improve Graduate School ability to access and utilize data for reporting and advocacy

Initiative 6.2.3: Continue and improve usage of Apply Yourself system for increased usage and effectiveness (e.g. customize services for individual programs) (2020 Initiative: 5.3.2)

Initiative 6.2.4: Continue to improve application and admission processes

Initiative 6.2.5: Move toward automated systems and digitalized environment (e.g. paperless environment and systems) (2020 Initiative: 5.3.1)
• Increased interactive and automated communications
• Review and revise all automated correspondences / communication originating from the Graduate School

**Initiative 6.2.6:** Assess and review potential new funding models (e.g. service charges) to provide additional resources for Graduate School services (2020 Initiative: 5.1.3)