UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI
GRADUATE STUDENT GOVERNMENT

Graduate Student Professional Development Survey
Results & Recommendations

Consolidated by: Parikshit Boregowda | Sarah Beal | Peter Stiver

GSG
GRADUATE STUDENT GOVERNMENT

Report on Graduate Student Professional Development

Key Findings and Recommendations in this report were consolidated by Parikshit Boregowda, Sarah Beal, and Peter Stiver, as part of University of Cincinnati's Graduate Student Government

Professional Development Evaluation Committee (PDEC) Composition*:

Parikshit Boregowda – GSG President (2020-2021) and PDEC committee Chair
E. Chandler - GSG Vice President (2020-2021)
Jack Cohen – Graduate Student Trustee
Sarah Beal – Coordinator/lead of Survey Subcommittee
Katelyn King – Coordinator/lead of Peer University Review Subcommittee
Peter Stiver
Hunter Scanlon
Akshata Upadhye
Zoe Wagner
(*Many more graduate students worked closely with the committee)

Executive Statement

The Graduate Student Professional Development Evaluation Committee consists of graduate student representatives from different colleges. While we have tried our best to represent the diverse graduate student population, we understand that a deeper study is required to understand the Professional Development needs of ALL graduate students. This document represents a starting point for the University to further its commitment to graduate student excellence and fulfill the Bearcat Promise by preparing graduate students for success in their future careers.

Following months of dedicated research, the Graduate Student Professional Development Evaluation Committee compiled this report of key findings and recommendations to aid the University in better supporting the Professional Development needs of graduate students. Additionally, the committee has worked on further findings that are beyond the scope of this document and can be obtained directly by contacting the current GSG President (gsg-president@mail.uc.edu). For instance, the subcommittee who studied UC's benchmark universities has consolidated their detailed findings as its own document. The data from our survey is also available, and we are happy to share it with any interested office or college.

Further questions and clarifications on our findings can also be directed to the GSG President.

Table of Contents

Bringing the Bearcat Promise to Graduate Students

"Bearcat Promise seeks to strengthen UC's ecosystem by reinforcing and bridging our human and technological resources to proactively assist students in creating a personalized path to achieving success. To accomplish this, we are building an innovative new framework that is both tech and human supported to guide students on their academic journey from orientation to graduation.

Our goal is to have students graduate with a degree in one hand and a plan for their career and professional development in the other with the skills and competencies to launch a lifetime of careers."

Overview and Methodology

Overview

In Fall of 2020, the Graduate Student Government established a Professional Development Evaluation Committee (PDEC) to learn about graduate student Professional Development needs, craft a rigorous study to collect data regarding student needs, and make recommendations to the University administration for meeting the Professional Development needs of graduate students.

Methodology

The committee initially studied the various Professional Development resources and services available for graduate students at the university and at each of the colleges. After studying the various resources available for graduate students to understand graduate student needs and to make practical recommendations, the PDEC further split into two subcommittees:

The **Survey Subcommittee** was tasked to develop a survey for all graduate students to:
- Understand how graduate students utilize current resources offered by the university.
- Understand academic vs nonacademic Professional Development needs in various colleges.
- Identify the unique needs of the diverse graduate student population.

The **Peer University Review Subcommittee** was tasked to research UC's benchmark universities (listed on Graduate school re-envisioning report) to:
- Understand how UC's benchmark institutes cater to the Professional Development needs of their graduate students.
- Find practices and ideas that can be used by UC for their own graduate student population.

Key Findings

1.

Graduate Students are most anxious about finding jobs, networking, and building important soft skills and professional competencies.

2.

Professional Development resources, opportunities utilized, and feelings of career support vary greatly by College, Department, and Program.

3.

Graduate students utilize online Professional Development resources— LinkedIn Learning, Handshake, etc.— and seek flexible programming options to meet diverse needs.

4.

Graduate Students seek graduate-specific career fairs, opportunities on Handshake, and support at the Bearcat Promise Studio

5.

Graduate students learn about Professional Development Opportunities from email listservs, advisors, and graduate peers though precise information sources vary dramatically.

6.

Peer Universities have Graduate Student-specific Professional Development resources including centralized webpages, graduate-specific career coaches, and advising teams. UC does not.

1. Graduate Students are most anxious about finding jobs, networking, and building important soft skills and professional competencies.

a. Many graduate students feel a high level of anxiety about finding jobs, navigating the job market, marketing themselves and their research experience, and networking. The average confidence level of graduate students in finding a relevant job after graduation was at 3.73 (out of 5 in our survey).

b. Student across several colleges expressed interest in Professional Development in various professional soft skills.

c. 62% of the graduate students who responded to our survey, had significant professional experiences prior to enrolling in graduate programs at the University of Cincinnati. However, students had mixed responses as to whether they preferred to remain in their field, or switch career fields.

d. The Professional Development programming should meet the needs of both-students looking for academic jobs, as well as students seeking nonacademic jobs following graduation. Our survey indicated that 64.5% of the participants wanted to pursue a nonacademic career directly related to their major, while 42.3% of all graduate student survey takers wanted to pursue a career in academia (research, administrative and teaching). At the same time, 33.2% of graduate students specifically indicated interest in teaching. Many students on the survey were still exploring multiple career paths, while some others were still undecided.

"I have no clue how the job market works, whether or not to continue to a post-doc, what positions are available to me, I wish we had some sort of short crash course on how it all works post-comps."

"My department offers little substantial advice or training in translating academic skills to an alt-ac or nonacademic career. I've been shamed and guilt-tripped about taking a job outside of academia when the job market in my field is dismal at best. I have had more success using campus resources to learn about career development than I have through my own department."

## 2.	Professional Development resources, opportunities utilized, and feelings of career support vary greatly by colleges, departments, and programs.

a.	Students' feelings towards career preparedness and available Professional Development resources differed significantly across colleges. 37% of survey respondents indicated that programming offered by their college/department do not suit their career needs.
b.	Student utilization of Professional Development resources varied dramatically between colleges and departments.
   i.	A&S and CECH students tend to greatly utilize resources offered by the Graduate School, Academic Writing Center, Professional Development courses and CET&L.
   ii.	Students from the College of Medicine tend to use a lot of Graduate School resources and have more opportunities to attend Professional Development workshops organized by student orgs.
   iii.	Engineering and Business students equally utilize resources offered by the ELCE center (and Bearcat Promise Studio), Graduate School and 1819 Center.
   iv.	DAAP students largely used resources from ELCE center for co-op needs and had access to Professional Development courses.
   v.	DAAP and CCM students heavily relied on college-level programming.
   vi.	Colleges of Nursing, College of Allied Health Science, College of Pharmacy and College of Conservatory Music students tended to underutilize the university's Professional Development resources.
   vii.	Of all the offices, students used resources offered by the Library the most to meet their career development needs.
c.	Students feel especially unprepared for nonacademic fields and underconfident in channeling their academic research and teaching skills in nonacademic careers.

"I all of a sudden feel like there are a bunch of resources out there that I don't know about. Where am I not looking?"

"The college/ department focuses A LOT on academic career paths whereas there is little to no guidance for students wanting to pursue a career in industry/ become an entrepreneur or any other nonacademic career paths. Healthcare is a vast field and PhD holders are helpful and required there. However, our graduate career does not train us or offer resources for that […]"

3.   Graduate students utilize online Professional Development resources— LinkedIn Learning, Handshake, etc.— and seek flexible programming options to meet diverse needs.

a.   Students heavily utilize **LinkedIn, and online MOOCS** such as LinkedIn Learning, Coursera, and Handshake for Professional Development needs and networking. Support for such programs should be continued and expanded.

b.   62% of survey responders indicated having professional working experience prior to beginning their graduate program. Additionally, many graduate students are working full-time or part time, and have a family to care for. Professional Development resources should be flexible to meet the diverse time and experience needs of students.

c.   Students expressed an interest in demographic, experience, department, and college specific Professional Development resources.

　　i.   For example, students expressed an interest in training for demographic-specific needs like dealing with sexual harassment or micro-aggressions in salary negotiation in their workplaces.

"I would like to open a virtual music lesson business with access to different resources and networking guidance. I have acknowledged the performance and teaching side of my career, but never the business aspect. I would like to learn more and reach out to different entities and organizations on guidance in creating a brand out of my craft."

"As a disabled trans student who may not even be able to work full time once I get my degree, I'm feeling pretty left out in terms of figuring out what career opportunities might exist that would be accommodating and welcoming enough to someone like me. Especially given I might not be able to move outside of the area, and many of the jobs in my field seem to require moving."

"Pretty much all of the Professional Development I have had was learned on the job, from friends, or from resources I found on my own. All UC ever really helped with has been resume writing and job hunting/interviews. UC did not prepare me to deal with sexism in the workplace or conflict resolution/de-escalation."

4.   Graduate Students need graduate-specific career fairs, opportunities on Handshake, and support at the Bearcat Promise Studio

a. Graduate students underutilize Professional Development and Networking resources offered at the ELCE Center. Only 13.2% of the graduate students who took our survey used either ELCE center or the Bearcat Promise Studio.
b. Most of the resources on ELCE (including Bearcat Promise Studio) are undergraduate student centric, and offer little programming specific to graduate students,
c. On the Survey, about half the survey respondents requested Job search assistance (69.4%), graduate student career fair (54.3%), Alumni networking event (43.4%), LinkedIn Premium Membership (42.6%). A significant number of students also requested Mock Interview/Auditions and increased Professional Development courses.

"I often look for career growth and Professional Development opportunities on Handshake or at career fair only to find that many opportunities at major consulting firms or organizations are aimed at undergraduate students specifically. This leaves me uncertain as to whether I am able to apply or whether I am overqualified by some arbitrary measure. If employers were able to specific whether an opportunity was aimed at or open to Graduate Students, this would be helpful."

"I think having someone department-specific who can help support job searches would be useful. It's not clear to me where I can go within the department to find that kind of support. I know this exists at the university level, but more department-oriented assistance/programming would be helpful. I also think having some sort of department-specific or college specific database of resources for various aspects of professionalization would be helpful. It should be clear for me as a grad student who I should be talking to if I want to talk about my career goals, and it isn't. That should change."

5.   Graduate students learn about Professional Development Opportunities from different email listservs, advisors, and graduate peers though precise information sources vary dramatically.

a. Students' abilities to find out about opportunities depend on their peer networks, advisors, and subscription to specific listservs.
b. Students would like to utilize a centralized repository of Professional Development events, opportunities, resources, and needs.
c. Many students indicated that they are unaware of the different Professional Development resources available to graduate students, and hence there is a need to improve communication and increase awareness of graduate student specific services and programs.

"I wish there was a set system of how your advisor supported you and the step-by-step procedures on how to connect to your advisor and what to ask along the way to get the proper support you need for your personal Professional Development."

"Most of my career needs have been addressed by my faculty mentor rather than the department as a whole."

6. Peer Universities have graduate student-specific Professional Development resources including centralized webpages, graduate student career fairs, graduate-specific career coaches, and advising teams. UC does not.

a. UC has limited staff to support graduate student Professional Development – both in regard to programming and graduate student career coaching/advising. The Graduate School's website is the only platform close to a PD website for graduate students, but diverse PD resources from other units are too scattered and difficult to find.

b. Most of UC's benchmark universities cater to their graduate students in various ways, and their methodologies can be used by UC to improve graduate student Professional Development programming and services.

    i. University of Pittsburgh has a center of Doctoral and Postdoctoral Career Development which leverages institutional resources to meet the career development needs of doctoral students and postdoctoral trainees across all schools. In addition to this center, the Office of Academic Career Development at Pittsburgh provides professionals in the schools of the health sciences with the tools, resources, and support they need to achieve their full potential as leaders in biomedical research, education, and clinical practice.

    ii. University of Michigan's Career center offers and co-sponsors programs with the Rackham Graduate School, thereby ensuring that services offered by the career center meet graduate student needs.

    iii. Georgia Institute of Technology, University of California – San Diego, Temple University, The Ohio State University, University of Pittsburgh, University of Washington, and University of Michigan, have separate resources and events for their graduate students listed on their website within their career center. Instead of clubbing undergraduate and graduate resources, these universities clearly lay out resources available for their graduate students. They also have a list of upcoming events and programs for their students on the website, making it easier for students to keep up to date with Professional Development workshops and events. Some of these universities also have separate resources preparing graduate students for academic and nonacademic careers.

iv. Some of our peer universities (like Georgia Tech, UCSD, University of Michigan, etc.) had career coaches/advisors and career development directors specifically for graduate students at the university's career center in addition to staff resource at the graduate school. Although OSU did not have graduate career coaches explicitly listed on their website, their career center clearly lists services to answer questions of graduate and professional students considering nonacademic careers.

v. Many of our peer universities have subscriptions to various external platforms which their graduate students can use to explore career options, these include versatile PhD, Imagine PhD, Glassdoor, Beyond the Professoriate, among others.

vi. Like UC, many of the peer universities utilize the Individual Development Plan Program (IDP). Many feature a website with detailed information and videos for students to keep up with their IDP.

vii. OSU and UCSD have multiple career fairs exclusively for their graduate students. OSU and University of Michigan also have career fairs organized by individual colleges, aimed at better matching students and employers.

viii. Some of our benchmark Universities also have specific Professional Development resources and information for International students, for different ethnic groups, for students with disabilities, for LGBTQ+ community, veterans, and other special populations – all on a single website maintained mostly by their career centers.

ix. UCSD recognizes Mentorship as a vital part of graduate school success and help their students find various opportunities across campus and beyond to be both a mentor and a mentee.

x. Many of these universities had workshops and speaker series, that help graduate students explore career paths outside academia. University of South Florida for instance had a workshop recently called "You can do THAT with a Doctoral Degree?!?"

xi. University of Michigan for instance has various PhD connection conferences (with invited speakers and panels) targeting different majors. These conferences give students an opportunity to network in addition to helping them explore various career paths.

xii. University of Minnesota, university of South Florida, University of Washington, and University of Michigan had various micro-credentialling, and certifications for their students to take up various courses that helps prepare students for various career endeavors. University of Minnesota even recognized students with digital badges to encouraged students to utilize the various micro-credentialing opportunities.

Recommendations

1.
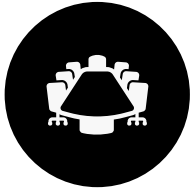
Create Graduate Student Professional Development Center

2.

Hire Director of Grad Student Career Development & Graduate Career Coaches

3.

Expand Alumni Career Connections and Networking Opportunities for Graduate Students

4.

Expand Graduate Career Development Programming across Colleges and Departments

5.

Improve Communication about Professional Development programming and resources.

6.

Organize Annual Graduate Student Career Fairs

1. Create a Graduate Student Professional Development Center

1.1   Establish a Graduate Student Professional Development Center within the Bearcat Promise Studio or the Graduate School.

- Currently, graduate students are underutilizing the Bearcat Promise Studio, in large part due to the lack of support specific to graduate students.
- Creation of a center within the Bearcat Promise Studio, or the Graduate School would allow the university to utilize existing funding structures and organizational charts to practically improve graduate Professional Development.
- The Faculty Enrichment Center is a great example for a Professional Development center for graduate students.
- This Center should be equipped to guide students in search of both academic and nonacademic careers and must coordinate with various offices on campus who currently offer programming and resources for graduate students.
- This center should also house graduate career coaches.

1.2 Create a consolidated Professional Development Webpage

- This webpage will be owned and maintained by the new Graduate Student Professional Development Center.
- The new webpage would serve as a regularly updated, central repository of information on all available Professional Development programming, courses, events, and workshops for graduate students.
- This center should communicate and work with all offices that currently offer graduate Professional Development services/resources to graduate students.
- This webpage should include a "community events calendar" which is regularly updated with all graduate Professional Development events across the university.

2. Hire Director of Graduate Student Career Development at every college and graduate career coaches at the Graduate Student Professional Development Center

2.1 Hire at least two career coaches within the new Graduate Student Professional Development Center who are dedicated to needs of graduate students.

- The needs of graduate students are different from the needs of undergraduate students. While career coaching is available through the university, graduate students who have used these resources have found that they are not adequate for graduate student careers.

2.2 Hire at least one Director of Graduate Student Career Development at each college.

- Career needs for graduate students are highly specific according to their degree. It is therefore necessary to provide career coaches at a college level.
- CEAS, Lindner, and DAAP currently offer career coaches in some form for their students, and we suggest that other colleges should follow this precedent.
- In CEAS, the Director of Career Development for Graduate Students serves as a point of contact for both graduate student alumni and current graduate students, and helps communicate job openings (including internships and coops) in both academia and industry settings for graduate students.

3. Expand Alumni Career Connections and Networking Opportunities for Graduate Students

3.1 Work with the UC Alumni Association and Alumni Network to develop Professional Development opportunities for Graduate Students.

- The above recommended Graduate Student Professional Development Center should work with the UC Alumni Association to create opportunities for graduate students to take advantage of alumni connections through various networking events.
- The university should improve their record-keeping of graduate professions post-graduation and share this with stake holders of graduate students. This would help to destigmatize nonacademic careers.
- Collaboration between the UC Alumni Association and the proposed Graduate Professional Development Center will help graduate student alumni to access resources relevant to alumni with advanced degrees.
- The Director of Graduate Student Career Development at each college should work with the UC Alumni Association to facilitate communication and programming between graduate students and alumni.
- Implementation of a university-wide graduate student Professional Development speaker series will bring together alumni from the various graduate programs to speak about their experiences in finding and securing jobs, both in and outside of academia.

4. Expand Graduate Career Development Programming across Colleges and Departments

4.1 Improve accessibility and flexibility of current Professional Development programming

- Since students are limited by time, program requirements, or personal obligations, current Professional Development courses and programming should incorporate online or virtual modules to meet diverse student needs.

4.2 Build upon current Individual Development Plan programming

- The Graduate School currently offers the Individual Development Plans (IDP) program, designed to mentor students through the process of career development. This program should be extended to all graduate students with regular opportunities to check-in on their progress.

4.3 Leverage Experience Based Learning for Graduate Professional Development across all colleges.

- Experience based learning opportunities such as co-ops and internships offer professional connections to students along with improved job prospects, financial compensation, and other Professional Development benefits. These programs should be expanded to include graduate students across all colleges.

4.4 Continue and Expand Micro-Credentialing Programming

- Third-party micro-credentialing programs like Coursera, EdX, and Versatile PhD should be utilized to assist in student Professional Development efforts.
- The micro-credentialing programming should be accompanied by Professional Development programming to educate graduate students on micro-credentials and their use in the job market.

5. Improve communication about Professional Development programming and resources.

5.1 Create a monthly Graduate Student Professional Development newsletter

- This newsletter should be curated by the Graduate Student Professional Development Center with information on resources and upcoming events.
- All graduate students will automatically be subscribed to this newsletter.

5.2 Provide faculty with information about the availability of Professional Development resources for their Graduate Students.

- All faculty members and faculty advisors associated with graduate students should be automatically subscribed to a faculty / advisor version of Graduate Student Professional Development newsletter.
- Training should be offered through the Faculty Enrichment Center to help faculty better understand the Professional Development needs of their students for the pursuit of both academic and nonacademic careers.

5.3 Hold Professional Development Orientation for incoming graduate students.

- The best way to keep students informed is by holding a Professional Development orientation for all incoming graduate students. This orientation should be made mandatory.

6. Organize Annual Graduate Student Career Fairs

6.1 Organize at least one annual career fair marketed specifically for graduate students

- Graduate student-specific career fairs would incentivize higher profile consulting firms, market research companies, leadership development programs, and other prestigious firms to visit the campus, and recruit students for higher level positions.
- This career fair should be held by the recommended Graduate Student Professional Development Center in collaboration with all colleges housing graduate students. There should be employers, both from non-profit and for-profit organizations. The career fair should focus on academic as well as nonacademic opportunities for graduate students.

Conclusions

The University of Cincinnati must improve its Professional Development resources for Graduate students. Graduate students receive extensive support from UC to achieve their research and scholarly goals. With this breadth of knowledge and preparation, graduates from UC will go on to pursue jobs in a broad array of fields, whether in the business sector, in an academic position, or a myriad of other career options. However, these students feel underprepared when faced with finding and acquiring these jobs, leading to an unnecessary degree of stress.
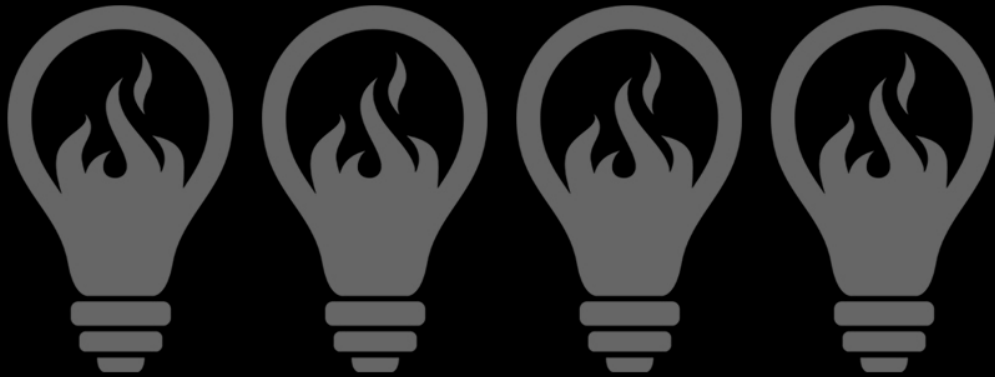
The University can and should do more to support these students as they prepare for their futures. By creating a dedicated Graduate Student Professional Development Center, UC will demonstrate to graduate students that they understand the unique needs and experiences of these professional students. By improving communication and accessibility for existing programming, graduate students will be better equipped to utilize the currently available resources. By hiring graduate career coaches, graduate students will be able to access the type of individualized support that can push them to achieve greatness. By empowering graduate students with the necessary tools to pursue a fulfilling career, students will be able to build upon their graduate educations and innovate for a better future.

The contributions of graduate students help the university to maintain its Tier 1 Research status, and with more support to graduate students in their professional endeavors, these students will take University of Cincinnati to even greater heights.

Next Lives Here, and next lives with graduate students.