

DIVERSITY & STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAM
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
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Executive Summary

The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill (UNC) is committed to sustaining a diverse graduate student body and fostering a climate of inclusion and acceptance. The Graduate School broadly defines diversity to include, but is not limited to, being a student who is racially/ethnically underrepresented, first-generation, LGBTQIA+, international, and/or military-affiliated. The [Diversity and Student Success \(DSS\)](#) program was created to support graduate and professional students who identify with one or many of these diverse backgrounds. Although many research studies and retention strategies focus on students who are underrepresented racially and ethnically in graduate education, we believe these efforts can also be applicable to students who hold other identities.

The aim of DSS is to contribute to the success, retention, and degree completion of diverse students through: targeted academic, professional, and personal development programs; community building to create a sense of belonging; and funding assistance. This program is unique in that it is one of the most formal and comprehensive diversity and inclusion programs at the graduate and professional education level in the nation. DSS was created and is led by two co-directors in collaboration with numerous campus partners that include both academic and student affairs units/departments.

The Graduate School serves as an administrative unit for admissions and student services for all PhD programs and the majority of master's degrees at UNC (8,245 total enrollment as of Fall 2019). Rather than dedicating efforts solely to the recruitment of diverse graduate students, The Graduate School redirected financial and human resources to focus more on diverse student retention and degree completion. In 2014, DSS began with the Initiative for Minority Excellence (IME) for students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, followed by the Summer Undergraduate Pipeline (SUP) in Summer 2015, which is The Graduate School's diverse student recruitment initiative. Additional diverse student recruitment programs are coordinated by individual departments and the professional schools. The remaining four initiatives started officially in Fall 2016—1) Carolina Grad Student F1RSTS for first-generation graduate students; 2) Global Grads for international graduate students; 3) Military-Affiliated Grads for graduate students who are active duty, veterans, in the National Guard or Reserves; and 4) QGAPS (Queer Graduate and Professional Students). Recognizing the intersectionality of identities, students are welcome and encouraged to take advantage of as many initiatives as they perceive applicable to their experiences.

As DSS has developed further with all six initiatives, empowerment student groups have also been established to meet the needs of students, in addition to the graduate student affinity groups already recognized by the UNC Graduate and Professional Student Federation (the governing body for graduate and professional students). The empowerment subgroups out of IME include: Brotherhood of Success (BOS) for men of color; Sisterhood of Empowerment in Academe (SEA) for womxn of color;

Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) Grads; La Familia for Latinx grads; and Queer Trans People of Color (QTPOC) through IME and QGAPS. Finally, DSS sponsors a bi-annual Carolina Cultivation Speaker Series which features guests whose identities, scholarship, and professional endeavors and experiences intersect with the DSS initiatives.

Student Learning and Success

The DSS program was created to better retain students from diverse backgrounds, to see them through degree completion, and have a positive impact on their experience as graduate or professional students at UNC. Central to the creation of each initiative has been the care and encouragement of the “whole” student, not just their academic success, but also their holistic development.

Students who come from diverse backgrounds may not always seek out assistance when they encounter barriers to continuing their graduate education. Those barriers might include: financial difficulties, challenges within their academic department, or personal issues/situations that may arise. It is the goal of DSS to preempt those barriers (if at all possible) and/or assist students in navigating those barriers through: intentional programming, connecting students to appropriate resources, and creating a community where students can depend on and learn from their peers and mentors. As graduate and professional students feel more empowered and resilient, they are likely to be more productive in the completion of their degree, find joy in their work, and graduate having had a more positive experience because of the support offered by DSS.

Mission and Advancement of Graduate Education

We are determined to chart a course where we can all work together to create and sustain the kind of community where we all feel welcomed, respected and free to pursue our goals and dreams and to become our best and truest selves. To realize that course, we must create a diversity structure that is coordinated and integrated, that celebrates all forms of diversity, and which ensures equitable and inclusive educational and social benefits for all.

-Carol L. Folt, Former Chancellor

The DSS program directly aligns with UNC’s mission to create a diverse and inclusive community for all. Out of approximately 30,000 students, the graduate and professional student body makes up about 30% of that population. Through DSS, the various needs of graduate students that would traditionally fall within student affairs and/or diversity and inclusion have come to the forefront. By proactively addressing the needs of graduate students from diverse backgrounds, DSS directly impacts the student experience by providing resources and individual support through day-to-day, “boots on the ground” student services.

The work of DSS also incorporates and meets the [Carolina Next Strategic Goals](#):

1. Build Our Community Together

1.1 Together create conditions on campus that enable each other to thrive and feel like we all belong

1.2 Enhance the educational benefits of diversity and inclusion through effective retention, recruitment and enrollment

2. Strengthen Student Success

2.1 Provide a student-centered experience, strengthen success for all students and foster equity in success across student populations

Student and Campus Needs

- All DSS initiatives have established individual advisory boards specific to each initiative that consist of graduate students that participate in them. These board members meet bi-annually to assist the co-directors in shaping the initiatives and advise on programming needs/interests.
- All DSS initiatives offer a variety of academic, professional, and personal workshops and social activities to meet various student needs/interests. Each workshop is individually evaluated to determine its impact, value, and continuity.
- All participants in DSS initiatives have access to various funding opportunities that provide financial assistance from recruitment to retention to degree completion.
- The DSS co-directors provide one-on-one consultations for mentoring and assistance with navigating any challenges students may encounter throughout their degree programs.
- As noted in the Executive Summary, DSS began with the Initiative for Minority Excellence in 2014, followed by the Summer Undergraduate Pipeline in Summer 2015. The final 4 initiatives all began formally in the Fall of 2016.

Brief History and Overview of the DSS Initiatives

- **Carolina Grad student F1RSTS (CGSF)**
 - This initiative was originally organized by a small group of graduate students in the Gillings School of Global Public Health. This group approached The Graduate School leadership to propose that this effort be formally coordinated by DSS as one of its initiatives which coincided with the timeline of the creation of new DSS initiatives. Carolina Grad Student F1RSTS are defined as those whose parents(s)/guardian(s) have not earned a master's or doctoral degree (which differs from the traditional notion of those whose parent(s)/guardian(s) have not earned a bachelor's degree). This initiative recognizes that graduate students come from a broad range of diverse and intergenerational educational experiences, with many, but not all, also being first-generation college students. As students who are the first to pursue a graduate or professional degree, it reassures them to find community to navigate the intricacies of the academy. In 2019, UNC was recognized by the National Center for First-Generation Student Success as a First-Forward Advisory Institution because of the work of CGSF and Carolina F1RSTS (the undergraduate program) supporting first-generation students. Leadership from CGSF and the Center for Student Success in The College of Arts & Sciences lead the First-gen Forward Mid-Atlantic Regional Community; and the CGSF director was appointed to a 2-year term on the Center's Advocacy Group.

- **Global Grads**
 - This initiative was started by an international doctoral student through a special project through the Graduate and Professional Student Federation (GPSF) subcommittee on international student issues. This student's personal initial isolation and lack of community sparked the desire to create connections amongst international students. Although the UNC International Student and Scholar Services office has been very supportive of international graduate students, that office primarily handles student visas and immigration paperwork. Global Grads, on the other hand, provides an infrastructure for social and personal support for international graduate students.
- **Initiative for Minority Excellence (IME)**
 - This initiative evolved when UNC's National Science Foundation Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) 2014 grant cycle was completed. The AGEP philosophy was adopted and elevated by The Graduate School as a starting point for DSS in supporting graduate and professional students of color. Building off the 10+ years of best practices in recruitment, retention and graduation of graduate students of color, IME continued with successful efforts such as building community through professional and social events, providing critical resources and connecting students to faculty advocates.
 - Empowerment groups were formed within IME to meet specific needs of student subgroups: Sisterhood of Empowerment in Academe (SEA) was started to support doctoral women of color throughout their graduate education journey. The men of color group, Brotherhood of Success (BOS), was created to provide an affinity space for the men to support one another. Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) Grads was started as a result of Dr. Jennifer Ho's DSS Speaker Series talk (Fall 2017) about breaking down the Asian American Model Minority Myth. La Familia was started in response to Latinx students wanting and needing a focused community of support. Worth noting, these empowerment groups emerged based on need expressed by our graduate students of color. These types of affinity groups exist at UNC for undergraduate students, but before IME, graduate-level groups for these subgroups of students did not exist.
- **Military-Affiliated Grads (MAGS)**
 - Military-affiliated students have been a priority for UNC for many years. Through the establishment of the Student Veterans Assistance Coordinator position through the Office of the Dean of Students, and the opening of the Carolina Veterans Resource Center (CVRC), it was important for The Graduate School to also demonstrate support for military-affiliated graduate students. The director of the MAGS initiative works very closely with the CVRC program director to implement the Boot Print to Heel Print Onboarding every August for new graduate students and various programming throughout the academic year.
- **Queer Graduate and Professional Students (QGAPS)**
 - This initiative started informally and became a formal partnership with the LGBTQ Center in Fall 2016. With the North Carolina House Bill 2 officially called *An Act to Provide for Single-sex Multiple Occupancy Bathroom and Changing Facilities in Schools and Public Agencies and to Create Statewide Consistency in Regulation of Employment*

and Public Accommodations, otherwise known as the “bathroom” bill, passing in March 2016, The Graduate School wanted to show its visible support for LGBTQIA+ graduate students. The LGBTQ Center previously had a graduate assistant who focused on graduate student programming. However, with the formal partnership, The Graduate School supports the partial funding of a Graduate Assistant position along with the Division of Student Affairs. Also, out of this initiative has come the Queer Trans People of Color (QTPOC) graduate student affinity group.

- **Summer Undergraduate Pipeline (SUP)**
 - The SUP initiative started as a new and innovative approach to diversity recruitment. Since UNC is recognized as the host of competitive summer research experiences for undergraduates (REU’s), The Graduate School developed SUP as a way of pulling these programs and their participants together to create connections and provide the tools necessary for a successful transition into graduate school. The latter is accomplished through professional development seminars throughout the summer, including: Effective Communication, Graduate School at Carolina, Funding for Graduate School, and Preparing a Statement of Purpose. The culmination of the summer is the SUP Research Symposium where the student participants have the opportunity to present their research to a broad audience of faculty, staff, students and the general public. Not only does this program build community with young scholars, but it also leverages broad community engagement in diversity recruitment efforts, thereby highlighting the important role the campus plays in supporting and valuing diverse students.

Collaboration and Sustainability

Often when the term “students” is used at large, public universities, many perceive that to mean undergraduate students – including graduate students themselves. In an effort to provide more student services for graduate and professional students, the DSS co-directors knew that they needed to rely on experts across campus to assist them in delivering the programmatic aspects of the initiatives. This also helped the various departments and units become more aware of graduate and professional student needs/interests and prompted them to find ways to meet those needs/interests, especially when graduate and professional students did not always perceive campus events to be legitimately or realistically open to “all” students.

Through partnerships and collaborations with our DSS initiatives, student affairs and academic offices have been able to reach more students who come from diverse backgrounds. It is imperative for DSS to collaborate with others, both internal and external to UNC, because the entire program was developed and is managed by two full-time co-directors, a program coordinator (which was a new full-time staff position added in Summer 2018), and three graduate research assistants. This model is currently sustainable, but as the initiatives grow with more participants, the infrastructure will also need to grow accordingly.

Examples of collaborators and partnerships are below:

- Diversity and Student Success
 - UNC Student Wellness – A full curriculum of wellness workshops was established for the entire academic year
 - UNC Carolina Union Activity Board (CUAB) – various social events for graduate and professional students
 - UNC Carolina Women’s Center – workshops on parenting, salary negotiation, violence prevention, etc.
 - UNC Graduate and Professional Student Federation – “DSS Welcome Back” Spring Event and a professional development workshop on leadership
 - UNC Office of the Dean of Students – support of individual students as issues arise, financial literacy workshops, etc.
 - UNC Colleges and Schools—Biological and Biomedical Sciences Program, College of Arts & Sciences departments, Gillings School of Global Public Health, School of Dentistry, School of Education, School of Information and Library Sciences, School of Media and Journalism, School of Medicine, School of Nursing, School of Pharmacy, and the School of Social Work—participation in diverse student recruitment and orientation days, consultation with administrators, faculty, and staff on diverse student retention issues.

- Carolina Grad Student F1RSTS (CGSF)
 - Carolina F1RSTS (CF) – This is UNC’s undergraduate program for first-generation college students. CGSF members have served on panels informing the Carolina F1RSTS about pursuing graduate school as a first-generation student and participated in special networking events with them. CGSF and CF coordinate efforts for the National First-Gen College Day celebration that is sponsored by the Council for Opportunity in Education and the Center for First-Gen Student Success through NASPA and the Suder Foundation.
 - UNC Counseling and Psychological Services – weekly group for first-generation college students, and workshops on navigating conversations with family about graduate school, finances/money management, etc.
 - Duke University Grad F1RSTS - Annual First-Generation Graduate Student Symposium in 2018, 2019, & 2020

- Global Grads
 - UNC Law School’s Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), Consumer Education Services Inc., and UNC’s Financial Literacy Consortium – Financial literacy/US income tax workshops
 - UNC Graduate Funding Information Center – Finding Funding as an International Graduate Student workshops
 - UNC University Career Services and UNC English Language Support in the Writing Center – Networking and Interviewing Skills as an International Student workshop series
 - UNC English Language Support – The Writing Center – Weekly English-Speaking Groups and Writing short courses
 - UNC Student Wellness – Building Resilience Through Community workshop

- UNC Counseling and Psychological Services – Weekly Global Grads support group
- UNC Graduate School Professional Development – Preparing International Teaching Assistants (PITAP) courses
- Initiative for Minority Excellence
 - UNC Office of Postdoctoral Affairs – Provides training, community and mentorship for students interested in a faculty-track career
 - Carolina Postdoctoral Program for Faculty Diversity
 - Minority Postdoc Alliance
 - UNC Initiative for Maximizing Student Diversity (IMSD) within the Biological and Biomedical Sciences Program
 - UNC (W)omxn of Worth Initiative – grassroots organization for graduate and undergraduate students, staff, and faculty who identify as womxn of color – workshops, signature events, and annual conference
 - UNC American Indian Center – Center focused on American Indian scholarship and community
 - UNC Carolina Latinx Center – campus center open to undergraduate and graduate students identifying as Latinx and other students of color
 - Duke University, Trinity College of Arts and Sciences – Dean Valerie S. Ashby, annual seminar for students of color on resilience and addressing imposter syndrome
- Military-Affiliated Grads
 - Carolina Veterans Resource Center
 - Boot Print to Heel Print Onboarding – Orientation for new military-affiliated graduate students.
 - Heeloween Spooktacular Trick or Treat Event with the military-affiliated students and graduate students with families who live at Baity Hill (graduate student on-campus housing)
 - Flash Talk Presentations – military-affiliated grads present 3-minute talks about their research
 - Women Veterans Breakfast – bi-annual affinity event for military-affiliated undergraduate and graduate women and local women veterans
 - Red, White, and Carolina Blue Graduation Recognition
- QGAPS (Queer Graduate & Professional Students)
 - LGBTQ Center – Monthly Speaker Series consisting of talks by UNC graduate students, faculty, and staff sharing their research in LGBTQIA+ issues; Annual LGBTQIA+ visibility day celebrations
 - Graduate and Professional Student Federation – Community service letter writing for children of incarcerated parents
- Summer Undergraduate Pipeline
 - 17 UNC summer undergraduate research programs focused on diversity participate in SUP
 - Welcome social, professional development seminar series, annual research symposium

- A typical summer: over 200 UG participants from universities across the country, research symposium where over 125 UG's present research in poster or oral format and attended by over 500 UNC faculty / staff/ students / community members
- Participants that apply to a UNC-Chapel Hill graduate program are eligible for an application fee waiver
- Future programming: deeper pipeline view by involving campus research programs that work with local high schools in order to broaden participation in the college pipeline

Visibility of Graduate Students from Diverse Backgrounds on the National Level

Programs and initiatives to support undergraduates from diverse backgrounds have largely become the norm on college campuses. However, once students reach graduate school, this formalized institutional support is often limited or nonexistent. By broadly defining diversity, The Graduate School has created a centralized campus-wide program for graduate student retention and success.

One of the DSS goals is to bring more visibility to the diverse graduate and professional student population by participating in national and regional conversations through avenues like NASPA's Administrators in Graduate and Professional Student Support (AGAPSS) Knowledge Community, Promising Practices in Supporting Graduate and Professional Students National Symposium held at Washington University in St. Louis, Council of Graduate Schools/Educational Testing Service Strategies for Increasing Graduate Program Diversity Symposium, the Annual Conference of Southern Graduate Schools, etc. As more students from diverse backgrounds enroll in graduate education, the need for graduate and professional schools to respond to these populations becomes even more critical. College and universities will need to respond to their diverse students and the DSS program can serve as a national model for how to implement such a comprehensive program.

Application of Research, Theory, and Assessment

According to the Council of Graduate Schools Graduate Enrollment and Degrees report (2018), graduate student enrollment continues to become more diverse. In addition, diversity and inclusiveness is one of the top priorities for graduate deans according to the 2017 Council of Graduate Schools Pressing Issues Survey. There have been several national grant programs, such as the Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP), that have focused on providing support to underrepresented students of color in the STEM fields at research universities. Graduate student centers are becoming more common on campuses offering professional development and community building opportunities, as well as affinity space for students of color, LGBTQIA+, and international students. More student affairs professionals are being hired to focus on the recruitment and retention of graduate students from diverse backgrounds.

In Griffin, Muniz, and Smith's (2016) qualitative study, they surveyed 14 "institutional agents" or graduate diversity officers (GDOs) who were charged with improving retention of graduate students of color. Acknowledging Tinto's Theory of Individual Departure (1993) for undergraduates, they built upon Lovitt's (2001) doctoral student retention framework which included academic integration, social integration, and the development of cognitive maps within a student's department or program by identifying three strategies to support retention. They are: 1) Individual support by GDOs outside of the department or program; 2) Building strong mentoring relationships with faculty; and 3) Building

communities beyond the department which had social, academic, and professional development components. These strategies are most successful when there is a supportive campus and departmental environment, institutional support, and adequate financial resources. The authors stated that, while continued efforts for student recruitment were important in considering graduate student outcomes, the student retention experience was critical (Griffin, Muniz, & Smith, 2016). Given the common retention strategies that have been identified amongst institutions in this study, the importance of a centralized effort for the retention of diverse graduate students is imperative.

As previously mentioned in the Executive Summary, diversity programs have historically focused on racial and ethnic underrepresentation at the graduate level. Using best practices from UNC's AGEP program in working with our underrepresented minority (URM) students, DSS has chosen to expand the definition of diversity which includes, but is not limited to, being a student who is first generation, LGBTQIA+, international, or military-affiliated.

Regarding assessment, evaluations are administered for individual workshops and events. This has enabled the co-directors to evaluate their programming and make data-driven decisions to adjust or discontinue specific events. These evaluations also help guide decision-making by their student advisory boards. Evaluation questions seek feedback on the following: 1) The content of this program is beneficial to my graduate student experience; 2) The session materials/handouts were useful; 3) The facilitator was knowledgeable about the topic discussed in this program; 4) The facilitator was responsive to participants' questions; 5) The technical aspects of the workshop was presented at an appropriate level; 6) Based on this experience, I plan on attending future DSS workshops; 7) List 3 Outcomes/Skills/Knowledge that you learned from this workshop; 8) Additional comments and feedback about this workshop/session/event; and 9) Suggestions for future DSS workshops/sessions/events.

In 2017, The Graduate School developed a database that will assist the co-directors in: tracking attendance at each event, tracking DSS funding awards, and better identifying and maintaining relationships with DSS alumni. Attendance and funding has been able to be tracked on a more consistent basis; the DSS alumni portion is still in development.

At the end of September 2018, Dr. Portia Flowers, a Postdoctoral Associate at UNC, completed an internship project for DSS that contributed to the creation of a survey/evaluation instrument. Through her review of peer institutions as part of her internship, Dr. Flowers confirmed what the DSS co-directors had received anecdotal feedback on:

Similar to its peer institutions, the UNC Graduate School's Diversity and Student Success (DSS) Program currently offers retention services to graduate students who fall within the broad DSS definition of diversity. However, UNC is unique in its variety of programming beyond those available for racial/ethnic minority graduate students. To our knowledge, no other peer institution offers retention services specifically for first-generation, international, military affiliated, or LGBTQIA+ graduate students all out of one centralized unit. Furthermore, with little evidence of thorough evaluation of student experience at the graduate level, there is an additional opportunity for UNC to set a standard for and become a leader in graduate student education and training. (Flowers, 2018).

Dr. Flowers assessment led to the creation and delivery of a formal summative evaluation in January 2020. The goal of this instrument was to assess the six DSS initiatives and their impact on the student experience. Specific learning outcomes that DSS identified as important targets of evaluation were: 1) Sense of belonging and community; 2) Ability to face and navigate challenges 3) Successful navigation of the university; 4) Preparation for post-graduate life; 4) Development of sense of self and 5) Leadership development. With three years completed and six initiatives in place, the assessment provided DSS and The Graduate School with: feedback on communication, programming, and services; guidance on next steps and future direction; and ideas and strategies for continuous improvement.

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MISSION STATEMENT

DIVERSITY is broadly defined to include, but is not limited to: racial/ethnic diversity, first-generation, international, LGBTQIA+, or military-affiliated. DSS has created a centralized, campus-wide program for graduate and professional students who identify with one or many of these diverse backgrounds. The MISSION of DSS is to contribute to recruitment, retention and degree completion through professional and personal development, community building, and funding assistance.

STUDENT-CENTERED

RECRUITMENT

- **Summer Undergraduate Pipeline:** Leveraging Carolina summer undergraduate research programs, assisting with the transition into graduate school through:
 - Professional Development Seminars
 - Research Symposium
- **Funding Resources**
 - Diverse Student Travel Recruitment
 - Diversity Off-Site Recruitment
 - Top-Up Award

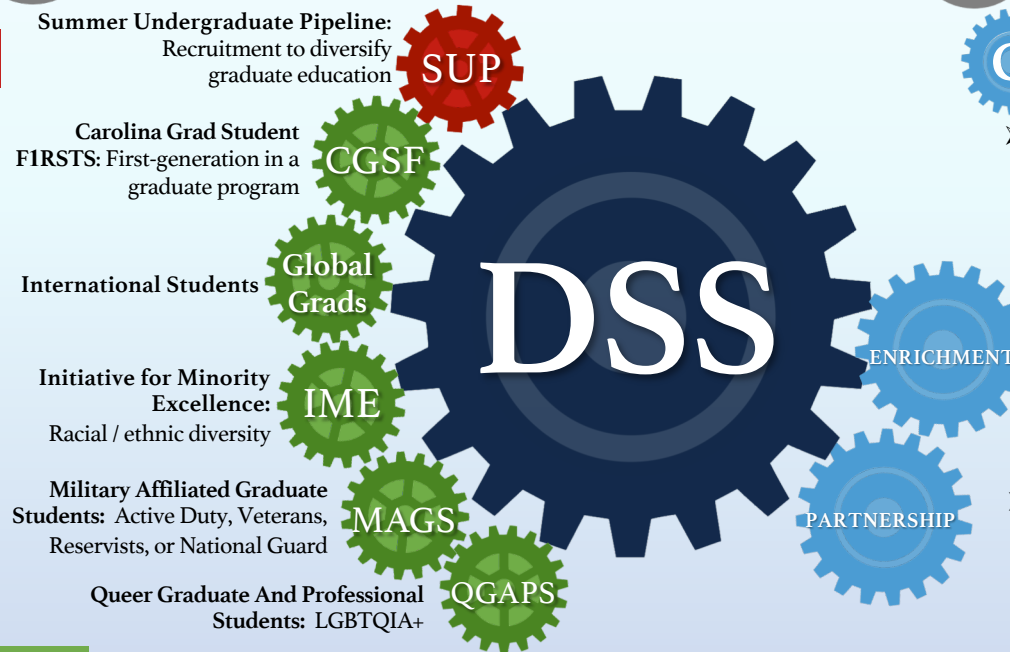
RETENTION & COMPLETION

- Professional Development Seminars
- Community-Building Events
- Bootcamps (statistics, emotional intelligence)
- **Funding Resources**
 - Chancellor's Doctoral Candidacy Award
 - Chancellor's Degree Advancement Award
 - Travel Award

CAMPUS-CENTERED

CAROLINA CULTIVATION

- **Enrichment:** Events enriching the Carolina CommUNITY through diverse voices
 - Advancing Narratives – featuring distinguished speakers sharing knowledge to advance narratives in higher education
 - Beyond These Walls – featuring graduate scholars creating knowledge that will impact Carolina and BEYOND
- **Partnership:** Creating and promoting a diverse and inclusive CommUNITY for graduate students through campus partnership



2019 Diversity Award
Intergroup
Collaboration



First-Gen Forward Advisory
Institution from NASPA

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Diversity and Student Success has created a student-centered, campus-wide program for graduate and professional students who identify with one or many of these diverse backgrounds.

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- **PARTNERSHIP:** Creating and promoting a diverse and inclusive CommUNITY for graduate students through campus partnership
 - Carolina FIRSTS
 - LGBTQ Center
 - International Student Scholar Services
 - Carolina Veterans Resource Center
 - Student Wellness
 - Office of Postdoctoral Affairs
 - Carolina Women’s Center
 - **Over 50** additional campus partners

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