

# Proposal for Establishment of Texas A&M University Graduate School

## **Introduction**

This document asserts a rationale for the establishment of the Texas A&M University Graduate School and provides a framework detailing changes in the scope of the existing Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. The proposed changes articulated in this document constitute a basis for a shift from an “Office” of Graduate and Professional Studies to a Graduate School in the summer of 2020. A task force composed of faculty, administrators, staff, and graduate students convened in February 2020 to gather input from graduate education stakeholders and generate feedback on the proposal. Further discussion of issues and changes that do not affect the initial scope of the Graduate School will be deferred to the fall 2020 task force meetings. Also, during the 2020-21 academic year, the task force will identify issues and changes that the central graduate unit and other university-level units can implement over the next five years to achieve the graduate-related goals of the 2020-2025 university strategic plan.

## **Rationale for Establishment of the Graduate School**

Vision 2020 identified the importance of graduate education in achieving the university’s aspirational goals. In particular, Imperative 2: Strengthen Our Graduate Programs states, “We must have a shift in our thinking about the role of graduate education to attain the level of excellence we desire. A substantially expanded graduate studies effort is critical to our academic aspiration and to our effectiveness as a great research university.”

Texas A&M has made considerable progress in strengthening its graduate programs over the past twenty years. Yet, if we want to build on our success and reach the level of excellence in graduate education for which we are striving, we must continue to evolve, embracing bold strategic changes and investing the financial resources necessary to maximize the positive impact of those changes. One such change is to transform the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies into a Graduate School. Making this move would necessitate shifting a few areas of university-level administrative oversight to a centralized administrative division, the Graduate School. Further administrative shifts or enhancements in governance structure, marketing, and graduate interdisciplinary degree program operations are proposed for summer 2020.

The shift from an Office of Graduate and Professional Studies to a Graduate School and the accompanying expansion or reconfiguration of services would provide numerous benefits to our graduate and larger Texas A&M community. First off, renaming or rebranding would immediately signify that graduate education is an integral part of the university mission and, therefore, strengthen the university’s identity as a research institution in a manner analogous to our peers. Thirteen of our Vision 2020 peer institutions have stand-alone graduate schools, colleges, or divisions. More than that, though, the Graduate School would support the enhancement of all of our graduate programs to build and sustain excellence in graduate education at Texas A&M by:

- improving effectiveness in the administration and delivery of degree programs, including utilization of systems and technology
- building our graduate community by providing a central hub for current students, prospective students, former students, faculty, staff, and other invested properties such as potential employees or sources of funding
- encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration
- centralizing coordination of health and wellness initiatives for graduate students
- enabling consistency in policies and practices across graduate programs
- centralizing the collection and analysis of data to support university, college, and department decisions, dissemination of information, and transparency about graduate education

Given these benefits, shifting to a Graduate School would advance Texas A&M’s goal to be known as a university that attracts the best students from the U.S. and abroad, supports its graduate students comprehensively, and provides outstanding professional and career development programming, thus elevating our graduate programs and community while building on Texas A&M’s reputation as one of the world’s preeminent educational institutions.

## **Guiding Principles**

The Graduate School will adhere to the following principles:

- *Service and Excellence* – the school exists to serve students, faculty, and graduate programs and advance excellence in graduate and professional education
- *A Student-Centered Approach* – the school should be leading the implementation of student centered, optimal approaches for student success and well-being across programs
- *Faculty Governance* – Faculty should retain a critical role in collective decision-making for graduate education.
- *Program Diversity* – TAMU administers a wide variety of graduate programs, from professional and research programs to STEM and Humanities programs. Respect for differences of disciplines in best practices will be guide implementation of the school’s strategies
- *Budgeting* – The core of the school’s budget should consist of funds currently allocated to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. Additional funding should come from new investments.

### **Proposed Graduate School Framework**

Section I below details proposed changes to be implemented in summer 2020. Section II lists current practices that will remain unchanged with the Graduate School assuming the responsibilities of OGAPS.

#### **Section I: Proposed Changes**

- The work currently being overseen by the associate provost for graduate and professional studies will be transformed into the work of the graduate school.
- *Graduate Faculty* will be affiliated with the Graduate School.
- *Proposed changes to the Graduate Council:* (i) The Graduate Dean will remain a non-voting member and become the chair of the GC; and (ii) establish three new subcommittees: a master’s and doctoral curricular review subcommittee, a first professional doctorate curricular review subcommittee, and a graduate policies and procedures subcommittee. The current time demand placed on the GC chair to review all materials and facilitate quality reviews by other GC members is excessive. Moreover, changes in department and college administrators over the past five years have resulted in frequent changes in GC chair and vice chair posts. Having the Graduate Dean serve as chair shifts the administrative burden from a faculty member, allows the faculty members on GC to focus on their operational responsibilities, and improves the consistency in committee operations. Several peer institutions employ this model.
- *Proposed changes to Graduate Program Directors:* (i) In order to attain more consistency for the position across graduate degree programs, the Graduate School and Graduate Council will work together to define a set of standard roles and responsibilities for GPDs; (ii) The Graduate School will hold regular meetings with GPDs to identify opportunities for improvement in graduate program procedures and operations and provide opportunities for GPDs to share their best practices; and (iii) The Graduate School will provide regular professional development for GPDs so they utilize best practices in graduate education and meet the diverse needs of their students. Also, the regular professional development sessions will provide opportunities to train new GPDs more quickly.
- The Graduate School will initiate a unified university-level *marketing and communication plan* to promote TAMU Graduate and Professional Studies across the U.S. and abroad, and invest in tools to strengthen engagement at university, college, department, and program levels with prospective students, current students, and alumni.
- *Proposed changes to Interdisciplinary Graduate Degree Programs:* It is critical that regular meetings occur between the A&EC and the IDP EC since most of the concerns articulated by faculty affiliated with doctoral IDP programs are related to policies and practices in academic departments such as access to GAT positions, student travel support, and faculty teaching assignments. Hence the Graduate School will assume responsibility for convening an annual meeting of the A&EC and EC for each IDP doctoral program to ensure that regular interactions occur to support the success of the IDP programs. Also, the IDP chair or a designee for each IDP program will serve on the GIC of their administrative college to keep intercollegiate faculty apprised of policy and procedural changes.

#### **Section II: Current Practices which will continue with the Graduate School assuming the responsibilities of OGAPS.**

- **Graduate Unit and Leadership** -- *Roles & Responsibilities:* The Office of Graduate and Professional Studies (OGAPS), led by the Associate Provost for Graduate and Professional Studies (APGPS), serves as the central unit responsible for graduate and professional studies at Texas A&M University. Once an applicant is accepted

into a graduate academic department, school, or college, OGAPS assists and facilitates the student's progress toward degree completion by maintaining all official records. OGAPS works directly with the GOC Deans (Associate Deans responsible for graduate studies in colleges) and Graduate Council to set minimal university guidelines, which all departments and colleges then use as a framework for operation, only setting more stringent standards when needed and appropriate. Clearance for graduation, including final reviews of theses, dissertations, and records of study, is performed by OGAPS. The Office of the Registrar is responsible for issuing diplomas and transcripts.

- **Academic Programs (Awards degrees)** -- Texas A&M University awards degrees. Graduate degree programs are administratively housed in departments and colleges. OGAPS provides administrative oversight for all graduate certificates, and master's and doctoral degree programs.
- **Administration and Governance Structure for Graduate & Professional Studies** -- Graduate and Professional Studies is governed by the following entities: President, Provost, Graduate Faculty, Faculty Senate, Graduate Council, Graduate Operations Committee, College Committees of Graduate Instruction, and Departmental Graduate Program Directors
  - Administration of Graduate and Professional Studies -- The graduate faculty at Texas A&M University consists of the President, the Provost and Executive Vice President, the Associate Provosts, the Deans of all subject-matter colleges, selected Directors and properly qualified academic groups. Graduate faculty participate in the graduate degree programs of the University by serving on student advisory committees and teaching graduate courses.
  - Faculty Senate -- Before submission to the President, the faculty senate reviews—and may initiate—the following related to graduate education: all university policies regarding curricula and instruction; academic standards for admission, standing, and graduation; and scholarships, honors and other forms of distinction.
  - Graduate Council (GC) – A reporting committee to the Faculty Senate, the GC reviews all curricular requests pertaining to graduate and professional academic programs, is responsible for the quality and development of graduate instruction and programs, and advises the Associate Provost for Graduate and Professional Studies on all graduate and professional program matters. The GC submits its recommendations to the Faculty Senate via the Executive Committee. The GC is composed of a representative from the graduate faculty of each College at Texas A&M with one member elected as chair. The Associate Provost for Graduate and Professional Studies is an Ex-Officio member.
  - Graduate Operations Committee (GOC) -- The GOC serves as an advisory body to the Associate Provost for Graduate and Professional Studies and provides a forum for the Associate Deans in each College to discuss issues/concerns of an operational nature. To resolve these issues/concerns, the GOC recommends actions or procedures that are as uniform as possible across Colleges. The GOC works very closely with the GC to coordinate all curriculum and policy guidelines.
  - College Committees on Graduate Instruction (GIC) – GICs are responsible for making recommendations concerning graduate course offerings, general policies on graduate instruction, and other matters pertaining to graduate studies in each college.
  - Graduate Program Directors (GPDs) – Department Heads typically designate one or more graduate faculty or administrators to oversee their graduate degree program(s) and designates one to represent the department on its respective College Graduate Instruction Committee (GIC). There are no defined titles or roles and responsibilities for these positions.
- **Graduate Admissions and Recruitment** -- The Office of Admissions facilitates the graduate application process including official admissions offers. Admission standards are established and decisions and discipline-specific recruiting are performed by faculty in departments and colleges. OGAPS performs recruitment to diversify the graduate student population.
- **Graduate Interdisciplinary Degree Program (IDP) Oversight and Operations** – Each graduate interdisciplinary degree program is overseen by a group of intercollegiate faculty, composed of graduate faculty from more than one discipline representing more than one college. Graduate IDPs typically reside administratively in the college and department of the chair of the intercollegiate faculty overseeing the IDP. According to University SAP 03.02.99.M1.01, annual reports will be submitted by the IDP Executive Committee (EC) to the Advisory and Evaluation Committee (A&EC) of Participating Department Heads for the program, who will ensure that

the report is distributed appropriately. A yearly meeting of the A&EC and EC will be held to review the performance of the IDP. Additional meetings may be called at the discretion of the A&EC or IOC

**Plans for 2020-21**

The task force will continue its efforts into the 2020-21 academic year, gathering broad input to work through issues identified during spring 2020 discussions. In addition, the task force will identify changes needed to achieve the graduate and professional studies goals in the 2020-2025 University Strategic Plan and provide recommendations to be addressed at the university level.

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