

**Report of the Task Force on Graduate Student Well-Being  
and the Task Force on Mentoring and Anti-Bullying**

*April 2020*

Task Force on Graduate Student Well-Being

Faculty:

Steve Corcelli, Chemistry and Biochemistry – Chair  
Glen Niebur, Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering  
Susan Ohmer, Film, Television, and Theatre

Graduate students:

Carly Hagins, Art, Art History, and Design  
Abby Jorgensen, Sociology  
Mortaza Saeidjavash, Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering

Liaisons:

Mimi Beck, Graduate Student Life  
Megan Brown, McDonald Center for Student Wellbeing  
Nyrée McDonald, Graduate School  
Demetra Schoenig, Graduate School

Task Force on Mentoring and Anti-Bullying

Faculty:

Steve Corcelli, Chemistry and Biochemistry – Chair  
Agustín Fuentes, Anthropology  
David Go, Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering  
CJ Jones, German and Russian Languages and Literatures

Graduate students:

Mauna Dasari, Biological Sciences  
Amanda Nowak, Psychology  
Ian Van Dyke, History

Liaisons:

Allan Loup, Graduate School  
John Lubker, Graduate School  
Nyrée McDonald, Graduate School  
Maura Ryan, Office of the Provost

## 1. Executive Summary

During the 2019-2020 academic year, Dean Laura Carlson initiated three Graduate School Task Forces: (1) Graduate Student Well-Being, (2) Mentoring and Anti-Bullying, and (3) Dependent Support. Each Task Force was composed of a diverse group of faculty, graduate students, and administrators to represent stakeholders from across the University. Because of the natural connectivity between graduate student well-being and relationships between students and their advisors, the Graduate Student Well-Being and the Mentoring and Anti-Bullying Task Forces chose to write a combined report.

The two Task Forces identified three reasons why these topics should be of interest to the University, and established a vision to guide their work:

1. Holistic graduate student well-being and eliminating academic bullying are consistent with our institutional values.
2. Well-being and outstanding mentoring translate to greater success and productivity of our graduate students and programs.
3. Embracing a culture where graduate students feel a strong sense of belonging and mistreatment is not tolerated can be defining features of graduate training at Notre Dame and thus leveraged as a strategic advantage in recruiting outstanding graduate students.

**Vision.** Establish an unparalleled culture of holistic well-being, where graduate students receive outstanding mentoring with zero tolerance for bullying.

The two Task Forces met regularly throughout the 2019-2020 academic year. During the fall semester, the primary focuses were engaging stakeholders and learning about the factors that impact graduate student well-being, mentoring, and bullying. We reviewed data from the 2019 Graduate Life survey, as well as the 2017 American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment II survey. We held two separate focus groups with graduate students from the College of Arts and Letters and students from the Colleges of Engineering and Science. Associate Dean John Lubker provided information about the broad range of issues with which he assists graduate students, and Vice President and Associate Provost Maura Ryan presented data on graduate student grievances against faculty and how these grievances are handled by the University. The Task Forces engaged the Graduate Studies and Research Advisory Council through a presentation and break-out groups, and the Chair of the Task Forces interfaced with numerous individuals and groups to solicit feedback.

During the spring semester, the Task Forces focused on synthesizing the information and feedback received during the fall semester into recommendations. Ultimately, the Task Forces adopted 13 recommendations that aim at addressing challenges with graduate student well-being and ensuring a positive graduate education and research climate:

1. **Establish an extended orientation course for graduate students.** The one-credit and non-mandatory course would provide an opportunity to educate students on a variety of topics, such as the role of wellness in professional success, managing student-advisor relationships, and what to do if an issue or challenge arises. Additionally, the class would serve to foster a cross-disciplinary community among all graduate students and greater connectivity to the University as a whole.
2. **Create a permanent mental health committee to address the growing mental health needs of students, including those of graduate students.** A mental health committee would ideally be composed of a wide cross-section of high-level campus leaders and students from different divisions and colleges, including faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The committee would assess the mental health needs and concerns of students, recommend campus prevention strategies at the individual, community, and policy level, and ensure accurate information and communication regarding mental health resources.
3. **Expand the current Medical Separation for Academic Duties to include non-medical crisis leaves.** By expanding the existing policy, the University can support graduate students who need a significant (more than 10 days), but short, amount of time (less than 6 weeks) to manage a personal crisis that is not covered under medical or childbirth and adoption accommodations.
4. **Graduate student community space in Bond Hall.** As the new home of the Graduate School, Bond Hall provides a natural connection for graduate students. Setting aside appropriately designed space for graduate students will provide opportunities for interdisciplinary interactions in a neutral environment. Its location in proximity to iconic campus landmarks will also allow graduate students to connect with the University.
5. **Required mentoring plans and annual student feedback.** The Graduate School should support graduate programs in developing robust training and tools for required mentoring plans and annual feedback. Students and mentors should have the resources to create and maintain productive mentoring practices grounded in clear communication of expectations. Programs should adopt practices to assess student progress on at least an annual basis, particularly to identify and assist any student who is struggling academically or in their professional training.
6. **Graduate programs craft and adopt anti-bullying statements.** Graduate programs should be encouraged to declare, as a matter of written policy, that bullying of graduate students is unacceptable and not tolerated. These statements would articulate programs' commitment to the civil and professional treatment of graduate students at all times; they would also serve to define for everyone, students and faculty alike, the aspirational culture of the program.

7. **Create a structure for reporting mistreatment that exists independent of academic programs.** Diversifying the ways students are able to report issues, including but not limited to forms of bullying and harassment, will empower students to seek more formal assistance and reduce power imbalances. The purpose of an independent reporting structure is to ensure students have more agency in the reporting process by providing resources from a neutral source outside of formal academic structures, thus reducing fears of retaliation.
8. **Provide temporary financial support to graduate students who need to change advisors due to mistreatment.** Financial dependence on the primary advisor can make it difficult for a student to exit that relationship when warranted. Thus, the intent of this recommendation is to eliminate financial considerations from the complex decision to seek a new advisor when the student-advisor relationship irreconcilably fails.
9. **Training for Directors of Graduate Studies (DGSs).** Despite the multifaceted duties of the DGS, at present, training is minimal and *ad hoc*. Moreover, DGSs are often the first point-of-contact when a graduate student is facing a personal challenge or has an interpersonal conflict with another student or faculty member, including their advisor. The rationale for this recommendation is that appropriate training can clarify and strengthen the student advocacy role of the DGS and promote best practice sharing for handling reports of interpersonal conflicts.
10. **Include graduate student mentoring as a component of Academic Program Reviews (APRs).** The purpose of APRs is to ensure the quality of Departments by providing a regular opportunity for internal reflection and future planning. This recommendation is meant to create accountability for Departments to adopt and maintain high standards for graduate student mentoring.
11. **Include mentoring of graduate students as a formal component in the evaluation of faculty for reappointment, promotion, and tenure.** Presently, the evaluation of graduate student mentoring in reappointments and promotion is primarily focused on outcomes (e.g., placement, co-authorship on publications, presentations at national meetings, etc.). Requiring a more comprehensive and holistic evaluation of mentoring would not only send a powerful message to our graduate students that we value the advisor-advisee relationship but also provide a pertinent incentive for faculty to employ effective mentoring practices.
12. **Establish a term-limited and renewable Graduate Faculty designation that includes mentoring evaluations and training as a prerequisite for appointment and renewal.** Including evaluations of mentoring practices and treatment of graduate students as part of hiring, tenure, and promotion only impacts faculty at three or four points in their career. In order to ensure that faculty continue to strive to be good mentors, we recommend that each College establishes a procedure for approving faculty to mentor

and work with graduate students through a “Graduate Faculty designation” that is term-limited and renewable. Requiring renewal provides the University with an opportunity to periodically review a faculty member’s mentoring of graduate students and a mechanism to protect students without depending on student complaints to initiate the process.

13. **New Graduate Student Life survey questions.** Analysis of the 2019 Graduate Student Life survey was instrumental in shaping many of the recommendations in this report. However, several important aspects of well-being, mentoring, and mistreatment were not captured by the survey. New questions can fill these gaps and provide an opportunity to assess many of the recommendations put forth by the Task Forces.

## 2. Introduction

### A. Graduate Student Well-Being

Personal well-being is a cornerstone of professional success, whether one is at the beginning of their career or well-established in their field. Besides the compelling moral reasons why universities should invest in the well-being of their faculty, staff, and students, the benefits of well-being in terms of increased productivity, creativity, and avoiding burn-out are tangible. Graduate students, in particular, are at a vulnerable point in their career progression where many face significant financial uncertainty, immense academic pressure, and anxiety about their professional future. Moreover, there is mounting evidence that graduate students are confronting increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions.<sup>1</sup>

There are many definitions and frameworks associated with the term “well-being.” In 2014, the Graduate Student Assembly at the University of California at Berkeley published the “[Graduate Student Happiness and Well-Being Report](#).” The centerpiece of the report was a survey of 790 graduate students at Berkeley designed to identify the factors that show a statistical correlation with two dependent variables, satisfaction with life and depression. The top ten predictors of satisfaction with life and depression were:

1. Career prospects
2. Overall health
3. Living conditions
4. Academic engagement
5. Social support
6. Financial confidence
7. Academic progress and preparation
8. Sleep

---

<sup>1</sup> T. M. Evans, L. Bira, J. B. Gastelum, L. T. Weiss, and N. L. Vanderford, “Evidence for a Mental Health Crisis in Graduate Education,” *Nature Biotechnology* **36**, 282 (2018).

- 9. Feeling valued and included
- 10. Advisor relationship

Four of these factors overlap with effective mentoring, the subject of the related Mentoring and Anti-Bullying Task Force, including career progression, academic engagement, academic progression, and the student-advisor relationship. Taken together, the predictors provide a scaffold for improving graduate student well-being.

The 2019 biennial Graduate Student Life survey offers some insights about several of the happiness and depression predictors at Notre Dame (Tables 1 and 2). Table 1 shows perceptions of current well-being and campus resources in three categories: physical, social, and occupational, which approximately map to the overall health, sleep, social support, and academic engagement predictors in the Berkeley report. The data is remarkably uniform across the three categories. A majority of students report very good or excellent physical (58%), social (56%), and occupational (60%) well-being. However, a significant fraction of students (10-13%) reported poor or very poor in these same categories. The perception of campus resources to support social and occupational well-being are nearly identical to the current state of well-being in these areas. In contrast, the opinion of campus resources to promote physical well-being is higher than the current state of physical well-being.

**Table 1.** Responses from the 2019 Graduate Life survey regarding perceptions of graduate student well-being. The composite scores are based on a five-point scale.

Question		Responses	Composite	% Very Poor or Poor	% Very Good or Excellent
Physical Well-Being (adequate nutrition and hydration, exercise, sleep, shelter, and safety)	Your current state of physical well-being	951	3.6	10	58
	Campus resources to support physical well-being	903	4.0	4	77
Social Well-Being (engaging with others in a positive and healthy manner, contributing to the good of the community)	Your current state of social well-being	947	3.6	13	56
	Campus resources to support social well-being	858	3.6	11	57
Occupational Well-Being (preparing for and engaging in work that is interesting and meaningful to you)	Your current state of occupational well-being	931	3.7	11	60
	Campus resources to support occupational well-being	835	3.7	9	63

The 2019 Graduate Life survey also inquired about the sense of belonging (i.e., feeling that one is a part of and accepted by a group) to groups ranging from specific graduate programs to the greater South Bend community. Sense of belonging approximately corresponds to the social support and feeling valued and included categories in the Berkeley study. The results were relatively high for graduate programs and disciplines with 69% and 76% reporting a strong or very strong connection, respectively. The sense of belonging to other graduate students and the University of Notre Dame as a whole were markedly lower, with only 42% and 46% reporting a strong or very strong connection, respectively. The sense of belonging to the greater South

Bend community was lower still with nearly twice as many students reporting little or no connection (43%) than those reporting a strong or very strong connection (24%).

**Table 2.** Responses from the 2019 Graduate Life survey concerning perceptions of graduate students' sense of belonging. The composite scores are based on a five-point scale.

Question	Responses	Composite	% Not At All or A Little	% Strongly or Very Strongly	
To what extent do you identify (feel a sense of community or belonging) with the following	Your Notre Dame graduate program	963	3.9	11	69
	Your discipline	962	4.1	7	76
	The community of graduate students at Notre Dame	963	3.2	26	42
	The University of Notre Dame as a whole	961	3.4	23	46
	The local civic community (South Bend, Indiana)	962	2.7	43	24

Based on the Graduate Life survey results and the anecdotal accounts gathered at focus groups with graduate students, the Task Forces developed recommendations to improve graduate student well-being (Section 4). Several of the recommendations are intended to build community among our graduate students with the hope of improving social support and a sense of belonging outside of individual graduate programs. For example, the extended orientation class has a dual purpose. One is to educate our students about various aspects of well-being and to raise awareness of available resources. Concomitantly, by mixing students together in small groups from programs across the University, we hope to impact social connectedness. Similarly, repurposing physical space in Bond Hall will provide graduate students with an additional point of gathering that will hopefully facilitate a greater connection with the Graduate School and University of Notre Dame as a whole.

Two recommendations target financial security, which is another important aspect of graduate student well-being. One is to expand the scope of the six-week medical leave policy to include personal crises that might not be strictly medical in nature. Another is to provide a temporary financial safety net when students wish to change advisors.

The Graduate Student Well-Being Task Force recognized that mental health is a critical component of graduate student well-being. Thus, we recommend that the University form a permanent mental health committee. Finally, we recommended new questions in the Graduate Life survey that will give us a more detailed understanding of graduate student well-being, including better alignment with the ten key predictors of happiness and depression in the Berkeley study.

## B. Mentoring and Anti-Bullying

In graduate training, the relationship between a student and their advisor is formative and, in many cases, can mean the difference between success and failure for the trainee. [Academic mentors serve in a variety of roles](#), including advisors who share their career experience, tutors who provide timely and objective feedback about performance, supporters who encourage, and sponsors who are sources of information and opportunities. Ultimately, graduate student mentors are powerful role models and play an essential part in shaping the professional identity of the trainee.

Despite the extraordinary impact of high-quality mentoring on the success of graduate students, few faculty receive any formal training in how to be an effective mentor. Instead, most rely on their experiences as graduate students and postdoctoral scholars to guide their approach to mentoring as a faculty member. Mechanisms to evaluate mentoring and resources to excel are scant; outstanding mentors are not often recognized and rewarded, but more insidiously, weak mentoring can persist unchecked. Even worse, is the presence of bullying behavior, which the [National Academy of Sciences](#) defines as “unwelcome, aggressive behavior involving the use of influence, threat, intimidation, or coercion to dominate others in the professional environment.”

The prestigious scientific journal *Nature* recently reported results from its biennial survey of Ph.D. students.<sup>2</sup> Although the study relies on self-responses, the 2019 iteration captured the opinions of some 6300 graduate students at institutions from around the world. 21% of respondents indicated they had experienced bullying at some point during their graduate training. The proportion of graduate students who reported bullying was even higher in North America (24%). Moreover, 57% of students who experienced bullying felt uncomfortable reporting the behavior for fear of retribution. One female student wrote, “I have witnessed and been the subject of bullying and intimidation by an academic supervisor. The absolute impunity of the top academic professors is astonishing and the biggest threat to young researchers.”

The 2019 biennial Graduate Student Life survey offers some insights about mentoring at Notre Dame (Table 1). Notably, the survey asked about several forms of assistance from their advisors. The results were generally favorable for constructive feedback, preparing for degree program milestones, and timely feedback on progress toward academic goals, where 78-83% of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with these aspects of advising. However, students were significantly less satisfied with assistance from their academic advisors to define career goals (64%), with 12% replying that they were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.

Although the Graduate Student Life survey did not ask specifically about the prevalence of academic bullying at Notre Dame, it did inquire, “Have you ever had a conflict at the University that affected your academic progress?” 148 students, or approximately 15% of those who

---

<sup>2</sup> C. Woolston, “Ph.D. Poll Reveals Fear and Joy, Contentment and Anguish,” *Nature* **575**, 403 (2019).

participated in the survey, answered “yes” to this question. About 64% of students knew the name of a person in their program from whom they could seek assistance to mediate a conflict. Substantially fewer, though, reported knowing a contact in the graduate school (38%) or elsewhere in the University (32%). Moreover, 44% of the students who reported using a conflict resolution process were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the process, and 39% were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the outcome.

**Table 3.** Selected responses from the 2019 Graduate Life survey regarding mentoring and conflict resolution. The composite scores are based on a five-point scale.

Question		Responses	Composite	% Satisfied or Very Satisfied	% Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied
How satisfied are you with the following types of assistance from your academic advisor?	Giving constructive feedback	1008	4.2	82	8
	Helping to define your career goals	986	3.8	64	12
	Preparing you for milestones to be met in your degree program	1013	4.0	78	8
	Providing timely feedback on your progress toward academic goals	1011	4.2	83	7
How satisfied are you with the following?	Conflict resolution process	126	2.8	33	44
	Outcomes of conflict resolution	124	3.0	37	39

The Graduate Life survey data, as well as anecdotal accounts gathered at focus groups with graduate students, suggests that sustained interventions are necessary to improve graduate student mentoring and eliminate bullying at Notre Dame. In particular, we need to acknowledge and reconcile the vulnerability that results from the massive power imbalance of faculty and graduate students. Addressing bullying will require an earnest commitment by the faculty to empathize with the graduate student experience and to elevate mentoring and advising to ensure that all graduate students may achieve success in their graduate studies and future careers.

The task forces developed a series of interconnected recommendations to address mentoring and bullying that are detailed in Section 4. Some of the proposals target graduate students directly (e.g., an extended orientation class where students can learn about how to choose an advisor, how to manage the student-advisor relationship, and where to turn if difficulties arise). However, the majority of recommendations target faculty and the institution. Increased conflict resolution training for DGSs, graduate programs adopting anti-bullying statements, a financial safety net for students who wish to change advisors, new mistreatment reporting structures, and required mentoring plans will address aspects of mentoring and bullying at the institutional level. Graduate faculty designations and evaluating mentoring quality as an element of the promotion process will incentivize faculty to improve their mentoring practices and will protect graduate students from faculty with records of bullying or neglect. Finally, new questions in the Graduate Life survey will allow us to understand mentoring and the prevalence of bullying better and whether our recommended changes have the desired impacts.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **A. Task Force Formation and Charge**

The two Task Forces were initiated by Dean Laura Carlson at the outset of the 2019-2020 academic year. Dean Carlson invited Steve Corcelli (Chemistry and Biochemistry) to serve as Chair, and they collaborated on writing the Charge Documents (Appendix A) and identifying students, faculty, and liaisons to serve as members. When constituting the Task Forces, the objective was to invite a diverse group of faculty, graduate students, and administrators to represent stakeholders throughout the University. In particular, the Task Force rosters include graduate students and faculty from the Colleges of Arts and Letters, Engineering, and Science to capture the perspectives of scholars in disparate disciplines.

#### **B. Activities and Approaches of the Task Forces**

The two Task Forces met regularly throughout the 2019-2020 academic year. During the fall semester, the primary focuses were engaging stakeholders and learning about the factors that impact graduate student well-being, mentoring, and bullying:

- We reviewed data from the 2019 Graduate Life survey, as well as the 2017 [American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment II](#) survey.
- We held two separate focus groups with graduate students from the College of Arts and Letters and students from the Colleges of Engineering and Science. Invitees were collected from the members of the Task Forces, as well as Graduate Program Coordinators. Approximately 25 students out of the 50 who were invited attended each focus group. The Task Forces developed the following prompts to guide the discussion:
  1. What does Notre Dame do well to promote graduate student well-being?
  2. How can we improve graduate student well-being at Notre Dame?
  3. Where do you perceive institutional weaknesses for addressing the mistreatment of graduate students by faculty?

Task Force members helped guide the discussions, answer questions, and take notes from each focus group. Their primary role was to facilitate receiving unfiltered feedback from the focus group participants.

- Associate Dean John Lubker provided information about the broad range of issues with which he assists graduate students, and Vice President and Associate Provost Maura Ryan presented data on graduate student grievances against faculty and how these grievances are handled by the University.

- The Task Forces engaged the Graduate Studies and Research Advisory Council through a presentation and break-out groups that focused on the following questions:
  1. How do you encourage high expectations without burning people out?
  2. In your organization, how do you deal with unequal power dynamics outside the HR framework?

Task Force members helped guide the break-out groups and take notes to record the discussions.

- The Chair of the Task Forces interfaced with numerous individuals and groups to solicit feedback:
  - Deans' Council
  - Directors of Graduate Studies
  - Faculty Senate
  - Graduate Program Coordinators
  - Graduate School Professional Development Committee
  - Healthy Campus Coalition
  - Provost's Cabinet
  - University Committee on Women Faculty and Students
  - Meghan Duffy, University of Michigan
  - Christine Gebhardt, Assistant Vice President for Student Services
  - Connor Mullen, President of the Graduate Student Union
  - Leah Zimmer, Director of International Student and Scholar Affairs

During the spring semester, the Task Forces focused on synthesizing the information and feedback received during the fall semester into recommendations. This process was facilitated by a combined meeting of the two Task Forces, where it was agreed that preparing a single report was appropriate because of the natural connectivity between graduate student well-being and relationships between students and their advisors. Additional feedback from stakeholders was solicited before the report was finalized.

#### **4. Recommendations**

The Task Forces adopted 13 recommendations that aim at addressing challenges with graduate student well-being and ensuring a positive graduate education and research climate. Table 2 summarizes these recommendations. For each recommendation, the Task Forces have identified the primary audience that the recommendation aims to address, the primary parties responsible for implementation, any potential collaborators for implementation and governance, and whether the recommendation requires financial investment or long-term governance and policies to be successful. In the following, explanations and rationale for each recommendation are detailed.

**Table 4.** Summary of recommendations.

Recommendation	Primary Implementor(s)	Primary Audience(s)	Collaborator(s)	Financial Need	Academic Governance
1. Establish an extended orientation course for graduate students	Graduate School	Students	Programs	N	N
2. Permanent mental health committee	Graduate School/Student Affairs	Students	McDonald Center/UCC	N	N
3. Non-medical crisis leaves	Graduate School	Students	Colleges/Programs	Y	Y
4. Graduate student community space in Bond Hall	Graduate School	Students	Provost Office	Y	N
5. Required mentoring plans and annual feedback	Programs	Students	Graduate School/Colleges	N	N
6. Graduate programs craft and adopt anti-bullying statements	Programs	Students/faculty	Graduate School/Colleges	N	N
7. Independent structure for reporting mistreatment	Graduate School	Students	Provost Office/Colleges	N	N
8. Temporary financial support for students who need to change advisors	Graduate School	Students	Colleges/Programs	Y	Y
9. Training for DGSs	Graduate School	DGSs	Programs	N	N
10. Graduate student mentoring component of Academic Program Reviews	Provost Office	Programs	Graduate School/Colleges/Departments	N	Y
11. Mentoring evaluation for faculty for reappointment, promotion, and tenure	Provost Office	Faculty	Faculty/Departments/Colleges/Provost Office	N	Y
12. Graduate Faculty designation	Provost Office	Faculty	Departments/Colleges	N	Y
13. New Graduate Life survey questions	Student Affairs	Students	Graduate School	N	N

Although a framework for the implementation of each recommendation is detailed below, several of the recommendations are complex and will require substantial reflection and further input from stakeholders to deploy in an effective manner. Furthermore, the implementation of recommendations that require significant financial support might be delayed because of the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Recommendation 1

Establish an extended orientation course for graduate students.

**Rationale.** New graduate student orientation is a time where most students are busy acclimating to Notre Dame (e.g., finding their way around campus), their graduate program (e.g., determining which courses to take, TA and safety training, etc.), and their new living circumstances in the South Bend community. The material they receive during orientation activities is limited and does not cover more nuanced, but important, topics. Therefore, students would benefit from the opportunity to take an extended orientation course that covers a wider range of topics spanning overall student wellbeing, preventive and interventive measures of anti-bullying, and practices to promote personal and professional success. Further, as graduate students often experience isolation in their department or lab, having an extended orientation

class would foster a cross-disciplinary community among all graduate students and a greater connectivity to the University community as a whole.

**Framework.** We recommend the extended orientation course have a one-credit, non-mandatory structure with several time offerings so the opportunity is available to all students regardless of their individual schedules. We further recommend eight, 75-minute modules offered in the first half of each fall semester with an end-of-semester or spring social event to reconnect students in each section. Each course section could be taught by a faculty member, staff member, or veteran graduate student. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Managing mentor/advisor relationships
- Wellness resources
- Stress/time management
- Leadership development
- Building/maintaining community
- Professional development
- Inclusive practices
- Imposter syndrome training/resources
- Ethical considerations

For many of these topics, (e.g., managing mentor/advisor relationships) the course will serve to not only provide guidance on best practices, but also highlight resources on what to do in the event an issue or challenge arises. Students will learn about who they can turn to, reporting structures, and resources the university and community provides.

Because students have cited isolation as a common frustration, we are recommending that each section be open to all graduate students, regardless of field. The modules should be generalizable to all students and conversations that are more field-dependent are encouraged to facilitate an open dialogue with multiple perspectives. Although the course is intended for first-years graduate students, other graduate students who may not have received the course content may also benefit from enrolling. It would be helpful for this course to be open to all graduate students, regardless of year, at least until all graduate students have had the opportunity to take the course in their first year. Lastly, we recommend a social gathering at the end of the semester or in the following spring to foster the interpersonal and multidisciplinary relationships that can result from this course offering.

**Responsible Parties.** The Graduate School would be the responsible party for designing the overall structure and implementing the course. They may wish to allocate the responsibility of specific modules and course topics to offices and departments that may be best qualified to educate students in those respective areas. The Graduate School would also be responsible for finding representatives of the Notre Dame community to teach and lead each course section.

**Assessment.** In order to assess improvement in the understanding of the course topics, surveys should be sent to all students who participate before and after they take the course. In the post-course survey, additional feedback should be acquired on specific aspects of the class they liked and disliked, as well as areas they feel could be improved. Elements of these surveys could also be included in the more general Graduate Student Life surveys as a way of tracking longitudinal feedback on the impact of the course.

---

### **Recommendation 2**

Create a permanent mental health committee to address the growing mental health needs of students, including those of graduate students.

---

**Rationale.** The 2017 National Collegiate Health Assessments indicated that Notre Dame graduate students felt more hopeless, lonely, and overwhelmingly anxious than the national reference group. Forty percent of graduate students who took the 2018 Graduate Student Life survey indicated that emotional health-related concerns negatively impacted their academic progress. Nineteen percent of this same group indicated poor to very poor emotional well-being. A conclusion from the Graduate Student Life survey was that emotional health “is an area for increased attention and resources,” especially for Ph.D. students. This was echoed in focus groups facilitated by the Graduate Student Well-Being Task Force. In both the Science/Engineering and Arts and Letters focus groups, the need for more mental health resources was a theme. Students expressed concern about their mental health and a desire for more resources for improving it. The University Counseling Center recently reported growth in counseling center utilization by all students of about 38%, which is more than twelve times the rate of institutional growth in enrollment of 3%.

Mental health is a pervasive nation-wide issue with both undergraduate and graduate students. Between 2009 and 2015, the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH) reported that university counseling center utilization increased by an average of 30 - 40%, while enrollment increase was only 5% (see [2015](#) and [2019](#) CCMH Annual Reports). Students around the country are reporting more mental health concerns and university and college counseling centers are struggling to meet the demands. Universities are coming to the logical conclusion that providing more mental health specialists for one-on-one treatment, although this may be what students are asking for, is not going to decrease the problem. Instead, some institutions are turning to public health and using prevention strategies and [collective impact](#) models that address mental health as an environmental and community issue to try to prevent the need for mental health treatment in the first place (e.g., [University of Southern California](#) and [University of British Columbia](#)). [Collective Impact](#) is a structured approach used to tackle complex social problems. At the heart of the model is a diverse team with a wide range of perspectives committed to solving a significant problem. A committee for mental health at Notre Dame could provide this function to support and enhance the emotional and mental well-being of the entire student body. Given the COVID-19 pandemic and the anticipated mental health aftershocks, a committee to lead a coordinated effort to positively impact the mental health of all students is especially critical at this time.

**Framework.** A mental health steering committee would ideally be composed of a wide cross section of high level campus leaders and students from different divisions and colleges, including faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students. This steering committee could task subcommittees and working groups, also of a diverse composition, to address in depth tasks related to graduate student mental health, undergraduate mental health, and universal or population-wide prevention strategies. Members would meet regularly to:

- Assess mental health needs and concerns of students
- Create a strategic plan that coordinates efforts to improve mental health of students
- Recommend campus prevention strategies at the individual, community, and policy level
- Ensure accurate information/communication regarding mental health resources

**Responsible parties.** We recommend that a charge for the committee for mental health is given by the Dean of the Graduate School, the Vice President and Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs, and the Vice President of Student Affairs. The success of a committee tackling a complex issue like mental health relies on effective infrastructure. The McDonald Center for Student Well-Being could be a strong partner and backbone for such a committee by coordinating and facilitating project and data management.

**Assessment.** Ideally, benchmarking would be conducted regarding best practices of a committee such as this. Developing a shared language and definition of mental health would facilitate assessment and impact. Through benchmarking and consultation with mental health organizations (e.g., the JED foundation) this committee would identify the best instruments for on-going, regular qualitative and quantitative assessment. The committee for mental health would likely design a comprehensive campus mental health assessment to identify mental health gaps and develop a long-term strategic plan. The campus community would benefit most if the committee agreed on ways the entire campus community could measure and report on the agreed upon variables of mental health. A report with recommendations and outcomes should be offered annually.

---

### **Recommendation 3**

Expand the current Medical Separation for Academic Duties to include non-medical crisis leaves.

---

**Rationale.** Graduate students are not employees, and therefore, ineligible for leaves under the 1993 Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Currently, there is no centralized policy that addresses how to support graduate students who need a significant (more than 10 days), but short, amount of time (less than 6 weeks) to manage a personal crisis that is not covered under the medical or childbirth and adoption accommodations. Because there is no centralized policy, there are two significant concerns about students who are dealing with a crisis. First, any accommodations given are either by the advisor or by the program on an *ad hoc* basis. This leads to a variety of issues - uneven application of leaves between students, different expectations of what is required of a student in crisis, and the inability of students to secure

leave to manage a crisis. Second, if a student needs significant time to manage a crisis, the only centralized policy available to him or her is to withdraw for the semester in which the crisis occurs. Withdrawing can cause a cascading source of stress because a withdrawn student loses his or her stipend funding, any academic coursework they are currently enrolled in, and generally impedes progress toward degree.

Providing a standardized accommodation for students akin to FMLA would clarify expectations on behalf of both departments and students, and would give students a middle-ground option between continuing at their current level of work and temporarily withdrawing from the program. For example, this policy might be defined to provide a respite to students whose dependent suffers a major medical event. Under current policy, this student has no central policy to which to appeal for relief as they manage the crisis of their dependent. Or again, this policy may be structured for students whose parents or close relatives are ill or pass away, particularly when the student serves as the primary caretaker in such situations. Also, like FMLA, such a leave might be considered for when an immediate family member of a student is called upon for active military duty.

**Framework.** The Medical Separation for Academic Duties currently outlines the process for a medical separation. The language should be amended to include crisis leave.

**Responsible parties.** The current Medical Separation for Academic Duties policy is included in section 5.2 of the Academic Code of the Graduate School. It would make sense for this policy to be expanded in this document to include crisis leave as well. It should be incumbent on the Graduate School, namely the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, to work with the relevant campus partners to define (1) what events qualify as a crisis, (2) the appropriate steps needed to secure a crisis leave, and (3) the documentation necessary to approve a crisis leave.

**Assessment.** It is recommended that the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs tracks how many crisis leaves are taken within the first two years of the policy being enacted. Also, it is important to make note of any difficulties with the decided upon definition of crisis as it relates to both the student and the programs' ability to navigate this policy.

---

#### **Recommendation 4**

Graduate student community space in Bond Hall.

---

**Rationale.** Social connection has long been recognized as a factor in physical and emotional well-being. The landmark longitudinal [Harvard Study of Adult Development](#) places fulfilling relationships among the strongest predictors of health and happiness. Cultivating opportunities for graduate students to connect with each other is therefore a powerful tool in supporting their well-being. Creating physical spaces and built environments conducive to social connection is such an opportunity.

Social connection is one among many health impacts of our built environment. Notre Dame faculty member Kim Rollings studies the effects of architecture and design on physical and mental health. In a presentation to the Healthy Campus Coalition last Spring, Professor Rollings outlined the theory, research, and outcomes of several successful strategies for designing spaces to promote well-being. Likewise, the McDonald Center for Student Well-Being has done extensive research in the past several years on the ways physical space promotes wellness. From the presence of natural light and live plants to seating configurations and artwork, the spaces we inhabit affect our mood, cognition, creativity, productivity, and social connectedness.

As the new home of the Graduate School, Bond Hall provides physical space with a natural connection for graduate students. Its location in proximity to iconic campus landmarks provides opportunities for graduate students to connect with the University. And its lack of affiliation to specific disciplines provides safe or neutral space with opportunities for interdisciplinary interactions.

**Framework.** Though there is not currently space in Bond Hall that can be dedicated solely to graduate student well-being, there are several rooms that can be utilized for this purpose with intentional design, scheduling, programming, and marketing.

- Design - Select one or two rooms to pilot. Available spaces include 106, 119, and 304 on the Lake-side of the building, and 215 on the Morrissey-side. Then, using the design recommendations from Professor Rollings and the McDonald Center for Student Well-Being, make appropriate changes in lighting, seating, artwork, sound, color, signage, etc.
- Scheduling - In consultation with graduate students, schedule blocks on a variety of times and days for unstructured and informal use, similar to the way the Graduate Student Lounge in the Duncan Student Center currently operates.
- Programming - In partnership with members of the Graduate Professional Development Team, offer a variety of programs and workshops in these designed spaces.
- Marketing – Communicating the availability and intentionality of these spaces will be key to their success. Incentives such as free healthy snacks or coffee may initially be necessary to drive traffic until awareness increases.

**Responsible Parties.** The Academic Enhancements Team of the Graduate School will be responsible for planning, scheduling, marketing, and assessing the use of student space in Bond Hall. Key partners include Graduate Student Life, the McDonald Center for Student Well-Being, and the Writing Center.

**Assessment.** The key indicator of success will be utilization. Tracking the total number of students, the representation of different demographics, and the types of activities pursued will provide quantitative data. Qualitative data in the form of participant feedback can also be garnered in a number of ways: having suggestion/comment boxes available, posting links (or QR codes) to quick online surveys, or adding a question to the Grad Student Life survey.

---

## Recommendation 5

Required mentoring plans and annual student feedback.

---

**Rationale.** Each student's academic and professional success relies on clear communication and benchmarking of expectations concerning progress towards degree and professional preparation, as well as mentoring timelines and boundaries. The Graduate School's [Academic Code](#) section 5.5 states, "All students should receive written feedback annually. This may come from the advisor, the area coordinator (or faculty member responsible for the area in which the student is working), or the Director of Graduate Studies." The practicalities of what form this feedback should take, and how it should be evaluated, vary across programs and it is currently implemented unevenly.

Notre Dame should support graduate programs in developing more robust training and tools for required mentoring plans for all students, as well as annual student feedback mechanisms. This issue needs to be met from several angles in order to ensure (1) that students and mentors have the resources to develop productive mentoring practices grounded in clear communication of expectations, and (2) that departments have practices in place to assess student progress and mentor students who are struggling in any aspect of their program and professional training.

**Framework.** We recommend that a working group be formed in order to survey the current practices in graduate programs across the University and to develop a set of best practices that may serve as a foundation on which individual programs can build their mentoring and student progress mechanisms. The products of this working group and the resources and best practices it develops for each aspect of graduate mentoring and feedback should be included as part of the more robust DGS training (Recommendation 9). This group should consider three related issues:

- Encouraging positive and productive relationships between students and faculty mentors, based on open communication and broader mentoring networks (moving away from a single master-apprentice model).
- Setting clear goals and expectations of progress for students both during and after coursework, including appropriate steps in career training and professional socialization.
- Annual assessment practices to provide students with feedback regarding their progress to degree and appropriate goals for the coming year.

The final element relies on the first two. In order to assess each student's progress in their program, the stakeholders need to articulate clearly what the appropriate milestones and expectations are for each semester.

The Graduate School has developed a resource for [establishing shared expectations](#) between mentors and mentees. This resource has not been broadly disseminated and is furthermore primarily addressed to graduate students with advice for approaching their faculty mentors

regarding certain topics. This places the burden of communication on graduate students. We recommend that a working group undertake updating this resource to explicitly encourage networked mentoring or multiple mentors, compressing it to encourage broader implementation, and disseminating it to faculty as well as graduate students.

For students in coursework, many of their progress expectations will be clearly articulated in course syllabi or exam timelines, but students and faculty should nevertheless create individual mentoring plans to address milestones in professionalization and career preparation. For students who have completed their coursework, a regular articulation of goals, timelines, and milestones is more crucial. Indeed, it is only on the basis of clearly articulated goals that faculty can assess a student's progress and assign a grade of S or U for Thesis and Dissertation Research credits. Each program ought to require a regular progress/mentoring plan from each student, producing the basis on which annual assessments and feedback will be made. If it has not already done so, each program should also consider drafting a milestone chart that includes the deadlines and appropriate timeframes in the areas of coursework, other degree progress (e.g., oral exams, dissertation writing, etc.), and professionalization (e.g., conference presentations, publications, fellowship applications, etc.). Procedures for the mentoring plans and annual student feedback should be outlined in each department's Graduate Student Handbook.

**Responsible Parties.** Once the working group establishes a set of best practices and frameworks for implementation, program leaders (i.e., Chairs and DGSs) would be the primary responsible parties for the implementation of this policy, in consultation with the Graduate School and the Dean's office in each School or College.

**Assessment.** The Graduate School should review each programs' documentation in their Graduate Student Handbook and conduct periodic assessment of the implementation of the mentoring and feedback practices for each program under their purview.

---

### **Recommendation 6**

Graduate programs craft and adopt anti-bullying statements.

---

**Rationale.** Academic bullying is a problem on campuses across the country. Notre Dame is no exception, as indicated in the 2019 Graduate Life Survey, where 15% of participants indicated that they have experienced a conflict at the University that affected their academic progress, and anecdotally at the focus groups held by the Task Forces. The rationale for this recommendation is to encourage graduate programs to declare, as a matter of written policy, that bullying of graduate students is unacceptable and not tolerated. These statements would articulate programs' commitment to civil and professional treatment of graduate students at all times; they would also create a basis for standards of conduct.

"Bullying" is [defined by the National Academy of Sciences](#) as "unwelcome, aggressive behavior involving the use of influence, threat, intimidation, or coercion to dominate others in the

professional environment.” As the Graduate School at Virginia Tech University [notes](#), bullying may take place in many spaces throughout the University, such as the classroom, laboratory, in group meetings or one-one-one interactions, or online.

Such behavior on the part of faculty, staff, or other persons in positions of power relative to graduate students creates an unacceptable impediment to graduate students’ pursuit of intellectual, academic, and professional development. In addition, bullying is antithetical to the University’s [“Spirit of Inclusion,”](#) animated by the University’s Catholic mission, which holds that all members of the University community should strive “to consciously create an environment of mutual respect, hospitality and warmth in which ... all may flourish.”

**Framework.** Programs should create clear, unambiguous anti-bullying statements that recognize the need for civil and professional treatment of graduate students by persons in positions of power, both in the classroom and beyond. This process might be collaborative, involving the entire faculty in a given program, or restricted to specific leaders (e.g., Chairs and DGSs). In either case, we strongly recommend that programs actively engage graduate students in this process. Programs should also consult with representatives from the Graduate School, and the Deans of the various Colleges and Schools, when drafting their policies.

Once finalized, it is imperative that program leaders distribute their anti-bullying policy to all faculty, staff, and graduate students in the program. In addition, faculty handbooks and graduate studies guides should be updated to include the new anti-bullying policy. Distribution and inclusion in program policy documents ensures two-way accountability: faculty and staff should understand their responsibilities, and graduate students should understand their rights.

**Responsible parties.** Program leaders (e.g., Chairs and DGSs) would be the primary responsible parties for the implementation of this policy, in consultation with the Graduate School and the Dean’s office in each School or College.

**Assessment.** The Dean’s office of each School or College should review guideline documents from each graduate program under their purview to ensure the implementation of this recommendation as well as periodic reviews to update the documents as necessary.

---

### Recommendation 7

Create a structure for reporting mistreatment that exists independent of academic programs.

---

**Rationale.** The rationale for this recommendation is to diversify the ways students are able to report issues, including but not limited to forms of bullying and harassment. Graduate students represent a population vulnerable to exploitation due to their reliance on, in most cases, a single highly specialized faculty advisor who determines a student’s career trajectory. This creates a large power differential, where the faculty advisor can, for example, withhold funding or networking opportunities if the student does not comply with their expectations. Additionally, if bullying or harassment occurs and a graduate student would like to file a formal report, the

graduate student may not be able to while also maintaining anonymity -- graduate students are often engaged in and with communities outside of campus (e.g. greater South Bend community, remote field work) that lead to unique encounters with other campus members that may compromise the reporter's anonymity.

The purpose of an independent reporting structure is to ensure students have more agency in the reporting process by providing resources from a neutral source outside of formal academic structures. In particular, diversifying student access to resources may empower students to seek more formal assistance in the future and reduce power imbalances. Presently, students may (1) report instances to a faculty member within their department who has been designated as the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), (2) report to the Graduate School Ombudsperson, or (3) report incidents at [speakup.nd.edu](http://speakup.nd.edu). None of these frameworks guarantee complete anonymity for the reporter, as all of these routes are attached to the academic decision-making process. Situating new reporting structures outside of academic departments may reduce concerns over conflicts of interest and immediate repercussions associated with reporting. This recommendation will compel the University to think about mechanisms to reduce unequal power dynamics that may otherwise remain unreported. In addition, the new reporting structures should include regular feedback on the process and outcomes to the reporter.

**Framework.** The implementation of this proposed recommendation will (A) require updating existing reporting structures, (B) designate new ombudsperson(s) outside of the academic framework, and (C) reevaluate reporting structures with the consideration of the unique needs of graduate students.

- A. *Updating existing reporting structures:* Many existing reporting structures focus explicitly on a Title IX context and should thus be expanded to include incidents such as bullying and harassment. Broadening the scope of reporting structures may best be accomplished by defining what is acceptable behavior in a best practices document available to students and faculty alike. Existing reporting structures also do not explicitly guarantee anonymity, and students may refrain from disclosing incidents due to fear of retaliation, escalation, or isolation. Steps should be taken to make the process as anonymous yet empowering as possible. This may include allowing multiple people to report together, aggregating reports through surveys, and publicizing the campus' participation in [Project Callisto](#).
- B. *Designating new ombudsperson(s):* Currently, the University has two ombudspersons who work outside of academic decision-making processes, but both ombudspersons are only equipped to handle sexual or discriminatory harassment related allegations. By designating more ombudspersons at the University level, students may be more empowered to seek out resources without fear of escalation. This may help mitigate problems before they become irreparably toxic. In order to increase awareness, ombudspersons should be publicized by each program and college. In the interest of reducing conflicts of interest and working synergistically with current reporting

mechanisms, new ombudspersons should not be faculty with the potential of having their own students.

- C. *Reevaluating reporting structures with the consideration of the unique needs of graduate students in mind:* Currently, all employees of the University, outside of specific clergy and counseling staff, are Mandatory Reporters. This requires reporting of all incidents of sexual misconduct, assault, dating, or domestic violence to the Deputy Title IX Coordinator. Automatic reporting of all incidents may affect graduate students in unique ways relative to undergraduate students - graduate students may be engaged in activities off campus (e.g., remote field work) that are unique to them and easily identifiable based on location. Also, the graduate student experience is closely tied to particular faculty members and academic peers. Currently, the formal reporting process fractures these ties in ways that may make successfully completing the graduate degree almost impossible. Despite a [clear non-retaliation](#) policy, the current process compromises much of the hope students may have to remain anonymous for fear of repercussions or retaliation. And waiting to report until a student is outside of this vulnerable period professionally may open other students up to harassment in the intervening time.

The intended outcome of this change is to reduce one aspect of an unequal power dynamic by empowering the more vulnerable party to seek out resources and report toxic relationships. These changes in reporting structures should be done in conjunction with training for faculty advisors about quality mentoring and mediation skills (Recommendation 11).

**Responsible parties.** Presently, bullying and harassment is primarily handled by each Department, the Graduate School, and the Office of the Provost, while Title IX related harassment is handled by the Office of Community Standards and the Office of Institutional Equity. If this recommendation is adopted, the Graduate School will be responsible for broadening the scope of current reporting structures. However, ultimately, it will be the responsibility of the Provost and the College Deans to ensure compliance and empower graduate students to report toxic environments.

**Assessment.** The best metrics to assess this recommendation is aggregate survey data showing that students understand their rights and the reporting process, as well as increased utilization of the new report frameworks. The latter could be quantified through the number of unique interactions the ombudsperson(s) has and the number of reports filed.

---

### Recommendation 8

Provide temporary financial support to graduate students who need to change advisors due to mistreatment.

---

**Rationale.** Financial dependence on the primary advisor can make it difficult for a student to exit that relationship when warranted. The reliance on the advisor for financial support is particularly pertinent in science and engineering, where many students are supported by external grants and contracts

controlled by faculty advisors. This financial dependence is further linked with students' status at the University, such that changing advisors imperils medical and other benefits and the visa status of international students. In the cross-disciplinary focus groups held by the Task Forces, graduate students expressed reluctance to report mistreatment or pursue a change in advisor due to fear of loss of these statuses, as well as retaliation in general. Moreover, attempting to change advisors was widely perceived to be prohibitively risky. Students also reported a lack of transparency regarding program policies concerning requests to change advisors; some believed that there is no mechanism at all for doing so. This recommendation aims to provide a partial remedy to the mistreated graduate student who wishes to continue in their current graduate program but to leave their primary advising relationship.

**Framework.** We recommend that centralized resources be available within each College to provide temporary financial support for students who wish to change advisors. The resources would be available to students who are supported through a funding mechanism that will terminate if they sever the relationship with their current advisor. Each College may wish to adopt policies relating to eligibility and the duration of the provisional funding. We suggest several general principles for these policies:

1. Funding should be available for a reasonable period of time for a student to identify a new advisor and associated financial support.
2. Eligibility policies should respect that students have a fundamental right to change advisors without stigma.
3. Those who might have the authority to certify eligibility should be external to the program of the student. For example, the relevant Dean or Associate Dean or perhaps an *ad hoc* committee of DGSs from other programs.

In addition to the centralized financial support, we strongly urge programs to adopt and promote clear policies that students may change advisors. Furthermore, whenever possible, programs should consider mitigation strategies to minimize the time-to-degree disruption that often results from changing advisors.

**Responsible parties.** The primarily responsible party is the Colleges who will make the provisional funding available and will establish eligibility policies and the duration of the financial support. However, implementation will require a close partnership between Colleges and their individual graduate programs. The Graduate School can play a role by serving as a central repository of best practices for programs and Colleges.

**Assessment.** An important metric for the success of this recommendation is a universal recognition by graduate students that there is a mechanism to change advisors with an appropriate degree of financial security. This recognition can be assessed in the biennial Graduate Student Life survey (Recommendation 13). Statistics for how frequently the bridge funding is utilized should be maintained by the Colleges and reported to the Graduate School.

---

## Recommendation 9

### Training for Directors of Graduate Studies (DGSs).

---

**Rationale.** DGSs play a crucial role in managing graduate programs. In many departments, the DGS shoulders a significant administrative burden, second only to the department Chair. The duties often include recruiting new graduate students, orienting new students, pairing students with advisors, assigning thesis committees, enforcing academic standards and managing the graduate curriculum, distributing teaching assistant assignments, and ensuring that students are funded. Moreover, DGSs are often the first point-of-contact when a graduate student is facing a personal challenge (e.g., needs a medical leave) or has an interpersonal conflict with another student or faculty member, including their advisor. Despite the multifaceted duties of the DGS, at present, training is minimal, focusing primarily on procedural aspects of the position (e.g., use of Slate, etc.) and *ad hoc*. The rationale for this recommendation is that appropriate training can clarify and strengthen the student advocate responsibility of the DGS and promote best practice sharing.

**Framework.** DGSs are in a position that interfaces between graduate students, faculty, programs, and the Graduate School. Ideally, the DGS is a first point-of-contact when a graduate student has a problem and is thus well-positioned to impact well-being positively and to curtail bullying. However, the Task Forces (including the members who are current and ex-DGSs) recognize that DGSs are not always equipped with the full range of skills necessary to manage their programs while simultaneously serving as a powerful advocate for the students. Thus, we recommend that the Graduate School initiate mandatory training for new DGSs and optional continuing training for existing DGSs. Several topics that might be included in the training include:

- Mental health awareness
- Inclusive practices
- Health and wellness resources
- Conflict resolution
- Difficult conversations

The training sessions will have the important ancillary benefit of strengthening the network between DGSs. For example, panels of more experienced DGSs can share best practices with new DGSs. Moreover, because many DGSs go on to serve in higher administrative positions (e.g., department Chairs, Associate Deans, etc.), the training can be viewed as a valuable opportunity to develop future leaders at the University.

**Responsible parties.** Implementing this recommendation will fall upon the Graduate School. However, for maximum effectiveness and impact, programs and DGSs themselves will need to buy-in to both new DGS training, as well as continuing training.

**Assessment.** The perceived quality of the training can be assessed through surveys of the participants. Future iterations of the Graduate Life survey could include questions about the effectiveness of their DGS and whether students perceive their DGS as an advocate (Recommendation 13).

---

### **Recommendation 10**

Include graduate student mentoring as a component of Academic Program Reviews (APRs)

---

**Rationale.** The rationale for this recommendation is to create accountability for Departments to maintain high standards for graduate student mentoring. The purpose of APRs is to ensure the quality of Departments by providing a regular opportunity for internal reflection and future planning. An essential aspect of the APR process is a comprehensive self-study. In particular, the self-study document offers a framework for the review of the Department by its external advisors, its College, and the Office of the Provost. Presently, the Department Self-Study Guidelines call for an outline of the strengths and weaknesses of the Department's graduate program(s) with suggestions to focus on curriculum, admission selectivity and yield, attrition, time to degree, and placement. By including graduate student mentoring as an explicit expectation in the self-study document, Departments will be held accountable for the quality of their mentoring. This recommendation will compel Departments to think about mechanisms to develop and assess their faculty with respect to mentoring.

**Framework.** The implementation of this proposed recommendation is simple: change the [Department Self-Study Guidelines](#) to explicitly require Departments to include an analysis of graduate student mentoring in their self-assessment during the APR process. The intended outcome of this change is to compel Departments to study the quality of their graduate student mentoring during the APR process, which will then be reviewed by their external advisors, College Dean, and the Office of the Provost, thus providing several layers of accountability.

Although the Task Force realizes that each Department approaches graduate education differently, there are several questions that Departments may want to consider in their self-study of graduate student mentoring:

- What mechanisms are in place for how students receive feedback about their progress and performance? How regular is the feedback?
- On how many graduate student committees does each faculty member serve?
- How is compliance for mandatory mentoring plans maintained (Recommendation 5)?
- What percentage of the Department's Tenured and Tenure-Track faculty are Graduate Faculty designates (Recommendation 12)?
- Has the Department hosted any mentoring training or workshops for its faculty (Recommendation 11)?

Departments may also choose to partner with the Office of Strategic Planning and Institution Research (OSPIR) to anonymously survey their current students and alumni to learn about their mentoring experiences.

**Responsible parties.** APRs are performed every seven years by Departments in coordination with their College Dean and the Office of the Provost. The Graduate School provides data and support to assist in the evaluation of graduate programs. If this recommendation is adopted, Departments will be responsible for including graduate student mentoring as a component of their self-study. However, ultimately, it will be the responsibility of the Provost and the College Deans to ensure compliance and to demonstrate the value of graduate student mentoring as an integral component of the APR process.

**Assessment.** The best metric to assess this recommendation is the quality and depth of the graduate student mentoring component of APR self-studies and how this then informs the review of graduate programs. However, the self-study documents are not made public, so it will fall upon the Provost, College Deans, and the Dean of the Graduate School to assess whether the APR process is meaningfully changed and Departments are held more accountable for the quality of their graduate student mentoring.

---

#### **Recommendation 11**

Include mentoring of graduate students as a formal component in the evaluation of faculty for reappointment, promotion, and tenure.

---

**Rationale.** Currently, the Provost's guidelines on the reappointment, promotion, and tenure (RPT) for Tenured and Tenure-Track faculty evaluate candidates across three domains, research, teaching, and service, requiring each domain to be addressed by the candidate's professional statement and by individual departmental reports and other supporting documentation. While both the teaching component of the candidate's professional statement and the department's report should include a discussion of mentoring graduate students, this is primarily focused on the outcomes of the mentoring; the [guidelines](#) specifically state that the teaching report "should include evidence of impact, e.g., students' co-authorship on publications, students' presentations at national meetings, and successful placement of students advised by the candidate." While focusing on the outcomes is one measure of mentoring, it does not necessarily or adequately address the holistic mentoring of the student and specifically, the nature of the advisor/advisee relationship fostered by the candidate. In fact, by focusing on outcomes, the potential exists that the guidelines open the door for bullying or abusive behavior by the candidate in order to achieve greater outcomes (e.g., multiple co-authored publications). Requiring a more holistic reflection on their mentoring by the candidate and evaluation by the department of the mentoring would not only send a powerful message to our graduate students that we value the advisor-advisee relationship but also provide a pertinent incentive for the candidate to engage in appropriate mentoring behavior. Finally, including this aspect in the evaluation of faculty reflects that Notre Dame values faculty

that embrace and are “[committed to the flourishing of the whole person](#),” including our graduate students.

**Framework.** The implementation of this recommendation will be moderately complex and will require detailed study beyond the scope of these Task Forces to ensure it will have the desired impact. It will require that the RPT guide for tenured and tenure-track faculty be updated to include a modification on mentoring but will also require that all department standards are updated to reflect this requirement and their own expectations for positive mentoring behavior oriented toward student outcomes.

The nature of this implementation could take several forms. Within the existing RPT framework, the guidelines could be amended to reflect that holistic evaluation of mentoring is required beyond its appraisal simply as an additional contribution to teaching with a focus on outcomes. As such, the candidate would be encouraged to discuss their mentoring philosophy and style in their personal statement under teaching. Alternatively, an additional section could be required, likely no more than a page, in the candidate’s personal statement to specifically address mentoring philosophy, style, and their outcomes. Similarly a separate report on mentoring by the Department could also be required.

The Task Forces recognize that how mentoring should be evaluated is difficult to define, but consistent with how teaching is currently appraised, the Task Force believes that the evaluation should be comprehensive. Quantitative outcomes such as those already stated as evidence of impact should remain, but additional qualitative evaluation should be required. This could be individual interviews with students under the guidance of the candidate, anonymous surveys of the same students, or other modes of observation and reflection, such as students switching to a new advisor. For example, [Stanford University](#) and [Case Western Reserve University](#) both require evaluative letters from students and mentees as a part of their promotion packages. The Task Forces also recognize that successful mentoring focused on the flourishing of the whole person can be achieved in a variety of ways and does not intend to dictate specific mentoring styles or practices. However, the Task Forces do recommend that there be an explicit mention in the RPT guidelines (and Department standards) that the nature (as opposed to style) of the candidate’s mentoring is evaluated and that bullying or abusive behavior is included in that evaluation.

In order to ensure that faculty seeking tenure and promotion are given the resources to understand expectations and develop positive mentoring practices, the Task Forces recommend the establishment of further mentoring and leadership training for faculty, perhaps under the auspices of ND Learning and the Kaneb Center. These offerings could be tied to the mentoring and leadership training we recommend as an aspect of Graduate Faculty designation (Recommendation 12).

**Responsible parties.** The Office of the Provost in collaboration with the Deans’ Council will be responsible for establishing and implementing the modifications to the RPT guidelines.

Individual Departments will then be responsible for modifying their own standards to reflect how their internal expectations for mentoring and how they are evaluated. As the various Departments, Schools, and Colleges across the University necessarily have different types of graduate student mentoring relationships with faculty, there cannot be a single, universal standard, in the same way that other standards (e.g., research) are Department-specific. Hence, this implementation will need to be coordinated by the Office of the Provost but in close conjunction with the Deans' Council, the Graduate School, and the Faculty Senate. Once a part of the RPT guidelines, University-wide implementation will occur as regular RPT practices. The Office of the Provost will be responsible for ensuring that ND Learning has the resources to expand their offerings to support faculty training.

**Assessment.** The ombudsperson of the Graduate School and the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs both track data on complaints against faculty members. The effects will likely be slow as this recommendation will not affect faculty currently at the level of full professor, but the success of this initiative will be measured by a longitudinal reduction in the number of incidents. Moreover, by implementing mentoring as an explicit part of the RPT evaluation, Notre Dame will achieve a truer expression of the culture to which it aspires in its mission.

---

### Recommendation 12

Establish a term-limited and renewable Graduate Faculty designation that includes mentoring evaluations and training as a prerequisite for appointment and renewal.

---

**Rationale.** Including evaluations of mentoring practices and treatment of graduate students as part of hiring, tenure, and promotion only impacts faculty at three or four points in their career at Notre Dame and does not provide a mechanism for ensuring continued good practices once one has achieved the status of full professor. In order to ensure that faculty continue to strive to be good mentors, we recommend that each college establishes a procedure for approving faculty to mentor and work with graduate students through a Graduate Faculty designation, that would be term-limited and renewable. Requiring renewal provides the University with an opportunity to periodically review a faculty member's mentoring of graduate students and a mechanism to protect students without depending on student complaints to initiate the process. It also ensures that faculty continue to receive the mentoring training that we have recommended be made available as part of Recommendation 11. Finally, making interaction with graduate students a privilege to be earned rather than a right to be lost will hopefully cause a shift in attitude towards the value of good mentoring.

**Framework.** The implementation of this recommendation will be complex and will require detailed study beyond the scope of the Task Force to ensure it will have the desired impact without overburdening faculty, Departments, and Colleges. It should be coordinated by a centralized body (e.g., the Office of the Provost in conjunction with the Graduate School) to ensure a certain degree of uniformity in the renewal cycles, for example. However, we recommend that individual Colleges have a degree of autonomy in determining the criteria for obtaining and renewing this status since graduate student labor affects faculty work in very

different ways in different disciplines: in the humanities, for example, graduate student work does not usually support or further faculty research and mistreatment thus often takes the form of neglect. In contrast, faculty in the sciences and engineering often rely on the labor of graduate students in labs, making exploitation and over-work more common.

We recommend that the standard university-wide components of this process include the following:

- Medium-length terms of appointment (3-5 years). Such a timeframe would mean that the frequency of required training is not too onerous, yet each faculty member would be evaluated for status renewal at some point during any given graduate student's time at Notre Dame.
- Required mentoring and leadership training upon first appointment and before or upon every status renewal. Periodic leadership training for all management personnel is standard in the business world and, indeed, the Graduate Studies and Research Advisory Council was shocked to discover that faculty members who oversee subordinates of any kind are not required to fulfill such periodic training. As with the recommended DGS training, this can also be seen as an opportunity to groom faculty for administrative positions and to create a larger pool of faculty prepared to participate in administration and governance.

Within this framework, Colleges should have the discretion to shape the Graduate Faculty designation to suit the practices of their disciplines. It will be important to consider issues such as:

- How will mentoring be assessed? Observations? Mentoring evaluations similar to CIFs?
- How will Graduate Faculty designation (e.g., a faculty member's availability to direct dissertations) be communicated to current and prospective students?
- Can faculty who lose their Graduate Faculty designation still co-advise or be readers on oral candidacy exam or dissertation committees?
- How does designating such a status affect Research Faculty, Concurrent Faculty, Adjunct Faculty, or other faculty positions?

Graduate Faculty designation should be developed concurrently with the measure to include mentoring evaluations as part of tenure and promotion (Recommendation 11). On the one hand, the mentoring training and support that we recommend there can be developed together with the periodic leadership training we recommend here. In the College of Arts and Letters, for example, many faculty in departments that do not have graduate programs (e.g., the Program of Liberal Studies) teach and mentor graduate students in other departments. Graduate Faculty designation must be available to such faculty and attainment of this status might trigger graduate mentoring evaluations as part of their reappointment, tenure, and promotion cases. In addition, Graduate Faculty designation should be open to Teaching Faculty, Research Faculty,

Library Faculty, etc., since under the Academic Code of the Graduate School these faculty are eligible to serve on dissertation committees.

**Responsible parties.** The Office of the Provost in collaboration with the Graduate School will be responsible for developing a University-wide framework. The College Deans will then be responsible for tailoring the privileges and responsibilities of Graduate Faculty designates to the disciplinary practices of their departments. Each Dean's Office will also be responsible for evaluating, appointing, and renewing faculty to this designation. These processes may perhaps fall under the purview of an appropriate Associate Dean.

**Assessment.** The ombudsperson of the Graduate School and the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs both track data on complaints against faculty members. The effects will likely be slow, but the success of this initiative will be measured by a reduction in the number of incidents. Also, the unit responsible for approving the Graduate Faculty designation will track compliance with respect to completing the appropriate requirements.

---

### **Recommendation 13**

New Graduate Student Life survey questions.

---

**Rationale.** Data-informed decisions are crucial for good stewardship, and access to the right kind of data is crucial for good decision-making. Analysis of the 2019 Graduate Student Life Survey has been instrumental in shaping many of the recommendations in this report. However, several key questions are unanswered because they were not included in the survey. Furthermore, the size and complexity of the 2019 instrument makes analysis difficult and time-consuming, and makes sharing of data with campus partners laborious and awkward. Revising the survey questions to gather more specific well-being data and streamlining the instrument for more efficient analysis and distribution will provide better assessment tools for better decision-making.

**Framework.** Graduate Student Life should convene a working group to review and revise the survey with representation from the Graduate School, the Division of Student Affairs, the McDonald Center for Student Well-Being, the Office of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research, and students and administrators of the four graduate divisions. The tasks of the group will include:

- Establish a timeline for administration and analysis.
- Review all questions to determine which to keep, remove, or edit.
- Create new questions to fill data gaps and to assess many of the recommendations in this report.
- Determine methods and timelines for distribution of data to campus partners.

**Responsible Parties.** Revisions to the Graduate Student Life Survey will be led by the Program Director for Graduate Student Life in consultation with the Graduate School, the Division of Student Affairs, and the Office of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research.

**Assessment.** Metrics for success on this initiative include:

- Compliance with institutional standards of assessment.
- Adherence to established timelines for administration, analysis, and distribution.
- Response and completion rates.
- Use of well-being data in decisions on policy, resources, and programming.

## **5. Acknowledgments**

The Task Forces gratefully acknowledge assistance, feedback, and insights from many individuals and groups, including James Black (Georgia Institute of Technology), Christal Colbert (Officer Assistant to Laura Carlson), Meghan Duffy (University of Michigan), Nicolas Garcia (graduate student in Electrical Engineering), Christine Gebhardt (Assistant Vice President for Student Services), Connor Mullen (Graduate Student Union President), Raghav Suri (University of California at Berkeley), Leah Zimmer (Director, International Student and Scholar Affairs), Deans' Council, Directors of Graduate Studies, Faculty Senate, Graduate Program Coordinators, Graduate School Professional Development Committee, graduate student focus group attendees, Graduate Studies and Research Advisory Council, Healthy Campus Coalition, Provost's Cabinet, and the University Committee on Women Faculty and Students.