

STUDENT AFFAIRS FORUM



Supporting Graduate Students across Student Affairs

Custom Research Brief

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I. Research Methodology

Research Challenge *Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:*

Student Services:

- What types of services and programs are provided to graduate students at other institutions?
- Which student affairs units provide these services and programs for graduate students?
- How do other institutions determine the specific needs of graduate students?
- What services and programs do these student affairs unit offer that are specific to the needs of graduate students?
- How do student affairs units assess the usage and effectiveness of these services and programs?

Social Engagement:

- How do other institutions promote social engagement between graduate students, faculty, and staff from different academic programs?
- What programs and services are offered for graduate students with families on campus?

Student Employment:

- To what extent do student affairs units at other institutions employ graduate students?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of these graduate student employees?
- How do employment units assess the impact of graduate student employees?

Communication and Marketing:

- To what extent are student affairs units involved in graduate student orientation?
- How do institutions educate graduate student on available student services and programs?
- How do institutions communicate offerings to incoming graduate students?

Project Sources

- Education Advisory Board's internal and online research libraries (www.educationadvisoryboard.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)
- University of California-Santa Barbara Grad Post (<http://gradpost.ucsb.edu/>)



Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed graduate life directors, associate deans of students, and directors of specific student affairs units at Association of American Universities public and private institutions:

A Guide to the Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Region	Type	Approximate Enrollment (Undergraduate /Total)	Carnegie Classification
Iowa State University	Midwest (City, Small)	Public	24,000/30,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Michigan State University	Midwest (Rural, Fringe)	Public	37,000/48,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Stanford University	Pacific West (Suburb, Large)	Private	7,000/20,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University of California-Davis (UC-Davis)	Pacific West (Suburb, Small)	Public	25,000/32,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University of California-Santa Barbara (UC-Santa Barbara)	Pacific West (Suburb, Midsize)	Public	19,000/22,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
University of Colorado-Boulder	Mountain West (City, Small)	Public	27,000/33,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech)	South (City, Small)	Public	24,000/31,000	Research Universities (very high research activity)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)



II. Executive Overview

Key Observations

Counseling and career services require graduate-specific administrators to fulfill graduate student demands. For career services, graduate student-specific administrators provide job search strategies for students with master's, doctoral, or advanced degrees in various fields; graduate students also benefit from resume and mock interview workshops specific to non-entry level positions, whereas undergraduate students require general approaches to both. For counseling services, graduate students require psychologists trained to assist high-risk student populations; these psychologists also conduct trainings for faculty and staff on identifying symptoms of depression and suicide, which empowers them to intervene with students of concern and refer them to the counseling center.

Wellness, activity, and academic support units in student affairs require marketing and programmatic adjustments to serve graduate students without requiring specialized staff. As graduate students enroll in institutional health insurance plans at higher rates than undergraduate students, health services administrators must ensure graduate students are familiar with insurance plan specifics, such as family planning services and spousal inclusion; graduate students may also access workers compensation if needed, but most students are unaware of the application processes, which are not communicated to them by supervisors. Student activities and residence life units develop graduate-specific programs to encourage social interaction and provide stress-free living environments; contacts explain while the programs are different, the benefits are similar to those of undergraduate student programming. Writing center administrators host graduate-specific workshops on dissertation writing and thesis defense to support academic development; contacts at several profiled institutions report various academic departments host similar workshops for graduate students.

Graduate student housing and programming opportunities increase cross-discipline social interaction as well as decrease stress among graduate students. Contacts at institutions with graduate-specific housing report increased rates of involvement with community programming and improved retention rates, similar to trends among undergraduate students who live in residence halls. Graduate-specific programming ranges from small, department-to-department social mixers to large-scale events hosted by undergraduate and graduate student organizations. These events encourage students to separate academic work from social events, which contacts explain reduces stress among graduate students and creates healthier working environments among students from all academic disciplines.

Most student affairs units employ graduate student-assistants; responsibilities for assistants vary by unit and individual students' academic focuses. For example, graduate student-assistants in the student activities office maintain a student affairs focus, develop programs with student organizations, and are assessed by program attendance and connection to the institution's mission. Graduate student-assistants working in the counseling center maintain an academic focus and typically study psychology, social work, or counseling; these student-assistants conduct research through the center on topics such as drug use among undergraduates and are assessed by research quality, strength of conclusions, and potential for publication.



Student-delivered service promotions are more successful than administrative-driven communications regarding graduate student services, regardless of delivery method.

Graduate students respond to surveys, attend events, and read articles more frequently when suggested by fellow students as opposed to unit directors. Contacts at most institutions explain most graduate student service marketing resembles undergraduate student marketing, such as fliers in student centers, and is not personalized for a graduate student audience. To address this, several institutions maintain blog pages that provide information specific to graduate students, such as research grant opportunities and graduate student programs.

Student service providers benefit from addressing all graduate students at institution-wide orientation events; for presentations to discipline-specific orientation events, service providers must prioritize essential services and how to connect to services through various academic departments. Contacts at profiled institutions with all-graduate-student orientation events encourage service providers to incorporate diverse media into presentations, such as videos, rather than PowerPoint slideshows as students connect better to information that does not resemble an academic lecture. Most graduate academic departments host individual orientation events, regardless of whether or not graduate students attend an institution-wide orientation. Service providers at academic-specific orientation events should include information on how graduate students can connect to various services through the academic department, such as consulting with the graduate studies office psychologist to determine which counselor to contact at the campus counseling center.

III. Student Service Providers

Graduate-Specific Administrators

Designate Graduate-Specific Administrators for Counseling and Career Services

Contacts at all profiled institutions explain graduate students require similar student services to undergraduate students but with more information and over a longer period of time. This requires certain student affairs units to employ specific personal to identify and fulfill the demands of graduate students.

Graduate-Specific Administrators in Student Affairs Units

Problem	Unit	
<p>“Graduate students require more frequent and more private access to psychological support than undergraduate students.”</p>	<p>Counseling Services <i>(Employs graduate student-specific counselors who specializes in long-term treatment)</i></p>	<p>UC-Davis employs several graduate student-specific counselors within the counseling center. The state of California also provides funding to house an additional counselor in the graduate studies office to conduct initial intakes and refer students to the counseling center. This counselor also trains faculty and staff to identify symptoms of depression and suicide in graduate students.</p>
<p>“Graduate students require more in-depth job search strategies and interview preparation skills than undergraduate students.”</p>	<p>Career Services <i>(Employs graduate student-specific career guidance administrators that specialize in job identification for master’s degree, doctoral, or post-doctoral students)</i></p>	<p>Virginia Tech employs several graduate student-specific career counselors within the career center. These administrators host resume reviews and mock interview sessions in the graduate student center, separate from undergraduate students, to focus on graduate student-specific needs, such as emphasis on leadership and management potential during interviews.</p>

Contacts explain graduate students appreciate the privacy offered by the counselor in the graduate studies office and attend regular sessions there rather than at the counseling center, where they may encounter other students.

Other Relevant Graduate Services *Revamp Other Units to Accommodate Graduate Student Needs*

Most graduate student service providers do not require specific personnel to meet graduate student needs, but each unit requires adjustments to serve the unique demands of graduate students.

Graduate Student Services in Other Student Affairs Units

The Director of Disabilities Services at **Michigan State University** reports to the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies, the Dean of Graduate Studies, and the Vice President of Student Affairs. This balance ensures that the office supports students academically as well as in non-academic ventures, such as employment or residence life.

Category	Unit
Wellness Units	<p>Disabilities Services <i>(Graduate students require assistance with both academic and employer accommodations)</i></p> <p>Disabilities service administrators at Michigan State University provide students with a memo that introduces professors to the student’s unique accommodation requests. These briefs also detail the university’s mission of cultivating an ability-aware community in which all students have equal opportunity to learn and grow. Contacts explain the office also prepares students to discuss their accommodations with employers, which can be difficult for job-seeking students.</p>
	<p>Health Services <i>(Graduate students require in-depth information on insurance options, access to insurance for partners, and workers’ compensation packages)</i></p> <p>Graduate students at the University of Colorado-Boulder serve on a Student Health Board that discusses insurance plan costs, considers coverage options, and communicates insurance deadlines and decisions to students. Contacts explain graduate students seek out information on student insurance but are generally unaware of workers’ compensation structures, which graduate assistants and teaching assistants can access if needed; health center administrators rely on the Student Health Board to communicate these options to students.</p>



Category	Unit	
Programming Units	Student Activities <i>(Graduate student programming increases social interaction, especially across academic disciplines)</i>	Contacts at both Iowa State University and Stanford University report increases in graduate student social interaction through exclusive graduate student programming. Stanford's Graduate Student Programming Board hosts both small- and large-scale events that range from happy hour socials to big-name comedians and concerts. Iowa State allocates portions of the student activity fee to graduate student organizations for similar programming, which encourages social interaction across academic disciplines.
	Residence Life <i>(Graduate students require less residential programming but more access to services than undergraduate students)</i>	Both Stanford University and Virginia Tech maintain graduate student exclusive housing. To support these students, both institutions offer graduate residential programming for student communities and families to encourage social interaction and academic support. Contacts at both institutions report positive changes in student mental health and academic success of graduate students living in university-sponsored housing.
Academic Support Units	Writing Center <i>(Graduate students require training in publication writing, which differs from the essay writing programs for undergraduate students)</i>	Writing center administrators at Iowa State University held thesis, dissertation, and publication workshops for graduate students for several years; contacts report the graduate studies department has taken over these workshops. Contacts explain the workshops were specific to the types of writing graduate students complete, such as journal articles, and separate from undergraduate writing workshops.
	Multicultural Affairs <i>(Graduate students seek out financial support from multicultural affairs)</i>	The multicultural affairs office at Iowa State University provides academic scholarships for minority graduate students with assistantship positions to cover their remaining tuition balance. Contacts report these scholarships, along with a three-way mentoring program for doctoral minority students, has increased retention and completion rates among these student populations.

Student success administrators at **Iowa State University** surveyed graduate minority students three years after graduation seeking recommendations to improve student services. Both the multicultural affairs scholarships and the three-way mentoring program were developed in response to survey results.

IV. Social Engagement

Engagement Initiatives *House Graduate Students in Close Proximity to Each Other, Resources*

Contacts at **Stanford University** and **Virginia Tech** boast the key to graduate student social interaction is graduate-specific housing; 54 percent of graduate students at Stanford and approximately five to ten percent of graduate students at Virginia Tech live in university-affiliated housing. These facilities are located on or near graduate student centers, which offer similar services to campus student unions but are smaller and targeted toward serving graduate student needs. Contacts observe proximity to other graduate students and easy access to various services increases graduate student social interaction, especially across academic disciplines as housing is not divided by academic concentration.

Graduate Student Center and Housing Services

Upper Floors

(Functions similar to undergraduate student residence halls but with less staff)

Services include:

- Single, double, and apartment-style layout options
- Study lounges on each or every other floor
- Laundry facilities in each building
- Secure access and restricted entry after hours
- Accommodations for couples and families
- Community-specific programming

Ground Floor

(Functions similar to a student union but smaller)

Services include:

- Quiet study spaces
- Dining and café options separate from undergraduate dining halls
- Graduate-specific programming spaces
- Computer, printer, and IT support services
- Graduate student specific career services, counseling services, academic advising, and library services office hours

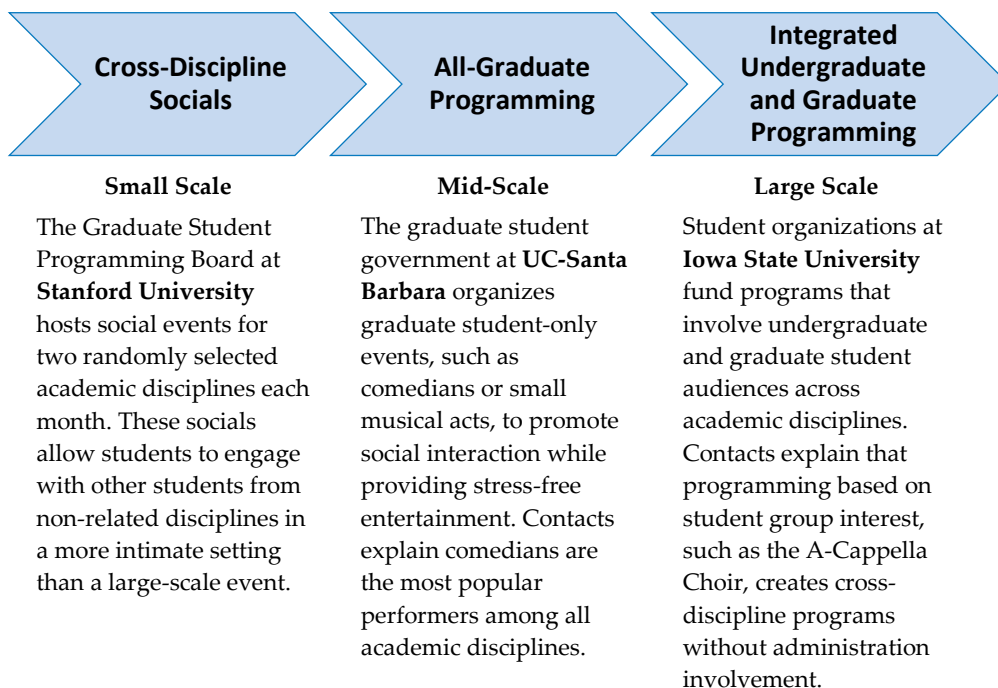
Additional Benefits to Graduate Student Housing Initiatives

Contacts at **Stanford University** and **Virginia Tech** explain graduate student housing is a relatively new tool for increasing graduate student engagement with campus resources and that longitudinal assessments of these initiatives are not complete. That said, both contacts report improved GPAs and graduation rates among students in university housing, which reflects similar trends among undergraduate students. Student service providers also report an increase in office visits located in graduate student centers or near graduate student housing, which indicates better communication of services to students living in university-operated residence halls. Lastly, contacts report community associates, similar to residential advisors for undergraduate students, recognize symptoms of depression and suicide in graduate students living in university housing and intervene quicker than fellow students, professors, or coworkers; contacts believe these interventions will lead to less graduate student suicide attempts.

Offer a Variety of Graduate Student Programming Opportunities

Contacts at most profiled institutions explain graduate student programming is a recent phenomenon that increases social engagement and relieves stress in graduate students, similar to the impact programming has with undergraduate students. That said, graduate students interact less with students in other academic disciplines; activities administrators must develop programs that intentionally promote cross-discipline interaction to encourage better work-life balances for graduate students.

Strategies for Increasing Graduate Social Interaction



Considerations for Family Programming

Create Programs to Connect Families and Children

Contacts at all profiled institutions identify family programming as one of the most difficult aspects of graduate student programming as the target audiences are so different from undergraduate students.

Family Programming Suggestions from *Stanford University*

- **Family Community Programing:** Stanford allows families to live in university-operated graduate student housing and employs community programming associates to conduct building-wide programs for families, such as potluck dinners and movie nights. This programming encourages social collaboration between families that emulates a traditional neighborhood community, which contacts explain is an ideal living and learning environment for graduate students. Contacts recognize this does not include all graduate students with families as many still live in off-campus housing and may not participate in other university-sponsored programs or receive information about such programs.
- **Programming for Children:** Stanford also hosts programs for the children of graduate students, faculty, and staff to promote social engagements between parents and children. These events include book drives, athletic competitions, and carnival-style game days for children. Contacts report these events have become more difficult as background checks are required for all university employees interacting with minors, regardless of the minor's relationship to the institution.

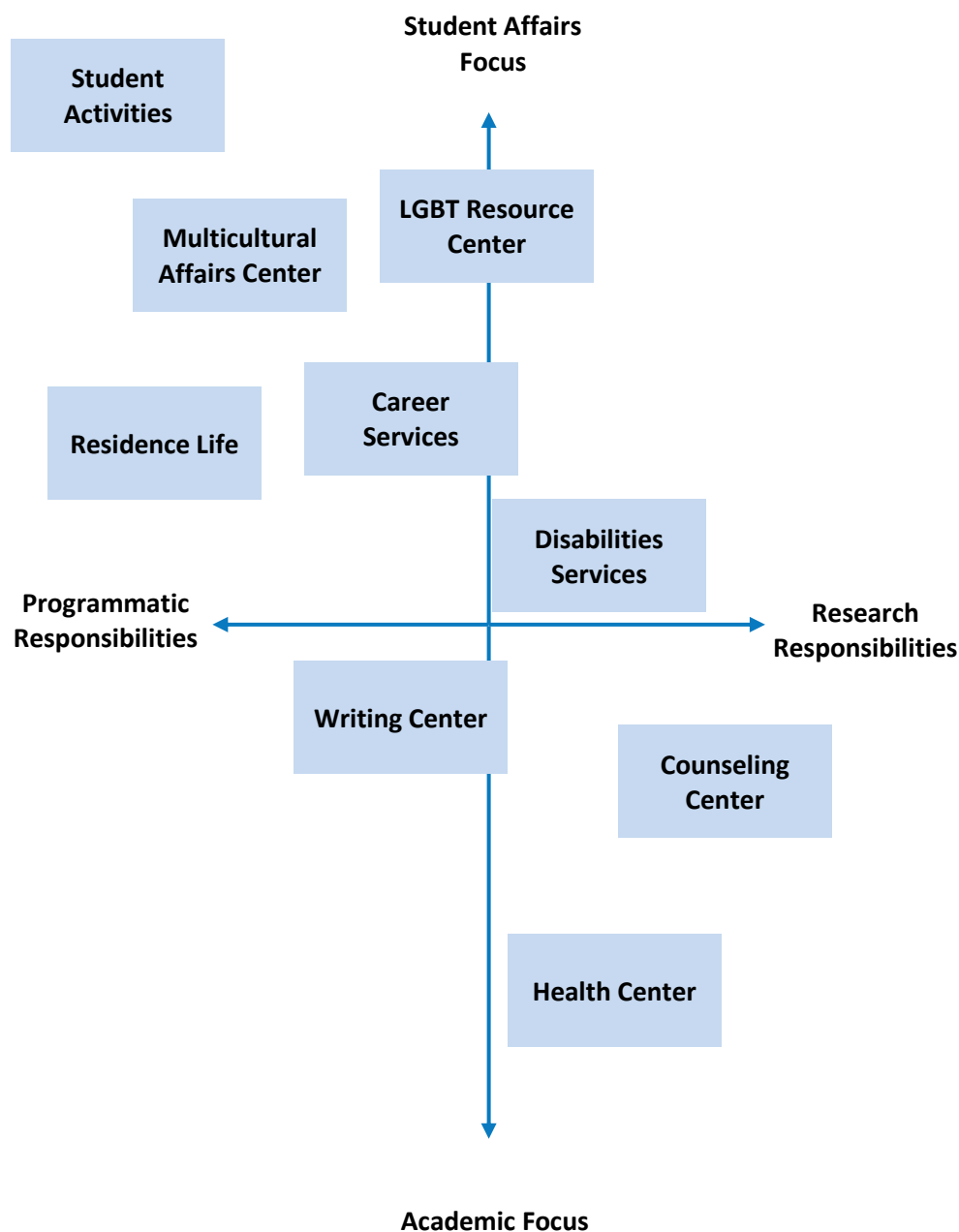
V. Student Affairs Employment

Opportunities for Graduate Students *Hire Graduate Students for Programming and Research Roles*

Graduate Students

Contacts at all profiled institutions report that all student affairs units employ graduate students through assistantship programs, which typically cover portions of tuition costs, housing costs, and include a stipend. Contacts explain graduate students hired typically create their own responsibilities that focus on individual academic interests. That said, many student affairs units employ graduate students with specific programmatic or research responsibilities, as illustrated in the graphic below.

Graduate Student-Employee Focus and Responsibilities



Establish Assessment Standards by Focus of Responsibilities

While graduate student-employees may work in student affairs units, those with research and publication responsibilities are typically assessed by their respective academic departments' standards.

Graduate Student-Employee Assessment Standards

Student Affairs Assessment Standards

- Strength of programming impact
- Student participation in programs
- Engagement of diverse student populations
- Engagement with other office programs
- Connection between programs and institutional mission statements

Academic Affairs Assessment Standards

- Strength of research topic
- Student participation in research topic
- Unit, institutional, and field benefit of research and resolution
- Potential to publish research

VI. Communication and Marketing

Communication Channels *Publicize Services through Student Testimonials*

Contacts at most profiled institutions report students are more likely to pay attention to information shared by fellow graduate students than from student affairs administrators, especially regarding more personal services, such as health or counseling.

Student Perception of Service Promotions

More Likely to Participate in Services Promoted by...

- Student service providers rely on the graduate student government (GSA) to disseminate information regarding student services through announcements during meetings, through email blasts, and social media postings.
- The graduate programming board at **Stanford University** advertises student services during events, such as inviting the writing center staff to present before a movie screening; contacts report increased student participation in services promoted during programming than through campus-wide newsletters.
- Contacts at **UC-Santa Barbara** explain students view blog posts authored by fellow students at a higher rate than posts authored by administrators or faculty members, regardless of post content.

Less Likely to Participate in Services Promoted by...

- Service providers at **UC-Davis** rely on paper fliers to promote services for graduate students, similar to promotions for undergraduate students; contacts report little to no increase in service participation from informational fliers.

Develop One-Stop-Shop Websites for Graduate Student Services

Several profiled institutions maintain graduate student-specific webpages with information on student services, academic support resources, and university-wide events. Graduate student offices typically maintain these webpages which include posts from graduate students about individual services or events that they found beneficial. While contacts at most of these institutions explain the webpage is not updated frequently, the graduate page at **UC-Santa Barbara** is updated several times a week with posts by students and administrators about graduate services, events, academic tools, and general life improvement information.

Graduate Student Webpage at *UC-Santa Barbara*

Top	Funds	Events	Life	Tools	Career	About
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top: Navigates to most viewed posts; currently defaults to homepage. • Funds: Navigates to posts on how graduate students can apply for and receive research funding grants from the university and external organizations. • Events: Includes a daily, weekly, and monthly calendar of events for graduate students, ranging from university holidays to discipline-specific presentations. Also includes posts about academic support workshops, such as humanities writing sessions or workshops on including statistics in social science research papers. • Life: Navigates to posts on balancing work and studies with social activities and promotes non-academic programs, such as massage sessions and athletic events. • Tools: Includes posts about teaching strategies for graduate students, such as creative ideas for interactive discussion sessions, and research approaches, such as keeping a research journal. • Career: Links to posts on job-seeking advice, interviewing strategies, and CV writing approaches. These posts frequently reference articles from other sources, such as CareerBuilder and LinkedIn. • About: Explains the purpose of the website, what information each section includes, and background on the authors. 						
<h4>Graduate Students Author Posts about Student Services</h4> <p>Several graduate student-interns write most posts for the website with the assistance of a full-time journalism administrator, who updates the website and occasionally writes posts as well. Allowing students to author posts about personal experiences with student services provides a better perspective than administrators posting about which services certain units offer. Contacts report increased rates of student participation in programs and services promoted by the website, with students indicating on event surveys that they heard about various opportunities through the website.</p>						
<h4>Web Analytics Detail Graduate Student Needs</h4> <p>The Director of First Year and Graduate Initiatives tracks website traffic and post views through a third-party web analytics platform built into the website. Through these analytics, graduate student-intern authors determine which events, services, and tools are most popular and strive to include similar content in future posts or ask specific service providers to author guest posts. Contacts explain web traffic and searches also demonstrate which services students require more from, such as searches for “graduate student housing” may indicate a growing demand for graduate-specific, university-owned residence halls. The Director then alerts other service providers of high traffic post topics or search results, such as altering counseling services to high click rates on posts about stress reduction.</p>						

Orientation Engagement *Host Institution-Wide Graduate Student Orientation Events*

Several profiled institutions host orientation sessions for all graduate students at the beginning of each semester; contacts explain these events do not replace discipline-specific orientation sessions, which most academic disciplines still host separate from the institution-wide programs for all graduate students. As a result, orientation sessions extended from a single day to multiple days—even a full week at some profiled institutions—which required student service providers presenting at these sessions to balance information and engagement so students will remember which services each unit offers.

Engaging Graduate Students during Institution-Wide Orientation Sessions

Incorporate New Technology

(Encourage video presentations rather than PowerPoint slideshows)

The Director of First Year and Graduate Initiatives at **UC-Santa Barbara** encourages orientation presenters to develop creative models to communicate student services by disabling PowerPoint on presentation computers. Rather than standard slideshows, presenters bring items that represent different offices, such as a stress ball for the counseling center. Contacts explain this element encourages a relaxed approach and is more memorable for students than typical presentations. The Director also used videoconferencing via Skype to enable three former graduate student commencement speakers to discuss what they said at their commencement ceremony and how that message is still important to graduate students.

Emphasize Cross-Discipline Programming

(Establish a social, stress-free expectation for student events)

Orientation administrators at **Stanford University** promote graduate social events during graduate student orientation week. Contacts explain academic department orientation sessions provide time for student services units to present on how students can access various resources, but these sessions are often not engaging for students. During student affairs orientation events, presenters speak about how different offices are involved in social activities for graduate students, such as recreation services sponsoring graduate only athletic tournaments. Contacts explain these separate presentations encourage students to develop academic and life balances early and remain engaged in social events throughout their time on campus.

Promote Services during Discipline-Specific Orientation Sessions

Virginia Tech hosts separate graduate orientation sessions by academic discipline, which requires student service providers to tailor presentations to specific student populations. These presentations include discipline-specific examples of how each service caters to different students, such as career services offering mock case-study interviews for business students. Several student affairs units also promote access in common student spaces, such as when the counseling center's graduate counselor holds office hours in the graduate student center. Although unit directors provide breadth to each presentation, remarks from a graduate student-employee during presentations makes offices more approachable to new students.

Points to Emphasize During Presentations

- Discipline-specific examples
- Primary point of contact for graduates
- Any similar services within academic discipline
- Location and services hours
- Graduate student testimonials

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