

The Director of Graduate Studies Position Description 2024-2025

Summary of Position

The director of graduate studies (DGS) serves as the administrative supervisor and coordinator of graduate studies within a program, overseeing all components of graduate education and promoting academic quality and integrity. The DGS functions as the primary liaison among the graduate faculty, the graduate students, and The Graduate School (TGS). As such, the DGS should be aware of developments in the program that affect the graduate faculty, should be available, present, and responsive to students, and should be familiar with [TGS policies and procedures](#).

The DGS is responsible for fostering the academic strength of the program and supporting the educational and professional success of its graduate students. This charge must be carried out within the guidelines and regulations established by the program, the graduate faculty, and TGS. While the work of a DGS differs across programs depending on the size of the program and its unique administrative practices, described below are duties and responsibilities that most DGSes at Northwestern fulfill.

Duties and Responsibilities

I. Promoting a Strong Graduate Program

General Administration

- Serves as the central source of graduate information within the program; interprets and enforces relevant TGS and program policies.
- Leads a standing committee of representative program faculty who review all substantive matters relevant to the program, and who advise and assist the DGS in decision-making. For example:
 - Conducting strategic and budgetary planning for the graduate program.
 - Ensuring that program policies regarding graduate students are fair, effective, and consistently applied.
 - Leading reviews—at least once per year—of the [program curriculum, course modifications](#), programmatic [learning objectives](#), degree requirements, and opportunities to enhance [professional development](#).
 - Leading annual reviews of graduate student progress (see Student Success, page 3 below).
- Conducts regular meetings with program staff to maintain open communication.
- Attends quarterly DGS meetings held by TGS or sends a designate if needed.
- Participates in TGS Academic Affairs Review on a two-year cycle and follows up on action points as applicable.

Communication and Record-Keeping

- Leads program's orientation for new students.
- Ensures clear communication of degree requirements, milestones, expectations, and probation criteria in an annually updated handbook. Confirms that information aligns

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with TGS policies. Distributes handbook to students and posts to a centrally available repository. Ensures that TGS receives all handbook revisions.

- Keeps abreast of TGS policies and events through regular review of the *TGS Wire* e-newsletter, TGS emails, and the University's [Academic Calendar](#); transmits pertinent information to graduate students and their advisers.
- Provides TGS Academic Affairs with proposals for any [changes to degree requirements](#).
- Maintains current course list including any courses outside the program that are accepted for program requirements.
- Oversees data collection regarding the graduate program's productivity, including student learning outcomes and up-to-date awards and [career outcomes information](#); reviews TGS [program statistics](#) for accuracy.

II. Supporting Graduate Student Success

Recruitment¹

- Employs strategies to recruit a diverse cohort of talented students, for example, by following up with students who have expressed interest in the program in a timely manner, producing printed and/or online program content, maintaining an up-to-date, clear, and comprehensive website, contacting colleagues at peer and feeder institutions to inquire about potential applicants, and liaising with [TGS's Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#).
- Serves as contact for prospective students, answering inquiries regarding the graduate program and ensuring that appropriate informational material is readily available. Refers inquiries to specific colleagues as warranted.
- Coordinates recruitment efforts by designating faculty members and students to work with TGS staff to reach out to prospective students and arrange campus visits. Ensures appropriate and up-to-date information and materials are provided to prospective students for recruitment visits.

Application and Admission

- Oversees the graduate student application process, facilitating prompt review of applications and financial awards. For example:
 - Consults [TGS admissions calendar](#) for relevant deadlines.
 - Consults with school/college associate dean about allocation (target yield for each season).
 - Reviews program's offer letter template and TGS Offer Letter Template at the beginning of each admission cycle to ensure that required content is included and that letters will be distributed in a timely manner and according to TGS guidelines. Also ensures that offers are only made after admission decisions are entered in CAESAR/SES.
 - Assigns (or designates an assignee) reviewers for the application files and determines an appropriate review structure via CollegeNet, the TGS admission platform.
 - Collects and reviews admission decisions, verifying that all admits have met TGS or program language proficiency requirements and possess satisfactory test scores, GPA, and research background.
 - Ensures that all admission decisions are rendered in a timely manner and meet TGS deadlines and best practices.
 - Consults TGS before admitting students when the file is atypical, e.g., test scores, GPA, and/or research experience is below typical average.

¹ In some programs, recruitment, application, and admission responsibilities fall under the purview of an Admission Chair and not the DGS.

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- Confirms that the number of offers awarded will yield results within the program's allocation.
- Coordinates nominations for relevant fellowships and awards.
- Archives all offer letters and supplies TGS with copies in PDF format through the mechanism prescribed by the Office of Admission and Recruitment.
- Collaborates with TGS to on-board and manage admission staff, ensuring that admission data are entered correctly, technology is used effectively, and correspondence with applicants is professional and timely.

Student Success

- Oversees program orientation of new graduate students and assists them in their transition to graduate student life.
- Ensures that program mentoring is functioning smoothly, regularly advises newly admitted students in arranging programs of study and monitors their progress quarterly (or more often if warranted).
- Regularly monitors and updates, in partnership with program faculty, the progress of graduate students utilizing the [Graduate Student Tracking System](#) (GSTS), approves student schedules, and ensures that students are aware of program and university requirements.
 - Provides students with [annual written communication](#) informing them of their academic standing.
 - Notifies TGS of satisfactory/unsatisfactory standing (instructions and reminders are provided by TGS Student Services).
- Facilitates provision of academic and professional development support for all graduate students in the program, with the goal of empowering all students to thrive in graduate school and transition into successful careers. Identifies graduate student professional development needs, works with faculty within and across academic programs to provide appropriate support, and notifies students of university-wide academic and professional development programs and services, including those offered by the [Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching](#), the [Office of Fellowships](#), [The Graduate Writing Place](#), and [Northwestern Career Advancement](#). Advocates that students use these resources and engage in professional development planning. Seeks support from TGS's Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Training and Development as needed.
- Addresses student grievances and is available when students are in academic or personal difficulty, updating TGS and other Northwestern services as necessary (see [Resources for Assisting and Referring Graduate Students](#)).
- Reviews communications from TGS Student Services regarding students placed on probation for not meeting TGS milestones.
- Serves as the primary point of contact for students who have special requests, for example, regarding [traveling scholar](#) requests and [leaves of absence](#).

Financial Support

- In partnership with the graduate program assistant and program faculty, ensures that each student receives funding through at least their fifth year, year-round, at the minimum TGS levels or above to support academic progress.
- Ensures that the graduate program assistant enter supplemental stipend and/or tuition support in CAESAR/SES for students receiving external funding below the base amount of support.
- Ensures that the graduate program assistant submits position/appointment forms to payroll for any funding entries or changes after the annual interface for non-TGS funds.

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- Requests on students' behalf and/or approves [permission to work](#) outside of their stipend appointment; such requests must include number of hours to be worked per week, the level of compensation, the time period of employment, and an approval by the faculty adviser as well as the DGS or Chair. Requests should be submitted before the work begins.
- Reviews funding allocation and usage. Provides recommendations to school/department for any unique student funding situation.

Instruction and Research

- Requests teaching allocations, advises on graduate teaching assignments, and coordinates the evaluation of graduate teaching.
- Ensures that students are aware of, and are utilizing, teaching and research support services available through the [Searle Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching](#) and [Northwestern University Information Technology \(NUIT\)](#); provides or arranges for supplemental pedagogical training within program.
- Communicates with students regarding available internal and external sources of support for teaching and research.

Graduation and Career Outcomes

- Checks in quarterly with advanced year students—for PhD students, those in the sixth year and beyond—in order to ensure they are making progress toward the degree, updating TGS as necessary.
- Coordinates guidance and support for students as they approach the end of graduate school and start their job searches.
- Refers students to [Northwestern Career Advancement](#) for additional job search support.
- Works with TGS and the Office of the Registrar to ensure that degrees are awarded on time.
- TGS awards degrees four times a year. The degree award dates may be found [here](#).