

## The Director of Graduate Studies

### Position Description

2025-2026

## Summary of Position

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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 graduate faculty, graduate students, and The Graduate School (TGS). As such, the DGS should be aware of program developments that affect graduate faculty, be available, present, and responsive to students, and 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, graduate faculty, TGS, and the collective bargaining agreement with graduate students. While the work of a DGS differs across programs depending on the size and any unique administrative practices, described below are duties and responsibilities that most DGSes at Northwestern fulfill.

## Duties and Responsibilities

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### 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 every three years and follows up on action points as applicable.

#### *Collective Bargaining Agreement*

- Supports department with compliance related to the collective bargaining agreement with graduate students, including but not limited to issues related to appointment letters, requests for information, grievances, and matters of discipline and discharge.
- Coordinates and conducts Informal Adjustment and Level 1 grievance meetings with the support of the Academic Labor Relations team.
- Drafts Level 1 response to grievance filings with input from the Academic Labor Relations team.

- Coordinates and communicates with the Academic Labor Relations team regarding any necessary departmental training or further support needed for faculty.

## *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 with TGS policies. Distributes handbook to students and posts to a centrally available repository prior to the start of fall quarter. 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**

### *Recruitment<sup>1</sup>*

- Employs strategies to recruit a 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 the [TGS Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Success](#).
- 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 Office of Admissions and Recruitment [SharePoint site](#) for resources, admissions policies, and relevant deadlines.
  - Consults with school/college associate dean about allocation (target yield for each season).
  - Follows the TGS Offer Letter Template for the current application cycle, including all required content and distributing letters in a timely manner and according to TGS guidelines. Archives all offer letters and supplies TGS with copies in PDF format through the mechanism prescribed by the Office of Admission and Recruitment. Also ensures that offers are only made after admission decisions are entered in CAESAR/SES.

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

- 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 minimum application requirements, including receiving a U.S. bachelor's degree or the equivalent and language proficiency requirements, if applicable.
- 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 does not meet TGS minimum application requirement (e.g. fewer than two letters of recommendation, undergraduate degree is not equivalent to a U.S. bachelor's degree, etc.).
- Confirms that the number of offers awarded will yield results within the program's allocation.
- Coordinates nominations for relevant fellowships and awards.
- 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 \(GSTS\)](#) (transitioning to [Graduate Student Progress \(GSP\)](#) application by Winter 2026), 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 concerns 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 enters all stipend and/or tuition support in CAESAR/SES for students receiving standard funding or supplemental funding.
- 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.
- Approves online [permission to work](#) requests from students who wish to accept work outside of their stipend appointment; such requests must include number of hours to be worked per week (no more than 20h/week allowed from all roles including primary stipend role), the level of compensation, the time period of employment, and an approval by the faculty adviser as well as the DGS or Chair. Requests must 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 according to the deadlines listed in the [Academic Calendar](#).