

# The Graduate Student Experience™:

Redesigning Graduate School So That Every Student Can Flourish and Finish



The Graduate Student Experience™

[gardnerinstitute.org](http://gardnerinstitute.org)

## Where Could We Go From Here? “Déjà Vu All Over Again”

John N. Gardner

Executive Chair and Co-Founder, Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education

Inaugural Graduate Student Experience Conference  
Asheville, N.C. March 26, 2024



# Fundamental Questions:

What **COULD**  
you do next?

What **WILL**  
you do next?

Déjà Vu  
All Over  
Again  
For me...

## Launching The First-Year Experience Movement in 1982:

- How did this get converted from conference attendance to an on-campus process?



Who is the “YOU”?

It is YOU +  
(ideally) some significant others

# Suggestions: Who could become part of a “coalition of the willing”?

- Your Boss
- Dean of the Graduate School
- Associate/Assistant Deans
- Chief Academic Officer and their inner circle
- Academic Deans
- Graduate Faculty
- Chief Research Officer
- Faculty who have won research and teaching awards
- Chair, Graduate Faculty Council
- Chair, Faculty Senate
- Chair, Faculty Union
- Researchers at your campus who have studied any elements of the graduate student experience
- Kindred souls who care about the graduate student experience

AND....

# Who else could become part of a “coalition of the willing”?



## Officers Responsible for:

- Student Affairs
- Student Success
- Counseling services
- Housing
- Health Services
- Financial Aid
- Assessment
- Institutional Research
- Academic Support
- Faculty development

# What is the Graduate Student Experience at your institution?

## This is fundamentally a research question:

- What is known about it?
- Who has the data? Any data?
- Who are the stakeholders?
- What are the cultural differences and drivers?
- How is graduate education organized/administered?
- What research has been done on the GSE at your institution?
- What is the overall impact of graduate education and graduate students at your institution?
- How do the roles and functioning of undergraduate education and support services impact graduate education?



# Key Questions About the Graduate Student Experience:

- What is the graduate student experience?
- What are the needs of graduate students?
- Which of these needs are we intentionally addressing?
- Who is responsible for such responses?
- What are the unmet needs of graduate students?
- What is the evidence to support this conversation?



# Key Questions About the Graduate Student Experience:

- What are the services and resources available to support graduate students?
- Is there evidence of hardship/neglect of students' welfare (e.g. housing food insecurity, mental health support, mentoring, support groups, etc.)?
- What campus services/resources for undergraduate students are ALSO available for graduate students?
- Are there services available to undergraduate students that are NOT available to graduate students?
- Have there been efforts to organize a consideration like this before? If so, what were the results?
- What efforts are being made to enhance the GSE at our peer institutions?

# Key Questions About the Graduate Student Experience:



**What facets of the Graduate Student Experience must be addressed at the institutional level?**

**At the unit level?**

## Essential Functions for Institution-wide Consideration

- Orientation to the institution and the graduate program
- Academic advising
- Mentoring
- Graduate teaching assistant support/training
- Socialization needs for graduate students
- Understanding the graduate school and unit culture
- Mental health support
- Health support writ large
- Housing assistance
- Childcare

## ...you need:

- **A working conceptual statement of what you are talking about**  
This could be a generic definition of The Graduate Student Experience
- **A clear statement of why this conversation is needed**  
Don't assume the "whys" will be immediately understood
- **A companion statement of why graduate students and graduate education matters..**  
..not just to the graduate units but to the entire institution
- **Why the GSE matters to the community, region, state and country**



**So much to consider  
So much to talk about  
So little time**

**To be continued....**

# Contact Info

**John Gardner**

[gardner@gardnerinstitute.org](mailto:gardner@gardnerinstitute.org)