I wrote the first of these columns three years ago. Today, as I write the last, I look back over the last three years with satisfaction, and ahead to the next stage with anticipation. I began as Dean of the Graduate School and now serve in the more broadly conceived position of Interim Vice Provost of Graduate Studies. In both roles, I have had the opportunity to foster and celebrate the achievements of graduate students and graduate faculty. This Newsletter, inaugurated three years ago, as were our weekly Announcements, is one essential way to communicate those achievements to others and to invite colleagues from across the campus to join us in shaping the intellectual, trans-disciplinary, and collaborative amalgam that is graduate studies.

Throughout these years, new workshops, professional development seminars, and mentoring groups such as Grad Gen 1 and the Associate Professors’ Network have re-oriented our understanding of graduate studies, as well as honed our understanding of our roles as students and teachers. My own understanding constantly evolves because of the rich range of experience and insights I have had the privilege of sharing. My professional development was radically affected by having been the Founding Director of Women’s and Gender Studies at LSU. Although an untenured assistant professor, I worked with faculty of all ranks across over thirty units on the campus. (The number is far higher now.) Serving as Dean/Vice Provost has amplified and expanded the bandwidth of that resonant input.

May is the month during which I can re-listen and re-think what I’ve heard over the year, as well as take part in its special events. May marks Commencement, of course. (See our Special Edition Commencement Newsletter on the Graduate School web site.) It is also the month during which I and Associate Dean Lane meet individually with the Perkins and Board of Regents/Southern Regional Education Board Fellows. And the focus of this month’s Newsletter shines a light upon the most sustained annual event through which we have explored and shaped graduate studies: the three-week, five-hour daily seminars that are the Summer Institutes on the Future of Graduate Studies.

In meeting with the Fellows, I am inevitably impressed and moved by their abilities, strengths, and potential. Their stellar achievements are professional and personal: journal articles, milestones completed, new babies, and new projects. (See the profile of Portia Henderson in the Commencement Newsletter for a splendid example of all of the above.) They enter LSU because of academic profiles that present outstanding scores, GPAs, and records. But they also enter LSU as whole people with histories, relationships, and communities. They struggle with doubts about their abilities, responsibilities for family members, their own illnesses, and finances. But still, they progress. They break down the enormity of "Get a graduate degree" into the smaller pieces that let them move forward day by day. They reach out to others. They go home, cry, and come back to school the next day. I recently heard Anita Hill speak, and was struck by one of her comments: "Courage consists not of one act, but of how we live our lives." In their commitment, abilities, and activism, many of these students exemplify this maxim.

The participants in this year’s Summer Institute on the Future of Graduate Studies individually and collectively do the same. Our focus this year is upon Career Diversity/Alt-Ac (CD/AC). The 25 participants have identified five key foci: CD/AC: Rethinking Trans-disciplinary Research and Collaboration; CD/AC Rethinking Curriculum and Pedagogy; CD/AC: Rethinking Diversity; CD/AC: Rethinking Mentoring; CD/AC: Rethinking Support and Advocacy. As they ponder and propose short- and long-term initiatives related to these topics, they highlight what will be the future of graduate studies. Join with them as they launch their initiatives next year, and work with them and my successor to help shape the future of graduate studies.

I know that I will hear from many of you as my term comes to a close. July 1 is my formal transition date from the Graduate School, but June 1 is the functional transition date the Interim Provost has selected for an orderly succession. I look forward to hearing from you at mmasse@lsu.edu.

Cordially,

Michelle Massé
Important Dates

June

- 4th - Classes begin, 7:30 a.m.
- 6th - Final date for dropping courses without receiving a grade of “W,” 4:30 p.m., deadline
- 7th - Final date for adding courses for credit and making section changes, 4:30 p.m., deadline
- 7th - Final date for Degree only**approval and registration, 4:30 p.m. deadline. All degree requirements must be met, including final defense reports and the approval of all format corrections requested by the document editor. Also, 1) final defense report is due for non-thesis students and 2) Survey of Earned Doctorates completion certificate is due for doctoral students
- 8th - Final date for submitting to the Graduate School “Application for Degree” to be awarded at summer commencement, 4:30 p.m., deadline
- 8th - Final date for submitting to the Graduate School “Request for Final Defense” (comprehensive exam, thesis/dissertation defense) for degrees to be awarded at summer commencement, 4:30 p.m., deadline. Note: All final defense requests must be submitted 3 weeks prior to the date of the defense, but no later than June 8th.
- 29th - Dissertation Title Deadline: Any changes to dissertation titles turned in after this date will not be reflected in the commencement guide at graduation.

For more important dates and deadlines, please view the Graduate Calendars for Spring 2018 and Summer 2018.

New Graduate Student Orientation

Wednesday, August 15, 2018
LSU Cox Communications Center for Student-Athletes
Bo Campbell Auditorium
12:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Save the Date!
2018 Summer Institute on the Future of Graduate Studies

The Summer Institute on the Future of Graduate Studies is a three-week program for graduate faculty and graduate students that focuses on a key range of issues with a particular emphasis on current students and retention. Issues ranged from an exploration of best practices in graduate studies policies, through exploration of collaborative initiatives in pedagogy and curriculum, to mentoring and collaborative work.

The 2018 Institute focused on Alternative-Academic (Alt-Ac)/Career Diversity and placement, with Alt-Ac being broadly understood as a consideration from the first planning of graduate studies, through decisions made throughout a professional life, including those made by faculty themselves. Twenty-five participants from multiple departments comprised the 2018 Institute, and they engaged in intense, wide-ranging reading, writing, and discussion. They provided preliminary reports and recommendations, as well as leadership in designing a year-long series of workshops, discussion groups, and readings to support LSU’s Strategic Plan to attract both students and faculty to LSU.

The Institute also consisted of a two-day visit and public lecture by Chris Golde, co-author of The Formation of Scholars: Rethinking Doctoral Education for the Twenty-First Century, who has served as Senior Scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Associate Vice Provost for Graduate Education at Stanford, and a career coach and consultant at Stanford Career Education.

Participants were awarded competitive stipends; their participation included proposals for initiatives that will affect graduate studies at LSU in 2018-2019 and beyond. Project initiatives focus on the development and implementation of advocacy and ambassador programs for graduate students, as well as professional development opportunities for graduate students and graduate faculty. Institute members were divided into groups to explore various aspects that contribute to career diversity in graduate students. Learn more about the groups and their proposals on pages 4-8. We congratulate and thank the following colleagues for a successful Institute.

2018 Summer Institute Members
Inter-/Trans-Disciplinary Research & Collaboration

Babasinmisola Fadirepo - Theatre, Jeehye Kim - Biological & Agricultural Engineering, Professor Chuanlan Liu - Textile Merchandising, Carly Rubin - English, and Professor James Stoner - Political Science

Collaboration is characteristic of modern life, and life in the university is no exception. University degrees, of course, are awarded to individuals, and while the individual remains the locus of scholarly judgment, the guarantor of integrity, and in some instances the key to creativity, all scholarly work — even that of the monk in his cell with a book — is collaborative. Importantly, we believe that collaborative and interdisciplinary projects are often the perfect opportunity to explore career possibilities that reach throughout and beyond academia.

After all, collaboration takes different forms. As mentioned, co-authorship is common. Moreover, some projects are so vast — for example, the creation of an archive of inscriptions, or a map of the heavens, or an extensive database — that no single person could ever complete them on one’s own. Other collaboration is interdisciplinary, sometimes involving a complex project where researchers from different fields contribute their separate expertise, sometimes joint projects where scholars from different disciplines teach one another some of the basics of their home disciplines to achieve a meeting of minds.

We are developing two projects, both designed to foster interdisciplinary scholarship and encourage explorations of career diversity. First, working together with the Voegelin Institute and modifying their model of undergraduate reading groups, we are exploring the possibility of an interdisciplinary graduate reading group or groups. Initial topics and readings might be developed by the director in consultation with a graduate student task force, while active groups might then choose their readings. Meetings might be monthly — avoiding the end of the terms — with a faculty member facilitating discussion (someone different each session). Students seemed intrigued by the prospect of earning a certificate for participation as well as the possibility of playing leadership roles. Initial topics include “Identity and Style,” “Science and Society,” “Ethics and the Moral Imagination,” or “The Idea of the University.” We think such a group might also offer an opportunity for speakers from outside of academia to talk with graduate students about different modes and forms of applying knowledge.

The more sweeping proposal takes as its model “LSU Discover Day,” an annual event at which undergraduates from different disciplines present their research, modified for the graduate level. Different formats would be included to accommodate different fields — poster presentations, oral presentations, shows — and prizes would be offered, perhaps by disciplinary group (STEM, Humanities, Arts). Departments might be invited to nominate presenters. Presenters might choose to participate to practice for a professional conference; they might also practice talks they would give at job interviews, academic and non-academic alike. Local business and industry might fund prizes, and representatives might be invited to attend (and observe graduate talent).
Rethinking Curriculum & Pedagogy

Professor Maribel Dietz - History, Professor Daniel Isbell - Music Education, Eric Kennedy - English, Kathryn Morris - Theatre, and Lydia Wilson - Physics

For the 2018 Summer Institute on the Future of Graduate Studies, we have focused on rethinking graduate curricula and pedagogy regarding how these areas could be updated and enhanced to better serve the Alternative Academic/Career Diversity (Alt-Ac/CD) campus community. During the three weeks of the Summer Institute, we addressed this initiative through discussion of restructuring graduate education to connect to practical problems, expanding online curricular possibilities, empowering students to personalize more of their curriculum, and increasing authentic/experiential learning experiences.

Graduate students are finding that the current limits of curricular standards are not adequately preparing them for diverse career options upon graduation. This initiative demonstrates LSU’s commitment to the success of its graduate community in a rapidly changing economy. The proposals we are planning are aimed at continuing LSU's progressive education initiatives.

We are working on three possible proposals. One of our short-term proposals is to create a template Graduate Student handbook for use by departments in the revision or creation of their handbooks. The template would include sections on mentoring and advising, issues of career diversity, and community engagement. As a long-term proposal, we are advocating for a requirement that graduate students attend at least two doctoral defenses in other programs, which necessitates defenses being both open to the public and well-advertised around campus. Another proposal we are addressing is the creation of a Graduate School Curriculum Code to facilitate graduate students taking courses that are specifically designed to accommodate career diversity, such as grant writing, public speaking, entrepreneurship, pedagogy, and more.
Rethinking Diversity

Professor Elizabeth Martin - Biological & Agricultural Engineering, Laura Oliver - Communication Studies, Professor Joe Skillen - Music Education, Professor Ying Wang - Mechanical and Industrial Engineering

Diversity is an area that we feel is often either too emphasized in organizations or overlooked as a conglomerate in others. While the nature of diversity seeks to address issues and characteristics about people who concern themselves with anti-discrimination, there are also questions about the reduction of tolerance instead of simply embracing and celebrating the richness of each individual. For the Summer Institute, we wanted to focus on this reality and how these things affect the nature of graduate studies. During our initial meeting, we saw the need to solidify a definition of diversity and allow this to guide us through discussions about the possibilities and consequences of allowing diversity to influence an institution. We all agreed that the spectrum of diversity includes demographic and philosophical differences, but also the nature of research. Diversity as a tool for learning allows us to devise a set of readings and activities that promote a conscious acknowledgment of difference.

To illuminate our overall objective, we assigned readings that incorporated a variety of learning styles. “Live at Carnegie Hall with Seth Gordon” and “Owning My Own Masters: The Rhetoric of Rhymes and Revolutions” explored alternative ways of producing academic scholarship, engaged a variety of learning styles, and highlighted aspects of engaging the individual as more than just a researcher. Through these examples, we were able to illuminate different forms of our scholarship and work together to encourage a much harder conversation.

These readings helped us initiate a conversation about the human aspects of diversity. It is necessary to ask questions about self to understand how one must move forward and reshape diversity in their departments. For this reason, we designed a series of activities geared toward the fluidity of our identities. Our guiding questions pushed us to look closer at how students connect with their advisors, how the validity of diverse research is negotiated, and finally, how to explore alternate paths of academia. We feel that this moves us to a direction of allowing faculty and students to express themselves and research in different ways.

We are not interested in proposing another workshop. LSU offers a variety of workshops on campus to engage un- and under-represented communities. Instead, we feel that there is a need to push for more career diversity that integrates conversations about how to communicate with underrepresented communities. We envision this as a course for skill-development that promotes professional development that would be cross-listed in other departments. This course would encourage students to enhance community involvement and develop portfolio projects as a result of their time in the course. Diversity as a topic can be further explored, but the goal is to connect people in different ways that can also expand the conversation about career diversity.
Rethinking Mentoring

David Baker - Music, Professor David Chicoine - Anthropology, Cheryl Foster - Anthropology, and Professor Michael Mathis - Biomedical Sciences

Our group explores initiatives to improve the relationships between graduate students and various mentors, including their major professor, dissertation advisor, peer graduate students, and mentors outside academe. Considering the changing nature of job markets and the placement of doctoral graduates, we are especially committed to raising awareness about career diversity and alternative professional paths.

During the Summer Institute, we focused on how these professional choices might enhance more traditional academic formations, styles, and expectations. We surveyed relevant literature to learn about favorable and unfavorable practices, and realistic mentoring relations and programs. We also assessed their feasibility for implementation at LSU. Our seminar participants have taken the pulse of the current situation at LSU through a survey and a series of focus groups exploring mentoring through the specific lenses of diversity, collaboration, student advocacy, and curriculum. Based on the results, our group is proposing both short and long-term goals designed to improve the mentoring culture at LSU.

First, we are in the process of developing a mentoring packet that would include a self-assessment questionnaire to help orient incoming graduate students and potential mentors. The assessment will also focus on more holistic and a long-term Individual Development Plan (IDP) that will help students and their mentors to monitor their changing needs, skills, and achievements better. We have explored what it would look like to have a mentoring specialist on campus that would help improve campus climate in regard to mentoring. We hope that our tools help students and faculty better identify career goals, work expectations, and the student’s personal life history and situation.
Support & Advocacy

Oluwakemi Adio - Mechanical & Industrial Engineering, Professor Weishan Huang - Pathobiological Sciences, Jordan Landry - Political Science, Meghan Saas - Art & Design, and Professor Ramachandran Vaidyanathan - Electrical & Computer Engineering

The goal of our proposal is to promote awareness of and interest in an alumni database for students, faculty, and university leadership. Our group’s primary focus is to investigate current issues and potential solutions related to Advocacy and Support for Career Diversity of Graduate Students. Given the increasing difficulty of launching a traditional, independent, academic research career, the lack of a formal training component in current graduate programs to prepare students for Career Diversity is a significant impediment to graduate students’ entry into the modern interdisciplinary workforce. We sought to pursue this effort through academic support in a vertical hierarchy that engages a diverse community including the faculty, programs, and the institution at large to provide support to and advocacy for graduate students facing today’s professional opportunities. We also discussed elements of a horizontal support system within the graduate student community.

Our discussion elicited various suggestions for Louisiana State University, including using the current resources available on campus for internships and externships, as well as adapting curricula to provide credit for internships and outreach.

Based on our discussion, we propose both short-term and long-term goals. For a short period, we suggest implementing a peer support network that connects senior students with newer students across departments. New graduate students need critical support mechanisms to help them transition and acclimate to the specific environment of their graduate studies. A key strategy includes pairing or identifying peer supporters for new graduate students within the department. A peer support committee, with supervision by a graduate faculty, will serve as an information hub, and individual students weigh in on the implementation of specific issues/questions that arise. This system allows specific support as well as a flexible information network. The supervising faculty performs the gatekeeper function to enforce the graduate program requirement and policy regulation. Eventually, we suggest establishing a database of alumni career information which would enable networking, enhance the visibility of diverse career options, and create potential mentor relationships. This long-term proposal is certainly a challenge and would require the engagement of university leadership as well as significant financial and administrative contribution from the university. The goal of this proposal at this point is to promote awareness of and interest in this alumni database to students, faculty, and university leadership.
Graduate Alumni Spotlight - Jessica McKelvie Kemp

What factors influenced your decision to attend graduate school at LSU?

I attended the University of Rochester in Rochester, New York, for my master’s degree and was ready for a change. LSU brought me in for a visit, and I was impressed by the faculty and the graduate students in the Department of English as well as the campus. They also offered a very competitive stipend.

How did you prepare for a career outside of academia?

I worked in administration at LSU before moving to the nonprofit sector. My experiences at the LSU Women’s Center and the College of Engineering helped me understand aspects of business development and management that were key to being effective and competitive in non-academic settings.

Describe your current position, and please describe how your graduate education prepared you for a job in the non-profit sector.

I’m currently Vice President at the Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX), which is a nonprofit planning organization serving the state of Louisiana. In this position, I’m responsible for strategic planning and communications as well as managing projects and assisting with business development. It was a challenge at first to translate my academic credentials and accomplishments into terms that were compelling to non-academic employers, but I quickly learned that my English doctoral degree provides a lot of value to these organizations. My ability to analyze complex materials, conduct quality research, and develop useful program and communications strategies have served me well in these roles and created new opportunities along the way.

What advice would you give to current graduate students who are considering various career pathways?

Given the dramatic changes taking place both within academia and our economy at large, I think it’s common sense to contemplate different options and position oneself to be successful in more than one type of job or career. Especially since many graduate students begin their careers at a later age, a broad understanding of the job market along with a willingness to be flexible and entrepreneurial will help graduates expand the range of opportunities available to them.