



5th Annual Graduate Student Success and Wellness Conference
June 1-2, 2023
Appalachian State University, Boone, NC

AGENDA

Thursday, June 1

- 12:00 Conference Check-in (Reich College of Education Building Rotunda)
- 1:00 Welcome (RCOE Room 124 A & B)
- 1:10 Keynote Speaker: Dr. Susan Colby
Interim Executive Director, Appalachian State Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for Student Success
- 2:00 Breakout Sessions

RCOE 227: *How Change Brings Challenges: A Closer Look at the College of Charleston Graduate Ambassador Program*
Keonya Booker, College of Charleston

Colleges and universities across the country are grappling with student retention, especially in the wake of enrollment shifts during the pandemic. Institutions must find sustainable ways to not only create a pipeline of new students, but also retain current students (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). Mentorship provides a way to socialize and orient a learner into a new professional environment through active engagement with others (Crisp et al., 2017; Marshall et al., 2021). Graduate students who actively mentor undergraduates report having improved teaching and communication skills, higher personal satisfaction, and greater clarity about their career paths (Dolan & Johnson, 2009; Reddick et al., 2012). The goal of Graduate Ambassador Program (GAP) at the

College of Charleston is to provide graduate students with an opportunity to augment their academic and professional experiences by mentoring an undergraduate student in their discipline. The session will explore the theoretical foundation of the GAP, recruitment methods for the inaugural class of mentors, challenges that have occurred, and proposed paths forward. At the conclusion of the presentation, participants will have a better understanding of how to begin a “near-peer” mentoring program at their home institution, sustain active participation from both mentors and mentees, and increase overall graduate student sense of belonging.

RCOE 237: ***Implementation of a Peer-to-Peer Support Training Program to Reduce Stress and Burnout Among Health Professions Graduate Students***
Bernice Alston, Duke University School of Nursing

The Duke Student Success Center (SSC) provides a wide range of academic, wellness, and occupational support to students enrolled in ABSN, MSN, DNP, and PhD programs. Through a HRSA Cooperative Agreement and in collaboration with the Interprofessional Education Center (IPEC) and North Carolina Central University (NCCU), the SSC implemented a positive psychology-informed Stress First Aid (SFA) training program for health professions students, faculty, and staff at Duke and NCCU. This program aims to address stress and burnout present throughout the healthcare workforce. SFA is a pre-clinical, peer to peer support training program that teaches participants to assess and respond to suspected psychological injuries in colleagues and classmates with the goals of preserving lives, preventing further harm, and promoting recovery. SFA is an indicated mental illness prevention measure published by the National Center for PTSD. This presentation will examine how the SFA training for graduate students was implemented, the impact this and similar peer-training wellness programs have on graduate learners, and the strategies currently being used to increase engagement and enhance effectiveness of this training program.

3:00 Coffee Break

3:20 Breakout Sessions

RCOE 227: ***How to Assist the Graduate and Professional Student Organizations***
Karin Bartoszuk, East Tennessee State University

The primary function of the ETSU Graduate and Professional Student Organization (GPSA) is to improve the graduate and professional degree students’ experience. GPSA’s most important benefits are to facilitate professional development by supporting student travel to professional

conferences; maximize member's potential as students, educators, and researchers; enhance the continuing educational experience; encourage involvement in institutional governance; foster the development of career-building skills; and to advocate participation in student-sponsored activities. This presentation will provide a short overview of GPSA, get feedback from participants on how this compares to other Graduate Schools, and discuss some of the challenges regarding membership and participation as more programs move online.

RCOE 237: ***Name it to Tame it: Unpacking Stress, Coping, & Resilience in Graduate School***

Jason Lynch, Appalachian State University

Stress and burnout are unfortunately common descriptors associated with graduate education. The American Psychological Association identified academic pressures, finances, anxiety, and work-life balance as top stressors for graduate students, even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. While trained in research, writing, and discipline-related competencies, graduate students are rarely equipped with the knowledge and skills to manage the stressors associated with earning an advanced degree. During this interactive session, participants will be given the space to speak to stressors their graduate students experience, as well as learn about the impact of stress on multiple dimensions of wellness. Participants will also be introduced to evidence-based strategies and resources for stress identification, management, and boundary setting within the context of graduate education.

4:30 Networking Reception (RCOE Rotunda)

6:00 Dinner (on your own)

Friday, June 2

8:00 Breakfast (RCOE Rotunda)

9:00 Panel Presentation (RCOE 124 A & B)

Issues, Strategies, and Resources for Addressing Graduate Student Wellness and Success

Panelists:

Ben Asma, Appalachian State University Wellness & Prevention Services

Tandrea Carter, Appalachian State University, Counseling for Faculty & Staff

Givie Lanier, Appalachian State University, Graduate Student

Mac Schauman, Appalachian State University, Graduate Student

10:00 Breakout Sessions

RCOE 227: ***Grads Just Want to Have Fun: Rethinking Graduate Student Orientation to Foster a Sense of Belonging***

Laura Burgess, Clark University

Too often, graduate student orientation is viewed as trying to present logistical information in as concise a manner as possible. The idea is that grad students are adults and have done the college thing before. However, this one-size-fits-all approach does not work with all graduate students. At Clark University, which has a large population of international students, graduate orientation was refocused with an intention to foster a sense of belonging and help students feel connected and comfortable, while also providing them with the information they need to successfully begin their graduate studies. This presentation will focus on what was done to change things, student feedback received, and efforts to achieve continuous improvement so that orientation is a positive experience for students.

RCOE 237: ***(Re)Prioritizing & (Re)Defining the Structure of Graduate Student Success: From Enrollment to Life After Graduation***

Melissa Auten & Stefanie Heinrich, Appalachian State University

At Appalachian State University, The Graduate Student Life (GSL) team pushes back on the commonly held notion that graduate students must devote every ounce of their time into academics in order to find “success.” We also work to complicate traditional notions of success, wellness, and student support. In the past year, the Cratis D. Williams’ School of Graduate Studies was placed in the unique position of rebuilding its GSL team. This offered an opportunity to rethink and reimagine, restructure and redesign,

what graduate student support would look like for App State. The presenters draw on their own personal experience as graduate students, evolving student support research, and observations of the shifting educational landscape to provide new and creative ways to support our grad students. In this presentation, we will expound on the driving goals and underlying ethos of App State Graduate Student Life, part of which centers the reframing of grad student support as a collective endeavor to foster growth within a holistic perspective.

11:00 Transition Break

11:10 Breakout Sessions

RCOE 227: ***Be Well, Be Fit, Be Whole: A Graduate Student Wellbeing Event***
AhDream Smith, Mark Simon, & Kate McAnulty, UNC Chapel Hill

The Graduate School and the Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG), in partnership with three other organizations at UNC Chapel Hill, hosted “Be Well. Be Fit. Be Whole - A Graduate Student Wellbeing Event.” Organized in response to the ongoing student mental health crisis and timed to precede exam week, the innovative event broke the boundaries of traditional wellness fairs and included a resource fair with 27 campus and community partners who offer health and wellbeing services; four holistic wellness experiences; “Cookies and Conversation,” a casual networking event, and complimentary lunch to all attendees. A record 520+ graduate and professional students attended the event, exceeding the organizers’ goal of 200 students. Post-event evaluations were overwhelmingly positive. This session will share lessons learned and best practices. Participants will leave with a framework for organizing a successful student wellbeing event, including marketing, programming, and partnerships/collaborations to deliver a high impact event for a wide range of graduate and professional students.

RCOE 237: ***Not “Just Doing it for the Pictures”: DEI Work and the Path to Earn Students’ Trust***
Laura Pagani & Aura Young, UNC Charlotte
Charles Gibson, Lees McRae College

Trust is perhaps the most fundamental element required in order to gain credibility and to provide the support and community that minoritized students need. We must first acknowledge that, regardless of our intentions,

our students' trust must be earned. Commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion must be reflected in the programs, policies, and procedures on the ground, not just in promotional brochures. Ideally, the outcome of these DEI efforts will be reflected in the numbers, including persistence to degree by minoritized students. This interactive presentation will feature a review of the DEI events and initiatives launched at UNC Charlotte over the last couple of years, along with efforts undertaken at Penn State, Appalachian State, and Lees McRae College. The session will include time for attendees to share their institutions' recent DEI initiatives and discuss the outcomes.

12:10 Networking Lunch (RCOE Rotunda)

1:00 Wrap-Up & Concluding Comments (RCOE 124 A & B)