

## Strategic Plan



### 2021-2026

Research, scholarship, and creative activity at the University of Connecticut have a national and international impact. Excellence in these areas rests on a foundation of excellence in graduate and postdoctoral education. The University of Connecticut is a great research university because it has both world-class scholars and world-class graduate programs and because it hosts a vibrant community of talented postdoctoral scholars. This strategic plan introduces the vision to which The Graduate School aspires, and it describes our mission as a set of activities grouped within three broad themes - **innovation, community,** and **service** - that will guide our work through 2026.

*Pictured Above: (front) Bahar Ahmadi, and Nicholas May Graduate Students in Materials Sciences and Engineering using an Orion Nanofab machine at the Innovation Partnership Building (IPB) on Dec. 21, 2018. (Al Ferreira/UConn Photo)*

## Vision

The Graduate School will be the heart of graduate and postdoctoral education at the University of Connecticut. It will foster excellence in graduate and postdoctoral education, and it will guide graduate students and postdoctoral scholars to personal and professional success.

## Mission

The Graduate School will lead **innovation** in graduate education at the University of Connecticut, foster a thriving **community** of graduate students and postdoctoral scholars, and provide flexible **services** for graduate students, faculty, and staff.

- **Innovation** - The Graduate School will lead innovations in graduate education by fostering the development of new programs that integrate disciplines across schools and colleges, new professional degrees and certificates that provide practitioners with advanced research preparation, and new models of mentorship and advising that respond to the needs of individual students.
- **Community** - The Graduate School will support a thriving community of graduate students and postdoctoral scholars by focusing recruiting efforts to enhance the participation of underserved communities in graduate education, offering programs that foster personal and professional development, and nurturing an engaged community of scholars based on principles of inclusive excellence and mutual respect.
- **Services** - The Graduate School will enhance the infrastructure that supports graduate students, faculty, and staff by providing comprehensive training and support resources for procedures associated with graduate education, developing electronic workflows to replace manual processes, and revising policies to ensure that they are just, efficient, and student-centered.

## Key Strengths and Current Responsibilities

The Graduate School

- Awards doctoral degrees in 78 fields of study, master's degrees in 109 fields of study.
- Administers all credit-bearing post-baccalaureate certificates.
- Supports a variety of communities among graduate students and postdoctoral scholars through programs that serve scholars in all graduate disciplines.
- Enhances recruitment and support of graduate students from marginalized populations.
- Ensures consistent enforcement of standards and requirements for all graduate degrees and certificates.
- Provides fellowship support to graduate students, both through allocations to departments and through awards to individual students.
- Supports efficient processing of application, admission, and matriculation to graduate programs
- Contributes to interpretation and implementation of collective bargaining agreements with graduate assistants and with postdoctoral research associates.
- Verifies eligibility of graduate students offered a teaching or research assistantships.

## Innovation

The Graduate School will lead innovations in graduate education by fostering the development of new programs that integrate disciplines across schools and colleges, new professional doctorates that provide practitioners with advanced research preparation, and new models of mentorship and advising that respond to the needs of individual students. To accomplish this goal The Graduate School will:

- Monitor trends in graduate and postdoctoral education around the world and use knowledge about them to reform practices at UConn.
- Support development of innovative graduate degree and certificate programs by
  - Supporting development of professional doctoral degrees in new, evolving disciplines,
  - Fostering the creation of new entrepreneurial master's degree programs, and
  - Administering the individualized/interdisciplinary PhD in Integrative Studies.
- Improve mentorship and advising for graduate students by
  - Providing guidance to faculty and departments on annual formative assessment of graduate students,
  - Developing a mentor training program with a particular emphasis on support for students and postdoctoral scholars of color,
  - Exploring multiple mentorship models that are responsive to the needs of individual students,
  - Creating a "Healthy departments" initiative that recommends best practices for adoption by departments, and
  - Fostering a culture that encourages graduate students and postdocs to explore a wide range of possible careers.
- Foster excellence in graduate programs by
  - Working with the University of Connecticut Foundation to enhance financial support for graduate students through fellowships and through support for graduate student travel, research, scholarship, and creative activity and
  - Ensuring that departments respond to data on retention and graduation rates of graduate students as part of regular reviews in the Provost's Office.

## Community

The Graduate School will support a thriving community of graduate students and postdoctoral scholars by focusing recruiting efforts to enhance the participation of underserved communities in graduate education, offering programs that foster personal and professional development, and nurturing an engaged community of scholars based on principles of inclusive excellence and mutual respect. To accomplish this goal The Graduate School will:

- Continuously improve online, hybrid, and in-person orientation programs that introduce students to UConn.
  - Develop a virtual resource fair for students in their first semester.
  - Deepen connections between orientation experiences within academic departments and the University-wide

- orientation experience offered through The Graduate School.
- Develop a First-Year Experience for graduate students.
  
- Enhance recruitment of a diverse community of graduate students and postdocs.
  - Represent the University at events that attract potential graduate students and postdocs who identify as members of a group underrepresented in graduate and postdoctoral study, e.g., the Institute for Recruitment of Teachers, the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science, the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students, Out in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math.
  
- Foster a culture of care and support for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars.
  - Coordinate with other University offices to respond to incidents of bias or hate.
  - Advise and collaborate with the Graduate Student Senate, the Graduate Students of Color Association, and the Postdoc Steering Committee.
  - Encourage and support the development of University resources that support graduate students and postdoctoral scholars of color as well as resources that support those who are undocumented, first-generation scholars, economically disadvantaged, or otherwise marginalized.
  - Collaborate with International Student and Scholar Services to support the community of international graduate students and postdoctoral scholars.
  
- Design, develop, and deliver professional development events for the graduate and postdoctoral communities.
  - Enhance student engagement through awareness of graduate student organizations.
  - Foster professional development communities through one-off, week-long and semester-oriented series such as our graduate and postdoc appreciation weeks, grant writing and academic job preparation series, three-minute thesis competition (3MT), financial wellness series, and a credit-bearing course on communicating research.
  - Develop a student resources page with information on wellness, financial literacy, and professional development.
  
- Advocate for a diverse community of graduate faculty.
  - Facilitate recruitment of faculty at the Institute for Teaching and Mentoring of the Southern Regional Education Board.
  
- Provide faculty and departments with information and training to support an inclusive environment for graduate training.
  - Enhance communications with Directors of Graduate Study.
  - Develop a faculty resources page with guidance on best practices and links to additional resources.
  
- Develop new sources of financial support for graduate students
  - Strengthen UConn's ability to attract training grants and fellowships.
  - Promote and support applications for prestigious national fellowships.
  - Work with UConn Foundation to increase philanthropic support for graduate and postdoctoral education.

## Services

The Graduate School will enhance the infrastructure that supports graduate students, faculty, and staff by providing comprehensive training and support resources for procedures associated with graduate education, developing electronic workflows to replace manual processes, and revising policies to ensure that they are just, efficient, and student-centered. To accomplish this goal The Graduate School will:

- Provide transparent administrative processes by developing electronic workflows processes wherever possible
- Develop a comprehensive, organized, and easily accessible catalog of outreach/training/support that The Graduate School provides to students, faculty, and staff
- Offer detailed answers to complex questions on balancing recruitment, admissions, mentorship, graduate student and faculty support
- Support departments/programs that choose to develop active strategies for graduate student recruitment
- Revise and implement policies to ensure that they are just, efficient, effective, and student centered, that they address the particular needs of marginalized communities, and that they are consistent with the University's goals to promote justice, equity, diversity and inclusion
- Coordinate diversity-focused recruitment efforts across departments/programs