GPSC Promising Practice Grants FY 2022 Application

Executive Summary: As the governing body of over 10,500 graduate and professional students at the University of Arizona, the Graduate and Professional Student Council (GPSC) supports programming that enhances the student experience, academic and professional success. GPSC runs several programs that support the University of Arizona's mission, including the Travel Grants, Research and Project (ReaP) Grants, Professional Opportunities Development (POD) Grants, and Student Showcase. The Promising Practice Grant (PPG) aims to support all students at the University of Arizona who are required to complete certifications or take licensing exams in furtherance of their academic progression and completion, graduation, professional success, employability, and practice in their respective fields. Together, these five programs advance all students' academic careers and professional development at the University of Arizona. The Student Services Fee Funding for this program will increase the number of diverse student populations supported and fulfill the University's land grant mission.

Supporting the SA and EM Mission
The Promising Practice Grant (PPG) aligns with both GPSC, Student Affairs, and Enrollment Management missions to support programs, services, and resources that have a measurable and positive impact on the development of students and to contribute to the well-being and advancement of our community. The Promising Practice Grant (PPG) aims to support all students at the University of Arizona who are required to complete certifications or take licensing exams in furtherance of their academic progression and completion, graduation, professional success, employability, and practice in their respective fields.

The PPG will meet five of the eight initiatives supported by more than 80% of undergraduates and graduates students who responded to the Student Services Fee (SSF) Survey: career preparation opportunities (86%), on-campus job opportunities (85%), academic support services (85%), access to financial aid opportunities (83%), and career-based experiential learning/leadership opportunities (80%). This program further fulfills the initiative of student retention and success, improving academic standing supported by 70% of undergraduates and graduate students. It meets four additional initiatives backed by more than 65% of survey respondents: funding for graduate student academic travel (by extension professional), presentation and professional development (88%); student retention and success programs (70%), leadership training for student workers who have jobs providing direct services to fellow students (65%), supporting specific campus populations (64%).

GPSC recognizes that the Promising Practice Grant will further promote and aid in the students' workforce readiness, which is vital during one of the worst job markets since the Great Depression. This program will also bolster the University of Arizona's recognition as a global leader in education, and it's ranking for its graduates' employability. Lastly, PPG creates a distinctive program that furthers ABOR's 'Impact Arizona plan' and the 'New Economic Initiative' by strengthening workforce development and supporting students driven by public service to solve the big challenges that we face. It further addresses one of the most commonly cited problems of "hidden costs" of an advanced education directly into the spotlight by offering a resolution to the burden it creates.

Project Motivation and Reasoning
The pandemic-induced recession has impacted the job market and has significantly impacted many students and their families' income levels. The penalties associated with delays in graduation and post-graduation job attainment have grown substantially over the past decade. By its nature, licensure testing and certifications increase the costs of entering an occupation, hinder academic success and professional success. Licensure and certifications tests require payment of testing fees, allocation of time and effort to prepare for the tests, and, given a non-trivial failure rate, create uncertainty about obtaining employment in their respective fields. Moreover, the cost of failure is increased by specialized coursework required for licensure in many fields.

Despite the significant need for service-oriented professionals in many fields, students' financial barriers are extremely high. The PPG grant furthers ABORS' 'New Economic Initiative' with a targeted approach to workforce development while responding to the public health needs in rural and underserved communities; and continuing to educate the doctors, nurses, and allied health workers on the front lines while contributing to Arizona's educational and technical needs. See student testimonial gathered in support of this programming in the attached document.
Table 1 presents a non-exhaustive list of the many professional programs offered at UArizona that require certification or licensing to practice in the field. On average, UArizona students will be required to pay $632 to license or certify in their field, with multiple fields paying more than $1000. Please note that these costs are only for fees directly attributed to registering for the exams(s) required and do not include the cost of preparation materials or travel required for various licensing exams, which can double and sometimes triple the total cost of becoming licensed. In order to pay for these expenses, students have to make undue sacrifices by either working multiple jobs while trying to study and performing below the requirements or sometimes having to retake the exam or incur more debt, putting students who are already food or housing insecure at a severe disadvantage and forcing them to make impossible decisions.

Further, a review of our data from the GPSC Travel and ReaP grant programs from FY'19, and FY'20 show that our traditional grant programs do not adequately meet many graduate and professional students' needs. Analyzing Travel and ReaP grants data, we find that students from Nursing, CAPLA, Law, Pharmacy, and Medicine have significantly lower application rates despite holding workshops in these colleges and having similar sized and sometimes larger student bodies than colleges with higher application rates (Figs. 1 and 2). Students from these colleges also have significantly lower travel grant award rates. The reasons for low application rates from these colleges can be attributed to i.) different needs in terms of professional and academic support and ii.) different reasons for travel required or encouraged by their programs that are not covered by our traditional grants.

Lastly, the PPG program aligns with the Proposed University of Arizona's Institutional Metrics before ABOR, i.e., raise the profile and prestige of UA's professional graduate programs. For most professional graduate programs ranked by World Report and US News, students' success passing professional licensure exams and employment rates is a highly weighted metric.

Together, PPG and the other programs run by GPSC offer opportunities that may not be readily available to all students but are vital to advancing their career trajectories, professional development, and completing their education.

Project Scope an Impact
From the data available to us, UArizona has at least 10,422 actively enrolled students who will require a license or certification either to complete their academic degree or in addition to their degrees to be gainfully employed. The PPG grant will support students who do not have sources and resources to fund these exams and certifications. The PPG aims to align with the University's land grant mission and minority-serving institution. The pilot iteration of the Promising Practice Grant (PPG) will attempt to alleviate some of the financial burdens of as many deserving students with specific aid for BIPOC students, first-generation, underrepresented, students from rural areas, and financially disadvantaged students who demonstrate significant need, dedication, the benefit of acquiring a license or certification and commitment to serve the community. The 2019 SSF survey shows that students overwhelmingly sought lower-income students, students with disabilities, students of color, and LGBTQ students. Funding this grant would thus go very far in making our students feel heard and that the student services fees are being utilized in a way they would overwhelmingly support. PPG would also improve the recruitment and retention of populations directly needed in service-oriented fields and increase our students' entry into the industry and serve the community. Finally, if PPG could support at least one student from every college in Table 1, SSF would be supporting $11,378 of less debt, missed meals, or missed rent. The PPG grant will impact at least 80 – 90 students annually.

Project Maintenance and longevity
GPSC runs several programs that support the University of Arizona's mission, including our flagship programs GPSC Travel Grants, Research and Project (ReaP) Grants, Professional Opportunities Development (POD) Grants, and Student Showcase. This year GPSC re-organized the grants programs' leadership by expanding support to undergraduate students and housing the grants programs within a single office and run by a team of two Graduate Assistants. The PPG grant will be developed and supported by the GAs and the Appropriations Committee. The PPG applications will be peer-reviewed by on the quality of the application on three main criteria: 1) eligibility; 2) description of applicant's need, service, and benefit to the UA community and the larger community 3) evidence of applicants' desire of continued public service. The initiative's success will be measured by the overall utilization of eligible students in terms of a percentage of funds awarded to PPG being allocated to students and the variety of disciplines that apply for grants. Awardees will be required to submit statements about the impact the award had on their education, career progression, professional development, and overall well-being. Awardees will also report the amount of award they utilized, success in passing the test or certification, and any costs related to completing their licensing/certification that was not covered by the award. These data will allow GPSC to assess both the financial and non-financial impact of the grant and identify needs not currently being met by the grant program. Additionally, GPSC will work on collecting donations from within the University, Alumni and other donors.