Dean of Students Office Graduate & Professional Students Program
The Dean of Students Office Graduate & Professional Students Program was implemented nine years ago to offer a comprehensive and consistent professional development opportunity to the graduate assistants serving in the various graduate assistantships within the Dean of Students Office. The program meets the educational goals of UA graduate and professional students by providing Graduate Assistant (GA) stipends, by giving GAs the opportunity to grow professionally by putting learned theory into practice, and by preparing students for a successful transition into a professional workforce.

The program aligns with the priorities of the 2019 Student Services Fee & Green Fund Survey priorities by providing on campus job opportunities, career preparation opportunities and career based experiential learning and leadership opportunities for 10-12 graduate students each year. The graduate assistants predominately work in areas of the DOS that work on top priorities listed in the survey; specifically, enhancing campus health and wellness programs and initiatives, and campus safety and security enhancements.

The Graduate & Professional Students Program supports the mission and core values of Student Affairs and Campus Life by providing expanded education and outreach, through a variety of outstanding programs and services, to positively impact diverse members of the campus community and both local and remote community partners. Graduate students who participate in the program receive individualized professional development opportunities which expand their career-related opportunities, offer focused leadership skill development, and a supportive environment for both their academic and professional pursuits.

Graduate Assistant Impact
The Graduate & Professional Students Program integrates intentional learning, mentoring, and collaborative work experience among the graduate assistants as a cohort and as a critical part of the overall staff of the Dean of Students Office. The GAs work alongside the coordinators, clinicians, directors and deans of DOS and are offered progressive experience in varied areas of expertise including planning, advising, presenting, teaching, curriculum development, behavioral intervention, faculty engagement, motivational interviewing, triage, mental health support and resources, First Amendment, academic integrity, code of conduct adjudication, and more.

The Graduate & Professional Students Program acknowledges the skills and area of study of each of the graduate assistants when they start with the DOS and seeks to understand their academic and professional goals. Through supervision and mentoring, DOS staff assist each graduate assistant toward their goals through diversified experiential opportunities and professional development.

The 2019-2020 graduate assistants articulated the value of The Graduate & Professional Students Program:

“Being a Graduate Assistant for Student Assistance and Accountability has significantly impacted and improved our ability to serve and support students in crisis. Our experiences have immensely improved our active listening, effective communication, creative problem solving, and presentation skills. With these skills, we are better prepared to answer student questions and respond to concerns at varying levels. This has been invaluable in being able to assist students who enter DOS and need immediate response through the office’s triage coverage and allows us to provide a higher quality of service to all members of the campus community. Additionally, we have a growing awareness of difficulties that many students face as they transition from high school to college. To assist with this transition, we have been inspired to seek ways we can further support students. Our experiences have reaffirmed our goals to work with students in a positive capacity where we can support students throughout their collegiate experience.”

Overall Student Impact
The Graduate & Professional Students Program places graduate students in a variety of responsible positions within the Dean of Students Office and the impact on the student community is both direct and indirect. Our graduate assistants have direct impressions on the overall student population through one on one meetings with students, the presentation of our educational workshops, course delivery and triage of student concerns.

Prior to the pandemic, the graduate assistants noted meeting with students who were concerned about their academic success, experiencing financial difficulties, presenting mental health concerns, and referred to our office for suicidal ideation. The GAs
often answered questions regarding academic withdrawals, medical withdrawals, academic department policies, Registrar’s policies, how to effectively communicate with professors, absence policies, financial aid deadlines, and change in schedules. The GAs also connected students with different resources on campus including cultural centers, Counseling and Psych Services, Title IX, Campus Pantry, and the Disability Resource Center. These contacts were critical to students’ continued success amidst personal crisis.

In Spring 2020, demand for support between March and June increased by 152% due to COVID-19. During this time the GAs assisted with reports regarding the health, safety and academic concerns of students. In the latter half of the spring semester, GAs attended to many reports from professors concerned about students whom they had not heard from since prior to spring break, were not attending online lectures and/or had tested positive and needed additional support. Common resources for such students were referring them to CAPS, discussing academic policy changes (consider pass/fail option) and issuing professor notifications for students who did test positive/lost a loved one to COVID-19 and needed time to recover. In the past two semesters, these interventions have been essential to student retention and wellbeing.

COVID-19 has exasperated previous areas of concern including students’ financial and mental health and introduced new areas of concern including access to technology. Often, students were unaware of the resources available to them after the shift to remote activities. Without the graduate assistants within the DOS central office, it would have been impossible to meet this demand.

In response to the financial crisis, the DOS took on the development, implementation and oversight of the Richard H. Tyler Student Emergency Fund distributing over $936,925 in donor funds and $2,687,550 in CARES Act funding between March and December 2020. Our graduate assistants played a critical role in the effective distribution of the funds as well as the consistent delivery of resources to students to supplement the funding.

Assessment
The Dean of Students Office Graduate & Professional Students Program assessment focuses primarily on the experience of the GAs. GAs receive year-end performance appraisals and are asked to provide appraisals of all major aspects of the program. Additionally, GAs collect information on programs/services to assess the effectiveness of outreach and intervention and determine how to continue to positively engage students and serve the UA community. The GAs observations and feedback are directly applied to our practice, services, and how we deliver education and outreach to the campus community.

The Graduate & Professional Students Program Longevity
The Dean of Students Office must remain flexible and well prepared to serve the University of Arizona community while maintaining its focus on providing meaningful employment and career preparation for graduate students. Health and safety of our campus community is our priority and we continue to have a high volume, high intensity, demanding caseload and a significant demonstration of need for our services on campus. While we build a stronger network related to student health and wellbeing through our interventions and programs, we cannot be satisfied until all students know of campus resources and have a connection of support that holds them up as they progress to graduation.

We must be ready to support students now and in the future. Our graduate assistants currently carry 57% of our overall caseload in DOS central. They are critical to the delivery of our programs; everything from Dog Days with the Dean to Plagiarism Awareness to Wildcat Events Board. Their professionalism, relevance and energy fuels our work. We do not know what the future looks like for our campus community and the mental wellness of our student population after nine plus months of social isolation will be altered. We must re-engage campus life with fervor. We are an essential service on this campus and we are only able to meet the campus’ needs with the support of our graduate assistance and the Student Services Fee.

The Dean of Students Office Graduate & Professional Students Program has proven to be a valuable work experience which has propelled our graduate assistants into full-time employment in their desired career fields, which include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, South Dakota Department of Human Services, and many Higher Education peers including The University of Texas at Austin, Texas State University, Arizona State University, UC-Boulder, University of Michigan, Berea and with many now employed as colleagues at the University of Arizona. We appreciate the opportunity the Student Services Fee Board has given us to grow The Dean of Students Office Graduate & Professional Students Program. We have created a program that excels at developing our graduate assistants while offering exceptional support and resources to all students. We look forward to offering consistently excellent support to students with the support of the Student Service Fee.