**UNC CHARLOTTE**

## 2018-19 Annual Report

## The Graduate School

*Highlights of the Year*

**Enrollment:** Following a national trend, graduate enrollment was down at UNC Charlotte by about 1.5% (5,403 to 5,323) from 2017-2018, driven by lower enrollment for new and continuing domestic students (3,960 to 3,901) and continuing international students (1,443 to 1,422). Domestic applications declined 2.5%, from 3,665 to 3,573, while applications from international students, which represent almost half of all graduate students at UNC Charlotte, dropped by almost 21% (3,763-2,975) over the same period.

Nationally, graduate school applications declined by 4% according to a study by the Council of Graduate Schools. The study also showed a 1% decline in first-time graduate enrollment, compared to an increase at UNC Charlotte of almost 15%.

Several factors are driving enrollment for both domestic and international graduate students, including the economy, increased competition coming from other states and countries, concerns with the return on investment for a graduate degree and uncertain political climate.

To support enrollment, the Provost's Master's Enrollment Incentive Funding Program was launched this year to support students such as part-time working professionals who otherwise would have no financial support.  That initiative produced 307 new master's funded awards compared to 188 in 2017 and an increase in enrolled master's students from 337-390 between 2017-18.  (Total enrollment of master's students actually decreased from 3,439-3,410 because of two record years for graduations).

**Student Progress:** Both graduation rate and time-to-degree measures improved in the 2017-18 academic year and appear on track for 18-19.  Time-to-degree for doctoral students was down from 5.16 years to 5.11; Master's degrees remained the same at 1.88 years; and Graduate Certificate time-to-degree improved from 1.64-1.62 years.

Examples of initiatives driving improvement in these metrics were new DegreeWorks reports and a summer fellowship.  The Graduate School now provides faculty with a student progress report from DegreeWorks that provides key information to faculty to assist in advising current students. Students also receive a Time Limits report each semester to let them know of courses nearing expiration.  A new Dissertation Completion Fellowship provides support to students interested in working on their dissertation over the summer.

**Student Funding:** The Graduate Student Funding Task Force completed its report in February to develop a scalable and sustainable plan for graduate student funding. A Graduate Council Standing Committee on Graduate Student Funding was established to oversee implementation of the Task Force's

recommendations. Work plans for each of the Task Force recommendations, which will be aimed at encouraging continued growth in UNC Charlotte's research portfolio, will be developed by staff in the coming months with oversight by the Graduate Council Committee.

In response to the Task Force Report, the Chancellor provided additional funds to increase graduate assistantship stipends for FY20. With direction from the Provost, the funds will be used to increase the baseline compensation for the 199 graduate assistantships provided to the colleges by the Graduate School; the increase in compensation will be implemented for the 2019-2020 academic year.

**New Appointments:** Jill Huerta was appointed Director for the Center for Graduate Life in the summer of 2018.  Also, Sandy Krause assumed the role as the Assistant Dean for Graduate Academic Affairs and Jonathan Blanton joined the staff as Director of Finance and Business Affairs in May.

**Employee Engagement**: The Graduate School received high marks in the 2018 UNC System Employee Engagement Survey, scoring higher than System benchmarks in several categories, including job satisfaction, recognition of innovative and high quality teaching, and pride in the workplace.


*Striving for Student Success*

Graduation rate and time-to-degree measures remain strong.  Time-to-degree for doctoral students was reduced from 5.16 years to 5.11 compared with the 2016-17 academic year; Master's degrees remained the same at 1.88 years; and Graduate Certificate time-to-degree improved from 1.64-1.62 years.

To improve time-to-degree and graduation rates, the Graduate School established the Dissertation Completion Fellowship that provides a summer fellowship to give the student time to work on the dissertation. The program also provides an opportunity for an additional semester on the Graduate Assistant Support Plan. This Fellowship provides the students with summer funding while also recognizing the contribution of faculty who have used extramural funding to support their students.

We also are now producing a Student Progress Report through DegreeWorks that provides faculty with timely and crucial student progress information focused on improving time-to-degree, and a Time Limits report that alerts students to vulnerabilities in their plan of study with time to address them.

With programming aimed at improving students' chances for success following graduation, the Graduate School's Center for Graduate Life enrolled more than 650 in a GRAD course in 2018-19 and more than 350 in Teaching Assistant training.  In all, 4,103 students visited the CGL last year.

A workshop on mentoring was introduced last year to strengthen this crucial aspect of student success. The workshop, based on a program offered at the Center for Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, focuses on communication, expectation setting and encouraging independence.   Two of the mentoring workshops had been conducted as of the date of this report, with 50 UNC Charlotte graduate faculty participating.

An effort was launched in 2018 to help ensure integrity in research conducted at UNC Charlotte by fostering a campus culture that is open and transparent.  The effort, which includes the mentoring initiative mentioned above, is the subject of an NSF grant proposal to address authorship disputes in research and help prevent detrimental research practices. Also, plagiarism detection software is being tested to enable students to scan their work for potential issues prior to submitting.

To recognize and reward excellence in graduate faculty leadership, the Thomas L. Reynolds Leadership Award was introduced in 2018.  The award was made possible by an endowed gift from Graduate School Dean Tom Reynolds and his wife, Claudia.  The award will be presented annually to a Graduate Program Director or Graduate Program Coordinator.

Through the Graduate Council, academic programming and policies were continually updated to meet changing needs of students.  More than 200 course and curriculum proposals were reviewed as well as staff proposals to
- improve the syllabus template for course proposals in Curriculog
- make thesis committee assignments more flexible by allowing remote participation
- change policy for Graduate Faculty Representatives serving on thesis committees
- adopt an embargo policy for theses and dissertations

Other 2018 initiatives enhancing student success included:

- A hybrid model for Teacher Assistant training was launched, moving portions of the training online to meet student needs
- Increased penetration of student Individual Development Plans. Student interest is growing and we are considering using the IDPs as part of the Funding Task Force recommendations to link funding to student progress.
- A career readiness program created by NC State was initiated that will offer graduate students more opportunities to explore career options.  The program, called Accelerate to Industry (A2i), will be implemented in the coming months.
- 424 new graduate faculty appointments were reviewed and processed.
- A Doctoral Hooding Ceremony was launched last year to recognize and encourage doctoral student achievement.
- 1,125 applications for graduation were processed, with more than 80% processed within three days.
- 143 theses and dissertations were reviewed in 2018 (spring 2019 data not available at the time of this report)
- 3,816 petitions were processed


***Expanding Horizons through Research***

Identifying plans for scalable and sustainable funding to ensure continued growth in UNC Charlotte's research portfolio was the aim of the Graduate Student Funding Task Force that completed its report in February.  A Graduate Council sub-committee on Graduate Student Funding was established to oversee implementation of the recommendations, which will begin in 2019.

In response to the Task Force Report, the Chancellor provided additional funds to increase graduate assistantship stipends for FY20. With direction from the Provost, the funds will be used to increase the baseline compensation for the 199 graduate assistantships provided to the colleges by the Graduate School; the increase in compensation will be implemented for the 2019-2020 academic year.

A copy of The Graduate Student Funding Task Force's report is available for download.

A new online system was developed in 2018 to allow GPDs to make funding offers to applicants and monitor offers and acceptance in real time.  To be implemented along with Funding Task Force recommendations in the coming months, the new funding system is expected to improve timeliness of funding offers and make the process more transparent.

For the second year, the Graduate School offered the Fellowship Application Incentive Program (FAIP) to encourage doctoral students to identify and apply for external grants and fellowships.  The program, which provides a financial incentive for students to apply, resulted in the more than $411,000 in incremental extramural funding growth in 2018-19.

### In the Community

The Graduate School raised more than $2.5 million through Exponential, the Campaign for UNC Charlotte in 2018.

A change in the Graduate School Veterans Fellowship was made in 2018 to reach more veterans interested in enrolling in a graduate program at UNC Charlotte.  The fellowship was simplified and carries a stipend of $18,000 for both master's and doctoral students.  The grant was named the Commander F.M. (Mike) Reynolds Scholarship and it continues as a two-year award that includes health insurance, tuition and fees as needed.

In recognition of Dr. William (Bill) Kennedy, who once served as a faculty member in the Belk College of Business, an official dedication was held in October naming the William Kennedy Graduate School Conference Room.  Kennedy left a gift to the University to endow scholarships. The William Kennedy Graduate Scholarship is used to help recruit exceptionally talented full-time graduate students doctoral degree programs.

### Other Activities:

- Coordinated the annual competitions for the First Citizens Bank Scholars Award (Dr. Steven Rogelberg, UNC Charlotte Chancellor's Professor, 2019 recipient) and the Harshini de Silva Graduate Mentor Award (Dr. Richard Lambert, Professor, Educational Leadership, 2019 recipient)
- Presented on The Role of Research Integrity in Promoting Excellence sponsored by the U.S. Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) on May 22-23, 2019 at Northwestern University
- Presented on Mentor Training for Graduate Faculty at the Virginia Tech Conference on Graduate Studies, June 19-20, 2019.

In the UNC System Employee Engagement Survey conducted in 2018, 87% of staff supported the statement, "This institution actively contributes to the community."

### By the Numbers

The Graduate School makes extensive use of data in tracking and improving graduate education at UNC Charlotte.  Primary indicators of fiscal health include application, enrollment and associated data which are tracked and reported on continuously to graduate program leadership.

That data also is compiled into the Graduate Fitness Report, an online dashboard implemented in 2018 providing GPDs vital data to help them improve program performance.  The Report is customized by program and shows trends in applications, admissions and enrollment, time-to-degree and demographic data to help GPDs identify and address issues.

Graduation rate and time-to-degree are the ultimate measures of success in student progress. Other important indices used in driving improvements in policies and programming include:

- **Exit Surveys**: The Graduate School conducts a biennial exit survey as a tool to identify potential improvements in graduate education.  The exit survey seeks the recent graduate's perspective on the academic and social environment on campus, as well as an assessment of satisfaction with program and professional development services.  For example, in 2017, students expressed interest in greater access to career preparation sessions and dissertation and thesis writing/formatting assistance sessions.

- **Needs Assessment**: Also conducted biennially, the Graduate Student Needs Assessment helps identify potential programming changes based on student input.  The results of the Assessment serve as the basis for an annual Student Affairs program review where professional development programming is assessed and new offerings are considered.

The Graduate School operates three distinctive websites, an intranet and over five social media platforms.  Data from these sources is analyzed weekly to gauge visitors' interests.  Graduate School staff use that data to tailor messaging and ensure channels are meetings SACS guidelines, as well as being informative to audiences.


*Improving Diversity*

As part of our collaboration with colleges to identify underserved populations in North Carolina that might benefit from a UNC Charlotte graduate program, we partnered with faculty in the Cato College of Education to deliver the MEd, MAT, and Graduate Certificates to off-site cohorts in different counties including Cabarrus, Iredell, Rowan, and Mecklenburg.  The program provides tuition incentives and reaches students who likely would not have enrolled in an advanced degree if they couldn't get funding and had to travel to the campus to participate.

Graduate Admissions staff selectively attended recruitment fairs seeking a diverse application pool. Some examples from 2018 include the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS) and the annual conference of the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans. Graduate Admissions maintains a Recruitment Events list that is updated regularly and shared with graduate program faculty.