



GRADUATE STUDENT ORIENTATION TOOLKIT

Resources & Information
for Academic Departments
to Support Successful Transitions

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Introduction

At the graduate level, students look to their academic department as their primary source of guidance, connection to the University, and link to resources. The Graduate School created this document as a resource for academic departments to ensure that units are equipped with the tools needed to support new students in their transition to graduate education and SIUE.

As you plan and execute your departmental orientation sessions and documents, we hope that the resources in this toolkit will be beneficial in creating an effective and engaging experience.

University Orientation Information

Information & opportunities provided at the University level

Graduate students have the opportunity to participate in both in-person and online orientation programs to provide them with information and resources that apply across the University. Encourage your students to take advantage of these opportunities to learn more about the campus and access the tools they need to successfully launch their academic careers at SIUE!

SIUE Experience & Winter Welcome: In-Person Orientation

Graduate students are invited to attend SIUE Experience (fall) or Winter Welcome (spring), campus-wide welcome events. The programs are multi-day events for undergraduate students, but the final day includes an agenda specifically tailored for new graduate students.

When?	August/January, typically the Sunday before the semester begins
Where?	Various locations, primarily in the Morris University Center
What?	The schedule for graduate students typically includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a graduate faculty and current student panel with interactive Q&A• informational session provided by the Graduate School and Lovejoy Library• access to a variety of student services in a one-stop shop format (student ID cards, parking permits, tech help, and more)• shuttle trips to Textbook Services
How?	Students planning to attend can find the schedule and the link to RSVP on the SIUE Experience website

SIUE 101: Online Orientation

All graduate students are automatically enrolled in SIUE 101, an organization within [Blackboard](#) created to provide all students with easy access to resources throughout their time at SIUE. Graduate students can access valuable content within SIUE 101 on the “Graduate Students” tab, including:

- An interactive online presentation introducing a variety of campus resources, including Health Services, Counseling Services, Campus Safety & Police, Financial Aid, Bursar, Parking Services, Assistantships, Graduate School funding opportunities, Campus Recreation, Kimmel Student Involvement Center, ACCESS, Career Development Center, CougarNet, and more.
- Link to gradsense.org, a comprehensive resource dedicated to financial literacy for graduate students
- FAQs regarding academic requirements/policies, Graduate Assistantships, theses/final projects, and research/travel funding
- Link to [Graduate Students](#) website maintained by the Graduate School

Academic Expectations

Ideas and best practices on how to support students’ understanding of academic requirements, policies, and resources

Creating a Plan of Study

Taking the time to work with each incoming student to create an individual Plan of Study provides each student with a road map of how they will achieve their goal of a graduate degree. Using a fillable PDF template for a Plan of Study for your program and encouraging students to save it electronically allows for potential revisions to the plan as students progress each semester. Seeing the “big picture” reassures students that they are on track and making progress, even at their starting point.

A Plan of Study is an ideal location to consistently remind students of other important academic expectations, such as minimum grades/GPA required for retention, thesis/exit requirements, and other progression elements unique to your program. Maintaining a Plan of Study also fulfills the requirements in [Policy 1L6: Graduate Student Matriculation, Advisement, Instruction, Evaluation, and Assistantships](#).

Appendix A is a Plan of Study template that can be used to be tailored to your specific program.

Academic Integrity

The start of students' graduate study is the ideal time to reinforce the meaning of academic and research integrity and how those concepts are executed within your discipline. Consider facilitating discussions and the sharing of information about:

- Acknowledging the contributions and ideas of others across all types of information sharing
- Common mistakes leading to accusations of plagiarism, cheating, or academic dishonesty
- Guidance on conducting research in your discipline that adheres to moral, ethical, and professional standards
- How to report instances of academic or research misconduct
- The serious consequences that can arise from lack of adherence to academic/research integrity policies or procedures

Exit Requirements

Discussing exit requirements for your program during orientation may seem like strange timing, but it is the perfect opportunity to discuss what is expected of them to graduate. Don't assume that because the exit requirement is described in your admissions materials, in the Graduate Catalog, or on your departmental website that students already understand what it is, how to prepare for it, or when it should happen. Remember that students don't know what they don't know, and if at all possible, provide an opportunity for an open Q&A regarding overall academic expectations and your exit requirement so that they have the opportunity to learn from others' questions.

In addition to your departmental exit requirement, be sure students understand the [University requirements to be awarded a diploma](#).

Graduate Catalog

Remind students that the [Graduate Catalog](#) is online and their official source of information for curriculum information, graduation requirements, course descriptions, archived catalogs, and academic policies.

Academic Resources

Orientation is the perfect time to ensure students are aware of the many resources that exist on campus to support them in meeting their academic expectations. As you discuss academic support, consider including the following:

- **YOU!** Do not take for granted that students understand that their faculty are a source of support if they are struggling, academically or otherwise. Students may have had an undergraduate experience where faculty support was not abundant, so take this opportunity to remind them of when it is appropriate to seek out help and the best way to do so.
- [Lovejoy Library](#). Explain to students that their relationship with the library may be different as a graduate student than it was as an undergraduate. Consider requesting an [Instruction Session](#) from the Library either as a part of your orientation, or early on in your program coursework, to ensure that students understand how to access the many services that the Library has to offer and the resources available in your discipline.
- [ACCESS](#). Do not rely solely on statements on syllabi to inform students about the services that exist in ACCESS for students with disabilities. Instead, be proactive in sharing the resource with all students.
- [Writing Center](#). Often graduate students assume that learning support services, such as the Writing Center, are only available to undergraduates. Be another voice at the time of orientation to remind them that they can and should utilize the Writing Center when appropriate.
- [ITS](#). Whether it's Blackboard assistance, downloading Office 365, printing a research poster, or one of the many other technology services that ITS offers students, help to make students aware of what they offer and how to take advantage of their services.

Wellness & Connections

Beyond the academic transition – promote healthy students by connecting them to campus resources and each other

Promoting Community

Your new graduate students automatically have one thing in common: they are all embarking on the pursuit of your graduate degree at the same time. Beyond that, they will likely have a variety of life experiences, interests, and backgrounds. Be intentional in helping them to connect with each other and with your current students in those early weeks. What works will be different depending on your program structure, but ideas include:

- Plan lunch or coffee breaks at on-campus locations, such as Starbucks or Fixins'
- Host a happy hour gathering at one of Edwardsville's many local establishments or an evening of bowling at Cougar Lanes
- Offer group campus tours, given by faculty or by current students in your program
- Give students the option to come to class an hour early or stay an hour after for social time and bring snacks to share

- Promote sharing online via Blackboard discussion board questions or private social media groups to encourage students to get to know one another
- Organize a group outing to a social event, such as a sporting or cultural event, either on or off campus
- Go as a group to check things off of the list of "[57 Things To Do at SIUE](#)"

Campus Engagement

Use the orientation period as a time to encourage your students to engage in the SIUE campus community through student organizations and events. Graduate students often assume that student life is focused solely on the undergraduate experience, but that is not the case. When students participate in campus organizations that align with their passions, academic disciplines, or leisure interests, it is likely to increase their connection to SIUE, satisfaction with their graduate student experience, and likelihood of being retained in their program.

As graduate students, your students are poised to rise to leadership positions in campus organizations and help to shape SIUE's campus culture. Consider highlighting the specific campus organizations and events that your students are likely to have an interest in based on your discipline, and encourage them to dive into the student experience. The [Get Involved at SIUE](#) site is a great starting point to explore the student organizations and events happening on campus all year long.

Wellness Resources

Ensure that your students understand that the campus resources devoted to their health and wellbeing are available to them as graduate students. Consider holding a group discussion about healthy ways to manage the stress of graduate school and incorporate the below resources as ways to integrate positive coping mechanisms into their daily lives:

- [Campus Recreation](#). Whether it's through a group fitness class, a trip to the rock climbing gym, or swimming laps at the indoor pool, there are many ways for graduate students to utilize the recreation and fitness opportunities on campus...for **FREE!**
- [Center for Spirituality & Sustainability](#). For some students, an important piece of their wellbeing may be through connections with their faith. Students can connect to various faith-based groups and learn more about the faith services offered in the area at the Center for Spirituality & Sustainability.
- [Health Services](#). All enrolled SIUE students, including graduate students, can visit Health Services to receive care for acute illnesses, physical exams, women's health services, and more.
- [Counseling Services](#). All enrolled SIUE students, including graduate students, can access the services provided by the professional psychologists and counselors at Counseling

Services...for **FREE**. The services provided include psychotherapy, counseling, crisis intervention, sexual assault counseling and advocacy, and more. To get started, students should call 618-650-2842 to schedule an intake appointment.

Career Development

Students often begin with the end in mind – engage in career readiness conversations from the start

Discipline Pathways & Choices

Students may have been able to articulate interest areas or career goals during the admissions process, but it is still likely that they would benefit greatly from thorough discussions about the various career pathways in your discipline upon matriculation. They may have changed their plans or may need more in-depth information about the career choices that they will have upon completing your program. Consider small group discussions or panel presentations with current students, faculty, and/or program alumni that help to answer the following questions for your new students:

- What are the most common career paths that graduates from your program pursue?
- What are examples of the less common career paths that have emerged?
- What does the current job market look like for those career paths? Are certain areas experiencing more growth than others?
- What “soft skills” do employers in your discipline rate as important in their hiring decisions? What are concrete ways that students can learn and demonstrate those soft skills while in the program?
- How can students distinguish themselves during the program to be more highly sought after by employers in your field?
- What are the ways in which students can or will participate in experiential learning in your program? How can they expect those experiences to shape their career development?
- For students who may pursue additional education following graduation, how can they be competitive in their next application process? In what ways and when should they begin searching for programs to pursue?
- What does the job application process commonly look like for your field? How can students build their résumés/CVs, LinkedIn profiles, or portfolios to be fully prepared for the search when the time comes?
- What formal and informal networking opportunities for students to connect to both alumni and potential employers exist in your department or profession?
- What are the notable success stories of your alumni?

Career Development Center

Ensure that your students know how to take advantage of the many services offered to assist in their career preparation at the [Career Development Center](#) on campus. In addition to individual services such as career assessments, résumé development, LinkedIn profile development, and interview preparation, they also provide opportunities for students to connect directly with employers via [Career Fairs](#) each semester and on-campus interviews.

Financial Literacy

Graduate students are in a unique situation when it comes to making wise financial decisions. As they may have prior student debt and may add to that debt as they invest in their graduate education, it is essential that they have support and resources to make informed decisions about their financial future.

During orientation, link to and inform students about [GradSense.org](#), a comprehensive financial resource, developed by the Council of Graduate Schools, tailored specifically to the needs of graduate students. GradSense provides a myriad of resources to students, including exploring the earning power of their graduate degree, tips for managing and paying off student loans, advice on how to transition out of graduate school financially, and budget calculators.

Remind your graduate students that the [Financial Aid Office](#) is here to assist them with student employment, loans, and grants to support their graduate education.

Research Funding

For many graduate students, part of their academic and career development will involve the execution of research projects. Be sure that students understand during orientation that SIUE supports research activities. Inform them about the various sources of research funding, at the department, school/college level, and at the Graduate School.

- [Research Grants for Graduate Students \(RGGGS\)](#). The purpose of RGGGS is to support research and creative activities conducted by graduate students to enhance their academic progress. Students are eligible to apply after they have completed at least 6 credit hours in their graduate program in good academic standing. The application is open for a specified period each fall and spring semester, and awards are for up to \$500.
- [Research Grants for Research Doctoral Students \(RGRDS\)](#). The purpose of RGRDS is to support research and projects conducted by doctoral students in the EdD, DNP, and cooperative PhD programs. The application is open during late May and June, and awards are for up to \$1000.

- [Travel Grants](#). The graduate student travel support program provides funding to support travel for major paper presentations and eligible exhibits and performances. Applications must be submitted in advance of the travel, and can be supported up to a maximum of \$600 from the Graduate School.
- [Grant Forward Database](#). SIUE subscribes to the funding database Grant Forward, which allows students to search and save funding opportunities and create funding alerts. Particularly for students interested in pursuing a PhD program following completion of their degree at SIUE, the Grant Forward database can be a valuable resource for searching for applicable fellowships and grants.

Graduate Assistant Orientation

GAs have additional orientation needs – help to provide them with the resources to launch their GA positions successfully

Graduate School GA Orientation

All new GAs should be directed to complete the online GA orientation published by the Graduate School before beginning their new positions. Information covered includes:

- Introduction to the Graduate School
- Accessing the [GA Handbook](#)
- GA Eligibility and Appointments
- Payroll Information & Direct Deposit
- Tuition Waivers
- Professionalism in the University Environment
- Legal Considerations, including Title IX and FERPA
- GA Benefits, including Paid Leave and Earned Summer Tuition Waivers
- Counseling Services, including Submitting SIUE Care Reports and videos on Self-Care and Coping with Anxiety & Grief
- Teaching Resources including Classroom Management, Academic Misconduct, and Supporting Students (ACCESS, Learning Support Services, Lovejoy Library, and more)
- Researcher Resources including Research Integrity, Research Misconduct, and Research Compliance

Graduate Assistant Handbook & Graduate School Website

Encourage your GAs to familiarize themselves with the content of the [GA Handbook](#), the primary reference document for all policies and procedures relating to GA employment. It is essential that they understand the terms and conditions of their position as a GA!

The Graduate School maintains a [Graduate Assistantship website](#) that has the information, processes, and forms that GAs will need throughout the tenure of their position.

Department & Position Specific Training

Consider the additional needs of your GAs to be successful in their positions based off of the unique responsibilities they will have in your department, and provide the training needed to help them start off prepared to execute those responsibilities. Consider the following as you evaluate the training provided to your new GAs:

- What technology systems will they use in their position, and how is training provided? (For example, for new TAs, how is Blackboard training provided for them to carry out instructor-level tasks?)
- What university resources and offices will they interact with? Consider providing a “Frequent Contacts” guide to help them know where to go for commonly asked questions.
- Who are the department stakeholders and where are the department resources? Take the time to introduce them to the staff and faculty in your department and to show them how to access the supplies they need for the job.
- Who are their peers? Consider planning time for new GAs to connect, informally or formally, with experienced GAs who can serve as mentors and fellow new GAs.
- What are the standards for performance? Be explicit in describing the expectations for work performance and what excellence looks like in their position.
- What ethical issues can arise in their position? Spend time familiarizing TAs with the specific concepts of academic integrity and RAs with research integrity. All GAs, regardless of role, should be explicitly informed about standards of professional behavior and conduct. Provide examples of how they might encounter tricky situations and consider hosting small group discussions on how to navigate various hypothetical case studies.
- What regulations and laws apply to the kind of work they will be doing? Discuss the relevant federal, state, and University regulations, including FERPA (privacy of academic records), Title IX (sexual harassment and violence), and any others. Examining case studies can be helpful to enhance new GAs understanding of how such laws and regulations can apply in real world scenarios within their role.

Appendix A: Plan of Study Template

Plan of Study for _____

Program/Concentration:

Intended Graduation:

Faculty Advisor:

Requirements for program retention and completion:

- Cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher
- # of program credit hours/courses
- # of 500-level credit hours
- _____
- _____

	FALL			SPRING			SUMMER		
	Course	Hours	Grade	Course	Hours	Grade	Course	Hours	Grade
Year 1:									
Year 2:									
Year 3:									