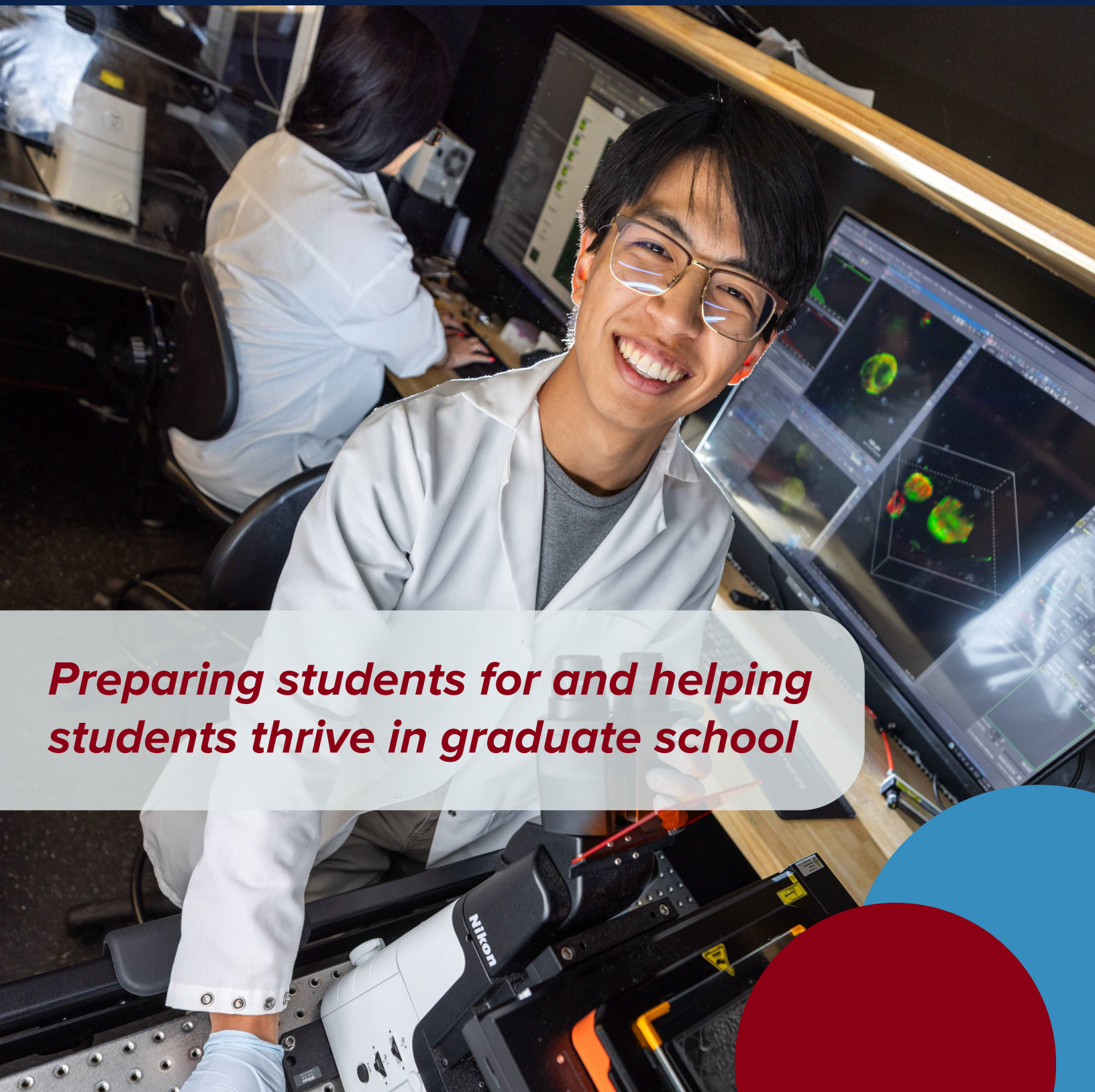




THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

Graduate Center

Impact Report 2025-2026

A photograph of a male graduate student with glasses and a white lab coat, smiling at the camera. He is sitting at a desk in a laboratory, with a computer monitor displaying scientific data (fluorescence microscopy images) behind him. Another person in a lab coat is visible in the background, working at another computer. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the computer screens.

*Preparing students for and helping
students thrive in graduate school*



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Top Left: Writing Consultant Sydni meeting with a student online.

Bottom Right: Students visiting at the Graduate Center Open House Fall 2025



Message from the Dean



Kirsten Limesand, PhD
Dean of the Graduate College
University of Arizona

The Graduate College and Graduate Center proudly present our Inaugural Impact Report for the 2025-2026 academic year. This report truly embodies how we live into our three strategic goals:

- Expand access to graduate education
- Provide foundational support across the graduate student lifecycle
- Graduate career-ready students

We expand access by creating pathways and reducing barriers for all talented students, particularly those from first-generation, limited-income backgrounds. As a first-generation college student, I still remember how my first undergraduate research experience transformed my academic journey. The consortium of programs under UROC couples meaningful research experiences and the mentorship needed to pursue doctoral study. In fact, our McNair Program Scholars are more than six times as likely to earn a doctorate as their University of Arizona peers. The Sloan Indigenous Graduate Partnership, Coverdell Fellows Program, and University Fellows Program further advance access through financial support, mentoring, community, and leadership opportunities.

We provide foundational support by connecting students with resources that help them thrive. The Graduate Center serves as a hub for mentoring, writing support, fellowship development, wellness resources, and community building. From navigating the transition into graduate school (Grad CATS Mentoring) to the

Dissertation Writing Course (Graduate Writing Lab), we served students from 19 colleges across the entirety of the graduate student lifecycle. Additionally, in partnership with the Campus Pantry, the Graduate Center serves as a pop-up pantry location where students can freely access unopened non-perishables, as well as menstrual products.

We also prepare students to translate their expertise into meaningful careers. Our new Core Professional Competencies Model helps graduate students and postdoctoral scholars identify their strengths and build individualized development pathways. Grad Slam strengthens communication skills, while Graduate Career Services supported approximately 1,800 students through advising, courses, document reviews, and career programming.

Together, our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners are building an inclusive graduate community where students can access opportunity, thrive throughout their education, and graduate prepared to become the scholars, professionals, innovators, and changemakers of the future.

New Team Members at the Center

In 2025-2026, the Graduate Center added two new full-time team members to further enhance our efforts and collaborations on and off campus.



Melissa McGee, PhD, MPH

Program Coordinator, Professional Development and Alumni Relations

Melissa supports graduate students and postdoctoral scholars by designing resources and programming that build essential professional (soft) skills and strengthen career readiness. She also leads mentoring, storytelling, and community-building initiatives that connect graduate students and postdocs with a broad network of University of Arizona alumni. Melissa brings more than 30 years of experience across academic, health, and professional sectors, including her early career in public health education at the UA Campus Health Service and a decade as an instructional designer and academic writing specialist at Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e). Her work is rooted in learner-centered, inclusive program design and a commitment to helping individuals prepare for and pursue meaningful professional pathways.



Christopher Oka, MEd, ABD

Assistant Professor of Practice Graduate Student Success

Christopher Oka is an Assistant Professor of Practice in the Graduate College, where he leads graduate mentoring programs and initiatives, including the Grad CATS Mentoring program and mentoring trainings. In his role, he supports and empowers graduate students to actively engage in growing and shaping their mentoring universe, both as mentees and as mentors and across their graduate academic journeys. He is passionate about collaborating with faculty, staff, and students to cultivate a culture of mentorship across the university, investing in that impact at the relational, curricular, and systemic levels.

In partnership with the STEM Learning Center, he also leads asset-based teaching, mentoring, and student engagement initiatives supporting STEM student success, including initiatives that contribute to positive teaching, mentoring, and learning outcomes for graduate and undergraduate students.



UROC

Undergraduate Research Opportunities Consortium

Preparing the Next Generation of Graduate Researchers

UROC provides undergraduates with immersive research experiences, mentoring, and academic development that prepare them to thrive in graduate school and beyond.

30+
YEARS

249
APPLICATIONS
for the 2025 cycle

101
STUDENTS
SELECTED FOR
THE 24-25 UROC
STUDENT COHORT

STUDENTS FROM
75
INSTITUTIONS
ACROSS THE
COUNTRY APPLIED

45%
FIRST
GENERATION

61%
PELL
ELIGIBLE

67%
PLAN TO APPLY
TO GRADUATE
SCHOOL

27
MULTIDISCIPLINARY
ACADEMIC
MAJORS
STEM, SOCIAL
SCIENCES AND
HUMANITIES

HOW UROC BUILDS GRADUATE RESEARCHERS



RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Students design and conduct hands-on research.



RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

Poster presentations, colloquia, and scholarly dissemination.



MENTORSHIP

Faculty guidance and individualized support.



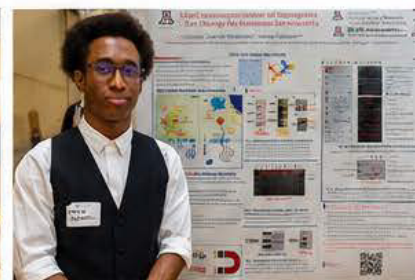
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Graduate school preparation, writing, communication, and career readiness.



COMMUNITY

A cohort model that fosters belonging and persistence.



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

“ I never knew if graduate school was a real possibility for me. Now, after this program, I walk taller than ever, into a future where I truly believe the only limit is my own dedication. ”

– Ricky Caperon, Neuroscience Major

Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program (McNair), a UROC Program

A federal TRIO program funded by the Department of Education, McNair is a premiere national pathway for preparing underrepresented students for doctoral study.

McNair meaningfully advances U of A's strategic goals by expanding access to graduate education and strengthening the future of innovative research. We empower first-generation, limited income, and underrepresented students to thrive in graduate school. Scholars don't just participate in research—they *become* researchers by developing the critical skills, methodological expertise, and confidence necessary to advance scholarly innovation.

Program Impact

PhD ATTAINMENT

6x

McNair Scholars are over six times more likely to earn their doctorate than their U of A peers.

RESEARCH OUTPUT

100%

100% of McNair Scholars *conduct original research* under the guidance of top U of A faculty and *present their findings at national conferences*. Many have also co-authored articles based on their research—all before graduate school begins.



McNair Scholar Jenna Dacayanan presenting at the McNair Scholars Research Conference at University of New Mexico in September 2025



According to McNair Scholar and 2025 UROC Outstanding Student Award Winner, Collin Brown, research isn't about having all the answers; it's about **curiosity, persistence, and asking good questions**. As a first-generation college student who moved from Pennsylvania to Arizona, Collin relied on the McNair Scholars Program to navigate the hidden curriculum of higher education.

Currently conducting summer research as a BioMed AMGEN Scholar at Yale University, Collin intends to pursue a joint MD/PhD in Neuroscience upon completion of his bachelor's.

Where are they now?

McNair Scholars matriculate into top graduate programs across the country, expanding the McNair and University of Arizona communities.



Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program

Serving the University of Arizona and the Tucson Community for 25 years and counting

The University of Arizona Peace Corps Coverdell Fellows Program is a graduate fellowship that offers financial assistance to Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. In return, Coverdell Fellows complete internships that demonstrate intercultural exchange in the Tucson community. Fellows carry out direct and indirect services in sector areas with community partners including education, food security, disease prevention, economic development, climate change water and other environmental issues. The mission of the Coverdell Fellows Program is to continue to bring service home.

Bringing Service Home

Fellows hone their skills in the community to expand on intercultural exchange, while providing outreach, volunteering, showcasing academic excellence and impact, professional development primarily through:

- Outreach Assistantships with community partners;
- Service and volunteer projects;
- Poster showcase; and
- Leadership roles with community partners and U of A outreach units.

Service in Action: Community Partners

Major partners in 2025-2026 include:

- Literacy Connects
- Sky Island Alliance
- Tucson Village Farm
- Ishkashitaa Refugee Network
- International Rescue Committee

Impacts for Students and Partners

4,708 Volunteer Service Hours

\$170,147 Economic Impact Equivalent

100% 2026 Coverdell Graduates
Employment Upon Graduation



**Oliver Fahrner, MS Student
Natural Resources**

Peace Corps Volunteer
Dominican Republic
2022-2024

"Being a Coverdell Fellow is the center of my identity here on the University of Arizona campus. This fellowship provides me with the financial support needed to pursue an advanced degree, the friendships necessary to maintain a healthy balance during the fast pace of graduate school, and professional development that has expanded my network and provided me the opportunity to make an even bigger impact in the communities I am passionate about supporting."

"Over the years, the Water Resources Research Center has hosted many Coverdell Fellows. Without exception, each has played a meaningful role in carrying out the WRRC's work with communities and other partners to further water stewardship throughout Arizona. In addition to their subject matter knowledge and skills, Coverdell Fellows bring maturity, determination and caring to their work."

**Sharon B. Megdal, Director, Water Resources Research Center
Professor, Department of Environmental Science, U of A**

Initiative to Maximize Student Development (IMSD)

IMSD is a graduate student support program in the biomedical sciences funded by the National Institutes of Health to support students who have overcome barriers in their path to graduate education. The goals of the program are to enhance student scholarly identity, create a sense of belonging, and develop self-efficacy skills.

Program Activities

IMSD supports students in five key ways:

- **Financial support**
- **First-year mentoring and support class**
- **Writing and public speaking training**
- **Social activities & peer support**
- **Academic coaching**

Student Experiences Enabling Success

"From the beginning, the program created a community where we could show up as people first, not just as students trying to prove we belong."

"The mentorship, community, and resources that came with IMSD helped me push through some of the more challenging parts of graduate school. It connected me with people who understand what it means to be underrepresented in science; that sense of belonging made a huge difference. I've grown so much personally/professionally, and I genuinely believe I would not be where I am today without this program."

Quick Facts

**Grant
Awarded**

2001

Total Students

220

**2025-2026
Students**

11

Amgen/IMSD Internships

In 2022, we co-created a program funded by biopharmaceutical company Amgen where our students spend six months at Amgen and then return to their doctoral labs with another six months of support for their dissertations.



Six students have participated in the Amgen/IMSD internship between 2022 and 2026.

Read about IMSD Scholar Hannah Ortiz' Amgen Internship experience on the Graduate College website:

<https://grad.arizona.edu/news/amgen-fellowship-shapes-doctoral-students-research-and-career>

University of Arizona Sloan Indigenous Graduate Partnership

Advancing U of A's Land Grant Mission through Access to Higher Education for Tribal and Indigenous Communities

The University of Arizona Sloan Indigenous Graduate Partnership (SIGP) supports Indigenous graduate students enrolled in master's and PhD graduate programs in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) with stipends, tuition, faculty mentoring, and a community of like-minded scholars!

2025-2026 Figures

Current Scholars

28

Completions

3 PhDs

4 Master's

Retention

84%

Sloan Scholars Experiences



Deandra Jones (Navajo)
PhD, Wildlife Sciences

"What I learned is, Traditional Ecological Knowledge is not a method...You have to be intentional about it. Indigenous research is really relational."

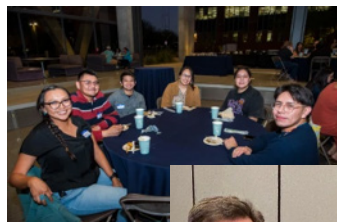
Sarah Olson (Iselta Tigua)
PhD, Pharmacology and Toxicology

"Being a Sloan scholar through my PhD provided me with the community and support that was critical to my success throughout my program"



<https://gradcenter.arizona.edu/uasigp>

National Sloan Symposium February 2026 Hosted at U of A

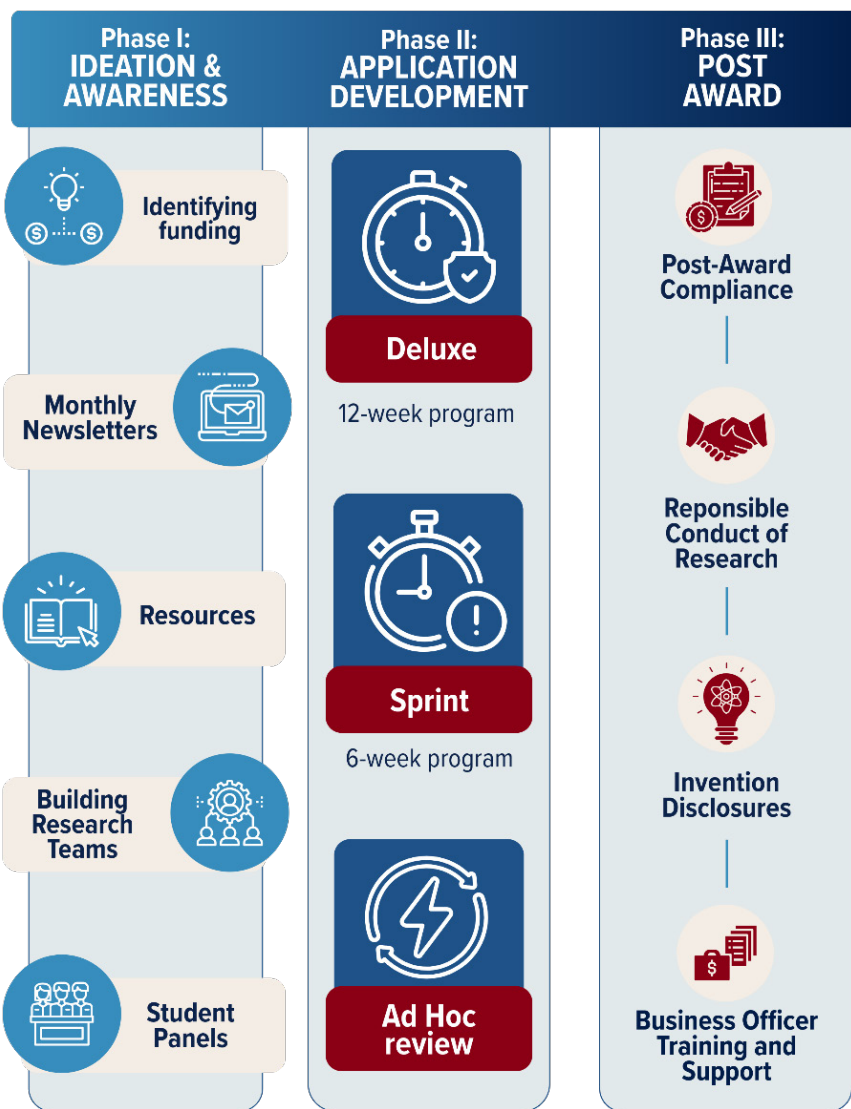


90+ students, faculty, staff, and alumni participated

The event featured keynote speaker **Robin Kimmerer**, Potawatomi botanist, author, and SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology. Her work bridges Western science with Indigenous ecological knowledge.

Office of Fellowships

The Office follows a **Grant Lifecycle Model**, ensuring support is available from the initial "spark" of an idea through to the final post-award compliance. This Office builds off the mindset that successful grant applications require equal contributions from discipline knowledge, writing support, and business services. Throughout this lifecycle, students gain critical essential skills that are applicable to most career pathways.



Student Testimonials



"Working with the Office over the summer provided a lot of help in setting up my application and then my mentors helped refine my story."

- Ethan Lin, 2026 NSF GRFP Recipient



"From creating a writing plan to offering consistent and targeted feedback, the support from the Office of Fellowships was invaluable in helping me receive a fellowship valued at \$265,800."

- Sam Gibbon; Simon Fellowship Awardee

Grad CATS Mentoring



*In Spring 2026, the Graduate Center launched **Graduate Communities for Academic Transitions & Success (Grad CATS) Mentoring**, a community-centered mentoring initiative that helps graduate students build meaningful connections, develop essential mentoring and student success skills, and navigate the transition into graduate school with confidence. The success of the pilot program has paved the way to expand the program in 2026-2027.*

Empowering Students

“It feels like this class has truly transformed my graduate experience from a passive whirlwind happening to me, to an active journey that I’m shaping for myself.”

“This class gave me the courage to actually speak up. I used to stay quiet because I was afraid of making mistakes, but now I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and joining the conversation.”

Keys to Success

- Engaging coursework
- Peer mentoring
- Campus Partners Valuing Student Success
 - Faculty
 - MENTOR Institute
 - Campus Health
 - Thrive Center Financial Wellness
 - Graduate Writing Lab
 - Graduate Career Services
 - Graduate Professional Development
 - Office of Fellowships

University Fellows Program

The University Fellows (UF) program enables programs across campus to recruit their top candidates. These students participate in interdisciplinary training and develop connections across campus that position them to be effective scholars and leaders.

2025-2026 > The program crossed the 250 students recruited threshold since 2014. UFs now number at 268 and counting.

Leading Change on Campus

Mourad Abdennebi (Cohort 2021-2022) served as President for the Graduate and Professional Student Council. His and the Council's efforts were critical in eliminating fees for mental health counseling for students, increasing graduate assistant base stipends, and creating community among graduate students.



Image credit: Chris Richard, University of Arizona

Generating Knowledge and Winning Awards

The UF program offers professional development awards to all UFs. Here is how several used theirs:

- > **Crystal Morales, Cohort 2021-2022**, doctoral student in Biomedical Engineering, will present at the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics & Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) 2026 conference
- > **Cason Hancock, Cohort 2023-2024**, Cancer Biology doctoral student, presented at American Association for Cancer Research 2026 Conference in San Diego, California
- > **Beihua Guo, Cohort 2024-2025**, Art MFA student, awarded the John Goto Prize and exhibited his work in Póvoa de Varzim, Portugal
- > **Ana Sanchez Zapata, Cohort 2025-2026**, doctoral student in Natural Resources, presented at the International Conference of the Wildlife Disease Association in Chicago, Illinois

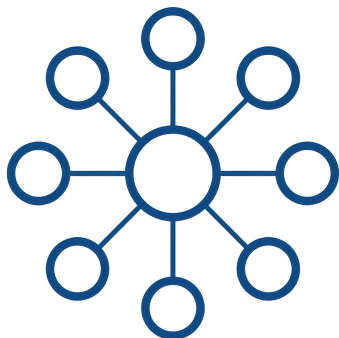
Interested students and programs can learn more on our website:
<https://gradcenter.arizona.edu/student-success/university-fellows-program>



Wellness Partnerships Lead to Enhanced Access to Services

To meet the University's *Success for Every Scholar* imperative, the Graduate Center offers a variety of events and online resources to support eight dimensions of wellness. A key focus in 2025-2026 was to expand our financial wellness resources for students.

Financial Wellness Resources Expand



CREATED

A New Resource Hub

The Center created a financial wellness page containing articles, events, videos, and online resources. The page helps students build financial literacy and confidence.



ROLLED OUT

CashCourse

By joining the High Education Financial Wellness Alliance, we are able to offer CashCourse to all students. This tool offers guides, games, and information that build financial literacy 24/7.



LEVERAGED

Partnerships

Our team deepened connections with Campus Health, CAPS, Mindful Ambassadors, 3rd Decade, and the Take Charge Cats to offer 4 to 6 events each semester.

Learn more: <https://gradcenter.arizona.edu/student-success/wellness>

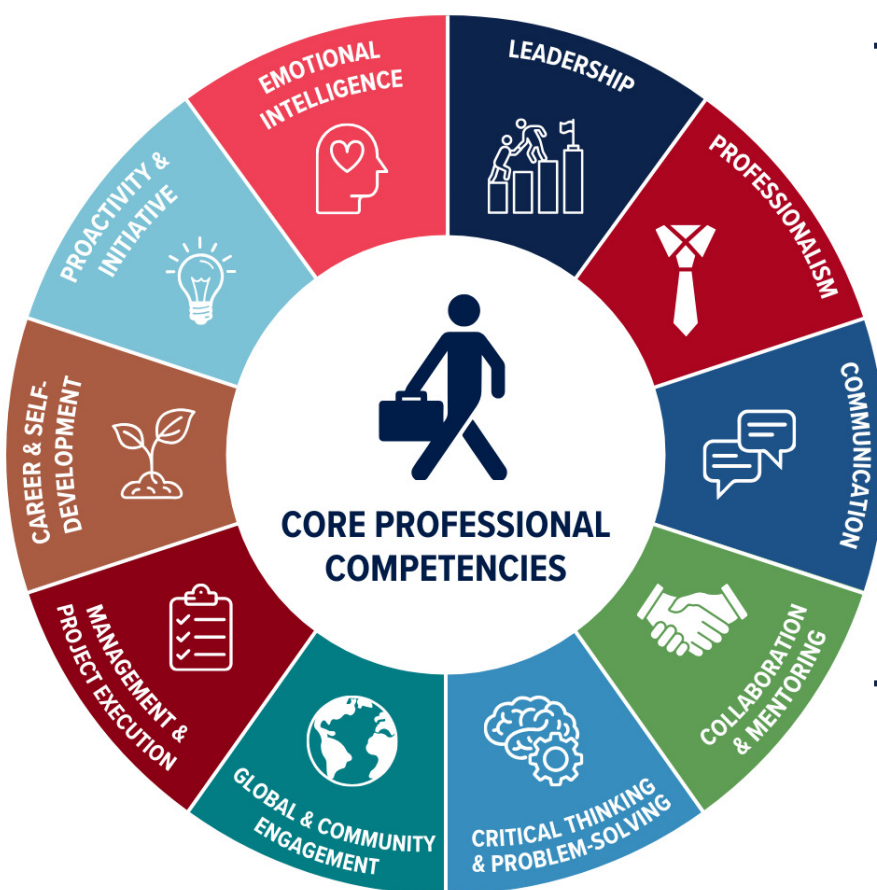
Professional Development Program

Our team helps graduate students and postdoctoral scholars develop the professional skills that put their expertise to work.

**2025-2026
Achievement**



Developed and Launched the Core Professional Competencies Model



Why this Matters

The Model helps students and postdoctoral scholars

- **Assess** current professional strengths
- **Explore** the skills they want to develop next
- **Access** workshops, resources, and opportunities
- **Build** a professional development pathway that supports their goals

Initial Partnerships

- GRAD 696 graduate seminar
- McNair Scholars Program
- INFO 698 capstone course
- CAMBIUM-Lovejoy Science Communication Series
- ENGINE Grant

What's Next: Building through Partnership

Professional Self-Development microcredential:

An asynchronous career-readiness program developed with the Eller College Graduate Professional Development Center for integration into graduate courses and programs.

Future microcredentials: New learning opportunities aligned with the Core Professional Competencies, developed in collaboration with faculty, programs, and campus partners.

Customized cohort development:

Tailored workshops, professional development plans, and DiSC-based learning for training-grant cohorts, fellowship recipients, research teams, and other graduate groups.

Learn more and connect with the team at
<https://bit.ly/coreprofcomp>

February 25, 2026



Grad Slam 2026 Grand Prize Winners: Andres Diaz, Nathan Hadland, and SoRi La

Grad Slam is an opportunity for students to refine their presentation skills and share their work with the public. The experience builds confidence and prepares students for multiple communication environments.



Mourad Abdennebi presenting at the CGS 3MT in Washington, D.C.



Open to All Colleges

Grad Slam is open to all students and disciplines. Workshops and the competition focus on communication to diverse audiences, a skill important in all fields.



Training Options

Workshops, practice sessions, and individual support cover

- Tailoring to the Audience
- Memorable Messages
- Visual Design
- Confidence and Presence



Prizes and Opportunities

Presenters can win up to \$3,000 at the U of A competition and the opportunity to represent the U of A at regional and national competitions. This year, Mourad Abdennebi went to the national CGS 3MT in December 2025 and Andres Diaz went to the WAGS 3MT in April 2026.

Graduate Writing Lab

The Graduate Writing Lab (GWL) empowers graduate students to become skillful and knowledgeable writers through individual support, workshops, writing groups, and classes. In addition, GWL plays a valuable role in promoting and implementing graduate writing best practices across campus.

2025-2026 Achievement



Served students from 17 colleges and 137 academic plans



Writing Efficiency Sessions

Structured writing time and support enables accountability, writing progress, and community.

1,464

Hours Dedicated
to Writing

"These sessions helped me with getting my proposal completed, my IRB, my chapters for my dissertation, and my focus on my writing. Thank you for holding these writing sessions to write in community! I couldn't have progressed or set intentional writing times for me to advance in this journey to complete my dissertation."

- WES Participant

Writing Consultations

Free individual consults online, in-person, or asynchronously. All with trained and certified graduate students.

493

Consults
Completed

120

Asynchronous
Feedback Sessions



Dissertation Writing Class and Writing Groups Feedback

"The class actively required me to address where I was in my process and also created opportunities for me to collaborate (sometimes commiserate) about the process. The writing log & writing time provided me with the nudge of accountability that helped me get out of my paralysis and make progress. The community of the class through consistent discussions and dialogues lent me perspective."

"The biggest benefit to participation in the Summer Dissertation Writing Group was accountability. I had a deadline for peer review, and when we checked in about progress, I wanted to be able to share positive progress with the other members of the group. I also appreciated the activities and tools provided in the group."

Graduate Career Services supports graduate students in exploring and achieving meaningful career pathways by connecting their personal values, interests, and skills to potential career outcomes. Our goal is to empower graduate students with the knowledge, tools, and confidence needed to make informed career decisions and build successful, fulfilling careers.

How GCS Helped Recent Graduates



Elena Calderon, PhD
2026 Higher Education

Associate Director of Student Accommodations and Support Services, Eastern Washington University

"Throughout my PhD program, I utilized individual career advising appointments that provided thoughtful guidance, feedback on my job application materials, and support in navigating my job search, interviews, and final job offer negotiations with confidence."



Aaron Heras, MPH
2025 Master of Public Health

Data Research Scientist with U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs

"I took GRAD 696 before completing my master's degree, which provided essential career development skills, practical job search strategies, and personalized support to help me confidently navigate identifying, applying, and interviewing for roles in public health."

Key Services for Master's & PhD Students

1x1 Career Consultations

In-person and online for graduate students

Document Review

(LinkedIn, Resume, CV, Cover Letter)

Graduate Career Groups

Online communities of career readiness learning

GRAD 696: Fundamental of Career Development Class

Ideal for PhD & Master's students at any stage in their academic program

Preparing for Faculty Job Application Series

Ideal for PhD Students

Preparing for Business and Non-Profit Series

Ideal for PhD & Master's Students

Alumni Career Chat Series

Ideal for PhD & Master's Students

Career Readiness Guest Lectures

Faculty and graduate student organizations can request

2025-2026 Fast Facts

Served ~ 1,800 graduate students from 17 colleges.

100% of students that had a career consult would recommend 1x1 career advising to a colleague or friend.

Fast track your employment success. Visit <https://gradcenter.arizona.edu/career-services>



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

Graduate Center

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