



BUILDING ON EXCELLENCE

STRATEGIC PLAN
SPRING 2023



**THE GRADUATE
SCHOOL**



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SCHOOL

THE
GRADUATE

CELEBRATING
CAROLINA'S GRADUATE
AND PROFESSIONAL
STUDENTS

Prepare
GLOBAL CAREER
EQUITY IMPACT
Next generation
Support
Student Affairs
Discovery
Research Access
TEACHING
Well-being
EXCELLENCE
DIVERSITY
Leadership
ADVOCACY
Interdisciplinary

SERVICE
FELLOWSHIPS
KNOWLEDGE
MENTORSHIP
INCLUSION

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Frank R. Pitt
University of North Carolina
The Graduate School
1988



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OVERVIEW OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

Established in 1903, The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provides comprehensive and holistic student-facing programming to support graduate and professional student success, and the School continues to excel in its role leading the highly complex infrastructure required for excellence in graduate and professional education in a large, world-class research institution.

Academic Affairs

The Graduate School provides oversight for more than 160 graduate degrees with nearly 7,000 graduate students. The School oversees the establishment and implementation of academic policies and the final review of admissions and graduation requirements. The School facilitates the creation of new academic programs and updates to existing curricula, as well as approves and manages certificate programs for the campus. The School conducts program reviews and data analyses for all undergraduate and graduate programs at the University. The Graduate School is a strong advocate for competitive graduate student stipends to recruit the top students to Carolina and to ensure students have sufficient resources as they pursue their degree. In addition to academic support, The Graduate School provides financial support to the graduate degrees it oversees, including tuition funds for full-time resident and non-resident students appointed as teaching or research assistants. The School also provides fellowship support through The Royster Society of Fellows and the Weiss Urban Livability Fellowship Program, among other funding opportunities.

Student Affairs

The Graduate School supports graduate and professional students through intentional programming and individual and group consultation. The School is dedicated to enhancing the student experience by fostering community and belonging for a diverse student body, and by advocating for student well-being as a foundation for student success. The School's Diversity and Student Success program offers a community for diverse students through programming and campus initiatives. To prepare students for career success, the School's CareerWell Professional Development program provides a range of training opportunities and resources, including courses, one-on-one consultations, and learning experiences inclusive of students across disciplines. The Graduate Certificate in Innovation, Leadership and Management and the interdisciplinary Master of Applied Professional Studies are both housed in the School.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – BUILDING ON EXCELLENCE

To ensure The Graduate School is well-positioned to respond to the changing nature of graduate education and is structurally aligned with the University's strategic plan, *Carolina Next: Innovations for Public Good*, in fall 2022 Dean Elizabeth Mayer-Davis initiated The Graduate School's own strategic planning process. Through a highly collaborative and iterative process, the strategic planning task force developed an updated mission statement that reflects The Graduate School's values. **An important outcome of this process was the identification of three core responsibilities that guide The Graduate School and its work.** The Graduate School will continue to 1) **advocate** for resources to support graduate and professional student success, 2) **collaborate** with campus units and stakeholders, and 3) **convene** pan-University discussions in support of graduate and professional education at Carolina.

In spring 2023, Dean Mayer-Davis established three planning groups, each of which focused on a particular opportunity to build on The Graduate School's existing excellence. These planning groups developed three strategic initiatives that respond to the ambitious enrollment growth goals put forward by the Office of the Provost, further the mission of *Carolina Next*, and advance The Graduate School's mission through achievable, measurable, and time-bound work.

Strategic Initiative #1 – Enrolling for Excellence: Support academic excellence by collaborating with academic programs to identify high-priority admitted students and create a focused set of activities to increase the likelihood these students will enroll.

Strategic Initiative #2 – Creating a Culture of Care: In collaboration with academic programs and units across campus, advocate for and support a University-wide framework to promote graduate student success and well-being so students can thrive from initial contact through graduation and beyond.

Strategic Initiative #3 – Growing with North Carolina: Convene a pan-University discussion to collaboratively develop a graduate education enrollment growth plan that is pragmatic, fiscally responsible, and that employs multiple delivery formats. The plan will involve an understanding of the rapidly growing, knowledge-based ecosystem that surrounds the University and the workforce needs of North Carolina, including but not limited to the areas of health care and technology.

STRATEGIC PLAN

OUR MISSION

The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill supports excellence in graduate education and fosters civic engagement and economic growth in North Carolina and beyond. We advocate, collaborate, and convene to serve the nation's first public university, and to promote inclusive educational and professional development experiences for a diverse community of graduate students.

OUR VISION

Graduate education enables the generation of new knowledge and promotes student success through intellectual leadership and support of world-class research and innovation.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Building on Excellence is comprised of three pragmatic, strategic initiatives designed to further the mission of The Graduate School – with suggested key activities designed to implement each initiative. These initiatives are grounded in The Graduate School's mission to advocate, collaborate, and convene on behalf of graduate and professional students. The first two initiatives are foundational and are designed to strengthen an already outstanding graduate school. The third initiative is aspirational and focuses on the collaborations and new infrastructure required to enable substantial growth in the offerings of the University as it strives to better serve the rapidly growing economy of North Carolina and beyond.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Upon completion of the strategic planning process in summer 2023, Dean Mayer-Davis identified a chair and co-chair(s) to lead each of the strategic initiative working groups. Under the direction of the Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives, the working groups will operationalize the strategic initiatives – identifying action steps, timelines, and specific measures of success. The Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives will issue annual progress reports; after three years, The Graduate School will issue a revised strategic plan.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #1: ENROLLING FOR EXCELLENCE

Support academic excellence by collaborating with academic programs to identify high-priority admitted students and create a focused set of activities to increase the likelihood these students will enroll.

1.1 The Opportunity

The strategic planning task force identified graduate student admissions, retention, and yield as key issues during the strategic planning process. The Graduate School has the opportunity to analyze and to improve the structure of systems in place to increase the likelihood of successfully enrolling high-priority admitted students.

Existing data, interviews, and focus groups suggest that many high-priority candidates do not enroll for a variety of reasons, including uncompetitive stipends, high teaching loads, preference for a private institution, and proximity to home or other geographical considerations. Interviews also indicated that the process for awarding merit scholarships is often not aligned with program needs and timelines. This is a particular problem with respect to applicants who are underrepresented and groups for whom competition is significant and financial aid is often a key determinant.

This working group will develop best practices and a set of campus-wide activities to increase programs' enrollment yield for top admitted students. When taken together, these activities will have a positive impact on overall academic excellence within The Graduate School and the broader University community.

1.2 Suggested Key Activities

- Partner with academic programs to identify high-priority applicants and enhance existing datasets to better understand why they may or may not enroll.
- Convene a cross-campus conversation in fall 2023 to learn more about the issues, how they differ from school to school, and what other units of the University are already doing to improve enrollment among highly ranked applicants.
- Develop a set of targeted pilot programs with a limited number of admitted students to test approaches to improving enrollment yield rates, including campus visits, ambassadors, open houses, and recruitment weekends involving alumni.

- Raise funds for a targeted dean's fund to be used strategically, in cooperation with the academic programs, to encourage top applicants to accept admission. This could include support of The Graduate School's premier fellowships, including its Royster Society of Fellows and Weiss Urban Livability Fellowship, among others.
- As appropriate, revise the process of awarding fellowships to best address academic programs' needs and to provide more competitive recruiting.
- Identify and pursue alternative streams of funding for graduate student support, including external fellowships and grant support as well as partnerships with local industry that provide paid research or professional opportunities.

1.3 Strategic Initiative #1 Working Group

- Julie Montaigne (chair), Director of Fellowships
- Stephanie Johnston (co-chair), Functional Data Analyst
- Kathy Wood (co-chair), Director of Diversity and Student Success
- Sarah Jacobson, Assistant Dean for Admissions and Enrolled Students
- Kate Moser, Associate Dean for Development

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #2: CREATING A CULTURE OF CARE

In collaboration with academic programs and units across campus, advocate for and support a University-wide framework to promote graduate student success and well-being so students can thrive from initial contact through graduation and beyond.

2.1 The Opportunity

This strategic initiative focuses on students once they enroll and aims to create a culture of care to keep students engaged and motivated during their time at Carolina. During the COVID-19 pandemic, graduate students' caregiving and parenting responsibilities became more visible, and the importance of these responsibilities has not diminished. In interviews and focus groups, students consistently expressed the need for additional resources and support for caregiving, including parenting and caring for aging adults, during their time in graduate school. Student affairs is only part of this work; there are a multitude of other challenges that arise during graduate study but have not been adequately addressed. The graduate student population has become older and more

diverse, but the multi-cultural character of the students and the various demands on their time and their finances are largely unaddressed in traditional academic culture.

Significantly, 62 percent of graduate students identify as female, and traditionally, caregiving falls disproportionately on them. The Graduate School has the opportunity to create a culture of care at Carolina by shining a light on the needs of a large and growing segment of the graduate student population and by encouraging and advocating for a cultural change on campus that embraces the many aspects of a student's life, including those beyond academics.

2.2 Suggested Key Activities

- Host family-friendly events and build a community component into existing events.
- Integrate the perspective of graduate students who are also caregivers at large-scale events, including but not limited to graduate orientation and well-being events.
- Develop an annual survey on graduate student satisfaction that incorporates caregiving and family issues.
- Better capture reasons for graduate students who choose to take a leave of absence in order to determine the impact of caregiving on graduation rates.
- Develop a set of early indicators for graduate students, focused on caregiving, who may be at risk of dropping out so The Graduate School and graduate programs can engage proactively.
- Review policies and procedures to better accommodate students who seek additional time to complete their degrees or need a break in study for caregiving reasons.

2.3 Strategic Initiative #2 Working Group

- Laura Thorp (chair), Director of Student Affairs
- Kate McNulty (co-chair), Senior Associate Dean for Student Affairs
- Kimberli Kuecker, Program Coordinator for Diversity and Student Success
- Allis Rodelli, Graduate Funding Coordinator
- Shaun Rutherford, Admissions and Enrolled Students Specialist

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE #3: GROWING WITH NORTH CAROLINA

Convene a pan-University discussion to collaboratively develop a graduate education enrollment growth plan that is pragmatic, fiscally responsible, and that employs multiple delivery formats. The plan will involve an understanding of the rapidly growing, knowledge-based ecosystem that surrounds the University and the workforce needs of North Carolina, including but not limited to the areas of health care and technology.

3.1 The Opportunity

The fastest-growing occupations in North Carolina are expected to be those that require a master's, doctoral, or professional degree. The Graduate School is well-positioned to enhance the dramatic growth that is occurring in North Carolina and beyond. This growth opportunity is driven by three important aspects.

First, the rapidly growing economy surrounding the University creates immediate workforce needs, including in nursing, data science, and technology, among other critical areas. Second, existing research infrastructure is well-positioned to address societal challenges ranging from health and environment to public discourse, democracy, and more. Increasing the size of the University's research portfolio will also increase the number of graduate students who can be funded, including those who come from diverse backgrounds and life experiences. Third, the changing nature of higher education will require that graduate degree programs offer a range of modalities from traditional residential models to hybrid and fully remote options. The University will train the professionals of the future and ensure they are ready to translate and implement new knowledge to solve societal challenges.

Major investment in infrastructure and changes in the funds flow model of the University are required to achieve this aspirational goal. This pan-University opportunity requires financial investment, structural changes to the funds flow model, and deep collaboration with campus leaders and external partners. It also involves working closely with academic units to ensure robust and efficient policies for excellence. Partnering with the private and nonprofit sectors and other parties external to the University will be important both as a funding source for graduate students and to ensure that students are prepared to enter the workforce, whether through the academy, industry, government, or other career paths.

3.2 Suggested Key Activities

- Develop a white paper outlining existing and emerging opportunities by mapping external needs of industry and others against internal campus areas of expertise.
- Continue to collaborate closely with the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Operations and Chief Financial Officer and other partners to develop a funds flow approach that provides the necessary resources to both academic and campus administrative units as needed to ensure incentives for growth.
- Develop a set of best practices for undertaking new credentials (e.g., certificates) based on lessons learned from recent initiatives and the professional development activities of The Graduate School.
- Partner with Innovate Carolina and leaders from the private sector to address the workforce needs of the rapidly growing economy of the state of North Carolina.

3.3 Strategic Initiative #3 Working Group

- Vanessa Doriott Anderson (chair), Assistant Dean for Academic and Career Development
- John Easterbrook (co-chair), Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives
- Brian Rybarczyk (co-chair), Associate Dean for Professional Development
- Ronice Johnson-Guy, Assistant Director of Diversity and Student Success
- Laura Kuizin, Director of the Master of Applied Professional Studies Program



PROCESS

The strategic planning process began in earnest with the appointment of Dean Mayer-Davis, who encouraged a highly participatory approach involving all members of The Graduate School team. Volunteers from The Graduate School staff joined the strategic planning task force, which was co-led by Buck Goldstein, Professor of the Practice and Entrepreneur-in-Residence, and Elizabeth Poindexter, Executive Director of Communications. The membership of the strategic planning task force can be found in Appendix A. The senior leadership team of The Graduate School served as consultants.

PHASE I – FALL 2022

Phase I of the strategic planning process consisted of discovery and research. The task force leadership sought input from key stakeholders to understand The Graduate School's reputation across the University, the changing higher education ecosystem in which The Graduate School is a vital part, and the evolving nature of the North Carolina workforce that graduate and professional students will face upon graduation.

Throughout fall 2022, the task force's leadership embarked upon a listening tour, which involved convening a series of focus groups as well as open-ended, one-on-one interviews with key administrators, including Chancellor Kevin M. Guskiewicz, Provost Christopher Clemens, and various deans and directors of graduate studies. In addition to holding interviews, Goldstein and Poindexter conducted several focus groups with a convenient sample of deans, department chairs, directors of graduate studies, student service managers, faculty, and graduate students. The strategic planning task force also developed and distributed a survey to graduate students, on-campus partners, alumni, and external partners, which yielded more than 340 responses.

PHASE II – WINTER 2022-2023

In Phase II, the strategic planning task force analyzed the data collected during Phase I, including the survey responses and transcripts of the focus groups and interviews, to produce an overview of the School's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The strategic planning task force then focused on updating the mission and vision of the School and ensuring structural alignment with *Carolina Next*. **An important outcome of this process was the identification of three core responsibilities that guide The Graduate School and *Building on Excellence*.** The Graduate School will continue to 1) **advocate** for resources to support graduate and professional student success, 2) **collaborate** with campus units and stakeholders, and 3) **convene** pan-University discussions in support of graduate and professional education at Carolina.

PHASE III – SPRING 2023 & SUMMER 2023

In Phase III, members of The Graduate School staff volunteered to serve on planning groups charged with translating the data analysis from Phase II into a series of strategic initiatives that further the mission and vision of The Graduate School and of the University. The membership of the strategic initiative planning groups can be found in Appendix B.

Each of the planning groups focused on a particular theme that emerged during the Phase II data analysis. One group focused on proactive approaches to improving academic excellence. Another group focused on the graduate student experience. The final group focused on a charge from the Provost to substantially increase overall graduate student enrollment. Each group developed an impactful, achievable strategic initiative as well as a set of suggested activities.

Upon completion of the strategic planning process in summer 2023, Dean Mayer-Davis identified a chair and co-chair(s) to lead newly formed strategic initiative working groups. Under the direction of the Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives, the working groups are charged with operationalizing the initiatives – identifying action steps, timelines, and specific measures of success. The Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives will issue annual progress reports; after three years, The Graduate School will issue a revised strategic plan.

ENVIRONMENT

In Phase II of the strategic planning process, The Graduate School assessed its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected from surveys, interviews, and focus groups. A summary of that analysis follows.

STRENGTHS

The Graduate School's strengths include excellence in its program review process, communication, availability, detailed feedback, timeliness, efficiency, and administration of merit and various other fellowships and awards. Several respondents praised the School's supportive and flexible approach to graduate education and its process for facilitation of new graduate programs or changes to existing programs. Several units within The Graduate School received positive feedback — including its professional development and diversity programming. Lastly, additional responses noted excellence in communication and proactive and timely responses to urgent/emerging issues or crises.

WEAKNESSES

Interviews and focus groups indicated that The Graduate School has historically lacked the resources and infrastructure necessary to engage in pan-University initiatives. The School operates, like other schools on campus, under a funds flow model that lacks transparency and even discourages growth. Several respondents commented on the need for The Graduate School to build more consensus as University-wide process and policy decisions are made. Others highlighted the need for a deeper understanding of workforce requirements in our state. Similarly, others described a need to work with companies and institutions outside of academia on course content and job placement. Lastly, other responses noted a need for additional community-building efforts, opportunities to improve the current process for awarding merit scholarships, and the necessity of continuing to advocate for student needs, including stipends and housing.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Graduate School's opportunities are abundant. They include advocacy work on behalf of increased graduate student stipends and benefits, right-sizing of academic programs, more comprehensive funding packages, and improvement of the overall graduate student experience. Respondents also identified advocacy work among the Board of Trustees, the Board of Governors, and the state legislature as needs. The Graduate School has the opportunity to support the development of highly focused master's and doctoral degree programs that respond to the changing landscape of higher education — with an attention to hybrid and online learning. The School has the opportunity to ensure recruitment and retention of students from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences. For issues concerning the workforce, The Graduate School has the opportunity to normalize academic and non-academic pathways to employment. In addition, the School has an opportunity to play a role in the mentorship of Carolina's graduate students, to develop an effective job-placement capability, and to streamline internal processes to better serve graduate and professional students.

THREATS

The Graduate School (and graduate education nationally) faces numerous threats, including academic, not-for-credit offerings from innovative, for-profit entities. The School must be a thought leader against the perceived tide that advanced degrees do not provide added value, and thus must also continuously advocate for support from all sources, including industry partners and philanthropy. There are several external pressures to consider, including the decline in the appeal of in-person learning, reduced demand in academia for professors, increased competition from other universities and from outside the state, and a reduced demand for traditional workers as technology and other innovations eliminate jobs.

APPENDIX A: STRATEGIC PLANNING TASK FORCE

The strategic planning task force was co-led by Buck Goldstein, Professor of the Practice and Entrepreneur-in-Residence, and Elizabeth Poindexter, Executive Director of Communications. Members of the task force are listed below. Throughout the planning process, various sub-committees emerged, including a sub-committee for surveys that was co-led by Rachell Underhill, Director of Web and Information Systems, and Julie Montaigne, Director of Fellowships.

- Vanessa Doriott Anderson, Assistant Dean for Academic and Career Development
- Sarah Jacobson, Assistant Dean for Admissions and Enrolled Students
- Laura Kuizin, Director of the Master of Applied Professional Studies Program
- Faye Lewis, Executive Assistant to the Dean/Alumni and Donor Relations Coordinator
- Julie Montaigne, Director of Fellowships
- Laura Pratt, Fellowship Programs Coordinator
- Alicia Rogers, Director of Human Resources
- Shaun Rutherford, Admissions and Enrolled Students Specialist
- Stephanie Schmitt, Vice Dean for Academics
- Rachell Underhill, Director of Web and Information Systems
- Kathy Wood, Director of Diversity and Student Success

APPENDIX B: STRATEGIC INITIATIVE PLANNING GROUPS

Strategic Initiative #1 Planning Group:

- **Stephanie Johnston**, Functional Data Analyst
- **Julie Montaigne**, Director of Fellowships
- Ronice Johnson-Guy, Assistant Director of Diversity and Student Success
- Jenny Lewis, Admissions and Enrolled Students Specialist

Strategic Initiative #2 Planning Group:

- **Vanessa Doriott Anderson**, Assistant Dean for Academic and Career Development
- **Kathy Wood**, Director of Diversity and Student Success
- Sarah Jacobson, Assistant Dean for Admissions and Enrolled Students
- Kate McAnulty, Senior Associate Dean for Student Affairs
- Laura Pratt, Fellowship Program Coordinator
- Alicia Rogers, Director of Human Resources

Strategic Initiative #3 Planning Group:

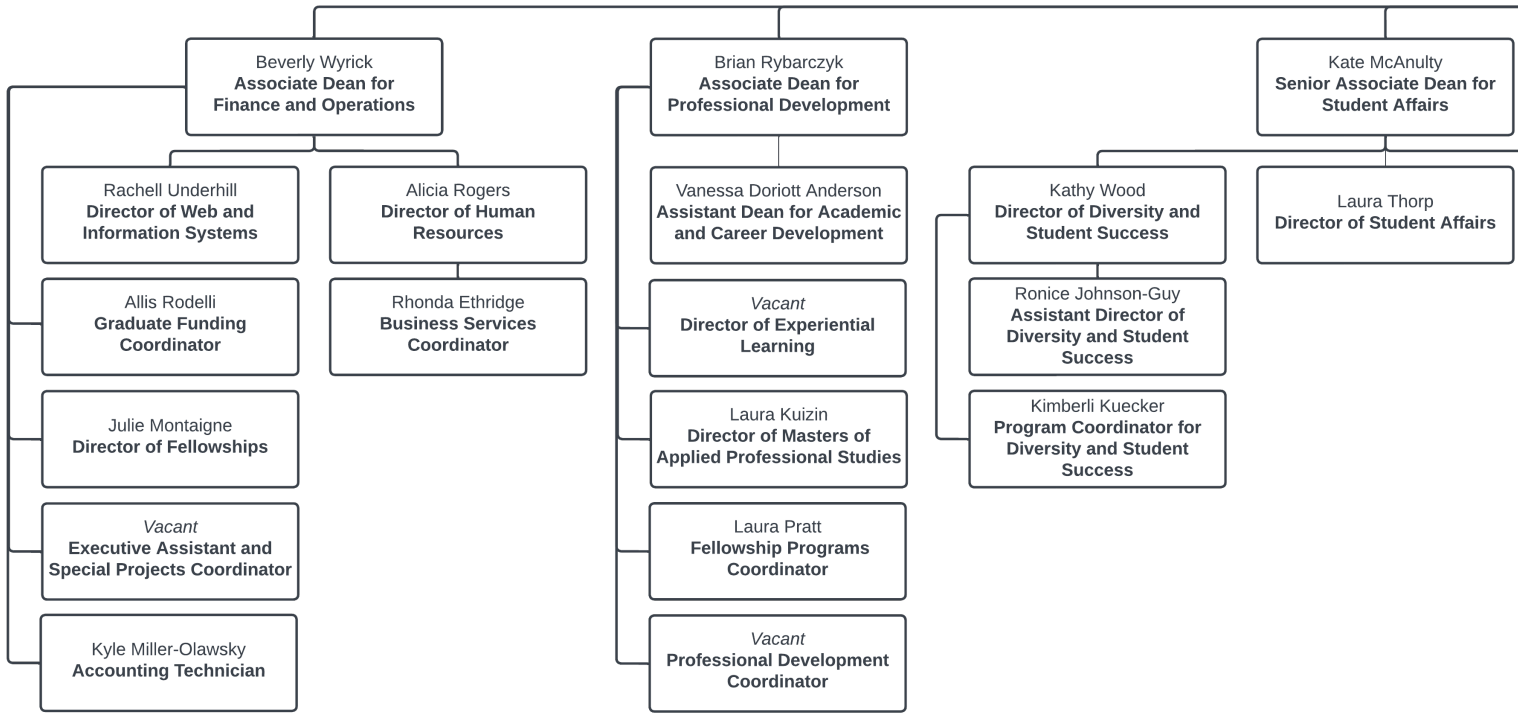
- **Brian Rybarczyk**, Associate Dean for Professional Development
- **Beverly Wyrick**, Associate Dean for Finance and Operations
- Laura Kuizin, Director of the Master of Applied Professional Studies Program
- Beth Mayer-Davis, Dean and Cary C Boshamer Distinguished Professor
- Allis Rodelli, Graduate Funding Coordinator

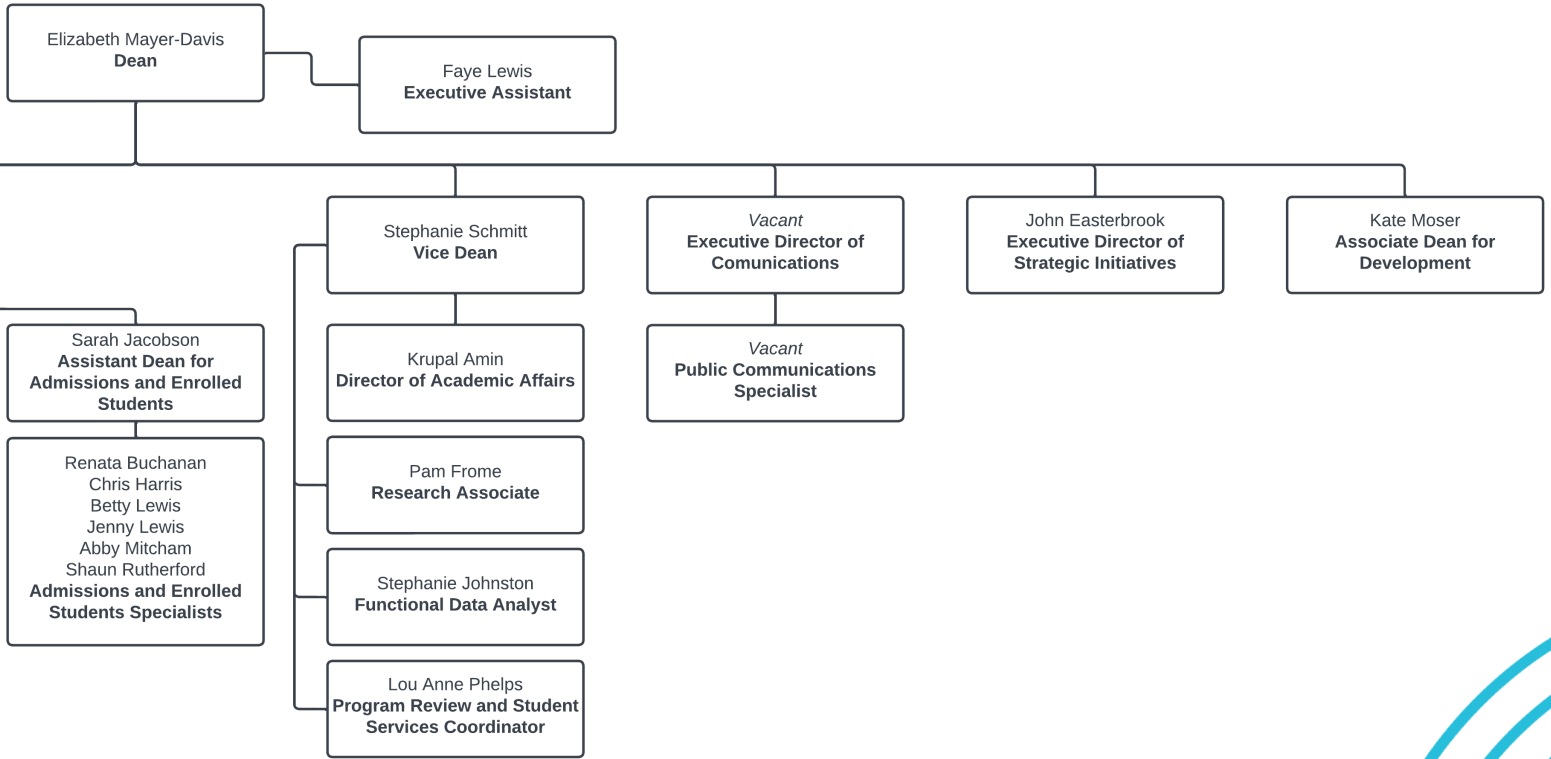
*Bold indicates initiative leadership during the planning process.

APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTORS AND RESOURCES

- University Communications
- Exit interview of graduate students
- NC Council of Graduate Schools
- Informal meetings with communicators with the School of Education, School of Medicine, School of Government, College of Arts and Sciences, Hussman School of Journalism and Media, and the Gillings School of Global Public Health

APPENDIX D: ORGANIZATIONAL CHART







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