

Presented by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Education, the Center for Teaching and Learning, the College of Lifetime Learning, Graduate Student Government Association, and Student Engagement and Well-Being

2025 GRADUATE EDUCATION SUMMIT

Georgia Tech

Championing Graduate Student Success: Building Holistic Support Systems for Research, Career, and Well-Being



November 10, 2025
JOHN LEWIS STUDENT CENTER



Georgia Institute
of Technology

Georgia Tech hosted the 2025 Graduate Education Summit: Championing Graduate Student Success - Building Holistic Support Systems for Research, Career Development, and Well-Being on November 10, 2025, at the John Lewis Student Center. This year's Summit gathered faculty, staff, and graduate students to engage in strategic discussions and collaborative learning focused on actionable approaches to enhance the graduate student experience.

The Summit provided a platform to explore emerging trends and best practices in graduate education with an emphasis on strengthening support systems that span academic success, career development, research engagement, and overall well-being. Participants exchanged insights, shared innovations, and expanded professional networks to support Georgia Tech's ongoing efforts to elevate graduate student outcomes

Featured presentations included a keynote address by Jennifer Sullivan, Ph.D., Dean of The Graduate School and Regents Professor of Physiology at Augusta University, who spoke on *Beyond the Degree: Promoting Success in Graduate School*, offering practical strategies for fostering student success across academic and professional dimensions.

The Summit also showcased a spotlight session by Dimitri Mavris, Ph.D., Georgia Tech Distinguished Regents Professor of Aerospace Engineering, on *The ASDL Academy: Building a Community of PhD Scholars — Reflections and Lessons Learned*—highlighting effective community-building models for doctoral education.

The full-day program included a robust schedule of strategy sessions, standard and themed sessions, poster presentations, networking opportunities, breakout discussions, and a graduate student panel that centered student voice and experience. Topics addressed ranged from strengthening institutional support for graduate coordinators and directors, holistic approaches to student success, career readiness frameworks, community building and belonging, and expanding innovative graduate support models.

Organized by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Education in partnership with the Center for Teaching and Learning, the College of Lifetime Learning, the Graduate Student Government Association, and Student Engagement and Well-Being, the Summit reaffirmed Georgia Tech's commitment to fostering holistic support systems that advance the success of graduate students across academic, research, and professional domains.

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Graduate Education Summit: Championing Graduate Student Success Schedule

November 10, 2025

Georgia Tech – John Lewis Student Center

Atlanta, GA

09:00 – 09:30 Opening Remarks / Welcome

- Vice Provost for Graduate Education – Bonnie Ferri
- Graduate Experience Survey Overview-James Black

09:30 – 10:15 Keynote Speaker

Jennifer Sullivan, Dean of The Graduate School and Regents Professor of Physiology at Augusta University

Title: **Beyond the Degree: Promoting Success in Graduate School**

Location: **Walter G. Ehmer Theater (Atlantic Theater)**

10:15 – 10:30 Break/Poster Session

Location: Graduate Student Lounge

- Human-Augmented Analytics Group: Standardizing Online Mentorship Practices for Masters and PhD Students - Breanna Shi
- From Experience to Engagement: Maximizing MS Analytics Graduate Outcomes – Shirmenia Nunes
- CTL's Graduate Teaching Fellows and Academic Development – Sarah Kegley
- International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Program – Sarah Kegley

10:30 – 11:15 Strategy Session/Standard Sessions

Strategy Session (Rafael Bras): Strengthening Support Systems for Graduate Coordinators and Directors at Georgia Tech, Presented by Nazanin Tork, Anna Traykova, and Danielle Ramirez

Standard Session (Peachtree): Skills, Support, and Success in Graduate Education, Presented by Caroline Layton, Hyeyeon Lee, Karena Nguyen

11:15 – 12:15 Lunch and Learn Breakout Rooms

- Guided AI Use (Rafael Bras): Introducing the Guided AI Use Framework (GAUF), Presented by Ashutosh Dhekne

- Career Readiness @ Tech in Action (Peachtree): Shaping Next Steps for Graduate Student Success Together, Presented by Gaeun (Gwenn) Seo, Laura Garcia, and David Gaston
- Universal Learning Outcomes (Techwood): Co-Creating Universal Learning Outcomes for Graduate Students, Presented by Tatianna Richardson, Heather Zesiger, and Christie Stewart
- Open Networking (Graduate Student Lounge)

12:15 – 1:00 Strategy Session/Standard Sessions

Strategy Session (Rafael Bras): Expanding PhD Funding Models with Corporate Funding, Presented by Jana Stone, Bonnie Ferri, Gloria Griessman, and Olof Westerstahl

Standard Session (Peachtree): Building Community, Belonging, and Engagement, Presented by Delay Carpenter, S. Gordon Moore Jr., Lea Marzo, Lewis Wheaton

1:00 – 1:15 Break/Poster Session

Location: Graduate Student Lounge

- Human-Augmented Analytics Group: Standardizing Online Mentorship Practices for Masters and PhD Students - Breanna Shi
- From Experience to Engagement: Maximizing MS Analytics Graduate Outcomes – Shirmenia Nunes
- CTL's Graduate Teaching Fellows and Academic Development – Sarah Kegley
- International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Program – Sarah Kegley

1:15 – 2:00 Strategy Session/Standard Sessions

Strategy Session (Rafael Bras): Supporting Graduate Success: Strategic Centralized Funding from Recruitment to Completion, Presented by Anne Shaffer, Associate Dean of the UGA Graduate School

Panel Discussion (Peachtree): Graduate Voices: Perspectives on Success and Belonging at Tech, Moderator: Vibhuti Dahiya, M.S., Panelists: Ejaz Ahmed, Ph. D., Empress Henry-Logan, M.S. , Isabel Boyd, Joint Ph. D., Kali Kater, Ph.D., Mithila Ramesh Warriar, M.S.

2:00 – 2:15 Break/Spotlight Refreshment Session

2:15 – 3:00 Keynote Speaker
Spotlight Session: Dimitri Mavris, Georgia Tech Distinguished Regents
Professor, Aerospace Engineering
(Moderated by Steve Ruffin)
Title: **The ASDL Academy: Building a Community of PhD Scholars.**
Reflections and Lessons Learned.
Location: **Walter G. Ehmer Theater (Atlantic Theater)**

Keynote

Beyond the Degree Promoting Success in Graduate School

Presenter

Jennifer Sullivan, Ph.D.

Dean of The Graduate School

Regents Professor of Physiology

Augusta University

Outline

The keynote opened with a clear roadmap for the day. Professor Sullivan introduced herself and her professional background. She provided an overview of Augusta University and The Graduate School. She explained the role of branding within graduate education. The presentation then moved to leveraging university resources to build graduate community, expanding graduate student support, collaboration and cross campus partnerships, and networking

Her career trajectory framed much of the discussion. She joined Augusta University as a postdoctoral fellow in 2000, later became the first year Biomedical Sciences PhD Program Director from 2017 to 2023, and has served the graduate community as Dean of The Graduate School since 2020. These experiences allowed her to speak with firsthand understanding of how graduate education systems evolve over time and how student needs change as institutions grow

Innovations and Opportunities in Graduate Education

Professor Sullivan emphasized that graduate student success requires intentional structures that recognize students as whole people. She explained that significant progress has been made nationally toward integrating career readiness and professional development into undergraduate education. However, graduate education has historically lagged behind due to longstanding emphasis on academic career paths.

Citing studies presented in the keynote, she noted that providing graduate students with awareness of alternative career options and building transferable skills is now essential. Many graduate students balance work and family responsibilities alongside research and coursework. This role strain can intensify stress during the most important doctoral milestones. Recent national research highlights that student wellness must be treated as a core part of professional preparation rather than as an optional resource

.

She reinforced that institutions must adapt by shaping programs that address mentorship quality, emotional health, belonging, and professional identity. Ethical leadership and inclusive environments directly influence how students perform and persist through graduate school.

Relative Lessons from University Consolidation

A significant portion of the keynote used Augusta University's own institutional history as a learning case. She described the complexities of combining different types of higher education institutions. a research focused university with high admissions standards and a community college designed to make education broadly accessible.

The timeline she referenced explained that experts in higher education estimate it takes about ten years before a merger can be considered fully successful. During those years, leaders must manage opportunities and issues emerging from new institutional identity and campus culture. This example demonstrated the importance of clear internal communication and understanding among faculty and staff in order to effectively serve graduate students

Knowing Your Students and Addressing Their Needs

Professor Sullivan repeatedly returned to a central theme. know your students and build systems around their real needs. She encouraged Georgia Tech attendees to evaluate whether current resources truly support graduate student success.

Using Augusta University resource surveys as an illustration, she walked through common areas where graduate students often feel underserved. access to essential educational software. adequate advising for online learners. graduate focused career services. housing options. parking. and designated spaces for study and community interaction.

She explained that thoughtful programs can combat the loneliness pandemic by creating structured communities, mentoring networks, and inclusive partnerships. Building community is not separate from academic success. it is a driver of it.

Demonstrated Outcomes and Takeaways

The keynote closed by affirming that Augusta University's strategic approach has shown promising results. Documentation, collaboration, and advocacy across departments have helped create an environment where graduate students, staff, and faculty feel valued.

Her final takeaway message was clear and directly applicable to Georgia Tech. graduate education goes beyond earning a degree. It is about building a community that supports success. By consistently advocating for graduate student needs, expanding professional

development opportunities, networking and fostering collaboration, universities can create systems where all members of the graduate ecosystem thrive together

Overview

For Summit participants, Jennifer Sullivan's presentation provided a practical and national perspective on holistic graduate student success. Her remarks reinforced that mentorship, well being, ethical AI use, and community engagement are essential pillars of a modern graduate education strategy. The keynote offered Georgia Tech both inspiration and actionable guidance for building support systems that prepare students for life changing careers beyond the degree.

Poster Sessions

The Poster Sessions at the 2025 Graduate Education Summit provided one of the most engaging opportunities of the day for direct interaction and shared learning. Posters were displayed in prominent locations near the Peachtree Meeting Room and the Graduate Student Lounge, allowing participants to explore initiatives in depth between formal sessions. Graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, faculty, and administrators moved through the exhibition area, stopping to speak personally with presenters, review visual data, and exchange practical ideas. Conversations flowed freely as attendees asked questions about programs that support academic success, professional development, mentorship, and well being.

Each poster presentation was designed to highlight work already underway at Georgia Tech or within partner institutions. The format encouraged individual dialogue and reflection, helping the audience feel actively connected to the ideas being shared.

Human Augmented Analytics Group Standardizing Online Mentorship Practices for Masters and PhD Students

Presenter: Breanna Shi

As artificial intelligence transforms every field of science, partnerships between domain experts and AI practitioners have become essential for ensuring ethical, impactful research that serves the greater good. We are a community of researchers committed to democratizing AI implementation across diverse domains while creating collaborative frameworks that benefit all participants. The Human-Augmented Analytics Group (HAAG) is an experimental virtual laboratory for applied data science collaboration. Founded by Director Breanna Shi in May 2024 as a 4th-year Bioinformatics PhD student with just 15 participants, HAAG has rapidly grown to host 125 researchers across masters, PhD, post-doctoral, and faculty levels.

From Experience to Engagement Maximizing MS Analytics Graduate Outcomes

Presenter: Shirmenia Nunes

This session presents data-driven insights from MS Analytics graduate placement outcomes to inform holistic strategies for advancing student success. Drawing on three comprehensive datasets—job offers, career advising activity, and event participation—we examine how prior professional experience, job location, salary negotiation, engagement

with support resources, alumni mentorship, and event attendance shape compensation outcomes. Findings show that students with greater professional experience consistently earn higher salaries, while salary negotiation alone does not strongly predict improved compensation. Instead, outcomes are more closely linked to factors such as location, years of experience, and guidance from career advisors. The analysis also highlights the positive impact of proactive involvement in career services workshops, social events, mentorship, and 1:1 advising. The session concludes with practical strategies implemented by the program to strengthen belonging, enhance career readiness, and help staff better understand how their support directly contributes to student success. CTL's Graduate Teaching Fellows and Academic Development

CTL's Graduate Teaching Fellows and Academic Development

Presenter: Sarah Kegley

What do seasoned TAs do to keep on top of academic professional development? The Graduate Teaching Fellows (GTF) are a cohort of graduate students from various disciplines who work with faculty in the Center for Teaching and Learning to support TA and future faculty programs. As graduate student ambassadors for CTL, they support and extend our reach into their academic units. Participants in the program develop mentorship, leadership, and management skills, enhance their teaching and learning expertise, and build connections with fellow graduate students.

International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Program

Presenter: Sarah Kegley

The International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Program, hosted by Georgia Tech's Center for Teaching and Learning, offers integrated support for international graduate students serving as Teaching Assistants (TAs). Compliant with University System of Georgia (USG) policy, it screens students for teaching-related language proficiency while creating opportunities to highlight ITA perspectives, experiences, and goals, fostering a sense of community. The program's importance lies in promoting belonging and inclusion, serving as a resource for on-campus internationalization, fostering intercultural learning and competence, and involving both graduate and undergraduate students. Core elements include:

Screening: Required assessment of language proficiency for international students before TA roles.

CETL 8802: ITA Development: A course focused on communication and pedagogical skill development within a culture of belonging. Selected learning outcomes

emphasize self-awareness of teaching practice and comprehensibility, strategies in communication and cultural awareness to enhance pedagogical decisions, practice of functional language for academic settings, and microteaching with feedback.

Liaisons: Experienced ITAs who complete CETL 8802 and pursue additional engagement or leadership, applying skills to support peers. Projects by liaisons include creating tutorials for lab TAs, jargon dictionaries, LLM-based interactive training platforms, resource banks for common ITA challenges, and quiz banks with short training and senior TA mentorship.

These efforts enhance ITA effectiveness and intercultural competence.

Overview

The poster sessions at the 2025 Graduate Education Summit generated an energetic exhibition atmosphere that served as a vibrant complement to the day's formal programming. The Poster Sessions at the 2025 Graduate Education Summit provided one of the most engaging opportunities of the day for direct interaction and shared learning. Strategically located near high-traffic meeting rooms and graduate lounge areas, the posters encouraged continuous circulation and informal engagement as graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, faculty, and administrators interacted directly with presenters throughout breaks and transitions. The open format promoted spontaneous dialogue, allowing participants to examine visual data, ask practical questions, and exchange ideas related to mentorship, teaching development, professional outcomes, inclusion, and well-being. Steady movement, curiosity, and collaborative exchange defined the exhibition space, transforming it into a dynamic learning marketplace where attendees felt actively connected to ongoing initiatives and to one another while collectively exploring approaches to strengthen holistic graduate student success.

Standard Sessions

The Standard Sessions at the 2025 Graduate Education Summit offered a focused and engaging segment dedicated to practical skill development and structured support in graduate education. Faculty members and program leaders shared proven approaches to academic preparation, mentoring, and career readiness. Each presentation highlighted real challenges within the graduate experience and the intentional partnerships formed to address them. Attendees participated in clear, detailed discussions that strengthened understanding of available resources and provided actionable strategies to support graduate student success across Georgia Tech.

Supporting Graduate Student Success through Holistic Initiatives Academic, Career, and Well Being Strategies in the MS Analytics Program Presented by Caroline Layton

Abstract

This session showcased a series of innovative initiatives implemented within Georgia Tech's Master of Science in Analytics program to enhance graduate student success across academic and professional dimensions. The presenter emphasized that effective graduate education must support students in multiple interconnected ways. academic preparation. clear communication. career alignment. and holistic well being.

Four primary efforts were highlighted as components of this support ecosystem. the MSA Success Hive Canvas Site. Wellness Wednesdays. a Career Values Presentation. and structured MSA Social Events such as the Baby Goats Meet and Greet, and Trivia Night. These initiatives were designed to address the varied needs of analytics students who often face intense coursework, demanding project schedules, and uncertainty around career direction.

The abstract explained that the MSA Success Hive Canvas Site functions as a centralized hub where students can easily access essential resources, advising information, workshop announcements, and program updates. By organizing these materials in one accessible location, the program improved communication and academic preparedness while reducing confusion during high stress periods.

Wellness Wednesdays were introduced as weekly sessions that create intentional pauses within the graduate calendar to focus on stress relief, mental health awareness, and

personal development. These meetings allow students to build self care toolboxes and connect with others beyond the classroom environment.

The Career Values Presentation helps students align their academic efforts with long term professional goals. Through structured reflection exercises, attendees learn to identify what motivates them, clarify personal strengths, and shape career aspirations suited to their values.

Finally, the social events component demonstrated that community connection plays a major role in persistence and confidence. Regular gatherings cultivated relationships among cohorts and provided opportunities for laughter, teamwork, and belonging within a large graduate program.

Together, these initiatives illustrate how a graduate program can champion student success in a holistic and transferable fashion. The session offered practical strategies for other disciplines seeking to build similar ecosystems that promote graduate student preparedness, career development, wellness, and community engagement.

Preparing Peer Tutors for the Aerospace Engineering PhD Qualifying Exam

Presented by Hyeyeon Lee

Abstract

This standard session focused on preparation of effective peer tutors to support doctoral students navigating the aerospace engineering qualifying exams. The Peer Tutoring for the Aerospace Engineering PhD Qualifying Exams was sponsored by the Provost's Fund for Excellence in Graduate Studies for the 2024 to 2025 academic year at Georgia Tech.

Central to this initiative was the partnership with the Center for Teaching and Learning, which offered a one day peer tutoring workshop built on the structured peer assisted learning model originally proposed by Topping in 1995. The workshop was designed to support aerospace students who had already successfully passed their exams in becoming capable peer tutors for others.

The session detailed the characteristics that matter most in development of effective tutors. subject knowledge. pedagogical strategy. and personal attributes that build trust and collaboration. Attendees learned general pedagogical methods such as problem decomposition, divide and conquer reasoning, and identifying key concepts. Discipline

specific tools were also introduced including system decomposition, free body diagrams, case studies, and algorithmic thinking.

Tutors were trained to employ guiding questions that are probing, clarifying, leading, diagnostic, metacognitive, and reflective. These questioning strategies stimulate critical thinking and deeper understanding among students preparing for the exam.

The abstract emphasized that peer tutoring is not only about helping others pass tests. It is also about building leadership culture, encouraging growth mindset practices, and developing project management skills. Interactive activities allowed participants to share personal experiences, identify success factors, and craft example questions relevant to their own disciplines.

Overall, this session demonstrated how intentional train the trainer approaches and partnerships with campus teaching experts can increase graduate student confidence and preparedness during critical doctoral milestones.

Increasing Graduate Student Confidence for the Academic Job Market Through Intentional Intra Institutional Partnerships Presented by Karena Nguyen

Abstract

This session introduced a collaborative model aimed at preparing graduate students and postdoctoral scholars for the academic job search. Professor Nguyen emphasized that obtaining a faculty position is a goal for many doctoral candidates, yet the academic hiring process can be time consuming, intimidating, and difficult to interpret without proper guidance.

The abstract explained that lack of clarity around faculty roles beyond research, including funding acquisition, service commitments, and laboratory management, can impede students' ability to discern whether this path is truly right for them. To confront this challenge, an intra institutional partnership was formed within the College of Sciences bringing together Rising Tide Program, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Education.

The initial pilot effort involved an intensive seminar series for Rising Tide Fellows. These sessions combined pedagogical expertise from CTL, discipline specific knowledge from College faculty, and best practices from GPE workshops on how to approach searching, applying, and interviewing for faculty positions. Participants reported that this combination

demystified the academic job process and strengthened their confidence in preparing high quality application materials.

Encouraged by success of the first seminar, the partners planned a similar two day short course open broadly to Georgia Tech graduate students and postdocs. The session emphasized that collaboration across campus units can create stronger faculty candidates by equipping scholars with structured preparation, ethical awareness, and clearer professional identity.

This lightning session demonstrated to attendees that intentional partnerships, rising tide, teaching and learning experts, and graduate education leaders, are powerful mechanisms for improving graduate student readiness for competitive career paths while supporting well being and sense of belonging.

Overview

Collectively, the Standard Sessions within the Skills, Support, and Success theme reinforced that graduate student success at Georgia Tech requires integrated and purposeful structures. From peer tutoring models that strengthen dissertation and exam readiness, to career preparation programs that demystify the academic job market, each presentation highlighted the importance of scaffolding, mentorship, communication, wellness, and community. These sessions offered Summit participants actionable insights and transferable strategies to support the holistic success of graduate and postdoctoral scholars across Georgia Tech.

Strategy Sessions

The 2025 Graduate Education Summit included a series of focused Strategy Sessions that transformed the event from a traditional conference into a working day of collaborative problem solving. These sessions were intentionally positioned to encourage candid conversation, shared planning, and direct engagement with institutional leaders. Each session gathered participants around common tables in the Rafael Bras Meeting Room, creating an atmosphere that felt less like formal presentations and more like purposeful roundtable workshops.

Strengthening Support Systems for Grad Coordinators and Directors at Georgia Tech

Presented by Nazanin Tork, Anna Traykova, & Danielle Ramirez

The first Strategy Session of the day acknowledged the individuals who quietly carry much of graduate education on their shoulders. graduate coordinators and graduate directors. As attendees settled into the room, the presenters opened with recognition that these roles serve as the operational backbone of Georgia Tech's graduate programs. Coordinators manage admissions processes, onboarding of new students, compliance requirements, academic tracking, and day to day problem resolution. Directors provide academic leadership, policy oversight, and mentorship. Yet many of these professionals perform their duties within isolated units with little opportunity to learn from one another.

Participants were invited to reflect on their own experiences within departments and colleges. The presenters discussed how Georgia Tech has already begun to respond to graduate student feedback by investing in centralized structures such as the Graduate Student Lounge and new administrative positions dedicated to engagement and belonging. The conversation moved naturally toward practical needs. standardized training. clearer documentation. consistent access to tools. and formal communities of practice for coordinators and directors across campus.

Audience members asked questions, compared processes, and exchanged wisdom gained from years of supporting students. Many noted that when coordinator networks are strengthened, students benefit directly through more responsive advising, smoother administrative workflows, and a greater sense of institutional cohesion. The session closed with a shared commitment to continue building systems that support those who support graduate students.

Expanding PhD Funding Models with Corporate Funding

Presented by Jana Stone, Ph.D., Bonnie Ferri, Ph.D., Gloria Griessman, & Olof Westerstahl

Following lunch, the next Strategy Session shifted toward the question of financial sustainability in doctoral education. The room filled again with faculty leaders, graduate directors, and administrative professionals interested in how universities can rethink traditional approaches to PhD funding. Presenters discussed that graduate student support increasingly requires flexible models that combine institutional fellowships with internships, co sponsored projects, and strategic corporate engagement.

Attendees heard directly from Georgia Tech Corporate Engagement leaders about how partnerships with industry can provide additional resources that help students refine professional skills while remaining compliant with federal and state policies. The presenters walked through structural barriers that sometimes make these models difficult to implement. rigid budget categories. historical focus on academic career paths. and lack of clarity around policies governing external funding.

The session unfolded as an interactive planning conversation. Participants considered how Georgia Tech might continue building systems that better align funding with career readiness and well being goals. Many asked questions about how internships can coexist with assistantships and how corporate relationships can be cultivated responsibly to benefit both students and faculty. The energy of the room made clear that this was not theoretical dialogue. it was active strategy in motion.

Supporting Graduate Success Strategic Centralized Funding from Recruitment to Completion

Presented by Anne Shaffer, Ph.D. Associate Dean, The Graduate School, University of Georgia

The third Strategy Session welcomed an external voice and national perspective. Professor Anne Shaffer shared a practical framework from the University of Georgia demonstrating how centralized funding administered through a graduate school can support students throughout their full academic lifecycle.

As she spoke, attendees followed along through examples that felt immediately relatable. targeted merit fellowships offered during recruitment. block grant funding that allows flexible allocation at the program level. emergency assistance for students facing

unforeseen challenges, and dissertation completion awards that provide senior students with protected research time.

Audience members discussed how such centralized approaches promote equity, consistency, and transparency in access to graduate resources. Many asked how these models might be adapted at Georgia Tech to expand graduate student support across disciplines. The keynote room buzzed with notes being taken, contacts being exchanged, and ideas being translated directly into participants' own funding strategies.

Lunch and Learn Sessions

The Lunch and Learn segment invited attendees to leave the large theater spaces and step into smaller rooms where conversation took center stage. At tables filled with graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, faculty members, and program staff, participants continued the work of championing student success in an interactive and collaborative format. Three themed rooms offered structured opportunities for engagement while a fourth space remained open for informal networking within the graduate student lounge.

Introducing the Guided AI Use Framework (GAUF)

Presented by: Ashutosh Dhekne

The Guided AI Use Framework presentation explored a practical pilot effort taking place inside a Georgia Tech graduate level computer science course. The presenter described how instructors can imagine speaking directly to students about expectations for artificial intelligence use before an assignment even begins. Faculty in attendance heard the following idea brought to life. a framework known as GAUF that defines various levels of acceptable AI engagement.

The model was explained as intentionally flexible and applicable to many forms of graduate work. code development, written text, proofs, answers to multiple choice questions, and project based assignments. Participants learned how GAUF tags are placed directly into the language of an assignment so students clearly understand what is permitted and what is not. When no GAUF tag is present, the expectation is simple. it should be treated as a traditional assignment with no AI use allowed.

The room engaged actively around this new concept. Attendees asked how such a structure could reduce doubts about AI usage and help students remain compliant with academic integrity policies. The presenter acknowledged that it remained to be seen how students would ultimately react, but faculty and staff recognized the importance of exploring the framework itself as a potential tool that could be adopted more broadly across Georgia Tech graduate courses.

Career Readiness @ Tech in Action

Presented By: Gaeun (Gwenn) Seo, Laura Garcia, and David Gaston

In the Peachtree breakout room, the Career Readiness @ Tech framework was presented as a living, shared language for graduate student success. The presenter walked attendees

through the philosophy underlying the model. graduate education must prepare scholars not only for completion of a degree but for long term careers across diverse pathways.

Faculty and staff learned that the framework draws from national competency models including those developed by AAC&U, NACE, and the University System of Georgia. The session described career theories that shape graduate professional development such as the T shaped professional concept, occupational engagement, and life design approaches.

Participants explored the three interconnected components that form the heart of the framework. Expand Your Skills, which includes core competencies such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and global perspective. Deepen Your Expertise, which recognizes field specific knowledge and experiential learning opportunities such as research, internships, and community based learning. Engage and Evolve on the Career Journey, which emphasizes proactive action, reflection, and adaptability to unexpected opportunities.

Attendees engaged in discussion on how this model can strengthen partnerships between academic programs, career services, and wellness initiatives. The Summit was described as an ideal venue to gather feedback and explore integration into future Georgia Tech programming. Graduate students in the room asked questions about how such a framework could support them in shaping next steps for success. Faculty members considered how the shared language could be adopted within their own departments.

The session closed with emphasis that participant feedback would directly inform the design of signature programs launching in the next academic year. Those programs include leadership academies, mentoring communities, and expanded preparation models that promote transferable skills and holistic student support.

Co-Creating Universal Learning Outcomes for Graduate Students

Presented By: Tatianna Richardson, Heather Zesiger, and Christie Stewart

The Techwood room hosted one of the most interactive workshops of the day. Co creating universal learning outcomes for graduate students. The session was grounded in Georgia Tech's strategic priority to cultivate well being and guidance from national organizations including the Council of Graduate Schools and the JED Foundation.

Participants learned that a project team had completed a comprehensive literature review and benchmarking process to draft a list of universal learning outcomes. These outcomes represent co curricular competencies that contribute to student success and well being and may also reduce time to degree.

The abstract description was brought to life through conversation. Attendees discussed how universal outcomes help instructors, advisors, student support personnel, registered student organizations, peer mentors, alumni, and community partners design programs that advance graduate student success in measurable ways.

Faculty and staff in attendance explored the importance of tailoring these outcomes to both master's and doctoral students and to special populations including first generation scholars, international learners, and online students. The workshop encouraged crowdsourcing from participants to ensure the final model reflects Georgia Tech culture and context.

Students and support personnel asked how universal learning outcomes could help create more equitable access to resources, clearer expectations around professional development, and more intentional program design. The room felt alive with ideas being shared, refined, debated, and strengthened through collaborative dialogue.

The session emphasized that feedback from this workshop would directly inform the final version of Georgia Tech universal learning outcomes, helping the Institute continue building holistic support systems for graduate education.

Open Networking Forum

Beyond the structured themed rooms, the graduate student lounge offered opportunity for informal engagement. Attendees used this space to network and interact with one another, continue lightning conversations, and exchange contacts and resources. The atmosphere provided graduate students and postdoctoral scholars with direct access to institutional leaders and campus partners in a relaxed and welcoming format.

Overview

The Lunch and Learn segment demonstrated that intentional breakout rooms can transform a conference day into a shared working experience. From exploring frameworks for ethical AI use, to shaping competency based career readiness language, to collaboratively refining universal learning outcomes, attendees felt immersed in the active process of supporting graduate student success. Walking from room to room, participants experienced the power of conversation, collaboration, and holistic support as integral pillars of Georgia Tech graduate education.

Lightning Sessions

The Lightning Sessions at the 2025 Graduate Education Summit brought momentum and variety to the day's agenda. This fast-paced format showcased innovative initiatives, emerging research, and practical resources supporting graduate student success. Rapid presentations from faculty, staff, and program leaders highlighted strategies to strengthen mentorship, expand holistic wellbeing, and cultivate engagement and belonging across disciplines. Attendees experienced a diverse range of ideas and left with actionable approaches that could be applied within their own graduate programs.

Creating Community for Graduate Students

Presented by Delacy Carpenter

Abstract

This session examined the importance of intentionally engaging graduate students in institutional efforts aimed at fostering a sense of belonging. The presenter emphasized that graduate students are often overlooked when universities design programs and initiatives. At Georgia Tech, more than half the student population consists of graduate and professional students, making tailored support especially important.

Assessment data shared during the Summit revealed that graduate students want opportunities to connect with others beyond their individual disciplines and research areas. In response to this feedback, Georgia Tech established a dedicated Graduate Student Lounge and created specialized staff roles focused on commuter and community engagement. These include the Graduate and Community Program Manager and the Assistant Director for Commuter Student Engagement.

The session provided attendees with an overview of Georgia Tech programmatic strategies designed to engage graduate students effectively. It also created space for participants to share successful initiatives from their own institutions, discuss pressing issues, and explore innovative ways to build graduate communities across campus

Building Community Amongst Students across Backgrounds

Presented by S. Gordon Moore Jr.

Abstract

The presenter discussed that building community among graduate students can be difficult due to the wide range of cultures, backgrounds, and undergraduate experiences represented within the Georgia Tech student body. Lessons learned from years of direct engagement with students and alumni were shared to help illustrate best practices.

This session focused on strategies for understanding the real needs of diverse graduate populations. It emphasized the value of effective communication, alumni mentorship, and inclusive programming as mechanisms for strengthening academic accountability and personal support systems.

Attendees participated in a facilitated discussion designed to generate additional insights and practical steps. The goal was to help graduate student leaders, faculty, and staff leave with clearer tools for creating inclusive and supportive environments in their respective departments and laboratories.

Building Community Engagement through Graduate Studies

A Pilot of the Community Engagement Graduate Fellowship Program

Presented by Lea Marzo and Lewis Wheaton

Abstract

This lightning session introduced a new approach aimed at integrating service and community engagement directly into graduate education. Recent national evidence has shown that graduate students are developing strong interests in civic and public engagement as part of their scholarly identity. However, aligning service learning with graduate curricula, particularly within science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine fields, has historically been challenging.

To address this need, the Center for Programs to Increase Engagement in the Sciences initiated a pilot partnership with Google to create the Google Community Engagement Graduate Fellowship. The fellowship was designed as a one year paid opportunity open to all graduate students within the College of Sciences.

Fellows collaborate with campus and Atlanta based community partners to build projects focused on Civic and Policy Engagement, Community Engaged Research, and K to 12 Research Outreach. Student participation is tracked through regular Academy meetings with relevant team members, clearly defined outcome goals, and mentor oversight.

The session highlighted how structured engagement opportunities can provide deeper meaning to student research, support professional development goals, and help cultivate faculty culture that values community impact alongside academic excellence.

GradSTEP: Making Science Accessible Seminar Fostering Graduate Student Belonging Within the College of Sciences Presented by Lea Marzo

Abstract

This session focused on the College of Sciences' dedication to increasing graduate student belonging across its six schools. Psychology. Mathematics. Biological Sciences. Chemistry and Biochemistry. Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. and Physics.

Student climate assessments summarized in 2022 demonstrated that graduate students desired an array of programs and events that addressed their psychological and academic needs. The GradSTEP initiative was proposed as a structured, student centered program to meet those needs by fostering autonomy, competency, and relatedness among scholars.

Funding from the Provost's Fund for Excellence in Graduate Studies enabled student led teams to design and implement enrichment seminars and peer mentorship programs tailored to the College community. Collaborative proposals were solicited from groups within a single graduate program as well as interdisciplinary teams working across multiple programs.

The session examined how engaging graduate students directly in proposal development strengthened confidence, improved inclusion, and encouraged participants to refine their path and redefine what is possible within graduate education.

Wisdom from alumni mentors and faculty partners demonstrated that community building and purposeful engagement are critical drivers of both academic success and emotional well being for graduate students. This initiative continues to serve as a model for how Georgia Tech can leverage internal partnerships to create environments where scholars feel valued and thrive together

Overview

Collectively, the lightning sessions from last year's Summit reinforced a consistent message. graduate education at Georgia Tech must intentionally support students beyond technical scholarship alone. By leveraging university resources, engaging student voice, expanding mentorship models, and collaborating across campuses and disciplines,

Georgia Tech continues to build holistic systems that combat isolation and promote graduate student success.

Panel Discussions

Graduate Voices: Perspectives on Success and Belonging at Tech

Moderator: Vibhuti Dahiya

Vibhuti Dahiya, representing the M.S. Cybersecurity Program within the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School of Public Policy, Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts. The moderator welcomed attendees warmly and introduced the panel as a space where student voices would be centered and heard directly. The setting created an atmosphere of openness and authenticity, encouraging participants to listen closely and reflect on the experiences shared from across the Institute.

Panelists

The panel featured a diverse group of students intentionally selected to represent multiple colleges, disciplines, and stages of graduate study.

Ejaz Ahmed, Ph.D.

Public Policy Program

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School of Public Policy

Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts

Professor Ahmed shared reflections from his academic journey in public policy and the ways in which structured mentorship and professional development influenced his path toward success. He spoke candidly about navigating program expectations, engaging with faculty mentors, and developing clarity around career goals beyond the classroom.

Empress Henry Logan, M.S.

City and Regional Planning Program

School of City and Regional Planning

College of Design

Ms. Henry Logan provided thoughtful perspectives on what belonging means within professional master's programs. She discussed balancing academic rigor with personal responsibilities and highlighted the importance of connecting with peers across different backgrounds to build confidence and community.

Isabel Boyd, Joint Ph.D. Program

Biomedical Engineering with Georgia Tech and Emory University
Wallace H. Coulter Department of Biomedical Engineering
College of Engineering

Ms. Boyd described the unique experience of being part of a joint doctoral program, offering insight into cross institutional collaboration, research accountability, and access to shared resources. She spoke on how structured supports and faculty engagement helped her manage complex research milestones while maintaining personal well being.

Kali Kater, Ph.D.

Ocean Science and Engineering Program
School of Biological Sciences
College of Sciences

Professor Kater discussed that interdisciplinary doctoral programs can feel particularly isolating without intentional ecosystems of peer support. She reflected on building professional identity within emerging fields and stressed the importance of access to wellness resources and alumni mentorship.

Mithila Ramesh Warriar, M.S.

Cybersecurity and Privacy Program
School of Cybersecurity and Privacy
College of Computing

Ms. Warriar offered perspectives on navigating graduate school as an online and non traditional learner. She shared wisdom on developing intellectual independence, cultivating networks, and understanding the importance of holistic career readiness for students within technical computing disciplines.

Abstract

The Graduate Voices panel brought together a range of experiences that allowed attendees to feel deeply connected to the real Georgia Tech graduate student journey. Each panelist reflected on themes of success, belonging, and balance, sharing candid perspectives on what it means to thrive in graduate school.

Attendees gained practical insight into how advising structures, mentorship quality, professional development opportunities, and wellness initiatives impact the day to day student experience. The panel emphasized that graduate education is not only about

academic rigor but about cultivating environments where students feel valued and supported across programs and disciplines.

As students in the audience listened, many nodded in recognition of shared challenges. navigating qualifying exams. preparing proposals. seeking internships. balancing family responsibilities. and developing confidence for the job market. The conversation created space for reflection and actionable ideas on how Georgia Tech can continue to elevate the graduate experience by investing intentionally in student centered support systems.

Overview

Walking out of the panel session, attendees felt inspired by the authenticity and openness of the presenters. The Graduate Voices discussion had allowed students, faculty, and staff to see the PhD and master's journey through a more human lens. It reinforced the importance of dialogue between those learning and those leading. and demonstrated that when students are engaged in conversation, institutional culture grows stronger and more inclusive. The panel brought the day's themes to life and left participants with clearer understanding of how to support graduate student success at Georgia Tech.

Keynote

The ASDL Academy: Building a Community of PhD Scholars – Reflections and Lessons Learned

Professor Dimitri Mavris

Distinguished Regents Professor and Director
Aerospace Systems Design Laboratory (ASDL), Georgia Tech

Abstract

Professor Dimitri Mavris delivered a thoughtful and informative keynote address centered on the importance of structured community building within doctoral education. His presentation examined a core reality faced by many PhD students. the doctoral journey, while academically rewarding, can also be isolating and emotionally demanding. Traditional models of graduate education often emphasize independent research progress but provide limited formal mechanisms for peer interaction and professional skill development.

He explained that in today's rapidly evolving workforce, technical excellence alone is not enough to ensure long term success. Graduates are increasingly expected to demonstrate leadership ability, collaborative problem solving, effective communication, and ethical awareness. These competencies are critical whether students pursue careers in industry, government laboratories, entrepreneurial ventures, or academic positions.

To address these gaps, the Aerospace Systems Design Laboratory created the ASDL Academy as an intentional support structure woven directly into the culture of the lab. The Academy reflects ASDL's interdisciplinary nature, bringing together scholars from multiple technical divisions and research domains. It provides a unified framework where students can strengthen their research approaches while simultaneously developing the holistic skills demanded beyond the degree.

Program Background and Rationale

Since its inception more than two decades ago, ASDL has recognized that graduate students benefit most when they are connected to purpose and to one another. The laboratory supports research spanning underwater systems, surface transportation, air and space applications, energy systems, data science, and emerging technologies. This multi domain environment offers students exceptional freedom to select and shape their dissertation topics. However, it also increases the complexity of the PhD process.

Professor Mavris noted that such freedom can unintentionally contribute to confusion, loneliness, and inconsistent preparation if students are left to navigate milestones entirely

on their own. The Academy was therefore formed to ensure that candidates receive guided development after qualifying exams, peer supported growth during proposal preparation, and reinforcement as they transition toward capable independent scholarship prior to dissertation defense.

Academy Structure

The Academy is grounded in the principle of scaffolding, a learning model that provides temporary support to help doctoral candidates complete tasks and develop skills until they can perform them confidently and independently. Key components of the structure include:

- Weekly organized sessions for all doctoral students within ASDL
- Focused guidance on dissertation research framing and structure
- Small group thesis pods that create accountability and cross phase mentorship
- Peer to peer clinics addressing common technical challenges
- Mock qualifying exams and shared study sessions
- Regular reviews of methodology, logic diagrams, and presentation materials
- A train the trainer approach enabling senior students to practice mentoring and facilitation
- Social events that promote strong networks and support good mental health

Students engage horizontally with peers at similar stages and vertically with mixed stage cohorts. This layered interaction helps reinforce big picture thinking while allowing individuals to learn from the experiences of others who have recently completed the same milestones.

Milestone Engagement and Support

Throughout the presentation, Professor Mavris walked the audience through how the Academy supports the full PhD lifecycle.

Qualification Exams. the Academy organizes structured preparation long before the exams occur, conducting numerous practice sessions and mock oral assessments. These opportunities help students understand what to expect, refine their arguments, and build confidence.

Proposal Development. once students enter the pre proposal phase, Academy meetings focus on hypothesis formation, literature search strategies, experiment design, and defensible logic. Students critique one another's research questions and methodologies, strengthening argumentation in practice.

Defense Readiness. In later stages, the Academy holds clinics on slide preparation, methodology reviews, and peer feedback to ensure clearer communication of complex research outcomes.

Beyond Beyond. Alumni remain connected to current students through pod networks and by attending Academy sessions, further reinforcing a sense of continuity and belonging across generations of scholars.

Demonstrated Impact

A substantial portion of the keynote centered on the measurable benefits observed from this model. The outcomes he presented included:

- More than 90 mock qualifying exams organized in 2025
- Over 40 students directly supported through proposal preparation
- High proposal success rate among first time proposers
- Earlier proposal readiness observed in recent cohorts
- Greater interdisciplinary collaboration between pods
- Faster integration of new doctoral students into ASDL research culture
- Stronger intellectual independence demonstrated earlier in the PhD process
- Reduced burnout, isolation, and confusion during high stress milestones

He connected these outcomes to the broader record of the laboratory. More than 300 PhDs have graduated from ASDL since 2000, many moving into highly successful careers in diverse sectors. The Academy has played an integral role in enabling that long term success.

Lessons Learned

Professor Mavris concluded by reflecting on practical insights gained over years of Academy operation.

Community building leads to better research outcomes.

Structured peer accountability strengthens scholarly independence.

Train the trainer mentoring develops leadership culture.

Holistic support reduces emotional isolation.

Regular knowledge exchange improves preparedness for post PhD life.

These lessons demonstrated that intentional support systems can enhance both academic rigor and student well being without reducing the individuality of the doctoral experience.

Vision and Future Growth

The keynote closed with a forward looking discussion on where the Academy is headed and what it can become. Planned next steps include:

- Formalizing documentation for long term continuity
- Expanding access to recorded meetings and materials
- Creating more opportunities of engagement for research faculty and master's students
- Sharing the model with other groups within Georgia Tech as a scalable framework
- Promoting broader engagement with NSF through service oriented scholarship
- Encouraging participation as NSF reviewers
- Developing opportunities for students and faculty to serve as NSF rotators or advisors

He emphasized that the Academy is not only a series of meetings but a method and process that elevates the intellectual culture of the lab, equips students with relevant professional skills, and prepares thought leaders ready to confront the complex problems of today's world.

Overview for the Graduate Community

For Summit attendees, particularly graduate and postdoctoral students, the ASDL Academy presentation offered an inspiring example of how purposeful structures can transform the PhD experience. It reinforced that strong mentorship, ethical AI use, and community engagement are essential pillars of graduate student success. The model demonstrates that when students feel better together, they research better together, and Georgia Tech becomes stronger as a result.

Closing Remarks

The 2025 Graduate Education Summit brought faculty, staff, graduate students, and postdoctoral scholars together for a landmark day of shared learning and collaboration. Through keynotes, lightning presentations, strategy workshops, panel discussions, and poster exhibitions, attendees explored practical approaches to strengthen the graduate student experience at Georgia Tech. The conversations throughout the day reinforced the importance of mentorship, holistic well being, ethical AI use, and purposeful career readiness as foundational pillars of graduate education.

Georgia Tech extends sincere appreciation to every presenter, panelist, moderator, and participant who contributed their expertise and insight. The Summit was organized by the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Education in partnership with the Center for Teaching and Learning, the College of Sciences, the College of Lifetime Learning, and Graduate Student Government Association.

Participant feedback gathered during the event will directly inform the design of future initiatives and programs aimed at championing graduate student success across the Institute. The Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Education looks forward to continuing these important dialogues and to building systems where all Georgia Tech scholars feel seen, supported, and prepared for success beyond the degree.

For additional information on resources supporting graduate education, community engagement, and professional development at Georgia Tech, please contact the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Education.