

## **2016-2021 Graduate School Strategic Plan**

### **Buffalo State Mission and History**

Buffalo State College is the largest comprehensive college in the SUNY system, with a long history of providing outstanding undergraduate and graduate education. Established in 1871 as the Buffalo Normal School, Buffalo State has grown from an institution primarily dedicated to training teachers for Buffalo's growing population to a large comprehensive college with programs in education, liberal arts and sciences, and professional studies.

Our location within the city of Buffalo's museum district and arts corridor is bordered by distinctive and emerging neighborhoods that enable students to participate in nationally recognized community engagement and service experiences in an urban setting. Buffalo State's diverse student population, engaged and exceptional faculty, wide range of academic programs, and applied-learning opportunities create a unique community of scholars where lives are transformed.

### **Buffalo State Mission Statement**

Buffalo State is a diverse and inclusive college committed to the intellectual, personal, and professional growth of its students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Our mission is to empower students to succeed and to inspire a lifelong passion for learning. Buffalo State is dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, service, scholarship, creative activity, and cultural enrichment.

### **Vision**

**Buffalo State College will be a nationally recognized leader in public higher education known for**

- its caring and rigorous academic environment where lives are transformed through education;
- the intellectual and creative accomplishments of its faculty, staff, students, and alumni;
- its cross-culturally competent community dedicated to developing leaders for an increasingly global society.

### **Values**

**We, the Buffalo State community, are committed to**

- actively facilitating access to public higher education;
- excellent learning experiences in and out of the classroom;
- being student centered;
- the rigors, joys, and fulfillment of intellectual discovery;
- engagement, applied learning, and partnerships with the community;
- social responsibility;
- respect for diversity and individual differences;
- supportive and collegial relationships;
- opportunities for individuals to realize their full potential,

## **Graduate School Mission**

The mission of the Graduate School is to support the overall mission of Buffalo State at the graduate level, including a commitment to access, transformative experiences, and high quality education. The Graduate School seeks to make significant contributions to students' professional and intellectual growth by providing a challenging and supportive environment that integrates advanced study and scholarship/research and that asks students to exert leadership in their chosen profession.

The Graduate School office is responsible, wholly or in part, for:

- the admission (in collaboration with academic departments) of domestic and international graduate students;
- monitoring graduate student progress and academic probation;
- certifying graduate students for graduation;
- administering the Minority Fellowship Program and the Graduate Educational Opportunity Program;
- administering tuition scholarships for graduate assistants;
- maintaining records of graduate policies and the graduate catalog;
- maintaining data regarding graduate programs and students;
- approving master's theses;
- recommending graduate faculty appointments to the Provost;
- assisting departments and schools with the development and revision of graduate programs and, as appropriate, with approval by SUNY and the New York State Education Department;
- marketing (in collaboration with academic departments, programs, and deans) graduate programs through a variety of approaches (e.g., Open House, Information Sessions, Drop-In Sessions, electronic media);
- serving as administrative liaison and support for Graduate Student Association.

## **Introduction**

SUNY Buffalo State formally adopted the 2016-2021 Strategic Plan in October 2016. The Graduate School 2016-2021 Strategic Plan was subsequently developed with the intent to align with the main principal goals of the College's Strategic Plan as they pertain to the Graduate School and graduate programs. The goals are:

Goal 1: Provide an Excellent Education Inside and Outside the Classroom

Goal 2: Continue to Create an Engaged Community

Goal 3: Enhance Institutional Effectiveness

Goal 4: Provide Appropriate Resources Necessary to Succeed

The process used in creating the Graduate School 2016–2021 Strategic Plan was collaborative, inviting participation from faculty, staff, and graduate students throughout the campus. Several SWOT sessions were conducted with diverse interest groups representing students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Additionally, the responses from over 300 graduate students who completed a comprehensive Graduate Student Survey in 2015 were integrated. What emerged was a common belief that graduate programs at Buffalo State have a distinct and important place in the educational community and the Graduate School remains committed to its fundamental role in supporting graduate programs and graduate students.

The results from the 2015 survey show graduate students select Buffalo State due to the academic programs that align with their professional goals and career aspirations. Buffalo State must continue to offer relevant high quality graduate educational experiences that meet the demands of contemporary society. Our applied graduate programs must continue to offer distinctive education opportunities that stand out from the numerous colleges that surround us. For example, Buffalo State's art conservation graduate program is one of only four in the entire country, and our International Center for Studies in Creativity offers graduate programs in creativity that are internationally recognized for excellence. Our Great Lakes Center actively conducts collaborative research with other institutions and agencies in the United States, Canada, and Europe and offers master's degrees in Great Lakes Ecosystems Science. Buffalo State also must continue to maintain and enrich its long and distinguished history of preparing highly effective teachers and educational leaders. Additionally, Buffalo State offers Multidisciplinary Studies degrees that allow students to design an individualized program by selecting graduate courses from academic departments at the college or other accredited institutions that align with their unique professional and educational objectives not readily met by traditional master's degrees.

Buffalo State must build on existing strengths and identify new opportunities emerging from a rapidly changing society. The college must examine graduate programs to determine whether new programs that are consistent with the college's mission might attract new students to the campus. Interdisciplinary programs in areas such as data analytics, conflict resolution, and community health could build on existing strengths of the faculty and would help distinguish the college from its nearby peers. *To accomplish this, a comprehensive Strategic Plan for the Graduate School and graduate programs must be developed and implemented in collaboration with graduate students, academic departments, faculty, deans, and College administrators.*

## **GOALS FOR 2016-2021**

### **GOAL 1:**

#### **PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT EDUCATION INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM**

##### **Focus Area 1: Create Engaging and Distinctive Academic Programming**

Graduate education is rapidly increasing in importance nationally, as our knowledge-based economy requires mastery of specialized content and skills. Many fields now require a master's degree as an entry-level credential, where only a decade ago a bachelor's degree would have sufficed. Buffalo State's graduate enrollment has experienced a steady decline in recent years, as the nationwide drop in students pursuing education degrees has had a significant impact on our programs. While we do expect a gradual increase in these areas going forward, we must also develop new programs that are in high demand and consistent with our mission. Recently developed programs such as the professional science master's (PSM) in professional applied and computational mathematics have shown great promise, as has the new master's in public relations. Our location offers ideal opportunities to develop distinct programs of interest surrounding the burgeoning blue economy and the urban environment.

- 1.1 Strategically expand graduate programs by serving as a resource to programs, departments, and deans to assist with analysis of programs and markets for new programs (Forms of assistance

include providing data, recruitment events, internal marketing efforts within Buffalo State, and external campaigns to recruit new students to Buffalo State)

1.1.1 Evaluate existing graduate programs to determine whether they continue to generate sufficient student interest to remain viable

- Work with academic deans and departments to create snap-shot of current programs in terms of their capacity, possibilities for the future, whether the programs are resourced properly
- Assess programs' plans, capacities and growth potentials
- Work with academic deans and chairs to plan for the future of their programs

1.1.2 Identify new opportunities and support the development of graduate programs consistent with our mission and capitalizing on our urban location.

- Work with academic deans, chairs, faculty, administration, Continuing Professional Studies and others to identify developing and projected opportunities for new programs that make sense for Buffalo State and help bring them to fruition. (e.g., Data Analytics; Sports Management; Health, Nutrition & Dietetics; Conflict Resolution)
- Support development of interdisciplinary programs and courses
- Facilitate collaborations/affiliations with companies, partner with more businesses, agencies, and organizations - offer courses jointly with and potentially at industry and workplace settings
- Collaborate with other area colleges/universities to offer joint programs
- Identify, encourage, and support development of programs that incorporate an explicit urban focus within the program of student
- Assist with marketing and communication plan for programs

1.1.3 Promote Multidisciplinary Studies

- Assess Multidisciplinary Studies following Assessment Plan
- With Graduate Advisory Council input, address results to improve Multidisciplinary Studies Program for students.
- Assure compliance of International Graduate Education Program (IGPE) with NYSED, SUNY, Buffalo State and all accreditation policies.

1.2 Offer more flexible delivery systems for programs and courses

1.2.1 Work with departments and deans to explore, encourage, and support flexible delivery systems for programs and courses

1.2.2 Work with departments and deans to reinvigorate evening and weekend programs

1.2.3 Work with departments and deans to pursue viability of various program delivery modes (e.g., distance learning, executive delivery models)

- Assess campus-wide policies regarding graduate staffing levels, course quotas, remuneration for faculty, and resourcing programs and make recommendations to maximize and enhance the delivery of graduate education.
- Increase distance-education presence to enhance student success and program accessibility
- Brand the Graduate School and graduate programs in relation to their applied nature and market the graduate school mission of access, transformative experiences, quality education, and career preparation.

1.3 Explore, encourage, and support innovative structures, 4+1 pathways, 3+2 international programs, and stackable graduate certificates with master's degree programs

- Integrate undergraduate and graduate programs (4+1 pathways)
- Support 3+2 international programs
- Investigate and when appropriate support joint enrollment in graduate certificate and master's degree programs
- Create and market evening and part-time program completion roadmaps
- Internally and externally market the innovative structures with prospective students (e.g., provide recruiters, UG Admission staff, and advisors the necessary information to promote these programs)

1.4 Assure compliance with NYSED, SUNY, and Buffalo State Policies

**Focus Area 2: Enhance Academic Support Services to Foster Student Academic Success**

Buffalo State offers a wide variety of academic support services, but there are too few available to graduate students and often little coordination across programs. All areas of the college play a major role in this effort; therefore, we must assess all academic support services available to graduate students to determine their appropriateness and effectiveness for graduate students. During this process we must consider the needs of our online graduate students. This is especially critical for students in our two fully online master's degree programs, Music Education and Adult Education.

With a growing number of international students in graduate programs, Buffalo State must work to ensure that they have the resources they need to succeed. International students often require academic support from specialists trained in working with students for whom English is a second language. Some international students may also have difficulty transitioning to the culture of the American classroom; professional development workshops designed to help faculty ease this transition for our students can be an important strategy to increase international student success.

1.5 Efficient operation of graduate admissions, record-keeping, and graduation reviews

1.6 Appraise existing academic support services available for graduate students to determine effectiveness, identify any gaps, and work with departments and offices across campus to make recommendations to address the gaps and improve availability and quality of campus services for graduate students

*Foster Student Engagement and Success*

- Identify current academic and student support services (e.g., writing center support, support in scientific writing) available for graduate students
- Assess their effectiveness for graduate students
- Identify gaps
- Create a plan to address gaps and improve academic and student support services and the experiences for all graduate students

1.7 Provide academic support for students completing online graduate courses and programs.

*Foster Student Engagement and Success for Students in Online Graduate Programs*

- Identify current academic and student support services (e.g., writing center support, support in scientific writing) available for graduate students completing online course and programs
- Assess their effectiveness for graduate students
- Identify gaps
- Create a plan to address gaps and improve academic and student support services and the experiences for all graduate students

1.8 Provide academic support for international graduate students.

*Foster Student Engagement and Success for International Graduate Students*

- Identify current academic and student support services available for international graduate students
- Assess their effectiveness for graduate students
- Identify gaps
- Create a plan to address gaps and improve academic and student support services and the experiences of international graduate students

**Focus Area 3 (Focus Area 4 in Buffalo State Strategic Plan): Support Staff Development**

The staff at Buffalo State plays an important role in the mission of the college, in many cases working directly with students in ways that are critical to their success. Highly trained Graduate School professional staff members interact with students from the moment they become prospective students to the day they graduate in diverse areas including enrollment, advisement, health, athletics, computing, technology, and the library. Recruiting and retaining professional staff who share Buffalo State's mission and dedication to student development is a crucial element of the overall effort to transform student lives.

The Professional Development Center supports the intellectual, personal, and professional growth of faculty and staff, offering numerous workshops and leadership development opportunities throughout

the year. Graduate School staff can capitalize on the expertise of Buffalo State's staff by attending professional development opportunities across campus.

An analysis of the staffing levels and responsibilities to ensure professional development opportunities are provided is critical to providing high quality service. A comprehensive and transparent assessment of Graduate School staffing can help identify areas of specific need to fulfill Buffalo State's mission.

1.9 Support professional development of Graduate School staff and Graduate Faculty

1.10 Routinely evaluate staffing levels and job duties of Graduate School staff to ensure relevant, high quality, and timely services and programs are provided for graduate students

## **GOAL 2:**

### **CONTINUE TO CREATE AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY**

Buffalo State College continues to attract well-qualified graduate students. Meeting our graduate student enrollment goals in a challenging environment requires the commitment of the entire campus community. Faculty and staff working together for prospective student outreach and events such as Graduate Open House and Graduate Program Information Sessions can help present a unified effort to attract Buffalo State undergraduate students to graduate programs as well as new students to Buffalo State. There are many reasons students initially enroll in graduate programs, among the most important reasons they stay is that they see a link between the applied nature and experiences of our distinctive programs and their professional aspirations. Another chief reason is the positive interactions, support and connections they develop with faculty and colleagues.

#### **Focus Area 1: Recruit New Students for Graduate Programs**

Graduate enrollment currently represents approximately 20% of the total Buffalo State enrollment and approximately 10% of the college's FTE. The college develops graduate enrollment targets that affect its SUNY allocation and overall revenue. To assure Buffalo State meets these targets the Graduate School office, academic deans' offices, department chairs, and faculty need to collectively assess the college's capacity to offer graduate programs, recruit, manage admissions, retention strategies, facilitate student access to courses, and market graduate programs.

2.1 Establish a communication plan for collaboration and consultation among Graduate School staff, academic deans and associate deans, department chairs and coordinators, and graduate faculty

2.2 Develop an Enrollment Management Plan for Graduate Programs

2.2.1 Solicit feedback from faculty, graduate chairs/program coordinators, and deans regarding enrollment trends and issues

2.2.2 Assist provost and associate vice president for enrollment management with establishment of reasonable graduate enrollment targets and the coordination of those targets with the Buffalo State's overall enrollment targets

2.2.3 In collaboration with academic departments, programs and deans, develop benchmarks and monitor key performance indicators for the recruitment of graduate students

- 2.2.4 In collaboration with the Office of Institutional Research and RITE, maintain, review, and disseminate comprehensive data about graduate admissions and enrollment to assist central administrators, deans, and department chairs in maximizing enrollment (e.g., lists of current and potential students who have not registered, list of recently admitted students who have not registered, enrollment trends by program)
  - 2.2.5 Implement recruitment plan, communication plans, and engage in year-round activities to recruit and enroll students
- 2.3 Develop and implement robust and comprehensive recruitment, communication, retention, and marketing plans that incorporate *innovative strategies* specifically focused on graduate student recruitment and retention.
- 2.3.1 Work with College Relations to brand and market the applied and distinguished nature of Buffalo State’s graduate programs and the Graduate School mission of access, transformative experiences, quality education, and career preparation
  - 2.3.2 Work with College Relations to develop materials to use in recruitment efforts that highlight the applied nature of graduate programs and how they foster student engagement and success. (i.e., Students Who Soar, Brochures, Website, Social Media)
  - 2.3.3 Work with College Relations to develop a comprehensive, targeted marketing campaign for graduate programs with capacity and/or high growth potential
    - Identify and implement strategies that focus on recruitment of current Buffalo State undergraduate students
      - Work with academic deans and departments to create, promote, and market seamless pathways to graduate programs for undergraduate students (e.g., 4+1 pathways, joint undergraduate/graduate programs)
      - Incorporate early-outreach strategies by expanding recruiting efforts to sophomore and junior level undergraduate students.
      - Apprise UG Admission staff about 4+1 pathways and encourage use as UG recruitment tool
    - Identify and implement strategies that focus on increasing external applicants that include specific targeted efforts to recruit new students from outside of Buffalo State or former Buffalo State students.
      - Local and regional
      - Statewide
      - National
      - Increase international recruitment efforts (e.g., Canada, India)
  - 2.3.4 Assess recruitment campaigns and call to action events to determine which are most effective and spend resources on those. (e.g., college fairs, radio advertising, Web sites, Facebook, e-mail blasts, targeting marketing)
  - 2.3.5 Identify and implement retention strategies



- 2.3.6 Enhance the use of technology and social media to reach prospective graduate students and other audiences by working with academic deans, departments, and College Relations to assure the College, Graduate School, and department web sites provide up-to-date information in an accessible and attractive format

### **Focus Area 2: Provide an Outstanding On-Campus Student Experience**

As we work to instill a feeling of belonging for graduate students, we must strive to create a welcoming atmosphere on campus. For some graduate students, primarily international and out of area students, housing accommodations is a concern. We should assess and advocate for arrangement options that align with the lifestyles of graduate students.

- 2.4 Engage the Graduate Student Association to advise the Graduate School Dean regarding matters related to graduate student experience
- 2.5 Advocate Housing Master Plan takes into account the lifestyles, expectations, and needs of graduate students, which are different than those of undergraduate students.
- 2.6 Investigate and advocate for access to centers and facilities similar to those of undergraduate students (e.g., Fitness Center)

### **Focus Area 3: Support an Engaging Co-Curricular Program**

Creating an engaging campus experience requires collaboration between the Graduate School, academic divisions across campus, and student organizations. All too often, Graduate Students attend classes and do not participate in what is offered outside the classroom. An area where we can be intentional and perhaps distinctive is to work with the Graduate Student Association (GSA) to promote social opportunities for networking with colleagues in professional and academic settings. To this end, the Graduate School provides administrative liaison and support for Graduate Student Association (GSA) to encourage, organize, and support scholarly activities and social opportunities to promote a sense of community for all graduate students.

- 2.7 Support the governance of GSA
- 2.8 Advise and support GSA and their efforts to promote scholarly and social activities
- 2.9 Support graduate student research and provide funds for student who present at professional conferences. Encourage graduate students to present at Graduate Student Fair and the Scholarship & Creativity Celebration.
- 2.10 Facilitate Outstanding Thesis/Project Awards annually
- 2.11 Assess graduate students' perceptions about their non-academic experiences regularly

### **Focus Area 4: Serve as an Anchor Institution**

Buffalo State has a significant presence in Buffalo, Western New York, New York State, and the world. It is a center of culture, learning, and innovation. Our graduate level applied programs, along with our faculty and students, continue to play a vital and active role in the renewal and revitalization of our community and those we serve. As an anchor institution for the city of Buffalo, we must simultaneously make our presence felt in the city and welcome the community onto our campus. For graduate programs this often occurs with advisory councils and through internship opportunities.

- 2.12 Capitalize on the urban location for graduate level academic and co-curricular programming
- 2.13 Develop partnerships with more businesses, agencies, schools districts, and organizations.
  - 2.13.1 Work with departments and deans to determine the viability of offering programs jointly with industry in workplace locations
  - 2.13.2 Work with departments and deans to identify and create opportunities for graduate students to engage in internships and field experiences to solve local problems and conduct research

**GOAL 3:  
ENHANCE INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Buffalo State’s ability to offer an outstanding graduate education to its students requires many moving parts all working in tandem. The behind-the-scenes work involved in everything from maintaining the website to disbursing financial aid plays a significant role in the success of the institution and ultimately of its students. One of the benefits of working in higher education is that we are surrounded by experts in their fields. Buffalo State can maximize institutional effectiveness by harnessing the expertise and talents of members of our own community to help fulfill our mission.

**Focus Area 1: Tell Our Story Externally**

Buffalo State College has a tremendous story to tell about our graduate programs, and we must renew efforts to ensure that our story is heard. Prospective graduate students, employees, and the public at large often develop an initial impression of the college on the website alone. Given its critical importance, the college must determine the best use for the website and focus its design accordingly.

In order to tell its story more widely to include graduate program and the experiences of graduate students, the college must commit to increasing the Graduate School marketing budget and deploying the funds strategically. This includes sufficient allocation to promote and market graduate programs and call to action events. We are located in a competitive market for graduate programs and Buffalo State’s marketing budget for Graduate School recruitment and the promotion of graduate programs has, unfortunately, remained woefully inadequate. In addition to traditional and new media, our Graduate School marketing publications program for Recruitment, Admissions, Retention and Academic Affairs requires predictable and targeted funding and creative approaches. Video content (for use on the web, social media, television, streaming networks, mobile, e-communication, and live presentations) is a critical component in telling the story of the people, programs, and traditions of Buffalo State. Dedicated funding for staff who will focus on authentic, genuine video communication for Buffalo State marketing efforts is essential and has been increasing in need for years.

While a dedicated team of marketing professionals is a critical component of telling our story, we also have a tremendous team of largely untapped experts who are the best advocates for Buffalo State: our students, staff, faculty, and alumni. We must deploy those who can speak most directly about the Buffalo State graduate experience to engage with prospective students, legislators, and supporters of the college.

- 3.1 Assess the Graduate School and Buffalo State websites to determine current and future use and maximize their value to different user groups to promote graduate programs and the graduate experience

3.2 Evaluate the marketing budget dedicated to Graduate School and graduate programs to determine the proper appropriation for Graduate School strategic goals and to tell the story of graduate programs (e.g., Students who Soar videos)

3.3 Engage graduate students, staff, faculty, and alumni in advocacy efforts

#### **Focus Area 2: Promote Fiscal Transparency**

As resources have become increasingly tight, it is more important than ever to be strategic with the use of limited funds. One way to help demonstrate accountability and transparency is through the creation of an online strategic planning and budgeting system that would assign financial resources to initiatives identified in the Buffalo State strategic plan and be reviewed annually by the campus community.

3.4 Engage in the process of fiscal resource allocation associated with Graduate School and graduate programming initiatives

#### **Focus Area 3: Ensure Data Integrity**

Data analysis has become an increasingly important aspect of decision making at all levels of higher education, from academic advising to budgeting. The growing reliance on data requires greater assurance that the data itself be accurate and that those using the data to make decisions be properly trained in its use.

3.5 Work with Offices of Institutional Research, Institutional Advancement, College Relations, departments and deans to transform data into actionable information to drive decision-making processes; ensure streamlined and reliable access to data and information

#### **Focus Area 4: Enhance Culture of Continuous Improvement**

Receiving constructive feedback on job performance is an important part of ensuring institutional effectiveness in fulfilling our mission to educate students. A consistent program of evaluation can help identify areas of strength and areas for improvement, and should not be viewed or used as a punitive measure; rather, the regular reflection on our own performance should model the same values of continuous improvement and lifelong learning that we strive to develop in our students.

3.6 Develop regular evaluation process for Graduate School staff

#### **Focus Area 5: Foster Sustainability**

The college's commitment to social justice must include sustainability as an overarching practice. Many of our institutional processes rely heavily on the use of paper products and could be more efficiently managed through electronic systems. Sustainability should be a consideration in all Buffalo State operations, from academic programming to building and grounds maintenance.

3.7 Move all paper processes to electronic where possible

### **GOAL 4:**

#### **PROVIDE APPROPRIATE RESOURCES NECESSARY TO SUCCEED**

Finally, the success of many of the strategic plan's goals rests on the campus's ability to secure the required financial resources. We must continue to advocate the importance of graduate education and

demonstrate that an investment of State dollars in Buffalo State College for graduate assistantships, graduate students, and graduate programs is an investment in the long-term welfare of the state of New York.

In addition to advocating increased public funding of the college for graduate students, we must work to increase private giving to meet our Graduate School strategic priorities. Buffalo State's Development Office has done a tremendous job in marshaling the support of alumni, foundations, and friends of the college. As we look forward to launching a new campaign during the period encompassed in this strategic plan, campus wide participation will demonstrate a commitment to the mission and goals of Buffalo State College to include graduate student opportunities.

While we look to find ways to increase funding, we must be effective stewards of the resources we have. The all-funds budgeting process will help identify resources and needs across campus; prioritizing spending will be an important component. The Graduate School along with Graduate Faculty and Students must be engaged in the process to ensure resources and needs are included.

4.1 Seek increased funding for Graduate School, graduate assistantships, and graduate programming through state appropriations, SUNY, and other private and public sector sources