

Leading Change in Graduate Career Support: Adapting to Evolving Student Needs

Gaeun (Gwenn) Seo, Ph.D.

Director of Graduate Career Development

Georgia Tech Career Center

Academic Professional

Graduate Postdoctoral Education

gwenn.seo@gatech.edu

Catharine Groover

Graduate Career Development Advisor

Georgia Tech Career Center

Graduate Postdoctoral Education

catharine.groover@gatech.edu



Today's Topics:

- **The Changing Graduate Education Landscape**
- **What These Shifts Mean for Graduate Career Services**
- **The Georgia Tech Case: Four Strategies for Adapting to Change**
- **Apply It to Your Context**



Start With Your Reality:

What's Your Graduate Engagement Challenge? (3 mins)



- What is one challenge you face in engaging graduate students or supporting their evolving career needs?
 - Think about visibility, relevance, reach, or specific student groups you've been trying to connect with.
- Jot it down in your worksheet. We'll come back to this as we explore strategies together.

Changes in Graduate Education & Career Landscape

It's Poll Time!



True or False!

1. The number of graduate students in the U.S. has steadily increased over the past decade.
2. Most graduate students in the U.S. today are enrolled full-time and attend in person
3. Most graduate students today still expect to pursue academic careers after graduation.



Shifting Graduate Education Landscape

- Graduate student enrollment in the U.S. has **steadily increased** since 2013 (Over 3.2 million students by 2021)
- More diversified graduate programs **in format and audience**:
 - 1-year and 2-year campus-based Master's programs
 - Multi-year part-time or online Master's or PhD programs for working professionals
 - Increasing flexibility in delivery (hybrid, asynchronous, weekend, etc.)

Graduate Student Enrollment in the U.S. Institutions



Source: National Center for Education Statistics ([LINK](#))

Evolving Graduate Student Populations

Graduate student populations are also changing

- Growth of online and part-time learners balancing full-time work and study
 - More mid-career professionals and career changers
- Students pursuing professional, non-thesis Master's degrees
- Rising enrollment of international and first-generation graduate students
- Traditional research-focused Master's and PhD students remain a vital population



Today's graduate students are **NOT one uniform group**—they bring diverse backgrounds, formats, and goals.

What These Changes Mean for Grad Career Services

- **Rethink Graduate Career Services** to support evolving student needs and career goals, ensuring *all graduate students feel seen, supported, and guided.*

Changing Landscape	Graduate Career Services Implications
More diverse student backgrounds, pathways, and goals	One-size-fits-all services are no longer effective
Rise in online, part-time, and non-traditional learners	Need for flexible, accessible, and asynchronous support
Expanded career outcomes beyond academia	Greater demand for industry-focused programming and employer engagement
Traditional academic careers remain a key goal for some students	Ensure academic career support is part of a comprehensive service portfolio

A New Expectation: Personalized Support at Scale

In the era of AI and on-demand information, more graduate students expect personalized support tailored to their unique situations



Yet, many institutions still face:

- Limited staff capacity
- Resource constraints
- Challenges in scaling individualized services

How can we respond to these changes?

Georgia Tech Case Study

Context – Graduate Students at Georgia Tech

A complex and expanding graduate student landscape

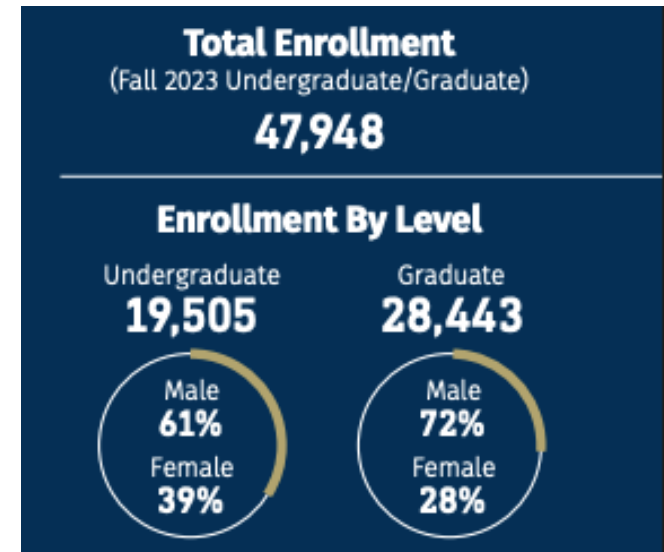
- Georgia Tech has more graduate students than undergraduates
- 32,000+ graduate students enrolled in Fall 2024

Who we serve:

- Campus-based Master's students (often early-career, full-time)
- Fast-track Master's students (BS/MS or 1-year programs)
- Online Master's students (working professionals, global, part- or full-time)
- Campus PhD students (research-focused, long-term training)

Each group has different:

- Motivations, career needs, and timelines
- Physical locations and life stages



GT Fall 2023 Enrollment

Graduate Career Support Challenges We Faced

The Reality Behind the Numbers in AY 23

- A team of 3 career development staff supporting 28,000+ graduate students (AY 23)
- High graduate student interest in personalized 1:1 support but limited career advising capacity
- 80+ career workshops offered by Career Center in AY 22, but graduate student engagement remained low, especially compared to undergraduates

We had to rethink how to support graduate students—**not by doing more individually but by reimagining how support is delivered.**

Amplifying Graduate Student Career Engagement

Key Strategies Applied

- Reframe the Perception to Rebuild Engagement
- Listen to Students—Not Just Your Own Voice
- Define Who You're Missing—and Why
- Maximize What You Have—Scale with Intention

Amplifying Graduate Student Career Engagement

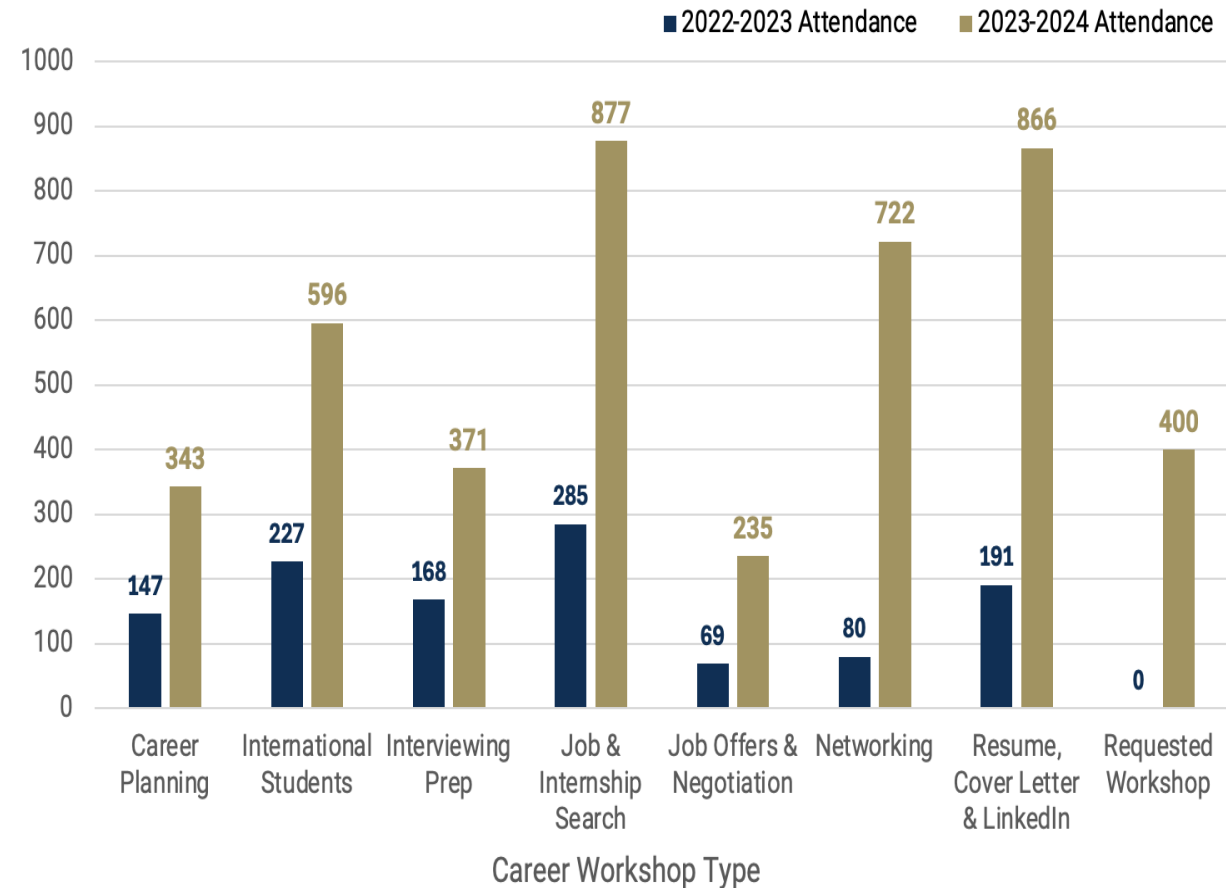
Key Strategies Applied

- Reframe the Perception to Rebuild Engagement
- Listen to Students—Not Just Your Own Voice
- Define Who You're Missing—and Why
- Maximize What You Have—Scale with Intention

New Reality at GT

- **7,517 (54%)** were graduate students out of 13,927 total career program participants at Career Center in AY 23
- **378% increase** in graduate student engagement in Grad Career Development Team workshops compared to AY 22

Graduate Career Team Workshop Engagement



1. Reframe the Perception to Rebuild Engagement

Guiding Question:

- What outdated assumptions do your students (or colleagues) hold about your office?

GT Case Highlights:

- **Old Myth:** Career Center = “just for undergraduate students.”
- **What We Did**
 - 1. Reviewed past offerings**—few visibly designed for grad students
 - 2. Established consistent, targeted communication channels**
: Launched weekly grad workshop reminders to Master’s and PhD students & bi-weekly career announcements to graduate departments)
 - 3. Active outreach to graduate departments**
: Hosted intro meetings for each department and offered requested workshops for graduate student clubs or departments (e.g., orientations)

2. Listen to Students—Not Just Your Own Voice

Guiding Question:

- How do your students describe themselves? Are you speaking their language—or relying on institutional labels?

GT Case Highlights:

- **What We Heard:** Students don't always identify with the term “graduate student.”
- **What We Did**
 1. **Adjusted our language in workshops and outreach**
: Rather than “graduate students,” use languages that more resonate with each graduate student group, such as
 - PhD students
 - Master's students
 - Experienced Professionals or Online Master's students
 - International graduate students

3. Define Who You're Missing—and Why

Guiding Question:

- Who isn't engaging with your services—and why? What data can help you identify and address those gaps?

GT Case Highlights:

- **What the Workshop Engagement Data Showed:** Gaps in participation from online students, international students, and early-stage PhD students
- **What We Did**
 1. **Analyzed workshop participation data and career advising trends**
: What went well and why, common topics emerged during career appointments
 2. **Identify each group's distinct career needs and preferred timelines**
: e.g., Online Master's students often seek career transitions and favor evening events
 3. **Made adjustments to timing and delivery**
: e.g., more virtual options, time-zone friendly scheduling)

4. Maximize What You Have—Scale with Intention

Guiding Question:

- If expanding your team or getting more resources isn't possible, how can you shift how you deliver support to reach more students—while still feeling personal and relevant?

GT Case Highlights:

- **The Challenge:** 3 career staff supporting 30,000+ graduate students who prefer to get personalized support
- **What We Did**
 1. **Transitioned to group-focused workshops by audience (PhD, MS, INTL, Online)**
 2. **Tailor content and title to match each group's distinct career needs**
: Resume workshops → “CVs to resumes for PhD students” and “Developing a winning resume as 1st-year Master's students”
 3. **Developed 24/7 tailored online career resources and posted recorded workshops**
: e.g., CV and resume samples and guides (click [HERE](#) for more resources)

Apply It to Your Context: From Insight to Action (5 mins)



- **Think back to the challenges you identified earlier.**
- Now, use the four strategies we explored to reflect on your own setting:
 - Which strategy feels most relevant to your challenge?
 - What might be one small shift you could try using that strategy?
 - Jot down one step you could take in the next 2–4 weeks to explore or test that idea.
- Turn to someone next to you and share the strategy you chose—and why.

Thank you!
Any Questions?

