

# 10 Years of GT6000 at Georgia Tech: Lessons and Tips on Supporting First-Year Graduate Students

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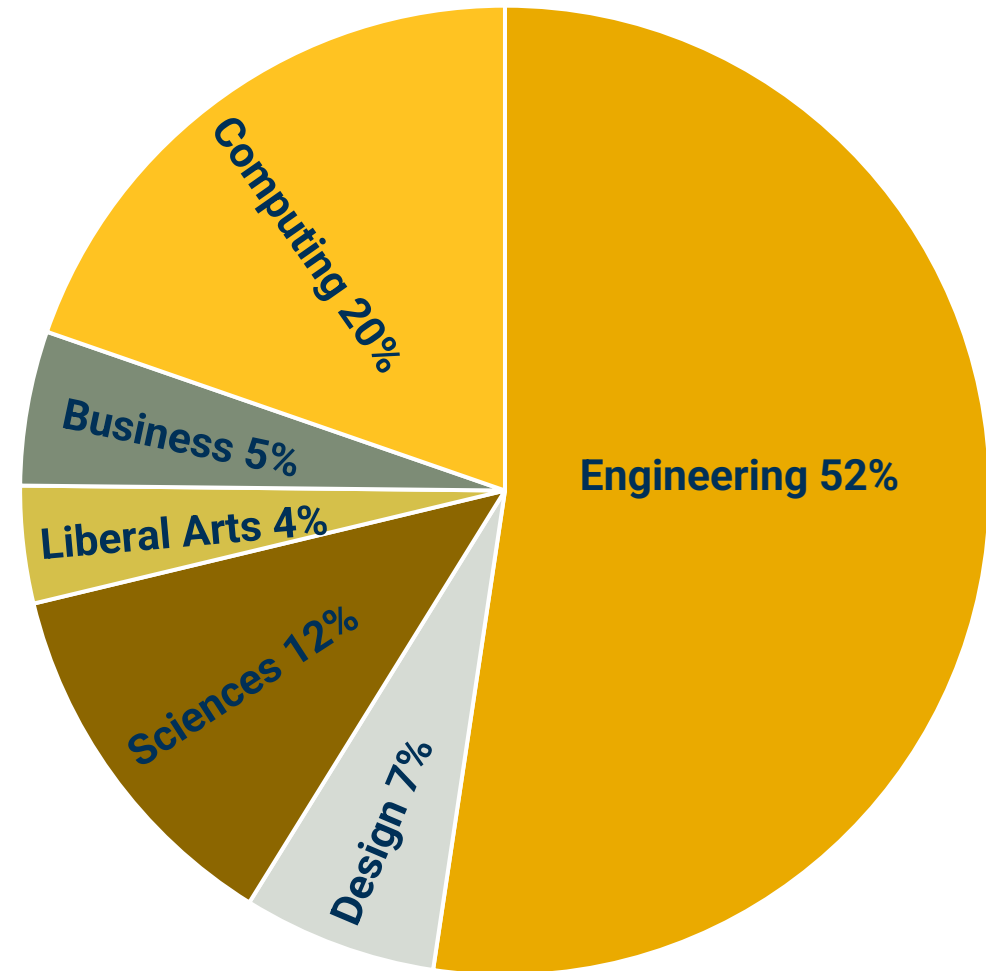


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# Graduate Education at Georgia Tech: Atlanta Campus

- Doctoral University – Very High Research Activity (R1)
- AAU Member
- STEM dominant
- Over 100 graduate degree programs and certificates
- 8,330 Atlanta-campus graduate students (fall 2024)
- Roughly 53-47 MS and PhD
- Roughly 49-51 domestic and international students



# Overview and Session Objectives

## Overview:

- Motivations
- GT6000 Program Details
- Assessment Strategy and Outcomes
- Modifications
- Lessons and Tips

## Session Objectives:

- Understand the design strategy and scope of the GT6000 program
- Learn the modifications made over the past 10 years to adapt to student needs / desires
- Provide lessons and tips on supporting new students transition to graduate school

# Literature

- New graduate students experience a double socialization process – into the role of a graduate student and into a profession or discipline (Golde 1998).
- Student preferences of department vs campus-wide delivery of orientation activities (Poock 2002)
  - Campus: health insurance, healthcare, public transportation, tour of campus, on-campus activities, off-campus activities, clubs/organizations, student government
  - “Non-white respondents put significantly more weight on the campus-wide orientation with regard to feeling welcomed”
- “Many graduate students when first entering their respective programs are just as confused and anxious as they were as new undergraduates.” (Rosenblatt and Christensen 1993)
- Well documented positive impact of first-year experience programs on retention for undergraduates

# Program Objectives

1. Enhance the social connectivity of graduate students across disciplines and degree programs
2. Facilitate the peer mentorship of new graduate students by more senior graduate students
3. Improve the awareness of campus resources among new graduate students

**GT6000**

**Community | Mentorship | Support**

# GT6000 Program Design Strategies

- Peer-led: reduces power differential and creates safe spaces
- 1-credit, pass-fail course: just enough accountability to encourage engagement
- 14 students per group/section: balance between capacity and maintaining a small group feel for discussion and conversation
- Hybrid format with synchronous in-person and asynchronous virtual delivery modes: flexibility for students and standardizes course content across sections
- Compressed, 8-week schedule: program ends as stress peaks mid-semester
- Not aligned with academic programs or research areas: facilitates connections with a broader student population
- Special interest sections for women and students returning to school after time in industry

# Curriculum: 8 Weeks – 8 Topics

- Building Community
- Mentor/Advising Relationships
- Professional Development
- Stress/Time Management
- Resilience
- Inclusion and Belonging
- Leadership Development
- Maintaining Community



Group Leader Promoting GT6000 at the annual Grad Expo

# Learning Objectives

- Identify, explore, and prepare for stressors typical of graduate students
- Develop plans for a successful and timely completion of your academic program
- Review key concepts related to and plan for professional development and a "whole-person" education

# Four Engagement Formats



Group Meeting Attendance (40%)



Online Modules (26%)

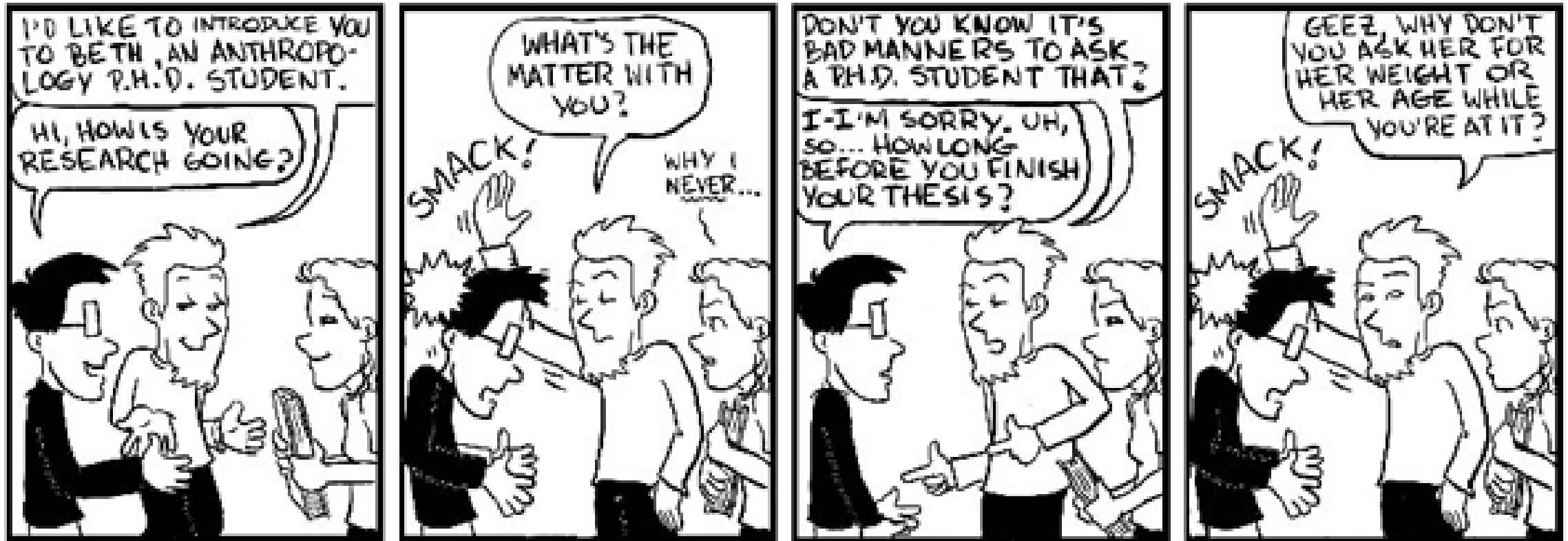


Program Workshops (17%)



Course Deliverables (17%)

# Online Canvas Modules – Content Examples



THANKS TO MIGUEL...

JORGE CHAM ©THE STANFORD DAILY

# Group Leader Role

- Seasoned graduate student
  - Open to all graduate students whether they took GT6000 or not
- Approximately 40 hours of work from June to October
- Facilitate eight group meetings, groups are about 14 students
- May plan social event(s) with their groups or in collaboration with other Group Leaders
- Are encouraged to observe other Group Leader sessions to gain ideas and provide feedback to their peers
- New Group Leaders receive a \$1000 stipend at end of semester while returners receive a \$1250 stipend
- 41 Group Leaders in fall 2024

# Community Engagement Leader Role

- After gaining feedback that GT6000 students desired large-scale social events to meet students from other sections, the Community Engagement Leader role was created
- Four student leaders that plan events, instead of leading their own group, for all GT6000 students throughout the semester
- Supplements small-scale events that individual Group Leaders hold with their own group
- Approximately 40 hours of work from June to October
- New Community Engagement Leaders receive a \$1000 stipend at end of semester while returners receive a \$1250 stipend

# Community Engagement Events

- GT6000 Kickoff at the Tech Rec
  - Free billiards, bowling, pizza
- Grocery Shuttles to H Mart, Buford Highway Farmers Market, & Patel Brothers Plaza
- Hikes to Stone Mountain and Sweetwater Creek
- Bicycling the Atlanta Beltline
- End of Course Sendoff



Centennial Olympic Park



Patel Brothers Plaza

# Measuring Success

- GT6000 Enrollment
  - 526 students fall 2024; ~20% of new graduate students
- Primary measurable outcomes:
  - Achieve learning objectives
  - Improve awareness of campus resources
  - Build social network and connectedness
- Pre-course and post-course assessments are utilized to capture a snapshot of curriculum efficacy, thoughts, and perspectives.
  - Subject-matter questions → learning objectives achieved
  - Awareness of campus resources → improved awareness
  - Feelings of connectedness → students feel more connected
  - Program feedback → 85% would “Yes, definitely.” recommend the program to others
- Statistically significant improvement in year 1 to 2 retention rates for master’s students

# Student Feedback – Fall 2024 Enrolled Students

"GT6000 made my graduate school journey less overwhelming and more enjoyable. The program's focus on personal growth and community has had a lasting positive impact on me."

"GT6000 has reinforced that success in graduate school extends beyond academic achievement. It's about building resilience, fostering connections, and developing as a whole person. ... I'm grateful for the head start GT6000 has given me, and I'm excited to apply these lessons throughout my time at Georgia Tech and beyond."

# From 2014 to Today

- Standalone Program / Course Development / Current Course

|                           | Semester   | Participants | New Students | Participation Rate | Notes                 |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Standalone Program</b> | Fall 2014  | 40           | 1980         | 2%                 | Grad Groups pilot     |
|                           | Fall 2015  | 80           | 1818         | 4%                 | Grad Groups launch    |
|                           | Fall 2016  | 144          | 2113         | 7%                 | Grad Groups           |
|                           | Fall 2017  | 250          | 2041         | 12%                | Grad Groups           |
| <b>Course Development</b> | Fall 2018  | 190          | 2143         | 9%                 | GT8801 (hybrid)       |
|                           | Fall 2019  | 232          | 2175         | 11%                | GT8801 (hybrid)       |
| <b>Current Course</b>     | Fall 2020* | 250          | 1661         | 15%                | GT6000 (fully online) |
|                           | Fall 2021  | 437          | 2534         | 17%                | GT6000 (hybrid)       |
|                           | Fall 2022  | 491          | 2396         | 20%                | GT6000 (hybrid)       |
|                           | Fall 2023  | 482          | 2700         | 18%                | GT6000 (hybrid)       |
|                           | Fall 2024  | 526          | 2781         | 19%                | GT6000 (hybrid)       |

# From 2014 to Today

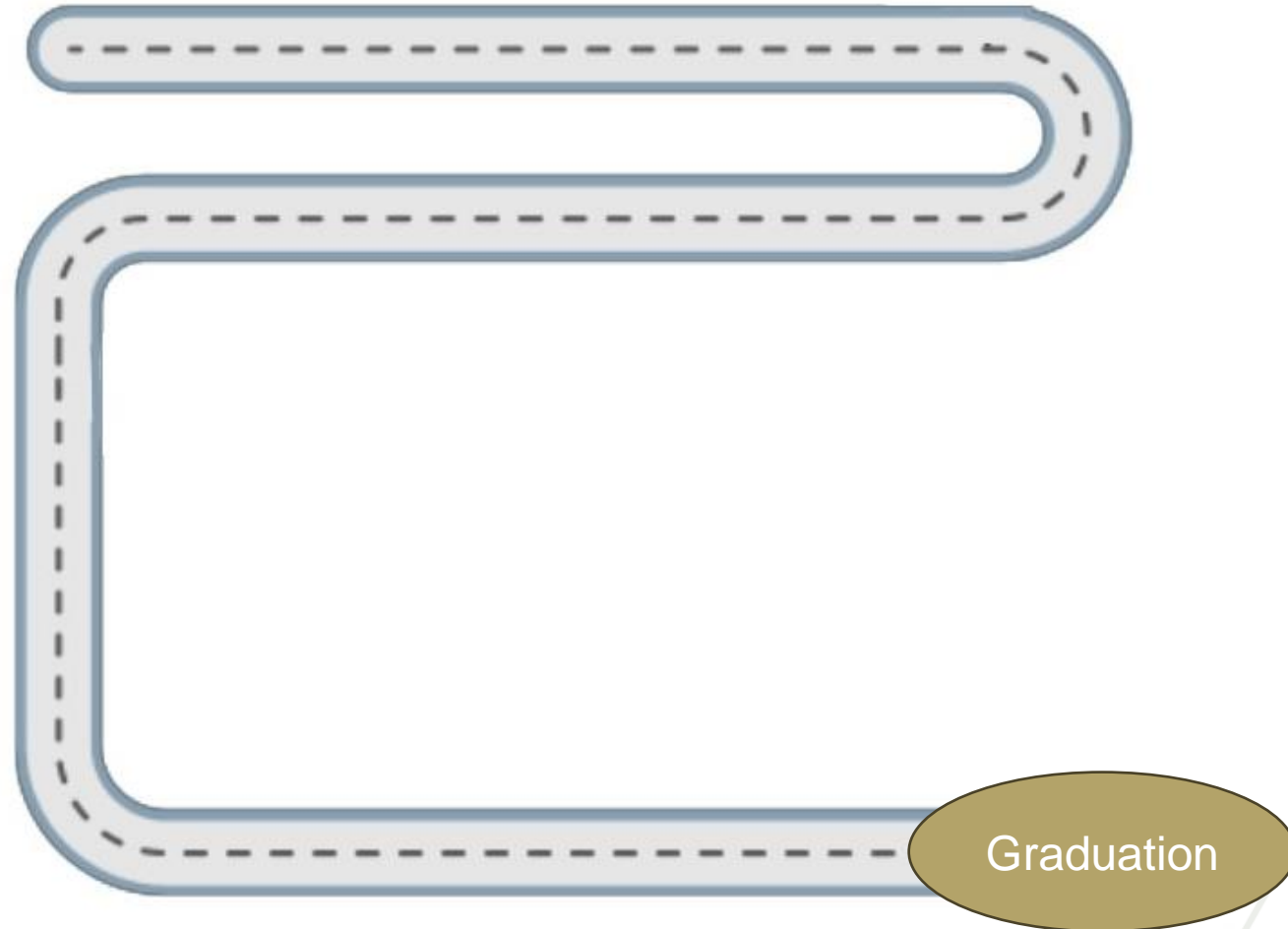
- Standalone Program / Course Development / Current Course
  - Approval from faculty graduate curriculum committee
  - Credit-bearing course
  - Room reservations
  - Pass-fail grading and accountability
- Evolution of Group Leaders
  - Started with volunteers
  - Began paying in fall 2016, raise in 2022
  - Added Social Group Leader position, now called Community Engagement Leaders
- Program Leadership
  - Began with GT6000 Program Creator James Black
  - Graduate Teaching Assistant added in spring 2019
  - Marc brought in as full-time Academic Professional in March 2022

# From 2014 to Today

- Curriculum
  - Eight-Week curriculum
  - COVID-19
  - Piloted spring sections
  - Special interest sections
- GT6000 Promotion
  - SWAG
  - Attended New Program Orientations
  - GT6000 Instagram; Partner with GT Communications
- Advisory Board Launched in 2023
- Expanded Events, Workshops, Outreach in Campus and Atlanta Community
  - Grocery Shuttles to International Markets
  - Intentional Outreach with Campus Partners
  - Navigating the Graduate Student Journey with VPs Ferri and Hong

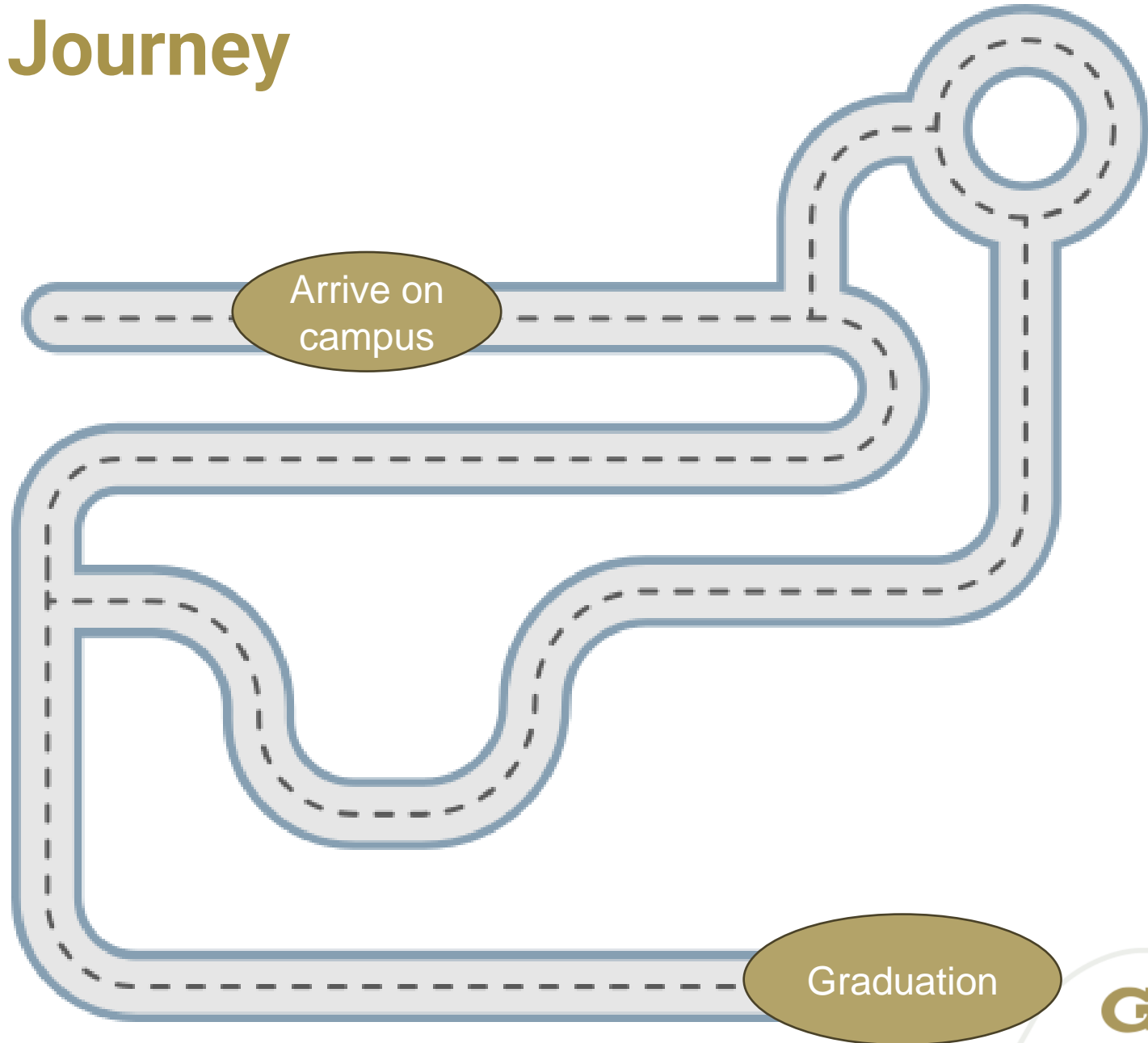
# The Grad Student Journey

- Ultimately students are here to get a degree
- Students want to grow
  - Professionally
  - Personally



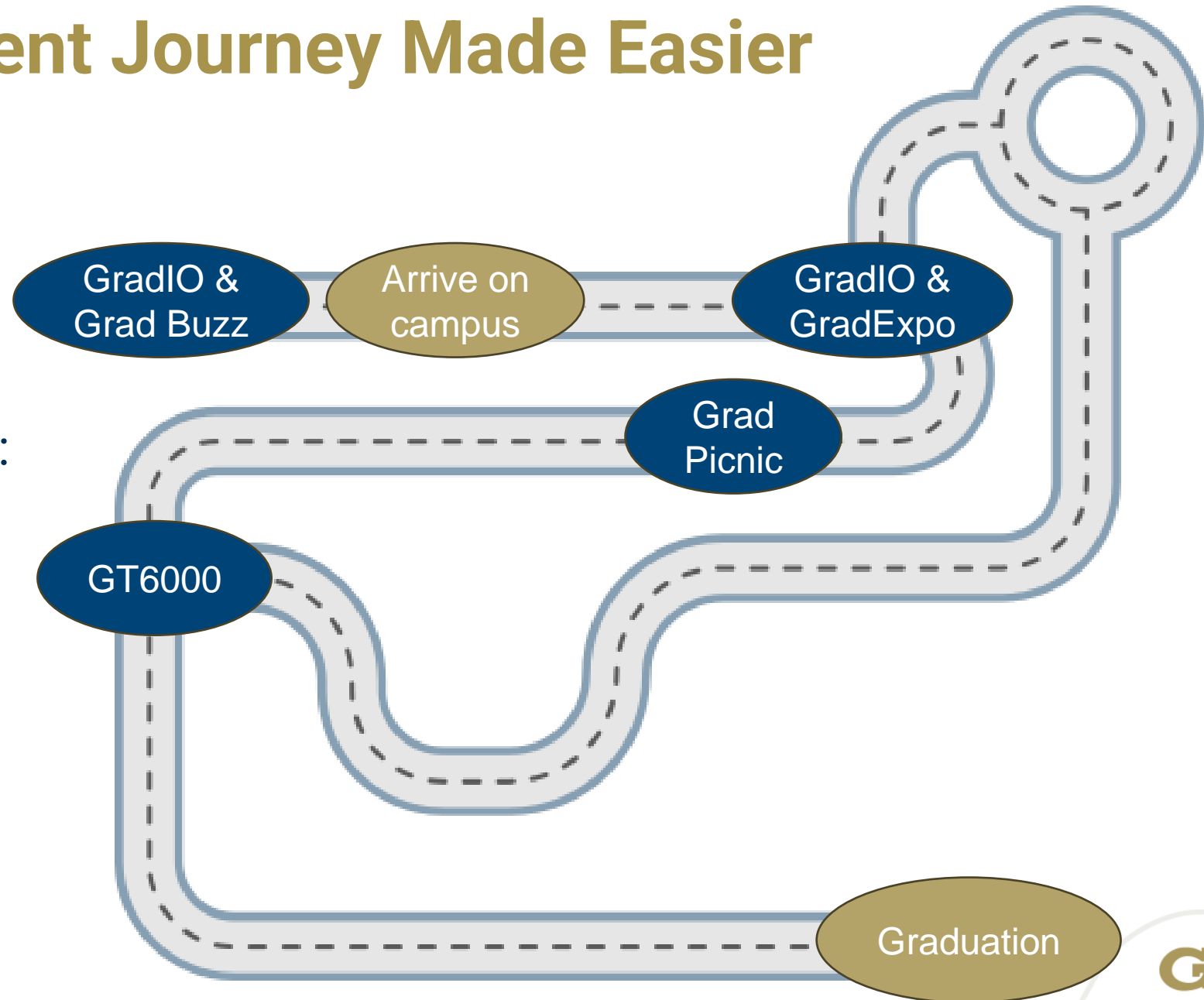
# The Grad Student Journey

- Ultimately students are here to get a degree
- Students want to grow
  - Professionally
  - Personally
- Many routes – highly individualized experience
- Journey starts even before arriving on campus
- What can we do to make it easier?



# The Grad Student Journey Made Easier

- Before arriving on campus:
  - Grad Buzz emails
  - Virtual GradIO sessions
- During the first week:
  - In-person GradIO
  - GradExpo
  - Grad Welcome & Picnic
- During the first semester:
  - GT6000



# Lessons and Tips in Supporting Grad Student Transition

- **Tip # 1 – Engage with current graduate students on your campus**
- Reach out to current graduate students via:
  - *Survey*
  - *Focus groups*
  - *Social media*
  - *Tabling at events*
  - *Host an event with food*
    - Find out about their experience
    - What are their needs?
    - How do they get their information?
- Partner with your Graduate SGA or Grad Student Association

# Lessons and Tips in Supporting Grad Student Transition

- ***Tip # 2 – When launching a new initiative***
- Start with a pilot – don't try to do this all at once!
  - Get buy-in from leadership to try your idea
  - Gather feedback from the start
  - Use your data to tell the story
- Once you have a proof of concept, ask for resources
  - Pay students
  - Event funding
  - Graduate Assistant

# Lessons and Tips in Supporting Grad Student Transition

- ***Tip # 3 – Get the most critical information and consolidate it***
- There is so much information to absorb as a new grad student
  - Be a consolidator
  - Make a checklist
  - Make it easily accessible
    - Canvas module
    - Website
    - Student portal
- Provide housing information
  - Gain first-hand reviews from current students
  - Send a survey of current graduate students about their living arrangements – make a summary and send it to newly admitted students

# Contact Us

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# References

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