

A Message from the Dean: PhD Excellence Initiative
Email to all CAS faculty
June 15, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

While the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to provide challenges that will have a dramatic impact on higher education as we move forward, we have also worked to realize the goals of the PhD Excellence Initiative.

In the fall we formed two [PhD Excellence committees](#) to engage the faculty in a robust, data-driven process. The Bridge Committee, led by chair Stephen Tiffany, was charged with creating a plan for how to distribute College of Arts and Sciences resources for TAs and RAs in order to attract the very best PhD students to the College and ensure the very best outcomes for our PhD students. The Curriculum and Teaching Committee, led by chair David Castillo, was charged with creating recommendations about how best to implement and support the changes we need to make in the College in order to improve PhD time to degree, rate of completion, and job outcomes throughout the College. The College's PhD Excellence Initiative Committees continued their work throughout the spring semester and submitted their recommendations and reports in April.

I would like to thank the chairs of the committees, Stephen Tiffany and David Castillo for their leadership and the members of both committees for their important work to chart a path for the College. I appreciate the work the committees did to involve as many faculty members in the process as possible. The committees shared their findings and details of their reports in an all faculty meeting on May 1, 2020. You can access the [Bridge Committee report](#) and the [Curriculum and Teaching Committee report](#) online.

At the May chairs and directors meeting, I shared the [PhD Excellence Initiative Funding Request](#) that I submitted to Provost Weber and Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School Graduate School, Graham Hammill. I asked for funds to support the recommendations of the committees.

We are also taking additional steps to respond to the committees' recommendations.

- [Dean's Office reorganization](#)—The reorganization of the CAS Dean's office in response to recommendations to reduce investment in the Dean's Office.

- The creation of a standing PhD Excellence Committee in the College. The Policy Committee will oversee the selection of an Ad Hoc Committee to serve as the PhD Excellence Committee until a full election process for the standing committee can take place.
- The adoption of the Bridge Committee's suggested algorithm to manage the distribution of TA stipend dollars. The oversight and management of the algorithm will be the charge of the Ad Hoc PhD Excellence committee until the election of the new standing committee.
- The coordination of department plans to respond to department level recommendations in the Curriculum and Teaching Committee report.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the status of our Provost-level requests is uncertain. The implementation of the recommendations that have emerged from this process may be delayed. However, the priorities stated by the committees are critical to the future of the College.

As a College, we need to create a great professionally satisfying future for every PhD student we train. The PhD Excellence Initiative provides an unprecedented opportunity to move the College forward in supporting the university's quest to be a top 25 research institution. I am thankful for the work of the committees on behalf of the entire College.

Take care,
Robin