The Basics of Advocacy

As a graduate dean, advocacy is an essential part to advancing policies that promote graduate education and research. CGS encourages member deans to work with their institution's government affairs department to advocate for issues impacting graduate education. This document serves as a guide for the basics of advocacy.

WHO: Pick Your Audience	
Who influences policy and government funding decisions?	**Policymakers (local, state, federal) and public stakeholders.** Engaging with public officials helps to center the graduate education community's goals in local, state, and federal conversations.
Who are your institutional stakeholders?	**Provost/Chancellor, faculty, campus offices (ex- financial aid), student groups, and alumni.** Informing and collaborating with institutional stakeholders can underscore the importance of graduate education and bring graduate education into the larger conversation on your campus. In some cases, activating these groups can increase who advocates alongside you.

WHAT: Identify the Issue(s) and Supporting Evidence	
What is your goal?	**Define what you aim to achieve.** Determine the issues impacting your graduate programs and the changes you hope to see. **This will serve as the foundation for crafting your advocacy plan of action.**
What facts can you present?	**Shape your story.** Facts and figures that present the importance of the issue make for effective advocacy. Include information on the distinctiveness and quality of your graduate programs, alumni contributions to their fields, and recognition that your students and faculty receive through publications, citations, grant awards, and conference presentations.
What is the financial impact?	**Present the numbers.** Quantifiable reports show your audience the depth of the issue at hand. Connect the financial impact to your audience's world to make a stronger case. For

	example, how would increases to federal research funding strengthen graduate education research and traineeships?
What is "the ask?"	**Outline the result.** Knowing what you want to accomplish during your meeting will shape your request. Be concise and clear in what you ask. Policymakers (and their staff) want to be helpful. Asking them to support a specific solution is mutually beneficial. **Trick of the Trade:** When appropriate, respectfully "up the ask." If a member of Congress agrees to cosponsor a piece of legislation, ask if she/he will make a floor speech or call the corresponding Senator regarding the bill.

WHEN: Engage Frequently and Build Rapport	
When are the most effective times to advocate?	**All year round.** Provide current information on the issue and outline upcoming events that might impact the issue. Communicate again when the events are taking place or when circumstances have changed. **Trick of the Trade:** Scheduling meetings with House and Senate offices during scheduled recess periods may lead in longer meetings and more time to present your argument.
When is there and opportunity to advocate?	**When you recognize it and seize it.** An opportunity for advocacy may be during a conversation with the Chancellor or Provost or in a formal meeting with a public official. When you have the chance to discuss an issue and make a case for the cause, take it.

WHERE: The Best Platform for Your Message	
Where can you advocate?	**In-Person meetings.** Research from the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) demonstrates that direct interactions with constituents most strongly influence legislators and staff.

	Virtual meetings. Due to COVID-19's impact, virtual meetings with legislative staff have become the norm. CMF [reports] that a majority of Congressional offices believe they will continue virtual engagement with constituents in the future. **Over the phone and through letters.** In the new era of remote advocacy, phone calls, virtual town halls, and letters serve as a direct platform to your audience. **Social media.** Online advocacy allows for limitless participation, unconstrained by location or demographic. A social media campaign is a great way to create buzz on an issue. **Trick of the Trade:** If attending a virtual town hall, arrive early and immediately indicate you have a question/comment, increasing the likelihood that you will get to speak.

WHY: Advocating for a "Seat at the Table"	
Why should you advocate for graduate education?	**Advocacy is essential to effecting positive change.** Policymakers hear from stakeholders representing all facets of higher education, research, and the workforce. Graduate education's voice is stronger when it is unified.

HOW: Simple Messaging and A Good Story	
How will you get your point across?	**State the importance.** Make clear why your issue matters. Narrate the contributions your graduate programs make to the workforce, the larger community, the research enterprise, etc. Describe what makes your programs and community unique. **Present a succinct narrative**. Anecdotal storytelling leaves a lasting impact. Put a face to an issue or bill. Prepare facts that shape a clear ask and describes the public benefit.
How will you personalize your message?	**Know your audience**. When speaking with policymakers, get to know their story and their staff; visit their website; learn their alma

	mater and discipline; familiarize yourself with their common legislative issues; and know their committee membership.
How will you leave a lasting impression?	**Compile materials to bring with you and leave behind (or send digital versions).** Before the meeting, prepare key legislative and political context for the issue. Collate briefs, data, infographics, and talking points that identify the impact on the district and the direct relationship with constituents. **Trick of the Trade:** Legislative staff will appreciate your preparing materials. Keep these materials unbiased and between 1-2 pages.

OTHER: Additional Considerations	
If meeting with policymakers, what are your institution's protocols?	**Logistics.** Is there a liaison on the campus or in Washington, DC who must be consulted? Accompany you? Make the appointments? Provide talking points and materials? Are they the only people on campus outside of the top administration who can have such meetings?
How many is too many?	**Keep your meeting to 2-3 talking points/requests, bills, and be thoughtful about number of attendees.** Your audience is more likely to be receptive to the topic of discussion if a smaller group presents 2-3 talking points and no more than 2-3 pieces of legislation. **Trick of the Trade**: Providing names/titles of attendees in advance prevents Congressional staff from being "surprised" by a large group. Generally speaking, Senate offices can accommodate larger groups (more than 4-5) than House offices. It is always a good idea to ask if there is a limit to the number of participants.

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