

Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water:  
**Dysfunction as a Mechanism  
for Systemic Change**  
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A high-angle, perspective shot of a wooden suspension bridge crossing a turbulent river with white water rapids. The bridge's wooden planks and metal cables lead the eye from the foreground towards the center of the frame. The water is churning and white with foam, contrasting with the grey, rocky banks. The overall scene conveys a sense of crossing a difficult or 'troubled' path.

# Like a Bridge over Troubled Water: Dysfunction as a Mechanism for Systemic Change

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# A Case Study: My Time at UAH

- University of Alabama in Huntsville – 9,300 students of whom roughly 2,400 are graduate students.
- Strong engineering and science programs, but comprehensive university with business, humanities, nursing, education programs.
- R1 university with strong research faculty, many grants and federal contracts. Close ties to Redstone Arsenal, NASA, the FBI, and the aerospace, biotech, and cybersecurity industries.
- Second largest research park in USA abuts the university. It contains many high-tech defense companies including Boeing, Blue Origin, SAIC, and Aerojet Rocketdyne.

# Dysfunction at UAH – Disassembly of the Graduate School / International Services

- Grad Dean retired 4 years ago. Grad School / International Services was disassembled and employees dispersed. Interim Dean served 2 years and had 2 employees. Job was converted to Associate Provost position during search.
- Provost retired during my hiring. President retired 2 months after I arrived.
- No institutional memory: unit had one employee with more than 2 years' UAH experience. Interim hired 3 more, but 2 had no clear duties and left soon after I arrived.
- Graduate Handbook 7 years out of date and often in conflict with Catalog.
- No graduate dismissal policy for more than 20 years.
- Graduate/International Admissions run by Undergraduate Admissions.
- Most International graduate students had been admitted using sketchy agents.
- Theses/dissertations were not being submitted. Manual 10 years out of date.
- Faculty unaware of policies. In the vacuum, colleges defined their own policies.

# An Opportunity for Systemic Change

- “Nature abhors a vacuum.” – Aristotle. Most faculty and administrators are eager for change because the existing system was so bad.
- The Importance of following Best Practices – Systemic changes are easier with advice and guidance from fellow graduate deans, resources at organizations like CSGS, CGS, NAGAP, NAFSA, and SACSCOC.
- It is necessary to involve as many stakeholders as possible while finding solutions. Listening tours, open forums, meetings with Faculty Senate, Graduate Council, individuals, Deans, Legal, SACSCOC liaison, and Registrar are important.
- Maintain standards. Do what is right rather than what is popular.
- Navigate political landmines carefully, but stick to your guns when you can or you will be stuck in a perpetually static system.



- The University of North Georgia is part of the University System of Georgia and is designated as a State Leadership Institution and The Military College of Georgia.
- In early 2012, the University System of Georgia's Board of Regents recommended the consolidation of North Georgia College & State University, which was founded in 1873 in Dahlonega, Georgia, and Gainesville State College, which was founded in 1964 in Gainesville, Georgia. The consolidation became official on January 8, 2013, creating the University of North Georgia (UNG), with four campuses across northeast Georgia.
- In August 2015, UNG opened an additional campus in Blue Ridge, Georgia, to serve students in the northernmost region of the state.
- One of only six federally designated senior military colleges in the nation, the university carries the distinction of The Military College of Georgia and its nationally recognized Army ROTC program attracts students from across the state, region and nation.
- Expects to move into “Regional Comprehensive State University” status in FY '24.



### **A Case Study of Dysfunction (and absence)**

- Since consolidation, UNG was organized into 5 colleges. NO centralized Graduate School.
- 2019 Provost Committee made special recommendations to the President RE: Graduate School/College and need for Dean of Graduate Studies.
- 2011-2020: Multiple positions on campus held Dean of Graduate Studies role including Associate Provost for Institutional Research and Integrity from 2017-2020.
- Upon his retirement in June 2020, no one was in the role until I was hired in August 2022.
- Without leadership, Graduate Studies budget dwindled until very little was left.
- Deans of the four colleges with Graduate Programs were on search committee and were unified in need to fill this position to assist their graduate program coordinators and provide leadership
- Many Policies and Procedures for Graduate Students pre-date consolidation when there were only 5-7 master's programs at the one main campus.
- No Graduate Student Handbook.
- DPT, DNP, EDD and PHD were all added over the last two decades without specific policies addressing terminal-degree students.
- No graduate student services built out within Student Affairs



## **Opportunities for System Change**

- Many policies are brand new and benefit from following best practices: USG and peer-institution policy review, professional associations and resources (i.e. Graduate Assistantship Policy, Instructor of Record, and Tuition Waiver procedures)
- Graduate Student Handbook premiered summer '23.
- Already defined and renewed Student Code of Conduct to apply specifically to graduate students
- Graduate Student Support Services was built out starting with Online Graduate Student Orientation (in partnership with Advantage Design Group) launched July '23
- GEM (Graduate Enrollment Management Plan) developed and marketing & recruitment plan (specific for graduate programs) premiered fall '23.