



PRESS RELEASE

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Mark J.T. Smith Receives Debra W. Stewart Award for Outstanding Leadership in Graduate Education

Washington, DC – Mark J.T. Smith, Dean of the Graduate School and Senior Vice Provost of Academic Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin), received the Debra W. Stewart Award for Outstanding Leadership in Graduate Education during an award ceremony at the Council of Graduate Schools' (CGS) 63rd Annual Meeting in Washington, DC.

Created in 2016 by the CGS Board of Directors, this award recognizes outstanding leadership in graduate education, with focus on leadership qualities exemplified by the Council's fifth president, Debra W. Stewart. According to his nomination materials, Smith demonstrates these qualities through his accomplishments in improving graduate student wellbeing and improving inclusion and access to graduate education.

At UT Austin, Smith launched a Graduate Education Task Force that identified and implemented initiatives to improve healthcare access, reduce healthcare costs, and expand benefits. He is also responsible for securing \$10.9 million in recurring funds to support graduate students, the single largest increase in funding for graduate students in the university's history.

Smith also developed comprehensive campus-wide recruitment strategies to better reach students around the world and from underrepresented groups. He launched several diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and in 2020, UT Austin's graduate school joined the University Research Alliance, funded by the National Science Foundation, and helped implement a faculty hiring workshop model that promotes holistic application review and recruiting.

Smith also served as CGS Board Chair in 2016, contributed regularly at CGS Annual and Summer meetings, and is the former Chair of the GRE Board and a leader in promoting holistic graduate student admissions.

Suzanne T. Ortega, CGS President, said Smith's work on graduate student health and wellbeing helped to set the standard for ensuring successful graduates and a strong workforce.

“Mark Smith’s Graduate Education Task Force demonstrates how strong leadership can address multiple and related aspects of a campus’s graduate education and center the experiences of students in programming,” Ortega said. “His commitment for supporting graduate student health and inclusion has spanned his entire career and provides inspiration to the entire graduate education community.”

Graham Hammill, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School at University of Buffalo, commends Smith’s extensive leadership in graduate education.

“Not only has Mark Smith held leadership roles at several universities, but he’s also held many leadership roles on boards of national graduate education associations and professional societies,” Hammill said. “I’m grateful for leaders like Mark who have given so much to the graduate education community and help others make student success a top priority.”

Jay Hartzell, President of the University of Texas, Austin, stated that Smith exemplifies the spirit of the award.

“Mark has been a tireless champion for graduate education at UT Austin, and his dedication to our students and their academic and career success is extraordinary,” Hartzell said. “His track record makes him a natural choice for the Debra W. Stewart Award, as he has exemplified a commitment to ethics and integrity, active participation and strategic vision, and action in graduate education.”

The selection committee considers nominees with a strong reputation for ethics and integrity, a history of active participation in the graduate community, and a record of strategic vision and actions resulting in meaningful impacts. Areas of special consideration include evidence-based innovation, program development, diversity and inclusion, student learning and career outcomes, personnel management, policy advocacy in support of graduate education and research, and fiscal responsibility.

Nominees for the award must be a current senior graduate dean at a CGS member institution and cannot be an active member of the CGS Board of Directors. Nominations are made by member institutions and are reviewed by a selection committee of former graduate deans in the CGS community. The winner receives a \$4,000 prize to support continuing innovations at the awardee’s institution.

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About CGS

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of approximately 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. The organization’s mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.