




Advocacy 101

Making the Case for Graduate Education

*July 12, 2025
3:15 to 4:30 p.m.*



Welcome & Framing

Co-Presenters



Nicole Lounsbery

*Director of the Graduate School
South Dakota State University*



Emory Woodard

*Dean of Graduate Studies
Villanova University*

Facilitator

Amy Scott

*Associate Vice President for Government Relations and Public Policy
Council of Graduate Schools*



Villanova University

- Established as a Private, Catholic, Augustinian institution in 1842
- 12 miles west of Philadelphia, PA
- R2: Doctoral university with high research activity
- Mostly decentralized structure
- We offer 60 Bachelor's, 36 Master's, the JD, 4 PhD, and a DNP degree program across six colleges/schools: Liberal Arts & Sciences, Business, Engineering, Nursing, Law, and Professional Studies
- 10,200 overall students:
 - 7,100 undergraduates
 - 2,000 master's
 - 410 doctoral
 - 560 law
- 330 Graduate assistantships per year – two thirds go to Masters students
- Villanova is a leader in producing master's graduates who go on to earn research doctorates
- Strategic vision for graduate education



South Dakota State University

- Brookings, SD
- Land-grant university
- 10,728 undergraduates
- 1,337 graduates
- 58 graduate programs
- 39 Master; 19 PhD
- Centralized Grad School



Warm-Up Poll Questions

- On a scale of 1 to 5, how comfortable are you with advocacy as part of your role as a graduate dean or associate/assistant graduate dean?
- What is the first word you think of when you hear the word "advocacy?"





On a scale of 1-5, how comfortable are you with advocacy as part of your role as a graduate dean or associate/assistant graduate dean?



**What is the first word you think of
when you hear the word
"advocacy."**



What is an Advocacy Opportunity?

Definition and Scope

Lobbying vs. Advocacy

- Lobbying refers to efforts to influence specific legislation, such as asking Congress to support increased funding for graduate fellowships.
- Advocacy is broader and includes educating policymakers, sharing student stories, and building public support for graduate education without referencing a specific bill.

Internal vs. External Advocacy

- Internal advocacy focuses on building support within your campus by engaging faculty, administrators, and students to align around key graduate education priorities.
- External advocacy targets outside stakeholders like elected officials, agencies, and the public to promote the value of graduate education.

Formal and Informal Advocacy Moments

- Formal moments include meetings with legislators or agency officials to present data or recommendations.
- Informal moments happen through casual conversations at events, op-eds, or social media, often helping to build trust and momentum for graduate education issues.



What Are Everyday Examples for Deans?

- Budget meetings with provosts or CFOs
- Engaging boards of trustees or alumni
- Talking with local media about a student's research
- Meeting with legislators on graduate student funding



Key Message

*Advocacy happens every day —
it's not just Capitol Hill visits.*



What Messages Work and When?



Framing Messages to Audiences

- **Campus leaders** → Student outcomes, ROI, enrollment impact
- **Policymakers** → Economic development, workforce needs, local success stories
- **Media** → Human interest, innovation, societal benefit
- **Business leaders** → Talent pipeline, research partnerships

How Do You Craft a Compelling Narrative?

Lead With Impact

- Start by sharing a story, such as a graduate student who is driving positive change in their community. Personal stories help connect policymakers emotionally to the importance of graduate education.

Use Data Sparingly But Powerfully

- Support your story with key facts like graduation rates or the economic return on investment from graduate programs. Use only a few strong data points to make your case clear and memorable.

Align With Shared Values

- Frame your message around values policymakers care about, such as investing in the community, fostering innovation, and promoting social mobility through education.



Key Message

Effective advocacy speaks your audience's language — connect stories, data, and shared values to win support for graduate education.



Advocacy Is Not an Add-On



Why is Advocacy Integral to a Dean's Role?

Stewardship of the Graduate Mission

- Deans are the primary champions of graduate education on campus and beyond. Advocacy ensures the mission to advance knowledge, train scholars, and prepare professionals remains central to institutional priorities and public understanding.

Protecting and Growing Resources

- Through advocacy, deans can secure funding, policies, and support systems that sustain graduate programs. This includes federal research investments, fellowships, and institutional resources.

Enhancing Visibility And Reputation Of Graduate Education

- By engaging stakeholders like legislators and the public, deans highlight how graduate students and programs drive innovation, strengthen the workforce, and benefit communities.

Should We Reframe Advocacy as Leadership?

You Are The Face Of Your Programs

- As a dean, your voice shapes how internal and external stakeholders perceive the value and impact of graduate education.

Strategic Communication = Mission Alignment

- Every message, whether to campus leaders or policymakers, should reinforce your program's goals, values, and contributions to institutional and societal priorities.


Use Your Platform Intentionally

- Newsletters, public remarks, and everyday interactions are opportunities to advocate for graduate students and elevate the graduate mission.



Key Message

Advocacy is leadership — when deans communicate strategically and consistently, they elevate the mission of graduate education and build lasting support.



Third-Party Validators Who Are They and Why They Matter ?



Who Are Third-Party Validators?

- **Local, State, Federal Elected Officials**
- **Local Business Leaders**
- **Nonprofit and Community Leaders**
- **Influential Alumni and Members of the Board of Trustees and Governing Boards**
- **Local Media (i.e., Journalists, Editorial Boards, Student Newspapers)**
- **Graduate Students and Graduate Student Associations!!**

How To Cultivate a Third-Party Validator?

- **Invite them to Campus Event (i.e., 3MT Competitions).**
- **Invite elected officials to tour campus laboratories and meet graduate students conducting important federally funded research.**
- **Share newsworthy graduate impact stories.**
- **Be intentional about establishing ongoing relationships with them and become a resource of information for them and their staff.**
- **Continue to show the benefit of the university and graduate school to the local community.**



Questions & Answers

Share one thing you do differently after this session



CGS Resources



*2025-2027
State Snapshots*



*2025 Budget
Reconciliation*

