



PRESS RELEASE

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Tabitha Hardy Wins Assistant and Associate Dean's Leadership Award

Recognized for impactful program development, resource acquisition, and mentorship

Washington, DC – Tabitha Hardy, Assistant Dean for Student Development and Student Success at Indiana University, Indianapolis, received the Assistant and Associate Dean's Leadership Award today during a ceremony at the Council of Graduate Schools' (CGS) 65th Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

The award was created by the CGS Board of Directors to recognize individuals who have demonstrated creativity and innovation in obtaining resources, creating new partnerships, and advocating for graduate education.

Hardy has consistently used creative, student-centered strategies to build and strengthen community at IU Indianapolis. After the COVID-19 disruptions, she secured major grants, including a \$25,000 Rebuilding Community grant and a \$10,000 Bridge to the Future grant, to launch inclusive programming and the Future Faculty Forum, a national professional development initiative. These initiatives show her commitment to turning limited resources into high-impact opportunities that enhance graduate education and foster belonging. In 2018, she also received a Welcoming Campus Initiative grant for the Underrepresented Professional and Graduate Student Organization (UPnGO).

Hardy's leadership extends across campus and beyond. Hardy builds strategic partnerships to advance student diversity, recruitment, and retention, and she plays key roles in policy development, mentorship, and professional programming. She co-chairs the ACE-WNI conference for women leaders, mentors 20 SREB Doctoral Scholars each year, and oversees the Graduate Emissaries to ensure student voices shape institutional decisions. Even during resource constraints, she continues to innovate—founding the Grad Parent Network in 2020 and earning honors such as the Alfred S. Bynum Excellence in Academic Mentoring Award and the NAGAP Visionary Award for her forward-thinking leadership in graduate enrollment management.

Rebecca Bartlett Ellis, Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Indiana University Graduate School in Indianapolis, said that what makes Hardy an exceptional leader is her dedication to students.

"I have witnessed Dr. Tabitha Hardy's passion for creating an environment where graduate students can thrive, and I often hear students speak about the sense of belonging she fosters. Her practical, student-centered approach has strengthened community and connection across programs, making IU Indianapolis a place where students feel supported and inspired to succeed," Bartlett Ellis said.

Kerry Wilks, Associate Vice Chancellor of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, said that Hardy stood out with her ability to develop policies and programs that elevate graduate education.

“On behalf of the Assistant/Associate Dean’s Leadership Award for Graduate Education committee, I am honored to present Dr. Tabitha Hardy with this year’s leadership award. Dr. Hardy has demonstrated extraordinary leadership from spearheading inclusive initiatives and culturally aware mentoring workshops to securing grants that expand opportunities for students,” Wilks said. “Dr. Hardy has consistently championed equity, innovation, and student success and her dedication has strengthened the graduate experience for countless graduate students and sets a standard of excellence in our academic community.”

CGS gratefully acknowledges Duolingo English Test’s financial support of the Assistant and Associate Dean’s Leadership Award. Duolingo English Test, a CGS Sustaining Member, offers a digital language proficiency assessment designed for international students and institutions.

“In my close relationship with the Duolingo English Test as its Advisory Board Chair, I’ve seen how deeply the organization values access, equity, and innovation in global education. Dr. Hardy embodies these same values through her transformative leadership, creating spaces where all students can thrive and contribute meaningfully to the graduate community,” said Johnna Watson, Associate Dean and Associate Graduate Faculty, The Graduate School, University North Carolina, Charlotte.

Assistant and Associate Dean Leadership Award nominees must demonstrate creativity and innovation in response to limited budgets or resources. They must also demonstrate evidence of building partnerships both internal and external to the graduate school; identifying and obtaining resources, both internal and external to the graduate school; effectively advocating on behalf of graduate education; fostering inclusiveness in the graduate community; and engaging diverse student voices.

Nominees for the award must be a current assistant or associate-level dean at a CGS member institution (Regular or Associate) with primary administrative responsibility in graduate education. The winner is invited to plan and participate in a session at the 2026 CGS Summer Workshop on a topic of their choosing.

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About CGS

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of approximately 460 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.