



# TASK FORCE ON GRADUATE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH FINAL REPORT

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# Task Force on Graduate Education & Research Position Statement

## Background

The University of North Texas Health Science Center (HSC) Office of the Provost established three task force committees on graduate education and research to explore ways to organize and administrate research-intensive Masters and Doctoral degree programs. Each task force was charged with specific tasks; all geared towards generating crucial data for considering the creation of a Graduate College/School at HSC. This type of school or college is common at most, if not all, Health Science Centers in Texas.

If commissioned and launched, HSC Graduate College/School would administrate research-intensive Masters and Doctoral degree programs university-wide.

Task force groups 1 and 2 generated reports with formative data relative to the need for a graduate college/school at HSC. Task force group 3 was chartered to build upon the previous groups' reports and generate specific recommendations on creating a graduate college/school at HSC and an operational framework for the entity.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has streamlined the requirements for creating new Bachelor, Masters, and Doctorate degree programs.

While enrollments are declining nationally, Texas is still experiencing population growth and increased enrollment in graduate programs. As recently presented at the 2023 Texas Association of Graduate School Annual meeting, there is a strong demand for market-based Masters degree programs such as Data Science, Health Services Administration, and Learning Technology.

The current task force group, based on its independently generated data and data from the prior two task force groups, recommends the creation of a Graduate College that would be the administrative home for all research-intensive M.S. and Ph.D. degree programs. The Graduate College possesses the potential to develop new Masters and Doctoral degree programs. These new degree programs can be designed to be workforce-oriented, better utilizing existing resources, including cross-listed courses. Additionally, the new degree programs could be aligned with the translational research activities conducted in the Division of Research and Innovation recognized Institutes and Centers that currently do not engage in graduate student education. This alignment would enhance the practical and research-oriented aspects of the degree programs. The initial programs will be strategically designed to expand our student applicant pool and attract research-active faculty, without creating competition for our existing programs (see below). The proposed approach ensures a complementary expansion of HSC's educational offerings, serving diverse student interests and needs, while maintaining the integrity and appeal of our current programs.

A new Graduate College would become the administrative home for existing research-based M.S. and Ph.D. programs from the School of Biomedical Science, School of Health Professions, and the School of Public Health. Professional degrees that are awarded by the existing School and Colleges (e.g. DO, PharmD etc.), Masters degrees at do not require a thesis (Medical Science MS), and undergraduate degrees (BS in Biomedical Sciences) would not be affected. The proposed Graduate College will have the infrastructure to facilitate the creation of planned new graduate degree programs in the System College of Pharmacy and the College of Nursing.

Students would benefit from having access to elective courses from outside their School/College that are not currently available. There would be a standardized infrastructure for professional and personal support. The Graduate College could become a source of support for student stipends.

## Graduate College Could Provide

- Courses on a standardized academic calendar priced at a uniform cost per credit hour. This uniformity will facilitate cross-listing across Schools and Colleges within the institution, enhancing accessibility and coherence in the curriculum.
- Benefits from sharing/cross-listing classes & infrastructure for students.
- Expanded offerings to attract students who are interested in clinical/translational research.
- Interdisciplinary research and training opportunities.
- A source of funding for students.

## Graduate College Structure

- The College would be led by a Dean who reports to the Provost.
- The College would have a representational governing committee or an executive council.
- To maintain compliance with accreditation standards for existing Schools/Colleges, certain programs will be structured with "dotted line" relationships. This approach ensures that while these programs are connected, they do not infringe upon the accreditation requirements of HSC's established professional Schools/Colleges.
- The Graduate College could be the administrative home for all research-intensive MS and Ph.D. programs. It could be the home for courses required by all programs and for training grants.
- Faculty members will have the autonomy to establish primary and/or secondary affiliations with Schools/degree programs within the Graduate College by obtaining standing as Graduate Faculty in consultation with their current by a procedure to be developed at a future date.
- Faculty members will have the option, but will not be obligated, to affiliate with existing Institutes and Centers.

## Remaining Issues

- Promotion and tenure for faculty with a primary appointment in the Graduate College.
- Relationship between DRI- recognized Institutes and the Graduate College for Faculty Evaluations.
- Relationship between existing Schools/Colleges and the Graduate College.
- The sources of funds for student support.

## Possible Organizational Elements

1. A proposed Program of Translational Whole Health Research, residing in the Graduate College, could offer a range of specialized degrees that would start as Masters degrees and if successful become PhD programs, such as:
  - M.S. in Regulatory Sciences
  - M.S. in Precision Medicine
  - M.S. in Health Equity Research
  - M.S. in Digital Health Sciences
  - M.S. in Translational Neuroscience
  - M.S. in Biomedical Informatics
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2. The existing School of Biomedical Sciences will continue to offer its current broad-spectrum umbrella degree in Biomedical Sciences through the Graduate College. New more specialized Masters degree programs could be created that could become Doctoral Degree programs, such as:
  - M.S. in Anatomical Sciences
  - M.S. in Medical Genetics
  - M.S. in Vision Sciences

These changes aim to diversify and deepen the educational offerings mainly through cross-listing existing courses, microcredentials, and internship programs, in addition to aligning with emerging biomedical health sciences fields.