

UNIVERSITY
OF WYOMING

Graduate Education



DR. JAMES AHERN
FORMER VICE
PROVOST & FORMER
DEAN OF GRADUATE
EDUCATION

A Note to Students

Dr. James Ahern, Vice Provost and Dean of the
School of Graduate Education

Greetings and happy summer!

This summer, after twenty-five years as UW faculty and eight years in my current position, I will retire from the University of Wyoming and move on to become Graduate Dean at Northern Illinois University. It has been a privilege to be part of the UW community, and I have especially enjoyed my time leading UW graduate education. Although life is taking me in a new direction, I know that UW graduate education will continue to thrive and grow.

In 2009, the University of Wyoming eliminated its last graduate school as part of a significant budget cut. As a faculty member, I saw our graduate students suddenly lose the support and structure that were essential to their success. Graduate education responsibilities were pushed out to the colleges and departments. While a few units took this as an opportunity to innovate, the student experience in many units fell and disparities and inequities quickly developed as

the few policies that were left in place were inconsistently interpreted and applied. Inspired by UW Graduate Council's 2015 call for reestablishing a graduate school, I stepped into my current position, joining the amazing Michele Peck as the only other person devoted to graduate education, centrally. Within one year and with the support of Provost Kate Miller and President Laurie Nichols, we had established the Office of Graduate Education and had recentralized oversight and support. We continued pushing to grow this oversight and support and, thanks to Provost Kevin Carman, President Ed Seidel, and the Board of Trustees, we were successful in establishing UW's new graduate school, the School of Graduate Education, in 2022.

Although reestablishing the graduate school was the primary goal I had when I started in 2017, other challenges and opportunities have arisen over the last eight years. Graduate enrollments had been flat for the years prior to 2017, but then, faced with the loss of many senior faculty mentors to an early retirement program, drastic immigration restrictions affecting international students, and, most dramatically, the COVID-19 pandemic, graduate enrollments fell precipitously by 7.5% from 2018 to 2020. Thankfully, by this point two new amazing staff had joined the Office

[Graduate Student
Degree Timeline](#)

[Graduate Student
Success Resources](#)

A Note to Students

of Graduate Education, Eric Penicka and Julie (Sheldon) Blomberg. Eric is a master of data analytics and serves as the graduate school's Senior Information Specialist, while Julie is an enrollment marketing guru who serves as the graduate school's Enrollment Marketing Strategist. With this team and the collaborative work of faculty and staff from across the university, we not only turned graduate enrollments around, but we have also now achieved the highest degree-seeking graduate enrollments, the highest PhD enrollments, the highest professional master's enrollments, and the highest underrepresented domestic minority enrollments in UW's history. The key approaches that we took to achieve these successes included: a) modernizing UW's graduate recruitment practices by embracing digital marketing; b) reallocating resources to create new recruitment funding opportunities to attract a broader spectrum of graduate students; c) purposeful recruitment of UW undergraduates; and d) strategically aligning program offerings with student demand and workforce needs by working with faculty to create more than two dozen degree and certificate programs.

While UW had managed to make amazing gains in terms of graduate recruitment leading to higher enrollments, another challenge and opportunity came to the forefront by 2021: graduate student retention and success. The COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges for graduate students and brought to light many challenges and barriers to student success that had been festering for some time. After years of encountering individual student concerns and problems, it became apparent to me that UW needed to take action. The SGE team took three primary approaches to this: 1) harnessing data, 2) policy and procedure revisions, 3) programming, and 4) advocacy. First, thanks to Eric Penicka, we launched the Graduate Milestones Initiative (GMI). In its initial phase, GMI wrangled data so that SGE was able to track every graduate student's progress on their degree, and we implemented timely automated email reminders to students of the milestones (e.g., committee formation, program of study, etc.) that they needed to take care of in order to stay on track. The second phase of GMI, launched in the past few months, is a dashboard (available in the UW Data & Reporting Hub) available to graduate coordinators and other faculty allowing them to check milestone progress for their students. The second approach that we took involved carefully reviewing existing policies and procedures to remove unnecessary and often harmful barriers to student success. Key to this work were the members of Graduate Council and the students, faculty, and administrators who served on the Graduate Student Task Force. The third approach has been to expand programmatic opportunities for graduate students both in terms of professional development and social belonging. The fourth approach has been to advocate to graduate student needs which helped secure a 22% stipend raise for graduate assistants, funded by the Wyoming Legislature.

Another challenge and opportunity that arose shortly after I started in my position was how to better support interdisciplinarity and, in particular, the cross-college interdisciplinary graduate programs that fell under UW graduate education. These programs had been left to languish in many respects and were dependent on staffing support from academic departments and on voluntary program directors. Although some of these programs were managing quite well, a couple had almost become non-existent. In order to revitalize these programs, we established the Office of Transdisciplinary Graduate Programs in 2020, bringing on a program coordinator (Debbie Swierczek) and an accountant (initially Chickie Washington and now Danette Altergott) to provide

A Note to Students

dedicated staffing support for these programs. Furthermore, to improve stability in leadership, we allocated funding to pay the program directors administrative stipends. Thanks to the tireless work of Debbie, Chickie, Danette, and the dedicated program directors, enrollment in these PhD programs has grown by 33.3% in the past five years. Enrollments in Neuroscience (under the leadership of Kara Pratt) and Hydrologic Sciences (led by Andy Parsekian) have grown by 163% and 200% over the past five years, respectively.

It has been such an incredible privilege working with the amazing School of Graduate Education team and the incredible faculty, staff, and students from across campus. Together, we have accomplished a lot, taking UW graduate education from being largely unsupported and lacking central leadership to where we are today with a new graduate school with team of dedicated staff who will continue to push forward with graduate education excellence. I would like to especially thank SGE's former and current office associates, Sarah Wolverton, Bitney Bartz, and Kaitlyn Whitlock, for their hard work and dedication and especially for keeping me organized! I am confident that my successor will be able to build on the foundation that we have established and take UW graduate education to new heights. I will miss the SGE team, and I will miss working with all of you.

Best wishes,
Jim

Introducing

Interim Dean for the School of Graduate Education

DR. CAROLYN PEPPER

I am deeply honored to have been appointed as the Interim Dean of the School of Graduate Education. I look forward to building on the legacy of our first Vice Provost and Dean, Dr. James Ahern, who enhanced old programs, built new ones, and recruited the very best and brightest students to our campus.

My new role offers me the exciting opportunity to collaborate with the School's amazing staff, our committed faculty, and our excellent students; I am eager to work together as we support and advance the outstanding graduate programs at UW and champion our students as they move through their programs and become experts in their fields. Please do not hesitate to contact me at cpepper@uwyo.edu if I can be of assistance.



University Resources

Graduate Student Degree Timeline

It's important to be aware of the various forms and tasks that must be completed as you navigate your graduate degree. Review the graduate degree timeline often to ensure you are on the right track!

Visit the [Graduate Student Degree Timeline](#) webpage for more information.

Mental Health

University Counseling Center (UCC)

Located in Knight Hall room 341, the UCC is open Monday-Friday from 8 am- 5 pm. They offer short-term, **free** support for full-time students. Telehealth and in-person services are available. Visit the [UCC](#) for more!

WellSpring

Available to most in the university and the broader community. Services are **free**, and a variety of times are offered during the week. Visit the [Wellspring](#) website for more.

Psychology Center

Offering affordable services to the university and surrounding areas. Services include psychotherapy, assessment, and diagnostic clarification. Review the [Psychology Center's page](#) for more information.



UW Food Share Pantry

The [UW Food Share](#) is open to anyone associated with the university. University of Wyoming, Knight Hall, Room 106.

Semester Hours: Tuesday & Thursday from 2-5 pm & Friday from 10 am-2 pm

Summer Hours: Tuesday from 11 am-2 pm and Thursday from 1-4 pm.

Wellness

Wellness Center

Found in Half Acre, The Wellness Center offers many opportunities to destress and feel better, including:

- Puppy or kitten play dates
- Wellness and stress management groups
- Massage chairs
- Personal training

Half Acre

Offering something for everyone, [Half Acre](#) promotes physical wellness. **Bonus: Even brief exercise can improve mood, concentration, and sleep!**

Student Health Center

The Student Health Center offers various services, including a full-service pharmacy, treatment, support for multiple illnesses and injuries, and preventative care.

To review more information, view [Student Health's website](#).

Visit [Graduate Student Resources](#) for additional student services.



Thriving Through Summer: A Grad Student's Guide

As summer unfolds, graduate students across campus are diving into a wide range of professional development and experiential learning opportunities. From attending academic conferences and conducting fieldwork, to participating in specialized training programs and community outreach, students are making the most of the season to sharpen their skills and expand their networks. Whether they're publishing research, teaching summer courses, or preparing for their next career step, these activities reflect the energy and dedication graduate students bring to their work—even when classes are on pause. Join us as we check in with graduate students to hear how they're spending the summer—learning, leading and connecting.

Rhema Boabeng, Department of Communication and Journalism **Degree: MA Communication and Journalism**

My name is Rhema Boabeng, and I am a student in the Communications department pursuing a Master of Arts in Communication and Journalism degree program. I expect to graduate in Fall 2025.

This summer, I am focused on working on my research, conducting data collection, planning, organizing, and utilizing my time to gather more information for the fall semester as a Graduate Assistant. This will enable me to work with others to create more opportunities for graduate students and meet their professional development needs. Specifically, I am working on my thesis and learning about the impact of emotional appeals in political communication.

On the personal side, I enjoy playing a variety of outdoor games and exploring the beautiful nature in Laramie, such as Vedauwoo. Some of my favorite summer activities include swimming, soccer, volleyball, hiking, golfing, and biking.

Just as Alan Lakein said, "Planning is bringing the future to the present so that you can do something about it." These efforts support my goals by allowing me to create an enabling environment that helps me thrive as a graduate student. Looking ahead with unbendable optimism, this summer's experiences will be amazing.



Thriving Through Summer

Maria Almendares, School of Counseling, Leadership, Advocacy, & Design **Degree: EdD in Higher Education Administration**

Hello! I am Maria Almendares, a doctoral candidate in Higher Education Administration in the School of Counseling, Leadership, Advocacy, and Design at UW. CLAD is part of the UW College of Education. I am also an Immigration Coordinator in the International Students and Scholars office here at UW! I have worked full-time in ISS for 22 years and absolutely love my job and the opportunity I have to support and impact international students on our campus. This summer our office staff is busy helping students navigate the current complex immigration climate and provide as many activities as we can to keep students engaged and make sure they feel supported on our campus. I will also be preparing an interactive session about international student athletes and name, image, and likeness compensation for our regional conference in October.

Personally, I am working hard to finish writing chapter five of my dissertation so that I can schedule my defense presentation. My dissertation is a program evaluation of a disability support services program for post-secondary students with learning disabilities. I am evaluating the program through a critical disability theory lens with respect to the program's efficacy in helping students overcome common barriers to higher education. I plan to defend in time to graduate this August! I am really grateful to the UW Writing Center for their "write-in" sessions over the past year that have allowed me uninterrupted time to write and to connect with others also working on writing projects. These sessions have been SO helpful for me with my busy schedule! I will also be enjoying the amazing Laramie summer, Laramie Jubilee Days, my 30 year class reunion, some baseball games in Denver, and making time to spend with family and friends. I hope that my fellow grad students, UW colleagues, and community members also enjoy our summer Laradise and achieve whatever goals they have set for themselves this summer!



Thriving Through Summer

Dhruvil Joshi, Department of Electrical Engineering & Computer Science **Degree: PhD in Electrical Engineering**

My name is Dhruvil Joshi, and I am a student in the Electrical Engineering and Computer Science department.

This summer, I'm settling into a new apartment while continuing work on a research paper focused on multi-agent robotic systems for information gathering. I'm currently finalizing data analysis and comparing results, which is a key step toward completing my paper. This paper will form an important part of my thesis and help me progress toward finishing my graduate degree. I'm also learning new techniques to improve my data analysis and exploring how to better use content management systems (CMS)—both of which support my work as a Graduate Assistant with the School of Graduate Education, where I help with website updates and data analysis projects.



Outside of academics, I make sure to enjoy the summer by spending time outdoors. One of my favorite traditions is camping with friends at Vedauwoo to watch the Perseid meteor shower—something we try to do every year. I also enjoy kayaking when I get the chance. These activities are a great way to recharge and support my mental well-being, helping me stay balanced and focused for the rest of the year.

Alexandra Quinn, School of Counseling, Leadership, Advocacy, & Design **Degree: PhD in Counselor Education & Supervision**

My name is Alexandra Quinn, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision, with plans to graduate in Spring 2026.

This summer, I am engaged in several exciting professional development opportunities. As a Graduate Assistant with the School of Graduate Education, I primarily support marketing initiatives. I also have the opportunity to teach Child and Adolescent Counseling as an adjunct instructor in my department, co-teaching the course with my classmate and friend, Amanda Tracy. In preparation for my dissertation, I am actively developing my prospectus. In addition, I continue to provide counseling services to several incredible clients.

Outside of my professional life, I enjoy caring for my pup, seeking new adventures, attending live music events, and staying active.

Thriving Through Summer

Victoria Flores, Department of Curriculum & Instruction Degree PhD in Literacy Education

My name is Victoria Flores, and I am a doctoral student in Literacy Education.

During the academic year, I facilitate the Graduate Student Mentorship Program (GMSP), and summer offers a valuable opportunity to step back and thoughtfully design ways to strengthen this initiative. I enjoy spending time researching and envisioning a more sustainable, supportive foundation for graduate students and their mentors at UW. I also coordinate the ACSD#1 Summer School program. This experience allows me to collaborate with incredible educators, engage directly with students, and explore strategies for impacting literacy outcomes in our community. These professional experiences enrich my research and scholarship in meaningful ways and directly support my long-term goal of pursuing a PhD in Literacy Education. This summer, I'll also be finalizing my research proposal and preparing for the next phase of my dissertation. I'm grateful for the space that summer provides to be curious and reflective, especially as I consider literacy and mentorship as transformative frameworks for supporting Wyoming learners, from kindergarten to graduate school.

Summer is for Laradise! I plan to spend as much time as possible outdoors—mountain biking, climbing, and hiking with my dog, Kenny, and my partner, Alan. I also tend a garden and a pollinator habitat in my yard. This summer, I'm excited to add raising butterflies to support the habitat. I hope to visit my 94-year-old abuela back home in El Paso, Texas. We have such fun exchanging plants, sharing stories, and cooking family recipes together. I love participating in local community events like PrideFest, the Farmer's Market, and Jubilee Days. These personal pursuits help ground me. Time in nature and connection with my community are essential to my mental, physical, and social well-being. They allow me to recharge and return to my work with greater balance, clarity, and purpose.



Thriving Through Summer

From research to teaching and everything in between, summer is a dynamic and rewarding season for graduate students.

Far from a break, this time of year is often packed with meaningful opportunities to grow both personally and professionally. Whether you're presenting at academic conferences, collaborating on interdisciplinary projects, conducting fieldwork, or making significant progress on your thesis, summer offers the freedom and flexibility to focus deeply on your goals. Many students also use this season to explore new research areas,

sharpen their teaching skills, or take on internships that offer hands-on experience and valuable career connections. It's a season of exploration, innovation, and momentum.

Just as important, though, is carving out space for rest and renewal—because recharging now lays the groundwork for a productive and inspired return to campus in the fall.



Crisis Support

University Counseling Center- 307-766-2187

AFTER-HOURS CRISIS- 307-766-8989

WellSpring Counseling- (307) 766-6820

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call or Text: **988**

Important Dates

August 2025

15	Last Day of Summer Session
20	College of Law Classes Begin
25	Fall Semester

Please refer to the Registrar's Office calendar/deadlines for other important dates and deadlines.

