

# GRAD IN FOCUS



UNIVERSITY of  
**LOUISIANA**  
LAFAYETTE

Graduate  
School

APRIL 2025

## Message from the Dean

DR. MARY FARMER-KAISER

April is here, and that means Grad Student Appreciation Week is just around the corner! I look forward to this time every year—it's one of the most energizing ways to lead into Spring Break and celebrate the grad community that keeps our University moving forward.

But we all know April doesn't exactly tiptoe in. For many of us, it's one of the busiest stretches of the year. Midterms. Deadlines. Conference travel. Thesis and dissertation crunch time. Add in teaching, mentoring, and professional commitments—plus spring allergies—and it's a lot.

That's why I was especially grateful to attend a talk last night that gave me both pause and perspective. Fumy Rita, Executive Director of LAGCOE and a two-time graduate of UL Lafayette's own Grad School, delivered a thoughtful message to our students—equal parts practical and powerful. As someone who's navigated both the classroom and the boardroom, her insights hit home. Let me share a few highlights I think are worth sitting with this April.

**Study smarter, not just harder.** Grades matter, yes—but so do relationships. Build them. Seek out mentors and, even more, sponsors—those who will say your name in rooms you haven't yet entered. As Fumy reminded us, important decisions about your life are often made when you're not in the room. Strategy and community are the infrastructure of success.

**Advocate smarter.** Know how systems work—on campus, in your field, and beyond. Your voice matters, especially when joined with others. Influence starts with understanding.

**Avoid distractions.** Fumy was candid here. It's easy to let "the scroll" steal your time—so can reality TV. But she doesn't lose sight of what matters. "Likes don't build legacies," she said. "Focus builds freedom." Use those tech tools wisely.

**Be strategic.** You don't have to be everywhere—just effective where it counts. Presence without purpose can be exhausting. Choose where you show up, and why. That kind of intentionality is powerful.

**And finally, be you.** Know your craft, trust your preparation, and lead with your expertise. If a space doesn't value what you bring, it may not be the right fit. Your authenticity, paired with competence, is not a shortcoming—it's a superpower.

Whether you're on campus or logging in from across the state—or globe—I hope something in Fumy's words gives you what it gave me: a reset button for the month ahead.

Wishing you focus, strategy, and even a little downtime in the weeks to come.  
Dr. MFK



"You need strategy.  
You need community.  
And you need the  
courage to go for it."

FUMY RITA  
Executive Director, LAGCOE





# Upcoming Events in April

## **Mondays - Wake Up and Write!**

If the University is open, grad students and faculty gather to write, read, and think at the Alumni Center Board Room on Mondays at 8:30-10:30 a.m. The Grad School provides coffee, treats, and quiet. You provide the focus and progress. Parking is easy. No registration is required.

## **4/3 - Student Workshop for Final Manuscript Submission and Review**

Students, join us online on Thursday, 4/3, from 12-1 p.m. to learn about the [Guidelines](#), manuscript formatting requirements, embargoes, common challenges, and the final review/approval process. Whether you're finishing a thesis or dissertation this Spring or just getting started, this workshop is tailored for you! [Register here to get the Zoom link.](#)

## **4/7 - GSAW Keynote Address, Professional Head Shots, and Doctoral Candidacy Recognition**

You are invited to the LITE Center for professional head shots beginning at 4:30 p.m., followed by the GSAW Keynote Address, beginning at 6 p.m. We will also recognize our new doctoral candidates and their graduate faculty chairs. [Register here.](#)

## **4/8 - Grad Money Matters Lunch & Learn: Career Planning**

Our last Money Matters event of the semester will focus on accepting job offers, negotiating salaries, and choosing a retirement plan. Join us in the Student Union Forum A for lunch starting at 11:30 a.m. and conversation at 12 p.m. [Register here.](#)

## **4/8 & 4/9 - Grad School Demystified: Making Graduate School a Reality**

Sponsored by the Graduate Council, these sessions are designed for undergrads exploring their next steps. There will be two sessions, one on April 8 at 10 a.m. and another on April 9 at 2 p.m. Learn more [here.](#)

## **4/9 & 4/10 - Research Showcase Poster Presentations**

Support grad students in the Dupré Library presenting research and creative works for cash prizes. Learn about the fascinating work happening on our campus! Wednesday and Thursday from 2-4 p.m.

## **4/9 - Donut Day!**

Say thank you to our grad students and those who support them while having a sweet treat. Donuts are a gift from SGA and they're being delivered to departments by GSO.

## **4/10 - Honors Convocation and Academic Excellence Awards**

At Honors Convocation, held at the Cajundome on April 10 at 6:30 pm, the University recognizes the academic achievements of outstanding grad (and undergrad) students. This is also where the Grad School will presents the 2025 Outstanding GTA Award, the Graduate Student Teaching Excellence Award, and Outstanding Master's Mentor Awards.

## **4/11 - Sustainable Development Research Summit & GSAW Awards**

Join us for the 2025 Sustainable Development Research Summit, where we will showcase grad students doing more great work. Co-sponsored with Dr. Brian Bolton and the Office for Sustainability, the short presentations on sustainability include economic development, the environment, human impact, and more. We'll also present all of the GSAW Awards! Lunch will be provided. Register [here.](#)

# Scholarship Expo

April 2nd  
10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Student Union Ballroom

Created by SGA, this first-ever Scholarship Expo is your chance to connect with **available scholarships, awards, and service-related financial opportunities.** Learn about funding options that can support your academic journey and ensure financial resources are utilized by those who need them most.

This event is held in collaboration with the **Career Services Summer/Part-Time Job Fair**, giving you even more opportunities to secure financial support and employment.

## Stay Up and Write with GSO



Need a quiet space to focus on your writing?

Head to the Student Union River Room from 7-9 PM for a productive environment, snacks, and a chance to power through your work.

Thanks, GSO for creating another space for grad community and productivity!



# Graduate Student APPRECIATION WEEK

You can find the full calendar of GSAW events on our website.



Join the Graduate School for some fun at the **Alumni Center (600 E St Mary Blvd.)** from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. There will be pizza, yard games hosted by our Kinesiology M.S. students, prizes, and good vibes! GSO also will be there to pass out t-shirts to those who ordered in advance.



Momentum for Startups

Join us Downtown, Lafayette at the **Opportunity Machine (314 Jefferson St.)** for a lively discussion and networking with industry professionals. The focus will be on translating research and creative works and how to sell your ideas in spaces beyond the academic setting. Opportunity Machine is an asset to our community that brings together tech startups, technical professionals, and aspiring entrepreneurs. We'll have food and drink too! The event will be held from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Registration is required.



FOUNDED BY THE NC STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL

Come explore the ways that **Bourgeois Hall (225 Cajundome Blvd.)** can support an active and healthy life during grad school. From 9 a.m. to noon GSAW activities will include yoga, networking walks, and even massages! Yoga sessions begin at 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m., and 12 p.m. Walks will begin every half hour. And thanks to our partners from Unitech, chair massages will be available for everyone on a first-come, first-serve basis. Snacks and water will be available.



All GSAW week long! Solve clues, find destinations, and submit photos to claim chances to win the **Graduate Student Organization Scavenger Hunt** big prize! Keep an eye out on GSO Social for more info about the scavenger hunt. We can't wait to see what GSO has planned!



The time has come to crown a new **Most Loved Grad Program**, but there was just one problem—the English Department wasn't giving up the traveling trophy without a fight. Rumors swirled of secret book-lined fortresses and poetic booby traps, but the Graduate School was determined. Under the cover of darkness (okay, maybe just during lunch), a highly trained operative (okay, really just the Dean in all black and sporting a doctoral hood instead of a cape) slipped into the department, fought off professors (okay, really just Dr. Orr who was a good sport), and reclaimed what was rightfully ours.



Now, the trophy is back where it belongs—in the Grad School—ready to be awarded to the 2025 winner. Will English defend it with the same tenacity? Only time will tell... but if history has proven anything, no department is safe when the Graduate School is on a mission.

Have you shared why your program is the Most Loved? Don't wait! Tell us here.

Grad Students--and Grad Faculty too--mark your calendars now! Pop in and engage when you can. Bring a friend. Bring your whole lab. And remember! Participating in GSAW events and activities can add up big time for the Most Loved Grad Program contest!



# THE BIG EVENT

University of Louisiana at Lafayette

The GRADiators, our Big Event flocked family, helped write 1,600 thank-you notes and stuff gift bags for teachers at 25 local schools.

Thanks to [Love Our Schools](#) for showing gratitude to educators in our community!

## GSAW Keynote Address

PhD - More Than Just Three Letters:  
Navigating Challenges and Maximizing Opportunities

Each year, our Graduate Student Appreciation Week celebration includes a keynote address from one of our very own graduates. This year, the Graduate School is especially excited to welcome back to campus not one of our recent graduates but three! Our speakers will be Dr. Rodrigue Rizk (Ph.D. Computer Engineering, 2022), Dr. Dominick Rizk (Ph.D. Computer Engineering, 2023), and Dr. Frederic Rizk (Ph.D. Computer Engineering, 2024). Need some motivation? This is the ticket. Join us on Monday at 6pm at the LITE Center.



## Writing Tips & Tools

from Jamie Benner, Ph.D.



April brings shifts in the seasons and in the University community's focus—we turn our attention to semester deadlines and the culmination of the school year.

As our projects near completion, we must consider revision, editing, and proofreading. Editing—tightening and clarifying phrasing—and proofreading—correcting mistakes—are end-of-project tasks often aided by Grammarly or Microsoft Word's editor feature. I also recommend reading your work aloud or having a text-to-speech program read it to you because hearing it spoken makes sentence-level issues more obvious.

If you're like me, revision—the process of re-envisioning a draft to enhance its organization and argument—is the most intimidating task. You must kill your darlings, removing pieces of the draft that don't develop your overall purpose, even if they're interesting or well-written.

Ask big picture questions: How well has this essay responded to its rhetorical situation? What is my purpose? Have I achieved it? **A REVERSE OUTLINE** will help answer these questions by breaking text into smaller, more digestible portions. This tool makes evaluating transitions and key ideas easier.

To create a reverse outline, write in the margins of a printed draft or use a blank document. Record each paragraph's main idea and how it advances your argument. Be brief. Then, review your reverse outline to see if each section aligns with your goals. Consider too what might be misplaced or missing.

Remember, you also can reverse outline the work of others—it's a great study tool and it can teach you a lot about structuring your own writing.

# WE HEAR YOU



A **Climate Survey** is one way universities assess the experiences, needs, and concerns of students within an academic institution. In Spring 2023, the Graduate School conducted the first-ever graduate education climate survey on our campus. The feedback you provided is helping us make informed decisions aimed at enhancing grad student support, academic resources, and the overall graduate education experience at UL Lafayette.

*Insights from the Graduate Education Climate Survey are informing investments and guiding meaningful action that directly benefit our graduate students, graduate faculty, and graduate programs. Here are a few examples:*

- **Increased Graduate Student Funding:** As we prepared for 2024-2025, survey data on student funding concerns helped the Grad School advocate for the largest single-year investment in assistantships, fellowships, stipends, and teacher tuition incentive support in University history. Rest assured, we are still working to address this critical need.
- **Mentorship Development:** Survey results reinforced the need to provide more support for grad education mentors. The decision to invite Dr. Christine Pfund, an expert in mentorship who leads the [CIMER Institute](#) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, to campus as part of the 125 celebration was informed by these climate survey findings. Partnership with other areas on campus is now focused on investing in mentorship training for graduate faculty.
- **NCFDD Institutional Membership:** In partnership with Academic Affairs and the Research Division, we have invested in an [NCFDD institutional membership](#) that provides external professional development training and support for every stage of the academic career--and it includes a dissertation success curriculum for advanced doctoral students. If you have not activated your membership and explored this important resource, now is the time to do so.
- **Career Development Initiatives:** Survey respondents called for more career guidance. Becoming one of only 40 grad schools partners in the A2i+ (Accelerate to Industry) network is but one way we're listening to this feedback. This program connects our grad students with employers, professional development, and career paths in industry as well as government and non-profit sectors.
- **Mental Health and Well-being:** Grad student mental health and well-being is a nationally-recognized area of concern, and survey responses confirmed that this it is an area of concern on our campus too. We've added the Director of the Office and Disability Services to the University Committee for Graduate Student Success and Retention, and [UWill](#) is another important resource now available 24/7 to grad students. UWill offers on-demand access to wellness resources, counseling sessions, and a crisis line that allows students to speak immediately with a mental health professional.
- **Improving Awareness about Student Support Resources:** The climate survey revealed a general lack of awareness among respondents about the University resources available to grad students. This newsletter (and especially its Key Resources for Grad Students on the last page of every issue) is one way we're trying to raise awareness. Inclusion of student resource offices during GSAW week programming is another effort to better connect students with campus support.
- **New Academic & Manuscript Support Coordinator:** The needs identified by our grad student respondents buttressed efforts to create the Academic and Manuscript Support Coordinator position in the Grad School. Dr. Jamie Benner now holds this position, and she is charged with providing grad students and grad programs direct assistance with dissertation, thesis, and synthesis project manuscript preparation. She'll also be key to other kinds of co-curricular academic and writing support in the future. Stay tuned!

Ready to learn more? Watch for a blog in the coming weeks that shares more information about the 2023 Graduate Education Climate Survey (and a full report). Want to participate? The graduate education climate survey is conducted every three years. That means the next one will take place in Spring 2026.



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at Lafayette Graduate School

## Get Outside get Involved

### Downtown Alive!

April 4 @ 6 PM - Parc Sans Souci

### Scott Boudin Festival

April 4-6 All Day - Lions Club Rd. Scott

### Trivia Night

April 10 @ 6 PM - Moncus Park

### Bach Lunch

April 11 @ 11 AM - Parc Sans Souci

### Language Cafe

April 20 @ 6 PM - Moncus Park

### Festival International

April 23-27 All Day - Downtown Lafayette

### Innovate South

April 24-25 - Opportunity Machine

## Important Dates and Deadlines

4/7 - Registration begins for Summer  
Intercession 2025, Summer 2025, and Fall 2025

**DON'T  
FORGET**

4/14 - Last day to submit DEFENDED theses/dissertations/  
synthesis projects for Grad School review and final approval

4/28 - Last day to submit FINAL theses/dissertations/synthesis  
projects for Grad School review and final approval

4/28 - Last day to complete graduate written and/or oral examinations

## Key Resources for Grad Students

**Campus Cupboard** supplies free, nonperishable items to meet students' temporary  
food needs. Location: 210 E. St. Mary Blvd

**Career Closet** provides students with free, gently used professional clothing items  
for interviews, career fairs, and other professional networking events. Location: 210  
E. St. Mary Blvd

**Career Services** provides services to students in career planning, development,  
and job-seeking strategies. Location: Agnes Edwards Hall, Room 104

**The Counseling and Testing Center** offers free counseling, crisis intervention,  
and short-term psychotherapy for individuals, couples, and groups. Location: Saucier  
Wellness Center, OK Allen Hall

**Uwill Student Mental Health & Wellness** offers free  
immediate access to teletherapy. Help is available  
24/7/365. Scan the QR code to get started using your UL email.



**The Office of Disability Services** establishes eligibility and  
facilitates services and accommodations for qualified students with disabilities.  
Location: Agnes Edwards Hall, Room 126

**The Statistical Consulting Center** provides statistical support to UL Lafayette  
graduate students and faculty for research involving statistical methods. Location:  
432 Maxim Doucet Hall

**Graduate Student Organization** and **Student Government Association** advocate  
for all graduate students and offer funding to help offset the cost of research and  
travel. Locations: gso.louisiana.edu and sga.louisiana.edu

**The Shopper Shuttle** runs on Friday afternoons on the hour from 2-7pm from  
campus to Walmart. Location: Catch the shuttle at the Union or Cajun Village

**The Writing Lab** offers a writing community for students and faculty with a  
comfortable space where writers work with other writers. Visit to discuss writing,  
receive feedback and help, and take advantage of tutoring services. Location: Dupré  
Library First Floor