# GRADUATE PROGRAMS APPENDIX 7
## Graduate Program Priorities

### Details of prioritization process for graduate program priorities

The list of priorities described in the APR document was the result of an extensive multi-step process.

1. Priorities identified by a small working group and presented in the foundational document
2. Priorities identified by the whole faculty at the October retreat
3. Overlay of 1 and 2 and scoring by faculty in a February 2023 survey

The departmental retreat held in Oct 2022 was used to find needs to be included in the 2023 APR within the nine different themes presented in this APR document. The foundational document, developed by small focus groups prior to the retreat, identified a series of questions where needs were perceived within each theme. These questions were used to prime discussions of retreat participants, both faculty and graduate students. Feedback from the retreat was then overlaid with the questions identified prior to the retreat. For the **graduate program focus area**, these unified priorities fell into four broad areas with several distinct priorities within each:

A. Program Relevance, Identify and Rigor
B. Career Preparedness for Graduate Students
C. Mentoring
D. Inclusion

In addition, several other priorities were identified which did not fit within these four areas. A complete list of priorities is shown in Appendix 1.

### Prioritization with Faculty Survey (February 2023)

Although many legitimate topics and concerns were voiced in the retreat, there were too many identified priorities to address in the APR document. For this reason, faculty and students were asked to participate in a survey assessing degree of importance of each topic using a response of priority ranging from 1 to 4:

1. Urgent. Elevate in APR and address internally as soon as possible.
2. Important. Include in APR and address in the next five years.
3. Lower Importance. Probably not included in APR.
4. Not a Priority.

A total of 53 graduate students and faculty members responded to the survey, with a mixture of anonymous/non-anonymous responses. Complete results of the survey are shown in the attached appendices, but some broad trends identified in the survey are as follows:

**Prelude Questions**: The GCRC has conducted an in-depth review of graduate curriculum and program, broadly across the department as well as within specializations and this work continues. A prelude question in the survey was posed to gauge the broader faculty's perspective of the role of this group with respect to both curricular work and voting on graduate courses. The survey results supported creation of a formal Graduate Curriculum Committee, which would operate alongside the graduate committee and the (Undergraduate) Curriculum Committee. Such a committee would be charged with general oversight and strategizing on improvements of graduate curriculum and programs, in addition to voting on approval of proposed graduate courses.

A second prelude question addressed the issue of DEI, asking opinions on whether Inclusion should be included within the Graduate Program section of the APR, given that there is a separate Working Group and APR section on DEI. Results clearly indicated strong support (33 yes to 18 no) for keeping topics on inclusion within Graduate Programs portion of the ARP in addition to the topics being covered by the DEI Working Group.

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**General Trends**: There was a strong tendency towards identifying Topics as "Important" followed by a mix of other response options (see Appendix 2 for detailed results from the survey). Based upon majority votes, **17 of 23** issues were identified as "Important". Only three of 23 issues were identified as "Urgent", and the remaining three issues were identified as either "Lower" or "Not a Priority". However, 17 individual topics are too many to be covered individually in the APR. Priorities outlined below represent selections based on the highest cumulative score (combining urgent and important rankings).

### Graduate program suggested focus areas for APR

The following is a summation of actionable items identified prior to and during the October 2022 Agronomy and Horticulture retreat. At the bottom is a list of other possible priorities.

### A: Program relevance, identity and rigor

1. Although the new curriculum website helps in framing the identity of the department's graduate program and provides a means of tracking recommendations of the department's areas of specializations, further work is needed beyond the website itself for the department to establish an identity and promote its graduate program as a whole. Continuing questions include: Is there one or more common threads uniting the specializations? How do courses fit into the overall curriculum of the department and what common courses are lacking (e.g., graduate physiology)?

2. There is a lack of graduate only level courses in some specializations and the level of proficiency /rigor required within and across specializations is ambiguous. Each specialization should identify core required courses.

3. Each graduate specialization should conduct an external review to assess rigor and industry relevance.

### B: Career preparedness for graduate students

1. Explore the need for establishing a career diversity advisory committee, which should include industry representation. The Alumni Advisory Council could provide insight and oversight to the need and development of such a committee.

2. Develop infrastructure for internship and sabbatical experiences for graduate students to:
   - create connections between our graduate program and a wide array of companies who seek qualified employees.
   - facilitate the extended projects that benefit companies while incentivizing faculty to cooperate with time, tuition and salary compensation.
   - explore opportunities for reciprocal programs, for exchanging internships/sabbaticals with industry and other national and international research organizations.

3. Develop vocational graduate student training for academic careers in the following:
   - Training in diverse communication skills from classroom, to government, to industry, to farmers.
   - Training and placement in teaching for graduate students and post-docs, especially at the advanced undergraduate and graduate levels.
   - Training in developing and funding independent research programs and projects.

4. Implementation of Individual Development Plan for all graduate students.

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### C:  Mentoring

1. All students should have a mentor who is separate from their advisor who may be on their committee.

2. Faculty should have access to formal professional development on mentoring as part of their advising or separate mentor roles. Provision should be made in annual reporting to get credit for mentoring.

3. Opportunities should be provided to late-stage graduate students to serve as peer mentors to incoming students, thereby providing valuable mentoring experience.

### D:  Inclusion

1. There is a need for improved inclusion of isolated and international students. Such students are frequently slower to know of and/or complete required steps in their graduate program and may communicate with their peers less. Such a program needs to be proactive in reaching out to these students before they fall behind.

2. Students who are located at research centers off-campus especially have the need of more inclusion, with better and other creative opportunities for on-line and distance ed graduate classes and training.

### Other Identified Themes of Consideration:

1. Low Enrollment Courses:
   What are strategies for increasing enrollment?

2. Funding:
   Can the department be more innovative and productive when searching for funds to support prospective and current graduate students?

3. Graduate FTE:
   How might the department facilitate increasing FTE for specific graduate program needs (e.g., Physiology) and how might use of existing FTE be optimized?

4. Time to Degree:
   Does current structure graduate program prepare students to complete a degree in a timely manner, and if not, what options exist to better prepare students in a timely manner?

5. Exams:
   Should the graduate program have minimal qualifying exams or other entrance standards, and/or other prescribed minimal soft skill standards and if so, how should they be determined and assessed?

6. Extension Involvement:
   Does the graduate program adequately address or promote extension opportunities, or otherwise prepare students to communicate effectively and professionally with diverse audiences?

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