

## CSGS 2026 Slate of Candidates

### Nominations Committee:

Ernest Brothers (The University of Tennessee, Knoxville)  
Michael Cunningham (Tulane University)  
Jon Hakkila (Chair, The University of Alabama in Huntsville)  
Jill Huerta (The University of North Carolina at Charlotte)  
Mary Anne Templeton (Troy University)

### President-Elect –

Laurence Bray (George Mason University) -



Dr. Laurence Bray serves as the senior associate provost for Graduate Education and leader of the Graduate Division at George Mason University. In this role, she chairs the Graduate Council and provides overall leadership for all matters pertaining to graduate education, including graduate student funding, graduate student success and professional development, graduate programs and pathways, and graduate academic policies and practices.

Bray joined George Mason as a faculty member in 2013 and has led a wide range of departmental, school, and university-wide educational and research activities in the Department of Bioengineering under the College of Engineering and Computing. As a professor of bioengineering, Bray has published widely and presented nationally and internationally on topics related to the basic fundamentals of neuroscience using experimental, computational, and behavioral approaches.

Bray has been dedicated to student success inside and outside the classroom, receiving the George Mason's 2017 Mentorship Excellence Award and the 2018 Teacher of Distinction Recognition Award. In addition, she received the Innovative Spirit Award demonstrating her work around innovation and new initiatives.

Bray also serves as the president of the Virginia Council for Graduate Schools. She is on the executive board of the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools and is actively engaged with the Council of

Graduate Schools (CGS) as a member of the Research & Information Services Committee. In 2024 and 2025, Bray was nominated by her peers for the CGS Outstanding Leadership in Graduate Education Award and the CSGS Outstanding Contribution Award.

Prior to George Mason, Bray was a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering in the Brain Laboratory at the University of Nevada, where she earned her PhD in biomedical and electrical engineering. She graduated with her MS and BS in bioengineering and biological sciences, respectively, from Clemson University.

Sharon James McGee (East Tennessee State University) –



I routinely tell my colleagues that I have the best job on campus. Being Dean of the Graduate School is exciting, challenging, rewarding, and usually fun. CSGS has played an important part of my professional network.

In 2018, I came to East Tennessee State University through a national search as Dean of the School of Graduate Studies. Over the next few years and two university reorganizations, my title and responsibilities have changed to Dean of the College of Graduate and Continuing Studies to my current title and role as Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School. I lead the Graduate School, which has an enrollment of about 2500 graduate students and a portfolio of graduate certificates and master's, clinical and research doctorate degrees.

Before coming to ETSU, I served as associate dean of the Graduate School and Research at Western Carolina University. I spent most of my career at as a faculty member at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and served in several administrative roles--as the Writing Program Administrator, Associate Department Chair, and Department Chair. I have served as graduate program coordinator, graduate student mentor, thesis/capstone, and dissertation member/chair.

In my time as dean at ETSU, we have grown graduate enrollment to all-time high and significantly advanced our HERD standing. We have revised policies, processes, and practices with a trauma-informed, people-first lens while supporting academic rigor. We are building programs and activities to support graduate student success, engagement, and retention.

Currently, I am an Executive Board Member of CSGS, and I am immediate past-president of the Tennessee Conference of Graduate School. In this role, I have advocated for graduate education throughout the state, and convened deans and administrators in graduate education for regular meetings. In addition, I serve on the Master's Committee of the Council of Graduate Schools.

All of us throughout the Southern region, regardless of size, are facing many of the same issues in graduate education: recruiting top students, ensuring access and inclusion in a challenging landscape, meeting demands for flexible program modality, doing more with less, improving graduate student stipends, scholarships, and funding. I believe a critical issue for us in the coming years will be telling the stories of how graduate education improves our country and local communities through research advancements and a highly skilled workforce. It would be an honor to serve CSGS as President and help our region address the changes ahead.

**Secretary –**

Julie Goodliffe (University of North Carolina at Charlotte) -



Dr. Julie Goodliffe is the Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Funding and Research at UNC Charlotte, and current Secretary of the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools (CSGS). Following her education and training at Johns Hopkins and Princeton, she served as an Assistant Professor of Biology at UNC Charlotte. During this tenure, she was a dedicated graduate mentor, chairing five Ph.D. and Master's committees and serving on 17 others, while securing NIH funding for her molecular genetics research.

In an intentional career shift, she earned an M.B.A. from UNC Kenan-Flagler and co-founded a biofuels start-up, working to commercialize a colleague's patented technology. While doing that, Dr. Goodliffe returned to UNC Charlotte in 2014, where she has held various leadership roles in the Graduate School. She uses her academic and business background to align incentives and improve graduate students' funding and education.

An active member of the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools (CSGS), Dr. Goodliffe served on the Executive Committee from 2020 to 2023 and was elected Secretary in 2023. She remains committed to the CSGS and enjoys working with the outstanding group of volunteers that make up the Leadership and Executive Committee of the CSGS.

**Executive Committee –**

Shannon Acosta (Florida Gulf Coast University) –



I am excited to submit my self-nomination for service on the Executive Committee of the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools (CSGS). My professional career at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) reflects a continual progression of leadership in graduate education. Beginning as Assistant Director of Graduate Studies, I was promoted to Associate Director of Graduate Admissions, and then promoted again to Director of Graduate Programs.

In my current role, I provide centralized oversight for more than 50 graduate programs, lead graduate policy development; coordinate faculty credentialing; oversee resource allocation; and support internal and external institutional reporting. With more than a decade of experience in graduate education at FGCU, I bring comprehensive expertise in graduate program administration, enrollment management, and academic policy.

The priorities of my current role include quality assessment, accountability for state and federal mandates, and student success. I serve as ex-officio member for two University-wide Faculty Senate teams: the Graduate Affairs Team and Graduate Curriculum Team. My work involves coordinated collaboration with academic affairs, enrollment management, and student support units to strengthen recruitment and retention, support responsible program growth, and identify ways to remove existing barriers for graduate students.

Since becoming the Director of Graduate Programs, I have thoroughly enjoyed being actively engaged with CGS, CSGS, and the Conference of Florida Graduate Schools (CFGGS). Through regular participation with these organizations, I have built meaningful professional relationships and have sought opportunities to engage in efforts to advance graduate education. Most recently, I volunteered as a 3MT judge during the Spring 2025 CFGGS. I really enjoyed this experience, and I am eager to expand my engagement with CSGS through service and leadership, and welcome the opportunity to contribute at a broader level.

My collaborative leadership style, regional perspective, and commitment to excellence in graduate education position me as a strong candidate who can contribute meaningfully to the CSGS Executive Committee and support shared priorities across member institutions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Irene Aiken (University of North Carolina Pembroke) –



Dr. Irene Pittman Aiken is Dean of the W. Howard Dean Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke and Professor in the School of Education. With more than 30 years of experience in higher education, she has led transformational institutional change, including UNCP's successful transition to doctoral-granting status and the development and approval of the university's first doctoral programs.

During her tenure as dean, Dr. Aiken achieved nearly 200% growth in graduate enrollment while expanding access, strengthening quality, and increasing the number and diversity of graduate pathways, including the establishment of UNCP's first graduate certificate programs. Her leadership has emphasized innovation, sustainability, and student success in regional public universities, including institution-level leadership in introducing and advancing the responsible use of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning.

Dr. Aiken has provided extensive service to graduate education organizations. She previously served on the Executive Committee of the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools and now seeks election to return, bringing both continuity and renewed perspective. She is a past President of the North Carolina Council of Graduate Schools (currently treasurer-elect) and has served on multiple regional and CGS committees supporting graduate education policy and leadership development.

In addition, Dr. Aiken has served three times as a consultant through the Council of Graduate Schools, providing external review and strategic advising to peer institutions. Her candidacy reflects a deep commitment to collaboration, shared governance, and strengthening graduate education across the southern region.

Lindsey Aloia (University of Arkansas) –



Lindsey S. Aloia (Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University) is the Associate Dean of International Education and Senior International Officer in the Graduate School and International Education, and Professor of Communication at the University of Arkansas. In her current role, she provides strategic leadership for international education, overseeing inbound and outbound student and scholar mobility, global partnerships, and the University's Rome Center in Italy. She advises six directors and supports more than 3,000 students and scholars annually through high-impact global programs.

Previously, Dr. Aloia served as the Director of the Honors Studies Program for the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences and the Director of the Center for Communication Research, where she led large, complex portfolios focused on student success, faculty development, interdisciplinary collaboration, and research-informed education. A nationally recognized scholar, she has published extensively on the causes and consequences of verbal aggression in interpersonal relationships and has received multiple awards for research, teaching, and service.

Dr. Aloia is deeply committed to inclusive, student-centered education and brings a collaborative, evidence-informed approach to academic leadership at the institutional and disciplinary levels. Dr. Aloia is excited to contribute as an Executive Committee Member for the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools.

Greg Bell (University of North Carolina Greensboro) –



Greg Bell has served as Dean of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) since 2021, following four years as Associate Dean of the UNCG Graduate School. In this role, he provides academic and administrative leadership for a regional R2 university with over 3,500 graduate students and approximately 700 graduate faculty. UNCG has nearly 150 graduate programs including 23 doctoral programs, 51 master's degree programs, and 74 graduate certificates. His work focuses on finding creative solutions to issues of student success, faculty engagement, and institutional strategy.

As dean, Dr. Bell has overseen graduate education during a period of significant disruption and realignment in higher education. Under his leadership, UNCG undertook the first graduate tuition waiver realignment in nearly two decades as well as navigated a university-wide academic portfolio review. His leadership emphasizes clarity of policy, equity of process, and sustainability of graduate programs, particularly for institutions that play a critical role in regional access and workforce preparation. He understands the challenges and opportunities facing mid-sized, public, student-centered institutions in the Southeast, bringing this essential perspective to CSGS.

Dr. Bell has served CSGS in the past, as a member of the CSGS Audit Committee from 2020 to 2023 and as a member of the CSGS Nominating Committee in 2024. At the state level, he has demonstrated sustained commitment to collaborative leadership, serving as Secretary of the North Carolina Council of Graduate Schools from 2020 to 2023, followed by service as President-elect/President/Past-president from 2024 to 2026.

Colleagues at UNCG recognize Dr. Bell for his consistent and ethical decision-making, procedural fairness, and ability to translate national trends into actionable institutional strategy. His experience working across institutional, regional, and national contexts positions him well to contribute thoughtfully to the CSGS Executive Committee.

Patti Giuffre (Texas State University) –



I am the Associate Dean for Retention in The Graduate College (GC) at Texas State University. I was promoted to this role after having served for two years as Assistant Dean at The Graduate College (2021-2023). My portfolio includes organizing and facilitating (1) events and professional development for graduate students, and (2) orientation, mentoring training, and professional development for graduate advisors and graduate faculty. I lead our retention events, which include a professional development series of approximately 60 workshops and attended by approximately 1,000 students per

academic year. In addition, I oversee the 3MT® competition, the Graduate Student Research Conference, and Graduate Student Appreciation Week. I have also started a new career exploration workshop series. Further, I am a trained mediator involved in conflict resolution among faculty and students. To support graduate faculty and advisors, I have created a Canvas orientation site for new graduate advisors that includes best practices for writing handbooks and developing program websites. I collaborate with our Faculty Success team to organize workshops for graduate faculty. Lastly, I have been trained as a facilitator with the Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER) at the University of Wisconsin and co-facilitate CIMER-based mentoring training for graduate faculty.

Prior to starting my work at the GC, I served as graduate advisor for eight years in Sociology for the MA in Sociology, MS in Applied Sociology, MA/MS in Sustainability Studies (interdisciplinary), and MS in Dementia and Aging (online and interdisciplinary). My time serving as Associate Dean has been the most rewarding part of my career because I am able to enhance activities I did as graduate advisor. I am running for Executive Committee member because I value graduate education and always try to identify new ways to support our faculty and students.

Manu Gupta (Virginia Commonwealth University) –



Dr. Manu Gupta serves as the Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Under his leadership as Dean, VCU has achieved historic milestones, including the university's highest doctoral enrollment to date and its highest master's enrollment in over a decade. An active and distinguished scholar, Dr. Gupta specializes in corporate governance, CEO compensation design, and risk management. His current research explores the financial implications of blockchain technology and the evolving impact of AI on the labor market. He has published extensively in top-tier finance and risk management journals, earning numerous teaching and research awards and garnering recognition at international conferences. Beyond his research, Dr. Gupta is deeply committed to professional leadership, currently serving on the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) Nominating Committee for 2026. He earned his B.E. in Electronics Engineering from NIT Surat, India, and his Ph.D. in Finance from Texas A&M University.

Alan Itkin (Southern Methodist University) –



Dr. Alan Itkin brings extensive leadership experience in graduate education and a sustained record of professional service to the field. He currently serves as Senior Assistant Dean in the Moody School of Graduate and Advanced Studies at Southern Methodist University (SMU), where he oversees the day-to-day operations of the University's central graduate school working closely with the Dean.

When Dr. Itkin joined SMU in 2019, the University did not yet have a centralized graduate school, but rather a small Office of Research and Graduate Studies with limited staff and scope. Since that time, he has played a key role in the development and successful launch of a comprehensive graduate school, significantly expanding institutional capacity in areas including graduate admissions support and data infrastructure, career and professional development, fellowship advising, writing support, PhD student health insurance coverage, postdoctoral affairs, and internal and external fellowship programs. His leadership has helped position SMU to better support graduate students and postdoctoral scholars across disciplines.

Prior to SMU, Dr. Itkin served as Assistant Dean for Graduate Education and Research in the College of Arts and Science at Vanderbilt University, where he also directed the Master of Liberal Arts and Science program. Earlier in his career, he was an Assistant Professor and Faculty Fellow in Literary Cultures at New York University, teaching and advising graduate students in the Draper Interdisciplinary Master's Program. This combination of faculty and administrative experience gives him a well-rounded, practitioner's perspective on graduate education.

Dr. Itkin has been an active and effective contributor to the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools. For the past two years, he has served on the CSGS Executive Committee and was the institutional lead for organizing the 2025 CSGS Annual Meeting hosted by SMU. His collaborative approach, organizational skill, and commitment to advancing graduate education have made him a valued member of the Committee.

Ron Walcott (University of Georgia) –



Dr. Ron Walcott serves as Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School. In this role, he is a member of the UGA University Cabinet and works with administration, schools, and colleges across campus to enhance the recruitment, support, and success of graduate students.

Walcott has served in several administrative roles on campus, including interim Dean of the Graduate School and Assistant Dean for Diversity in the UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Walcott currently serves on the Student Affairs Advisory Board, the ConnectUGA Leadership team, and the OneSource Leadership team.

Walcott is also a professor of plant pathology in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. His research focuses on pathogens that affect commercially important vegetables and has been funded by more than \$5 million in external grants from agencies such as the USDA, as well as industry partners. He is the co-author of two books in the field of plant pathology, more than 75 peer-reviewed journal articles, and numerous book chapters. He has delivered invited seminars and presentations in nine countries on four continents and recently served as President of the American Phytopathological Society.

Walcott has garnered nearly \$1 million in additional grant funding to enhance educational experiences for underrepresented students through career awareness programs for high school and undergraduate students. He has mentored or served as an advisory committee member for more than 40 master's and Ph.D. students. He also has mentored several UGA undergraduate students as well as high school students through the CAES Young Scholars Internship Program.

Walcott's honors include receiving the CAES D.W. Brooks Diversity Award for Faculty and being named a UGA Senior Teaching Fellow and a Teaching Academy Member. He earned his Ph.D. in plant pathology from UGA and his bachelor's and master's degrees, also in plant pathology, from Iowa State University.