



University Life Graduate Staff Academy Syllabus Fall 2026 – Spring 2027

Graduate Staff Academy Coordinators:

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GSA Community of Practice Overview

Graduate Professional Assistants (GPAs) and graduate student staff (interns, externs, practicum, coordinators, etc.) work throughout University Life in various offices and units. The diverse experiences UL Graduate Staff members have in their respective roles provides a phenomenal opportunity for graduate staff to network and build communities with peers outside of their offices. Additionally, as graduate staff members are often emerging professionals, there is a great opportunity to provide targeted professional development to this group to build and enhance their professional skillset, regardless of their academic program. This community of practice experience will meet monthly, and each session will have a topical focus to support personal and professional development, while providing the space to connect with each other and professional staff from University Life.

Participants are to attend monthly sessions from September 2026 to May 2027. They are expected to engage and participate in conversations and discussions at each session.

UL Graduate Assistant Academy Learning Objectives:

- Participants will identify, at a minimum, one skill they have built upon during their community of practice experience.
- Participants will identify at minimum two resources available to them in their graduate staff role.
- Participants will illustrate their experience in this community of practice through a reflection activity at the conclusion of the experience.
- Participants will identify professional learning goals for the academic year.

NACE Competency

Each session of the Graduate Staff Academy (GSA) is tailored with a National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) competency outcome. These competencies are designed to prepare UL GPAs for success in the workplace and lifelong career management. The NACE Career Readiness Competencies are a set of eight key skills widely recognized by employers as essential for career success.

By incorporating these competencies, the GSA ensures that graduate assistants not only excel in their current roles but also build a foundation for long-term professional growth. These competencies align with the demands of modern workplaces, emphasizing adaptability, collaboration, and continuous learning.

For more information on NACE Competencies, visit <https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/>

GSA Instructional Modality & Communication Format

All 2026-2027 Graduate Staff Academy sessions will be held **in-person**.

The ability to meet in-person reflects University Life's commitment to fostering a strong sense of community among UL GPAs. We believe that face-to-face interactions provide greater opportunities for communication, collaboration, networking, and relationship building.

Aside from GSA sessions, we have two social events – one at the end of Fall 2026 as a mid-year check in with UL Leadership and at the end of Spring 2027 – to celebrate the achievements and honor the outgoing GPAs who are graduating.

- **MS Teams:**
 - MS Teams will serve as our primary technology platform for the duration of the community of practice experience. All GPAs will be added to the designated MS Teams group at the beginning of the program.
 - MS Team Name: UL Graduate Staff Academy - GRP
 - Channel Name: UL GSA 2026-2027
 - **UL GSA announcements and updates:**
 - All GSA meetings will be scheduled through the GSA Meeting Channel
 - Any adjustments are made regarding time, location, or content, will be communicated through the MS Team and to your GMU email
 - **GSA Session Materials:**
 - All files associated with this community will be included in the MS Teams File Section for your access at any time.
 - ***In the event pre-work is required for a GSA session, you will be notified no less than 2 weeks prior to the session.***
- **MS Team Communication**
 - We encourage all participants to check the MS Teams to stay informed about upcoming events or announcements.

Attendance & Participation Expectations

- **Attendance:**
 - You are expected to attend and participate in each GSA session over the upcoming academic year. As a division, we are committed to providing you with ongoing professional development to support your academic and professional experience in University Life.
 - You are expected to attend these sessions unless you have an academic time conflict. Rose Pascarell, Vice President for University Life, has made this experience a requirement of all Graduate Student Staff in the division.
 - Attendance has a direct impact on the activities and reflection we engage in during our sessions. Your presence determines the success of this experience.
 - In the event you have a scheduling conflict or will be out of the office (illness, vacation, etc.) you are expected to communicate the following:
 - Email the GSA Coordinators (Paris + Meeghan) and cc your supervisor

- Emails should be sent at least 24 hours prior to the session.
 - This allows the facilitators to plan and respond accordingly in the event multiple participants are out of the office.
- **Participation Expectations:**
 - **Presence:** As previously stated, this is a professional development experience to support your professional and personal growth while working in University Life and your unit. Your presence and perspective are critical to this being a dynamic learning experience.
 - You are asked to not engage in other work during the session time to allow for full participation.

Accommodations

- Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this educational experience, please first visit <https://ds.gmu.edu/> for detailed information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with us. Disability Services is located in Student Union Building I (SUB I), Suite 2500. Email: ods@gmu.edu | Phone: (703) 993-2474
- **Mason Supports Success in the Workplace.** The university provides accommodation to individuals with disabilities in order to ensure equal access and opportunity to Mason employees.
 - **Employee rights include:**
 - Access to all university offers, including courses, programs, services, activities, employment and facilities.
 - Information reasonably available in accessible formats.
 - An equal opportunity to employment.
 - Receive reasonable accommodations, which may include auxiliary aids and services.
 - Confidentiality of all information regarding his/her disability.
- Contact Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator to request an accommodation. Additional information can be found at <https://diversity.gmu.edu/ada/employee-accommodations>

GSA Curriculum Outline

The curriculum outline below includes slated topics, facilitators, and dates for sessions.

OPTIONAL GSA Community Hours

To provide ongoing opportunities for UL GPA engagement, we will be piloting an optional event series for GSA members to connect. These are open sessions for GPAs to engage in community & connection, and will act as a space for collaboration, participation in discussion, completion of work, etc.

Date & Time: TBA

Session Topic	Date & Time	Session Learning Outcomes	NACE Competencies	Audience	Session Facilitators	Session Location
New to UL Welcome	Monday, August 31, 2026 1:00-2:30pm	New to UL		First-Year GPAs	New to UL committee	Merten Hall Room 1201
Success in the Year Ahead	Monday, September 21, 2026, 1:00 – 3:00pm	- Identify 1 strategy for success in the GPA role in 2026-2027 - Identify one professional goal as a GPA for 2026-2027 - Create a minimum of 1 action item to share with supervisor to address the strategy for success	- Career & Self Development - Critical Thinking	All GPAs	Lewis Forrest II University Life	Merten Hall Room 1201
Resume Ready + Career Preparation with University Career Services	Monday, October 5, 2026 1:00 – 3:00pm	- Participants will identify at minimum 1 strategy to support their job search process - Participants will explore the use of AI in preparation of their job search/candidacy process	- Career & Self Development - Professionalism	Second year GPAs Optional for First Year GPAs	Saskia Campbell, University Career Services	Merten Hall Room 1201
Individualized Development Plan (IDP)	Monday, October 19, 2026 1:00 – 3:00pm	Participants will identify professional development goals and specific strategies and timelines for action steps to achieve those goals.	Career & Self Development	First-Year GPAs Optional for Returning GPAs	Dr. Julie Choe Kim, Graduate Student Life Dr. Alyssa Bivins	Merten Hall Room 1201
Psychological Safety in the Workplace	Monday, November 16, 2026 1:00 – 3:00pm	- Participants will learn how psychological safety supports innovation and well-being. - Participants will learn leadership practices that support psychological safety in the workplace - Participants will discuss ways to manage challenges associated with psychological safety concept implementation	- Leadership - Critical Thinking	All GPAs	Dr. Rachel Wernicke, Chief Mental Health Officer	Merten Hall Room 1201

Coffee with University Life leadership	Monday, December 7, 2026 1:00 – 3:00pm	- Participants will engage in a conversation with divisional leadership in University Life - Participant will interact with peers in a conversational environment - Celebrate UL GPAs who are graduating in December 2026	- Communication - Career & Self Development	All GPAs	Dr. Sally Lorentson and Dr. Pam Patterson VPs of University Life UL Cabinet Members GSA Coordinators	Merten Hall Room 1201
Access and Inclusion in the Workplace	Monday, January 25, 2027 1:00 – 3:00pm	- Participants will identify one action they can implement into their work to support inclusivity - Participants will be able to identify tools/resources/ programs to support inclusivity in an evolving social climate.	- Equity & Inclusion - Critical Thinking	All GPAs	Josh Kinchen, LGBTQ+ Resources Center Naomi Martinez ODS	Merten Hall Room 1201
Effective Communications: Clear conversations in the workplace	Monday, February 1, 2027 1:00 – 3:00pm	- Participants will identify four speech acts to practice clear, effective communication in the workplace. - Participants will identify strategies to manage breakdowns in communications. - Participants will practice dialogue skills that foster mutual understanding	- Communication - Professionalism	All GPAs	Amy Snyder	Merten Hall Room 1201
ALTERNATE WEATHER DATE [Hold]	Monday, March 1, 2027 1:00 – 3:00pm	Communications will be sent if date is needed				Merten Hall Room 1201
Preparing for Launch: Building Professional Networks + Identifying Transferrable skills	Monday, March 15, 2027 1:00 – 3:00pm	- Participants will engage in LinkedIn Profile Development - Participants will identify the transferrable skills/experience from GPA role to support career development	Career & Self Development	First-Year GPAs Required Optional for Returning GPAs	University Career Services Staff	Merten Hall Room 1201
Navigating Wellbeing:	Monday, March 29, 2027 1:00 – 3:00pm	Participants will identify factors that contribute to burnout in the workplace	- Critical Thinking - Career & Self Development	Second year GPAS		Merten Hall Room 1201

Managing change, burnout, and more		Participants will discuss practical strategies for managing change as well as stress/burnout		Optional for First Year GPAs		
ALTERNATE WEATHER DATE [Hold]	Monday, April 5, 2027 1:00 – 3:00pm	Communications will be sent if date is needed				Merten Hall Room 1201
ALTERNATE WEATHER DATE[Hold]	Monday, April12, 2027 1:00 – 3:00pm	Communications will be sent if date is needed				Merten Hall Room 1201
Ethics in Technology: A Conversation	Monday, April 19, 2027 1:00 – 3:00pm	Participants will apply strategies for using technology intentionally and responsibly to support efficiency, focus, and professional growth	- Critical Thinking - Career & Self Development - Technology	All GPAs	[To be confirmed]	Merten Hall Room 1201
End of Year Celebration for 2026 - 2027 AY	Monday, May 3, 2027 1:00 – 3:00pm	Participants will gather and celebrate the end of the program and all outgoing GPAs		All GPAs	GSA Coordinators	Merten Hall Room 1201