



# 2026 Award Winners

## **Awards Committee**

Francesca Reed - Neumann University

Tanith Fowler Corsi - Hood College

Ryan Taughrin - University of Buffalo

Melaine Steele - Ursuline College

Jennifer Sayre - Bowling Green State University

# Graduate Education Research Grant Gold Winner

*The Graduate Student Enrollment Management Research Grant is designed to encourage emerging knowledge and understanding of the complexities of graduate enrollment management, including all aspects of admissions and recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation in higher education.*

The 2026 Graduate Education Research Grant Gold Award is awarded to **Dr. Jackie McDermott**



Dr. Jackie McDermott is Associate Director of Graduate Student Excellence in the Purdue University Engineering Dean's Office for Graduate Education. She leads initiatives that advance graduate student success across Purdue's West Lafayette and Indianapolis locations, strengthening research communities and expanding career preparation opportunities. Dr. McDermott holds a B.S. in Biology from Hofstra University and a Ph.D. in

Molecular and Cellular Biology from Brandeis University. She serves as Co-PI on Alfred P. Sloan Foundation grants and studies mentoring models, program scaling, and graduate student support structures. She co-founded EngGAP, a NAGAP community for engineering graduate education practitioners.

# Graduate Education Research Grant Silver Winner

*The Graduate Student Enrollment Management Research Grant is designed to encourage emerging knowledge and understanding of the complexities of graduate enrollment management, including all aspects of admissions and recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation in higher education.*

The 2026 Graduate Education Research Grant Silver Award is awarded to **April Owens**



April Owens is Director of Graduate Recruitment at the University of North Texas and a doctoral candidate in Organizational Change and Leadership at the University of Southern California Rossier School of Education. She has more than a decade of experience leading graduate recruitment strategy, admissions operations, and enrollment initiatives across large public universities and selective graduate programs. Her research focuses on crisis-responsive leadership in graduate enrollment management, examining how middle managers interpret institutional disruption and navigate decision-making

in complex university systems. Owens' work aims to generate practical insights that strengthen enrollment leadership, cross-unit collaboration, and organizational resilience in graduate education.

# Future Leader Award

*The Future Leader Award is presented to an individual who has clearly exhibited leadership qualities and an enthusiasm for the graduate enrollment management (GEM) profession that distinguishes them as a rising leader in NAGAP and the field.*

The 2026 Future Leader Award goes to **Tanith Fowler Corsi**



Tanith Fowler Corsi is Director of Graduate Admission at the Graduate School at Hood College, where she leads enrollment strategy, graduate marketing, and international admissions initiatives. With 30 years of experience in higher education, international education, and organizational leadership, she brings a global perspective and a strong commitment to advancing the Graduate Enrollment Management (GEM) profession.

Since joining Hood College in 2019, Tanith has strengthened graduate recruitment strategy, expanded international engagement, and helped position graduate education around career outcomes, access, and student support. Her work bridges admissions strategy with cross-cultural communication, institutional collaboration, and mission-driven leadership. Prior to Hood College, Tanith served in senior leadership roles in international education at George Mason University, The Catholic University of America, and NAFSA: Association of International Educators, where she oversaw study abroad and internationalization initiatives.

Raised in Monaco and the south of France, Tanith holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of California, Riverside, and a master's degree in International Communication from American University. She is currently pursuing a Doctor of Organizational Leadership at Hood College, where her research explores cultural competence in Graduate Enrollment Management leadership. An engaged NAGAP member and presenter, she is passionate about strengthening the profession through ethical, culturally responsive, and strategic enrollment leadership.

# Chapter Leader Award

*The NAGAP Chapter Leader Award is presented to a current or past NAGAP chapter board member who has demonstrated a commitment to the success of their chapter community, connections between members, and strengthened chapter communications with the NAGAP leadership. The Chapter Leader Award recipient is known for exemplary service to the graduate education community*

The 2026 Chapter Leader Award goes to **Jennifer Nyeste**



Jennifer Nyeste Hoyt is a strategic leader in graduate enrollment management with more than 22 years of progressive experience in admissions and recruitment. She currently serves as the inaugural Director of Graduate Admissions at Rutgers University–New Brunswick, where she leads operations, recruitment, and enrollment marketing strategies that support more than 200 graduate and professional programs across eight schools.

Throughout her career, Jen has modernized admissions operations, implemented innovative CRM solutions, strengthened faculty engagement in recruitment, and built collaborative partnerships that expand access and opportunity.

An active leader in the GEM community, she serves on various advisory boards and, as Chapter President, played a key role in reinstating NJGAP in 2025—advancing collaboration, best practices, and professional development across New Jersey.

# Promotion of Excellence Award

*The Promotion of Excellence Award is presented to an individual or team that has developed or implemented methodology (e.g., processes, policies, events, technologies) demonstrating best practices, creativity, and/or innovation in graduate enrollment management that could serve as a model across the GEM profession.*

## The 2026 Promotion of Excellence Award goes to **University at Buffalo Graduate School of Education Office of Admissions**



### "Hidden Curriculum of Applying to Graduate School" Series

Admissions Team: Lynette DePonceau, Renad Aref, Duvi Kominiarek, Daniel Krawiec, Will Bogdan, Alaina Guzman  
The UB Graduate School of Education Office of Admissions developed the "Hidden Curriculum of Applying to Graduate School" series; a comprehensive, scalable model that demystifies the graduate application process for prospective students. What began as a pilot week of education-focused sessions has evolved into a multi-office partnership offering critical guidance 2-3

times annually, with sessions covering topics from securing strong letters of recommendation to navigating funding options.

This empathy-driven approach addresses a fundamental gap in graduate enrollment: many students, particularly first-generation and underrepresented populations, lack foundational knowledge about application components. By packaging educational sessions as genuine student support rather than recruitment tactics, the GSE team has built trust with local partners, peer institutions, and community organizations, creating a "rising tide lifts all boats" philosophy that strengthens the entire graduate pipeline.

The series demonstrates innovation through multimodal accessibility (live sessions, YouTube archives, SMS/email campaigns), strategic cross-campus partnerships (Career Services, Writing Center, Financial Aid), and data-driven continuous improvement. With consistent attendance of 80-100 RSVPs per fall series and proven peer adoption following presentations at the 2025 East Coast GEM Conference and 2026 NAGAP Summit, this model has established itself as a replicable best practice in graduate enrollment management.

The initiative exemplifies how transformative enrollment work doesn't require massive budgets. It requires deep student empathy, strategic execution, and genuine commitment to removing barriers for all prospective graduate students.

# Visionary Award

*The Visionary Award is presented to an individual in the higher education community who has demonstrated unique vision in the graduate enrollment management (GEM) profession. The individual should be an established leader who has developed and executed innovative strategy or led bold, cutting-edge, and successful initiatives that have influenced their own campus, university system, or the GEM community at large.*

The 2026 Visionary Award goes to **Patricia Flaherty**



Patricia Flaherty is a higher education leader specializing in graduate enrollment management, recruitment strategy, and operational excellence. With a strong background in graduate admission, she collaborates with academic departments and institutional leadership to design strategic recruitment initiatives, manage enrollment operations, and enhance prospective student engagement.

Her work includes developing data-informed outreach strategies, coordinating recruitment events and networking initiatives, and strengthening partnerships across campus and within the broader higher education community. Patricia brings a relationship-driven approach to enrollment management, grounded in student access, equity, and institutional alignment.

An active member of NAGAP, Patricia is committed to advancing professional development and leadership within the graduate enrollment field. She values collaboration, innovation, and the sharing of best practices to support institutional growth and student success.

# Distinguished Service Award

*The Distinguished Service Award is NAGAP's most prestigious award and is presented to an individual who has contributed progressive leadership and exceptional service to the association and to the GEM profession.*

The 2026 Distinguished Award goes to **Amanda Ostreko**



Amanda Ostreko, PhD, is the Assistant Vice Provost and Director of Graduate Enrollment Management at the University of Kansas (KU), leading strategic enrollment efforts for nearly 75 graduate departments serving domestic and international students. For over two decades, she has advanced Graduate Enrollment Management (GEM) through roles in Enrollment Management, the Office of Graduate Studies, and the School of Engineering. Amanda's professional and research expertise includes GEM and Graduate Strategic Enrollment Management (GSEM), data-informed

decision-making, and student opportunities and pathways.

She draws on her research and professional expertise to present to national and international audiences and has held several leadership roles within NAGAP. She served on the NAGAP Governing Board for six years (2018-2024), completing two terms as Chair of the Professional Development Committee (2018-2022) and one term as Chair of the Research Committee (2022-2024). While serving as Chair of the Research Committee, Amanda co-led an important update to a research project on GEM models as a field of inquiry and practice. She continues to serve on the Research Committee and build on this work, further developing the project to help ensure its findings can be applied more broadly across institutions. In addition to her research contributions, during her time leading the Professional Development Committee, she guided its offerings during the COVID-19 pandemic, which required timely and thoughtful adjustments to ensure continuity, several of which remain in use today due to their ongoing value.

Amanda's longstanding engagement with the GEM community spans several inaugural NAGAP roles, serving as a mentor in the first mentorship cohort (2012-2013), as a founding member of MAGAP, the NAGAP's Midwestern chapter (2012-2014), and as one of the first recipients of NAGAP's Graduate Student Enrollment Research Grant (2008). Amanda is an active member of both AACRAO and NAGAP, with extensive engagement in graduate enrollment management at the national level. Beyond NAGAP, she serves on the peer review board for AACRAO's SEM Quarterly and previously held a position on the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) Research and Information Services Committee. In 2025, she was invited to co-present at the AACRAO Annual Meeting Graduate and Professional Schools Luncheon and has been a featured guest on a prominent higher education podcast to discuss graduate enrollment trends and models.