

Reimagining the VP&S Biomedical PhD Graduate Programs Executive Summary

Graduate Education Future State Task Force
Charged by Dean Armstrong

Vagelos Institute of Biomedical Research Education

Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons

Columbia University

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For internal purposes only.

Executive Summary

Through a generous \$175 million gift from Roy and Diana Vagelos to establish the Vagelos Institute for Biomedical Research Education, the Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons (VP&S) has the opportunity to rethink how we train, support, and foster the careers of our graduate students today and in the decades to come.

To identify the necessary steps to create a new academic training model, Dean Armstrong convened a task force in June 2023. The task force met a total of 18 times over three months and held numerous discussions with current students, faculty mentors, program directors, chairs, as well as colleagues at other institutions. The recommendations are organized into the following five goals:

1. Revolutionize the programs through a centralized and democratic scientific and administrative structure.
 - Restructure the graduate programs into 5-7 non-overlapping thematic areas.
 - Create a program governance structure based on inter-departmental program committees, a Central Coordinating Committee, and an inter-program Curriculum Committee. Foster movement between programs and standardize core practices.
 - Centralize and expand administration and support for graduate students.
 - Alleviate departmental financial burden by using the Vagelos funds to support students in their first year.
 - Reduce financial barriers to supporting students and explore ways to endow the entire program.
2. Recruit the most talented students locally and globally.
 - Establish school-wide admissions standards and unify the process across programs.
 - Strengthen efforts to increase the number of diverse applicants.
 - Redesign a user-friendly VP&S central website for all programs.
 - Create an electrifying and exciting interview visit.
 - Increase the breadth and size of student body over time.
3. Equip students with the best possible scholarly education and research training.
 - Establish and communicate faculty and student expectations.
 - Expand the role of thesis mentoring committee.
 - Build great curricula and courses, redesign lab rotations, and redesign qualifying exams.
4. Give graduate students the resources and support they need to thrive.
 - Eliminate all avoidable financial hardships and reduce the burden of living in high cost-of-living city.
 - Create effective physical and virtual spaces for PhD students.
 - Provide career services to enhance skills and foster networking with alumni.
5. Provide faculty the resources and support needed to thrive as mentors and educators.
 - Enhance early career faculty access to and recruitment of students.
 - Help faculty become more effective mentors.
 - Increase financial support to provide a research environment that promotes outstanding science.