

Laney Graduate School Dean's Address

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Emory University acknowledges the Muscogee (Creek) people who lived, worked, produced knowledge on, and nurtured the land where Emory's Oxford and Atlanta campuses are now located. In 1821, fifteen years before Emory's founding, the Muscogee were forced to relinquish this land. We recognize the sustained oppression, land dispossession, and involuntary removals of the Muscogee and Cherokee peoples from Georgia and the Southeast. Emory seeks to honor the Muscogee Nation and other Indigenous caretakers of this land by humbly seeking knowledge of their histories and committing to respectful stewardship of the land.

In 2009, Emory University's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences was renamed in honor of James T. Laney, a Methodist minister, professor, Dean of the Candler School of Theology, and president of Emory University from 1977 to 1993. Just two years after he became the university's 17th president, Emory received the identity-changing \$105 million gift from Robert and George Woodruff. As a result, Laney was instrumental in helping transform the university into the comprehensive research university it is today. He held a clear and compelling vision for the central role of graduate education in establishing and sustaining a great research university at the forefront of discovery in the sciences and humanities.

Standing on the shoulders of giants, it is an absolute honor to be here this evening. I will soon complete my second year as Dean of the Laney Graduate School, and I am delighted to say that I am hitting my stride. In this short time, I have marveled at the brilliance, motivation, and commitment of LGS faculty, staff, and students. This is what allows Laney to make good on its commitment to scholarship, research, teaching, and service, all for the purpose of promoting the global public good. Out of a desire to acknowledge and recognize excellence, under the leadership of Dr. Katy Leonard and Maya Palmer, my team embarked upon planning this second Awards Ceremony to coincide with the annual Deans address, which is why we are here today. Thank you all for joining me.

LGS Executive Council

I would like to start by offering sincere appreciation to the LGS Executive Council, the elected graduate faculty governing body, for their outstanding work this year. I would also like to offer special recognition to Jessica Sales, our outgoing Chair and to Tamara Caspary, our incoming Chair, both of whom have already demonstrated strong leadership in graduate education here at Emory. To the EC, I thank you all for your leadership and for your commitment to faculty governance and graduate education.

LGS Mission

There is no other unit within Emory University that is as well-poised as Laney to help fulfill Emory's mission, which *is to create, preserve, teach, and apply knowledge in the service of humanity*. Emory's model for graduate education is robust and unique. The way that LGS is organized allows students and faculty access to centralized services, helps to standardize the student experience, and offers our students the opportunity to move across schools for their training and education with greater ease.

Perhaps this is most clearly articulated in our Mission, which is *to promote discovery and enduring knowledge by preparing innovative, thoughtful leaders in research, scholarship, teaching, and practice in service to the global good.*

In order for LGS to fulfill this mission, we must work closely with partners across the other six schools (that is the schools of Business, Medicine, Nursing, Public Health, Theology, and the Emory College of Arts and Sciences), the Winship Cancer Institute, as well as other units within the university to provide broadly based, excellent graduate education that supports the research and scholarship of students, faculty, and the University as a whole. I want to publicly thank our president and provost, Greg Fenves and Ravi Bellamkonda, respectively for their ongoing commitment to graduate education. We are fortunate that in both leaders, there is a deep understanding of the role that graduate education plays in driving the research and scholarly missions of a comprehensive research university. Through their leadership, our students and faculty collectively drive the production of field defining scholarship while innovating in pedagogy.

State of the School

The state of the Laney Graduate School is healthy, resilient, and strong. But this is only because of the people, processes, and priorities that define us. I will discuss each of these strengths individually. Some of what I share is an outgrowth of the strategic planning process that we embarked upon last fall. We built on ideas generated by the senior staff to draft broad priorities before embarking upon 10 listening sessions with faculty, staff, students, and alumni over the course of the spring semester to brainstorm specific initiatives that would align with these priorities. We are in the process of analyzing the rich text that emerged from these listening sessions in order to articulate a bold strategic plan that will be finalized over the summer.

People

We are proud that faculty, staff, students, and alumni are working to collectively solve our era's most complex problems, form deep connections, and develop shared interests through intellectual curiosity, innovation, and creativity or they are supporting the ability of others to do so. I want to start by publicly thanking LGS staff and program administrators for your dedication, commitment, knowledge, and skill as it relates to the delivery of quality graduate education. You form the backbone of the school. Thank you for what you do.

Emory University is honored to have world-class *faculty* who are deeply committed to both advancing the research and scholarship in their fields in order to understand and intervene on the most vexing challenges faced by our society and train the next generation of scholars and practitioners to continue this work. Laney has almost 1,500 graduate faculty across the six schools. Of these: (a) approximately 22% are in the humanities, (b) 18% are in the social sciences, and (c) 60% are in the natural sciences. Among these faculty are the 65+ Directors of Graduate Studies, Program Directors, and Recruitment Directors who partner with us to lead their respective programs and ensure that the needs of prospective and current students are met.

And of course, our *students*. We have a large and diverse group of graduate students at the Laney Graduate School. We have over 1,800 students. Of these students, 92% are pursuing doctoral degrees with 7% and 1% of students pursuing Masters degrees and certificates,

respectively. Our students are diverse based on gender, race, ethnicity, and citizenship. I often talk about the important work that we are doing to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion to create a more student-centered experience for all students. The amount of diversity that we have achieved thus far is not where we want to be, but it does reflect considerable progress made along this journey.

It is our *alumni* who leave Emory, armed with knowledge, skills, experience, and a commitment to improving the human condition that further allow us to impact the world in which we live in positive ways. We have almost 16,000 active alumni who remain engaged with the University after graduation. These alumni interact and engage with our students in meaningful ways, such as by speaking at career panels targeting current students, serving as judges for the Three-Minute Thesis® Competition, mentoring students, and serving as campaign leaders for the 2036 campaign and board members on our alumni board.

When I meet alumni, I am amazed at the varied ways they use their training to impact this world in which we live. When we look at their physical locations, we find that the top 3 cities for LGS alumni are Atlanta, New York, and Washington, DC. Our graduates work in a variety of sectors, with the most common being higher education, biotechnology, information technology, and the pharmaceutical industry. Our alumni are impressive, connected, and committed to supporting the professional development of the students that come behind them.

Processes

We are also implementing new processes that seek to help us be more effective as a school. Several newly implemented processes allow for *student voice to inform our administrative decision-making*. Over this past year, I held monthly meetings with the Laney Graduate Student Council, a group of committed, passionate, smart students who represent their constituents with professionalism, compassion, and understanding of the complex ecosystem of university administration. I want to publicly thank Megan Mayfield, Rebecca Ellis, Vishwanath Seshagiri and the entire Executive Board for sharing, listening, and partnering with our team to support quality graduate education at Emory. I have held numerous lunches with student affinity groups and office hours in which students came to share both their challenges and success with me. I am thankful for the openness that students bring to these conversations. It makes me a better dean.

We also seek to engage in administrative practices that center on *inclusive programming*. Under the leadership of Dr. Amanda Marie James, LGS EDGE (Emory Diversifying Graduate Education) is currently engaging two Fellows and 19 Ambassadors in the delivery of quality programming that seeks to create more inclusive environments for both masters and doctoral students here at Emory. This programming includes the Peer-to-Peer BIPOC mentoring program, the Annual Research Symposium, the Centennial Scholars Luncheon, and mixers for many affinity groups such as Women in Humanities and Social Sciences, the Graduate Students of Latinx Descent, First Generation Scholars, and Scholars of Asian Descent just to name a few. Over this past academic year EDGE has delivered 18 events focused on diversity and community engagement for domestic and international scholars. Under the leadership of not only Dean James, but also Heather Boldt, Director of the English Language Support Program, we have enhanced the community-building efforts that target international students specifically.

We always seek to *operate more effectively and efficiently*. To that end, this past year we began to transition to a new client relations management system called Slate, under the leadership of Dr. Ulf Nilsson. This is pretty boring stuff to most, but it is worth calling attention to because through the use of Slate, we seek to a) provide a more seamless admissions interface for applicants, faculty reviewers, and accepted students, and b) more effectively manage the many actions students take during their lifecycle as a student. Slate will provide students with a “one-stop shop” for enrollment, milestones, and information on when actions are completed, and it will provide staff with a single system to access multiple types of student data, process requests, and communicate with students. All of this is in service to a more student-centered experience and greater efficiency for staff. We are also exploring the use of automated processing of finance-related actions in order to utilize staff time more effectively and efficiently.

Lastly, we have engaged in processes that serve to strengthen *engagement with alumni and donors* under the leadership of Monica Polisetty, our Senior Director of Advancement and Alumni Engagement, not only as part of the 2036 campaign, but because we are richer as a school as a result, and we hope to add value to their lives as well. Through collaboration across multiple LGS offices, we offer career-focused programming that strengthens the linkages between current and former students, in addition to programming that explicitly targets alumni, like the recent Alumni Career Panel and the CDC Career Panel held earlier in the semester. As an example of the robust efforts to encourage philanthropy, I am also delighted to share that the Sociology doctoral program and department has received our largest gift to date through the establishment of the Levin/Rushing Population and Health Inequalities Research Collaborative Endowment. Once realized, funds will be available for both faculty and doctoral students to pursue research in these areas, thanks to the generosity of our donors Drs. Martin Levin and Wanda Rushing.

Priorities

Lastly, our priorities. The strategic planning process described earlier generated three broad priorities. We are currently engaged in several activities that align with these priorities, but new initiatives will be finalized over the coming months. Below I describe existing efforts that align with each priority.

Priority #1: Interdisciplinary academic opportunities: LGS embraces an approach to graduate education that honors the ability of students to train both within and across relevant disciplines drawing upon the most promising practices within graduate education.

This past fall we opened the application process for the **African American Studies Ph.D. Program**, an interdisciplinary graduate program combining the expertise of an esteemed group of more than 50 [core](#) and [affiliated graduate faculty](#) with research specializations in multiple disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields. Under the leadership of Dr. Walter Rucker, the program provides rigorous training and preparation for Ph.D. students interested in careers within and outside of academe and is organized around the four pillars upon which African American Studies as a field, rests: interdisciplinarity, intersectionality, community engagement, and transnationalism. We received over 100 applications for just five slots, making this a highly competitive program. I am also proud to share that even before the first class steps foot on campus this fall, the African

American Studies department received the National Council for Black Studies Sankore Institute Award because of how intricately engaged they have been in efforts to help improve and promote the study of African descended people through the launch of this new program. Warm congratulations to the department.

Notably, there is another other doctoral program under development in Environmental Sciences that brings a high level of interdisciplinarity and curricular innovation and responds to pressing societal need. We recently completed an external review of the program and will be working with program leaders to refine the proposal.

But we also have **two new master's programs** which have excellent potential for success: Quantitative Theory and Methods and Biomedical Innovation and Development-Advanced Therapeutics (BMID-AT). The former, which starts this summer, will train students in core data science skills related to data management and predictive modeling most associated with work in Computer Science but will also explicitly link this training with theoretical models of human behavior and research design techniques for causal inference typically found in statistics and the social sciences. The latter program, BMID-AT is an Emory degree offered through the joint Emory - Georgia Tech Coulter Department of Biomedical Engineering. This industry-focused program, which will commence Summer 2024, will train the next generation of leaders in bringing medical breakthroughs to the patient. Distinct from programs in drug discovery or vaccine development, our advanced therapeutics degree focuses on the emergent industries of cell therapy, gene therapy, tissue engineering, and regenerative medicine. Trainees in this program will learn at the interface of advanced therapeutics, healthcare, and business management, developing the skills they need to hit the ground running in this industry and spur advanced therapeutics innovation. As we grow our Master's programs, we will also turn attention to how we can improve upon the Master's student experience. We have been listening to students and learning about the ways in which we can be more effective in supporting the success of Master's students.

Finally, LGS is now supporting the development of a **certificate program** in the Public Humanities under the leadership of Drs. Tom Rogers and Ben Reiss, which will combine multidisciplinary instruction in the classroom and internship experiences with community partners. A centerpiece of the initiative is GRAD 700: Public Humanities, a course in which students learn to work in university-community partnerships with non-profits, such as the Charis Circle Foundation, the Alliance Theater, the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, and the Rose Library that invite students to bring their scholarly insights and capabilities to public productions – and in turn provide students an opportunity to learn how their scholarly training and concerns intersect with organizations and projects outside the academy. I have described just a few signature initiatives, but I want to publicly thank Dean Jeff Staton for the great care that he puts into assuring the highest quality academic programming for graduate students at Emory.

Priority #2: Inclusive environment: Faculty, staff, and students work towards cultivating a diverse and inclusive environment that enables everyone to achieve their highest potential.

The work of Laney EDGE centers on three activities. Regarding recruitment over 40 conferences were attended this year to recruit diverse students to Emory. Additionally, 92 members of the Fall 23 incoming cohort will receiving additional funding as part of the Centennial and Women in Natural Sciences admissions fellowships. This office also holds

the annual Learning about Laney and SOAR (Summer Opportunity for Academic Research) programs in order to expose the most promising and diverse scholars to LGS. I talked about some of the community building activities earlier, but this also includes the Annual Diversity Reception in which the Kharen Fulton Award for Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement in Graduate Education is given to a student. And finally, student success is cultivated through activities such as the induction of 10 new scholars into the Emory Bouchet Graduate Honor Society, named after the first African American to receive a PhD in this country. This is a national network of preeminent scholars who exemplify academic and personal excellence and foster inclusive environments on their campuses. Notably this spring I attended the national meeting at Yale in which our 10 scholars were inducted and was taken back by the prestige of this Honor Society and the outstanding contributions our students are making in order to be selected for this honor.

Additionally, I am delighted to announce that under the leadership of Drs. James and Anita Corbett, the Initiative to Maximize Student Development was recently funded by the NIH as a new initiative to increase the number of historically underrepresented groups of students across 18 programs in the natural sciences here at Emory. Congratulations to their entire team.

Moreover, under the leadership of Heather Boldt, our English Language Support Program has been modernized by shifting away from a required curriculum that is based primarily on testing upon entry to one that is more flexible and tailored to student needs, in keeping with changing norms in the field and a desire for a more student-centric approach.

Finally, we are pleased to offer a suite of programming designed to promote graduate student flourishing under the leadership of Dr. Jennifer Cason. Dr. Cason's office oversees programming that is designed to a) support the socialization of incoming students to the Emory community, b) integrate students into the fabric of graduate student life including a Spring Wellness Fair, c) enhance opportunities for leadership development through engagement in student organizations, and d) chart a path towards professionalization in collaboration with programming and opportunities offered by Dr. Leonard's Office of Professional Development and Career Planning. I appreciate Dr. Cason's attention to what flourishing means in a graduate student context.

Priority #3: Impactful scholarship: LGS will have a substantial positive impact on the Emory community, fields of scholarship, and society more broadly.

There are many ways to determine the extent to which one's scholarship is impactful. One of the ways I think about it revolves around the extent to which students achieve successful careers both inside and outside of the academy based on what knowledge and skills they acquired while at Emory. Here at LGS we are intentional about ensuring that our students are undergoing training in scholarship, pedagogy, and practice to prepare them to have meaningful impact on their fields of scholarship and society more broadly. This work is led by the Office of Professional Development and Career Planning under the leadership of Dr. Katy Leonard. Over this past year, Dr. Leonard's office has continued to lead initiatives to enhance effectiveness in teaching and communication, research conduct and ethics, career planning and exploration, and access to financial support for conferences, training, and research. But this past year she oversaw the first full year of a newly revised course that offers structure and academic credit for students engaging in experiential learning and internships. These opportunities enhanced students' awareness

of career trajectories beyond the academy. A new cohort of this course will begin this summer.

Dr. Leonard's office has also offered varied workshops on finding postdoctoral fellowships and grant funding, an insider's view of the academic job search, inclusive teaching and engaging disconnected students, and giving and receiving feedback among many others. Moreover, she oversees the Three-Minute Thesis Competition®, whereby students expand their capacity to effectively explain their research in three minutes in language that is appropriate to a non-specialist audience. We have more work to do to systematize the grant-writing supports that we provide to all students as these are invaluable skills that cross disciplines.

Finally, the university hired 19 new faculty under the AI.Humanity initiative, and many of these faculty are well-poised to train and support doctoral students in their research. We are working on a more expansive model of graduate education that will allow student growth in areas for which faculty have more funding for student support. This would help ensure that we maximize the impact of graduate education at Emory. Expanding the number of doctoral students who could work with these new faculty comes out of deep understanding of the unique contributions that doctoral students could make to the cutting-edge research that these faculty are engaged in.

Finances

As I come to a close, it is worth sharing that LGS is on firm financial footing, and this is due to the leadership of Surabhi Vittal, our Chief Business Officer. I often say that LGS functions as a cost center because all of the other schools are revenue generating, but Laney Graduate School is not. And I say this proudly as a reminder that doctoral education is an investment. It is investment in the development of new knowledge and scholarly pursuits that positively impact the human experience. We are proud that doctoral students receive a full tuition scholarship, a competitive stipend, and 100% health insurance subsidy.

With an annual budget of around \$159M (including tuition scholarships), you can see from the graph on the right, that the vast majority of our controllable expenses go directly to students or to programs supporting the students. These, in my opinion, are some of the most valuable investments Emory makes.

Challenges

I have sought to give you a taste of the exciting things going on in the Laney Graduate School. But I would be remiss if I did not also share with you the things that keep me up at night. Among the most pressing concerns are: a) the need to ensure that we are attending to the needs of specific sub-populations of students like masters students, international students, and students who are also parents; b) the need to maximize the financial support we provide to both masters and doctoral students given constrained resources; and c) the continued need to build a culture where all students feel seen, heard, and valued.

While it is important for me to be honest about our challenges, we are not defined by them. They propel us forward, teaching us and making us wiser along the way. I remain wildly optimistic about the future of the Laney Graduate School.

Conclusions

Over these past 20 months as dean, I have focused on listening and learning, and I will absolutely continue to do so. But we are transitioning to a phase where we can take what we learned, combine it with an understanding of our history and chart an exciting path forward.

Emory is truly a special place. I have spent my entire career here at Emory, having arrived on this campus as an MPH student in August of 1998. As a student here, I felt intellectually challenged, that my voice mattered, and that the university was investing in my future. As a faculty member, I have felt supported in my desire to conduct innovative research in my area of interest, teach using student-centered approaches, and serve the university and my field in ways I find most meaningful. It is a tremendous honor to be in a position to give back to faculty, staff, students, and my fellow alumni in the same way that others poured into me. Thanks to each and every one of you for the remarkable ways in which you support graduate education at Emory.