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**Dean's Address to the Graduate Faculty
State of the Laney Graduate School**

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The following report is an abbreviated Dean's Address due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021. This report is submitted and posted in compliance with LGS Bylaws.

In a year filled with challenges and disruptions to our work lives and personal lives, we were called to respond and reshape what we do and how we do it. Our conventional approaches were recast against many dynamics, and the 2020 Dean's Address is no different.

Here, I present an overview of the Laney Graduate School's accomplishments and efforts to reach greater eminence through graduate education amid personal and collective challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges include:

- an ongoing pandemic
- transition to virtual learning and work environments in a polarizing election year
- separation and isolation from each other and loved ones
- racial and social unrest
- grief and loss
- the devastation caused by natural disasters.

Through every difficulty, our commitment to our community remained steadfast. Programming, messaging, policies, resources, and support required flexibility and adjustment to meet our students, faculty, and staff's specific needs.

In response to the transition to remote work and learning due to COVID-19, LGS created the LGS-specific COVID-19 website to include daily graduate school updates, messages, frequently asked questions, mental health and well-being resources, community resources, community-building and belonging support, professional development and career planning topics, international student support, and links and alignment to the Emory University's COVID-19 website and resources.

Additionally, LGS provided a Weekly Roundup Newsletter specific to COVID-19 related topics, in addition to the Laney Grad Report Newsletter with additional information on regular LGS programming and opportunities. A Spring 2020 digital Student Resource Guide was created as a quick reference for students to access essential support resources. The LGS Website and social media accounts were used to provide immediate access to breaking news and information.

LGS also remained in close collaboration with schools and units across the University to ensure an alignment of policies and protocols. LGS senior leadership led and participated in various central University committees and remained a pivotal voice in conversations and solutions to address our community needs.

LGS Executive Council

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the work of the Council proceeded as usual. The Council approved new courses and modifications to existing courses such as title and credit hour changes. The Council also worked with many programs proposing essential revisions to their curricula. These revisions included modernizing required methods courses, adding grant writing requirements, restructuring programs' curricula, updating programs' governance structures, changing qualifying exam structures, and modifying dissertation committee processes. Some of these revisions were substantial, and all demonstrated creativity and thoughtfulness on the part of program leadership and graduate faculty in improving their curricula for their graduate students.

One of the key and critical governance activities of the Council is to review letters of intent and proposals to form new graduate programs. This year, the Council reviewed, provided recommendations on, and approved several exciting new proposals.

- Approval of a full proposal, which incorporated feedback from a rigorous external review, to form a new doctoral program in Global Health & Development. The proposal has been approved by the Office of the Provost and Board of Trustees.
- Approval of a proposal to form a 4+1 Master of Science program in Mathematics. This program has been approved by the Office of the Provost and awaits approval by the Board of Trustees.
- Approval of a proposal to form a 4+1 Master of Science program in Economics, which now awaits approval from the Office of the Provost and the Board of Trustees.
- Approval of a proposal to form a Master of Science in Biomedical Innovation and Development – Advanced Therapeutics from Biomedical Engineering to move to the external review stage.
- Approval of a letter of intent to form a Master of Science in Quantitative Theory and Methods. We are expecting the program proposal to be submitted for the Council's May meeting.
- Approval of a letter of intent to form a new PhD program in African American Studies, which is now in the proposal stage.

These letters of intent and proposals make explicit a strong commitment to engaging in interdisciplinary research and scholarship. It is illuminating to see how framers of these programs bring together faculty and resources from across Emory, and in some cases beyond, to demonstrate the competitive advantage of interdisciplinary scholarship and research and to develop innovative experiences for prospective students.

Another important activity of the Council this year was drafting an LGS Graduate Faculty Membership Policy. The Council approached this task thoughtfully with an extensive and ongoing discussion of both intended and unintended consequences of this policy on graduate programs and graduate students. The resulting draft was shared with the Directors of Graduate Studies (DGS) and Program Directors (PD) at divisional meetings in early March. The intent was

to follow this with a comment period open to all graduate faculty and then to incorporate feedback from the DGSs, PDs, and graduate faculty into the next draft. However, the Council was concerned that the graduate faculty would not have the time nor the proper context to fully consider the proposed policy during the COVID-19 public health crisis. Therefore, the Council postponed further work on the policy until fall 2020.

Throughout the year, the Council also received updates on broader issues and initiatives at LGS, such as changes to Professional Development Support Funds, a new policy on Rescinding an Offer of Admission, a clarifying Statement on Digital Dissertations Components added to the LGS Handbook, and more recently, discussion of the ramifications of the COVID-19 public health crisis on students and on LGS deadlines and policies.

Student Affairs

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as countries closed borders and implemented travel restrictions, the Laney Graduate School worked closely with Emory's Office of Global Strategy and Initiatives and the 45+ LGS programs to identify, support, or assist every LGS student across the globe.

LGS worked closely with programs to find solutions for students impacted by the pandemic. This included support services, instructional resources, and guidance ranging from technological needs to increased health and wellness events.

LGS also adjusted milestone deadlines such as candidacy to accommodate new research timelines and realities. Specifically, LGS Student Affairs was instrumental in routing and supporting the administration of the Emory Forward fund to support student needs related to the pandemic.

Finally, LGS expanded its pre-orientation Canvas site and its first remote orientation. This online work was completed in time to welcome and onboard our new Assistant Dean of Student Affairs, Dr. Jennifer Cason.

International Students and English Language Support Program (ELSP)

LGS continues to work closely with Emory partners and organizations, particularly the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), to advocate for policies that support international students. Such policies range from studying remotely or deferring admissions to support academic progress. ELSP's adjusted course schedules and trained faculty on remote teaching strategies accommodated learners from around the globe.

Flexible office hours were held to accommodate the needs of international students. ELSP hosted remote events to include the International Student Orientation, the International Welcome Reception, and international coffee hours.

Additionally, ELSP developed new, specialized workshops for multilingual students to advance remote communication and presentation skills.

Laney EDGE

Fall 2019 ushered in the largest group of Centennial Scholars and WiNS (Women in Natural Sciences) Fellowship recipients for LGS. Laney EDGE hosted several in-person celebrations to acknowledge these new scholars and other scholars from historically underrepresented groups in graduate education. Also, in September 2019, Laney EDGE hosted its first preview visitation, Learning about Laney. This inaugural event hosted over 40 prospective graduate students from historically underrepresented groups in graduate education. These programs, along with opportunities to engage with the EDGE community at large, were geared to continue throughout the spring 2020 term. The impact of COVID-19 and the transition to remote learning called for creativity and adjustments in how scholars would be supported and celebrated. Laney EDGE implemented virtual events, celebrations and promoted student achievements via social media and the web.

As isolation became the norm, Laney EDGE scholars' feedback indicated that our students missed the sense of belonging and community previously received from their race, ethnicity, and gender affinity groups. To address isolation and other well-being issues, Laney EDGE and LGS Office of Professional Development and Career Planning created virtual "Fireside Chats." The fireside chats were conducted in alignment with the strategic directions from Emory University's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

During fall 2019, Laney EDGE hosted the inaugural Learning About Laney: Preview Visitation Weekend. This two-day, in-person visit was designed to familiarize potential LGS scholars from historically underrepresented groups in graduate education with our graduate programs, faculty, staff, and current scholars while providing insight into the life of a PhD scholar. These visiting scholars were chosen in partnership with the DGS, Directors, and recruiters of each of the participating doctoral programs.

Lastly, under the stewardship of Associate Dean, Dr. Amanda Marie James, LGS nominated the first cohort of scholars to the National Bouchet Graduate Honor Society in Spring 2020.

The 2020 National Bouchet Graduate Honor Society Scholars include:

- Jamie Hamilton –Advisor: Curtis Henry
- Sandra Mendiola – Advisors: Nicole Gerardo, Dave Civitello
- Raphiel Burden – Advisors: Benjamin Risk, Renee Moore
- Frederica Lamar- Advisor: Matthew Freeman
- Tatenda Mangurenje- Advisor: Peter Brown

Professional Development and Career Planning

The Professional Development and Career Planning team, under the leadership of Assistant Dean, Dr. Robert Pearson, maintained a high level of engagement with students and faculty while also pivoting all of its activities to an online format.

LGS was proud of the contributions of Teaching Assistants (TA) and Graduate Instructors (GI) to Emory's virtual and health and safety adapted in-person ecosystem of teaching and learning. LGS TAs and GIs navigated entirely new challenges and moved forward during long stretches of uncertainty while demonstrating an unwavering commitment to their students. Many of them opted into special trainings in teaching and learning.

Professional Development and Career Planning redoubled its commitment to preparing students for the range of diverse careers available to them, specifically in a new virtual environment. Group trainings and workshops featured numerous speakers who brought expertise in working with graduate students.

Admissions

The public health measures associated with the pandemic gained real force just as the admissions season for fall 2020 was in its final phase.

- LGS faced a succession of changes: the move to remote education, first for spring, then for summer, and eventually for fall; changes in the lives of new students, including travel restrictions; rapid changes in visa rules and regulations.
- We developed options for new students to defer or enroll remotely, and with ISSS supported new international students in a changing visa landscape.

LGS Advancement and Alumni Engagement (AAE)

The impact of COVID-19 created logistical and financial implications for many LGS community members, causing a unique set of challenges and a shift in priorities concerning alumni engagement efforts.

With a new focus on engaging alumni support to help LGS students navigate the trying times of the pandemic --with minimal disruption to their academic progress-- AAE worked in partnership with Emory University to provide support to our graduate community in various ways:

- The Emory Together Fund assisted with emergency needs. The added support of our alumni and donors helped to amplify efforts to provide funds for food, housing, health, travel, remote learning, family, and other COVID-19-related expenses.
- Student Hardship Funds provided additional funds to students facing extreme financial hardships.

As a result of increased engagement with alumni through virtual events, social media campaigns, direct messages, and an increased online format, alumni played an essential role in supporting the LGS community during the most extraordinary times of uncertainty.

Moving Forward

During our centennial year, LGS activities were sparked by the phrase, *It Starts With One*. The essence of that phrase holds true now more than ever. Although still faced with a journey ahead, LGS students, faculty, and staff continued to demonstrate a full range of

accomplishments. Together our collective efforts and dedication advanced the Laney Graduate School's mission and contributions to our great research university.

Faculty and staff devoted tremendous time and energy to student progress. In addition, students and staff supporting our graduate community achieved extraordinary strides that defined our shared graduate project. Work and effort generously given allowed us to continue and persevere with research, teaching, clinical care, and community outreach during this pandemic.

Thank you, again, for all you do for graduate education at Emory.

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