

SPRING 2026 REPORT

University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Graduate Student Organization (GSO)

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UNIVERSITY of LOUISIANA LAFAYETTE | Graduate Student Organization

PREFACE

The following report identifies areas that the Graduate Student Organization (GSO) in partnership with others at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette (faculty, staff, student organizations, and campus offices) can continue to develop to sustain our graduate students.

Our goal is to **raise awareness** of the role of GSO in advocating, funding, and communicating with and for graduate students to address the issues that they face throughout their graduate education.

Thus, this report will add value to the ongoing University-wide discussion on how to **better support graduate students** to develop professionally.

Using real student responses, this report also strives to **provide a platform for unheard graduate student voices**, candidly sharing ideas and sentiments that may otherwise never find an audience.

Lastly, the Organization has needed to adapt from 2020-2021, and our Department Representatives and Executive Board have put in more work than ever before to increase the Organization's profile and grow operations.

ORGANIZATION INTRODUCTION

All graduate students at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette are automatically members of the Graduate Student Organization (GSO).

We are here to advocate for you! The GSO supports graduate students in several ways:

Advocacy

One of the most important things we do is to represent the needs and concerns of our members to the university administration. The GSO president serves on the University Graduate Council, the Graduate Appeals Committee, as well as other administrative committees the Dean of Graduate School deems appropriate. Student representatives from graduate departments meet each semester to discuss issues that are important to graduate students.

Funding

Graduate students know that conducting research and presenting at conferences puts a strain on our limited budgets. The GSO uses student-assessed fees to help offset the cost of research and travel-related expenses! We also provide one-time grants for purchasing thesis, dissertation, or project supplies.

Communication

The GSO is one of many important relays to get vital information to graduate students. Check out Facebook and this website often for the latest GSO information. Your representative is also a reliable source of information. Find your representative here!

If there is an issue that you would like to see the GSO address, or if you are interested in helping, please do not hesitate to contact us at gso@louisiana.edu.

Like us on Facebook and Instagram.

GSO General Council Participation

- Maintained **100% occupancy** on the Executive Board since Fall 2022:
  - Clement Tochukwu Okolo – President (August 2022)
  - Reem Ahmed – Vice President (Spring 2026)
  - Mohamed Ghoneim – Treasurer (Fall 2025)
  - Mahek Pahek– PR Officer (Fall 2025)
  - Michael Pellerin – Secretary (Spring 2026)

Spring 2025 Department Representatives Table

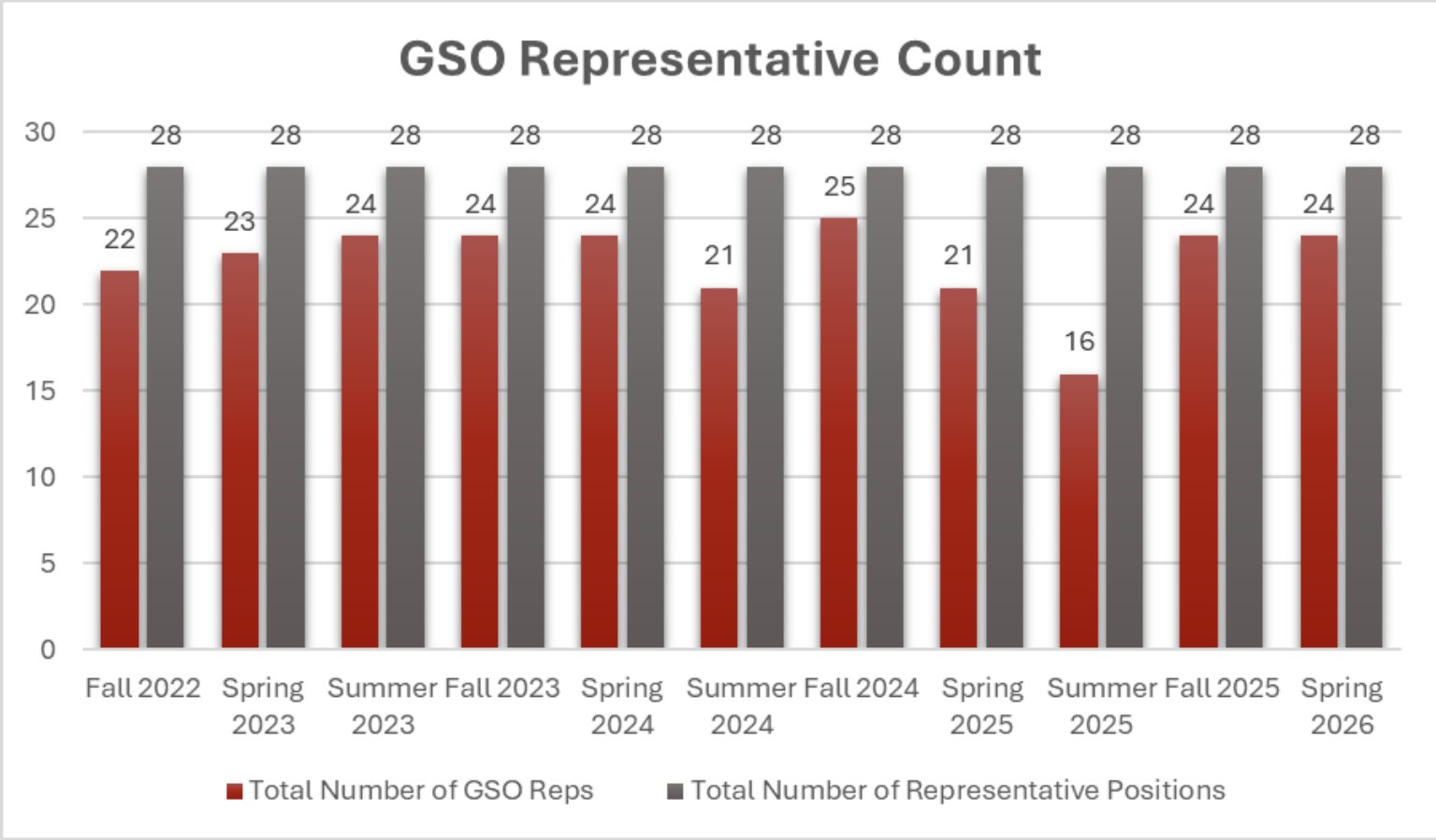
Department	Representative
Accounting (ACCN)	Vacant
Architecture (ARCH)	Ana C. Batista Duran
Biology (BIOL)	Eric Haddad
Business Administration (MBA)	Leah Pontiff
Chemical Engineering (CHEE)	Ryan Cook
Chemistry (CHEM)	Vacant
Civil Engineering (CIVE)	Sherbaz Khan
Communications (COMM)	Goodness Okhumode
Communicative Disorders (CODI)	Mary McMahon
Computing and Informatics (CMIX)	Samantha Fowler
Counselor Education (CNED)	Reem Ahmed
Criminal Justice (CJUS)	Michael Emmanuel Pellerin
Educational Curriculum Instruction (EDCI)	Vacant
Educational Foundations Leadership (EDFL)	Kevin Hislop
Electrical Engineering (EECE)	Mohamed Ghoneim
English (ENGL)	Yazdan Mahmoudi
Geosciences (GEOS)	Precious Batubo
History (HIST)	Sawyer Coco
Industrial Technology (ITEC)	MD Sayem Bin Kashem
Kinesiology (KINE)	Marzia Iffat Jahan
Mathematics (MATH)	Lovelyn Madu
Mechanical Engineering (MECH)	Md Saiful Islam
Modern Languages (MODL)	Chiraz Amani
Music (MUSC)	Elaine Dean

Nursing (NURS)	Justin Fontenot
Petroleum Engineering (PETE)	Silver Damigoru
Physics (PHYS)	Vacant
Psychology (PSYC)	Maria Lindquist

Key:

Vacant Departments	Departments which received funding

Note: Departments without a representative are not eligible for funding. The following departments requested funding but were ineligible due to a vacant representative position: .



Vacancy

- The Departments of **Accounting (ACCN), Chemistry (CHEM), Educational Curriculum Instruction (EDCL), and Physics (PHYS)** have been unrepresented for over a year.
- **Other Vacancies:** Nursing (NURS); Kinesiology (KINE).
- With **~86% of GSO representative positions filled**, GSO has made strong progress in strengthening its leadership structure. Filling the remaining vacancies, particularly in mostly online departments, will further ensure inclusive representation and strengthen our collective advocacy efforts.

SPRING 2026 GSO Graduates

- Michael Pellerin (CJUS)
- Goodness Okhumode (COMM)
- Kevin Hislop (EDFL)
- Kevin Torgersen (BIOL)
- Asif Istiak (MECH)
- Precious Batubo (GEOS)*
- Maria Lindquist (PSYC)*
- Leah Pontiff (MBA)*
- Lovelyn Madu (MATH)*

Note: Names with an asterisk (*) are the graduating department representatives that do not have a replacement currently.



GSO Graduating Representatives (left to right): Maria Lindquist (PSYC), Kevin Torgersen (BIOL), Ryan Cook (CHEM; graduating Summer 2026), Kevin Hislop (EDFL), Lovelyn Madu (MATH).





Graduating Representatives with Faculty Advisor Dr. David Khey and the GSO Executive Board.

Advocacy



Dr. Ramesh Kolluru at the GSO General Meeting

Addressing Student Concerns

The Graduate Student Organization (GSO) systematically gathered and analyzed graduate student feedback to identify key barriers affecting student experience and success. Primary concerns included funding for new

and continuing students, stipend competitiveness, reinstatement of the Doctoral Hooding Ceremony, parking accessibility, and feedback regarding the combined Doctoral Candidacy and Honors Recognition Ceremony.

To address these priorities, GSO implemented a targeted advocacy strategy centered on direct engagement with senior university leadership. This approach established a stronger and more consistent channel of communication between graduate students and university decision-makers.

GSO President Clement T. Okolo met with President Dr. Ramesh Kolluru to present these concerns, strengthening institutional alignment and responsiveness. This engagement was further expanded when President Kolluru attended GSO's Third General Meeting, providing graduate student representatives with a direct forum to ask questions, share experiences, and discuss key issues.

In addition, GSO leadership actively participated in the Graduate Student Success and Retention Committee. During these discussions, President Clement Okolo and Vice President Reem H. Ahmed introduced a peer support program model informed by counseling best practices and tailored to current graduate student needs. The proposal received strong support from committee members as a viable strategy to enhance student support and retention.

Advocacy Outcome

GSO's advocacy efforts led to the successful reinstatement of the Doctoral Hooding Ceremony, restoring a significant academic tradition that recognizes the culmination of doctoral achievement. The initiative also extends participation to Fall 2025 graduates, reinforcing the institution's commitment to student recognition and milestone celebration.

GSO Events and Profession Development

- ## Stay Up & Write with the Writing Lab

A new initiative this semester expanded this GSO program through a strategic collaboration with the Writing Lab, embedding two tutors into three evening writing sessions to provide on-site support with writing, brainstorming, and revision.

The initiative demonstrated strong impact, with consistent attendance and peak engagement in the final session, indicating growing demand. By integrating academic support into a structured environment, the program enhanced graduate student productivity and reduced barriers to focused work.

Key performance indicators include delivery of three sessions staffed by two tutors each, steady participation with increasing turnout, increased utilization of Writing Lab services, and positive student feedback on tutoring support and peer accountability. Evening scheduling (7–9 PM) improved accessibility, while the collaboration established a scalable cross-unit model aligned with student success priorities.



GSO Students at Stay Up & Write, calmly reading and writing



Writing Lab tutor assisting a student



Graduate Student Studying

- **Grant Writing Workshop:**

A panel of grant-awarded professors**, including Dr. Erika LeBlanc (Counseling), Dr. Taylor Clement (English), and Dr. Sharon Hei (School of Computing and Informatics)** was convened to guide graduate students through the grant writing process. Panelists shared practical strategies for developing competitive proposals, identifying funding opportunities, and strengthening applications for successful outcomes.

The session was highly interactive, with strong attendance and active participant engagement, underscoring significant interest in research funding and professional development among graduate students.



GSO Grant Writing Workshop faculty panel in conversation with graduate students (left to right): Dr. Erika LeBlanc (Counseling), Dr. Sharon Hei (CMIX), and Dr. Taylor Clement (English)



Graduate Students at the Grant Writing Workshop

- **Resume Writing Workshop:**
  This event was a successful collaboration between the Graduate Student Organization (GSO) and the MBA Association (MBAA). It was attended by graduate students and employer representatives from CGI and Stuller, Inc. The workshop began with a 20–30 minute presentation on resume best practices, followed by individualized resume reviews, providing participants with tailored feedback to strengthen their applications and improve their competitiveness in the job market.



Poster of the Resume Writing Workshop

- **The BIG Event**

  GSO partnered with the Graduate School to establish the **"Graduate School Flock"** for The BIG Event on March 28, the University's largest annual day of community service. This collaboration resulted in a record-breaking 52 graduate student registrations, representing more than double the level of participation seen in previous years.

  Graduate students were assigned to two neighborhood cleanup sites, where they worked alongside Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. Mary Farmer-Kaiser, and peers from academic programs across campus. The initiative provided graduate students with an opportunity to engage directly with the local community while strengthening connections across disciplines and fostering a shared culture of service.

  The strong turnout and enthusiastic participation demonstrated a significant increase in graduate student engagement in university-wide service initiatives. The event not only enhanced the visibility of graduate students within the broader campus community, but also **reinforced GSO's commitment to leadership, civic engagement, and community impact at UL Lafayette.**



Graduate School Flock at the Big Event 2026

- **Scavenger Hunt**

  As part of Graduate Student Appreciation Week (March 23–27), GSO organized a campus-wide Scavenger Hunt designed to increase graduate student engagement and awareness of key campus resources and services. Participants competed individually or in teams by following interactive clues to locations across campus, scanning QR codes to retrieve keywords, and submitting photos through an online platform.

  The initiative **encouraged graduate students to actively explore campus spaces and connect with essential support services**, including the Writing Lab and the Campus Cupboard, reinforcing GSO's commitment to student success and resource accessibility.

  The event received five complete submissions, including three individual entries and two team entries. All participants who completed the scavenger hunt were entered into a raffle for a gift basket sponsored by the Graduate School, further promoting participation and community engagement.

  The raffle drawing took place during GSO's second General Meeting on March 27,

where team participants **Evangeline Han (English, Ph.D. Student) and Marjorie Padilha (CODI, Ph.D. student)** were announced as the winners. The winners were also recognized publicly during the Louisiana Impact Research Summit and the Graduate Student Appreciation Week closing events, providing additional visibility for graduate student involvement and achievement.

The scavenger hunt successfully fostered cross-campus engagement, strengthened awareness of student support resources, and contributed to a more connected graduate student experience at UL Lafayette.



GSO Scavenger Hunt raffle winners (left to right): Evangeline Han and Marjorie Padilha pictured with GSO President Okolo, Public Relations Officer Mahek P., and Representative Michael P.

- **Raising Cane's Fundraiser Event**

On March 17 (St. Patrick's Day), GSO partnered with Raising Cane's for a fundraising initiative designed to increase graduate student engagement while building community partnerships. Participants supported the event by placing orders in person, through the drive-thru, or via the mobile app and mentioning "GSO" at checkout. Those who uploaded receipts through a QR code were

entered into a raffle for a Raising Cane's gift basket, awarded during GSO's second General Meeting to Allison Abel.

While last spring's partnership generated a **$100** contribution for GSO, this spring's event did not meet the sales threshold required for a direct monetary payout. Following the event, Raising Cane's expressed continued support for GSO through future in-kind contributions, including donated drinks, door prizes, and raffle baskets for graduate student events and initiatives.

These partnerships remain valuable to GSO's mission of enhancing the graduate student experience at UL Lafayette through community engagement, event support, and expanded student programming opportunities.



Graduate School Staff supporting GSO at Caine's



Left: Gift baskets provided for the Raising Cane's and Scavenger Hunt raffles.
Right: GSO Public Relations Executive pictured with the Raising Cane's raffle gift basket.

- **Graduate Student T-Shirt Design Contest**

  GSO successfully organized a campus-wide T-shirt Design Competition to create a new design that represents graduate students and reflects campus heritage in a professional and engaging way. The competition was open to all graduate students and generated strong interest across campus.

  A total of six original designs were submitted, demonstrating student creativity and involvement. To ensure broad student participation, all submissions were shared with graduate students through a Microsoft Forms voting campaign. The initiative achieved significant engagement, receiving **256 total votes**, reflecting strong community participation and enthusiasm for the project.

  The winning design, created by **Morteza Bodaghi, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Mechanical Engineering**, received **70 votes** and emerged as the clear student favorite.

  Following the competition, GSO launched an online T-shirt sale featuring the winning design. The initiative was highly successful, with **79 shirts sold and $395 raised**, representing a **172% increase in revenue** compared to Spring 2025, when $145 was raised.

  Overall, the competition and subsequent merchandise sale strengthened graduate

student engagement, increased campus visibility for GSO, and created a stronger sense of community and representation among graduate students.



The winning GSO T-shirt design created by Morteza Bodaghi, Ph.D. student in Mechanical Engineering.

Funding

Application Trends for the GSO Applications in recent Semesters:

a. 2020-2021 Academic year – **86** Applications
b. Summer 2023 – **13** applications
c. Fall 2023 – **74** applications
d. Spring 2024 – **64** applications
e. Summer 2024 – **16** applications
f. Fall 2024 – **83** applications
g. Spring 2025 – **95** applications
h. Summer 2025 – **17** applications
i. Fall 2025 - **82** applications
j. Spring 2026 – **88** applications

- In **Spring 2026,** the number of applications (88), the second highest number of applications we have received in the last six (6) academic years. Six (6) of these were duplicated submissions due to being initially incomplete, and two

(2) for GSO operations

- **Out of the remaining 80 applications, we did not fund 11 applications** for the following reasons:
    - 2 applicants submitted an incomplete application
    - 2 applicants withdrew their applications
    - 3 applicants have access to departmental funds
    - 1 travel application was for a conference in July rendering ineligible for Spring 2026.
    - 2 applicants requested items we could not fund, for example gas money and hard drives.
    - 1 applicant requested funds for a conference where the applicant's paper was rejected

- For FY 2025–2026, GSO's initial approved budget of **$19,560** was increased to **$38,532** following strategic discussions between GSO President Clement Okolo and UL Lafayette CFO Dr. Edwin Litolff, in collaboration with the Graduate School and the GSO Council. This **~97% increase** significantly **enhanced GSO's capacity to support graduate student research, conference participation, and professional development, strengthening student success, scholarly productivity, and the university's R1 research mission**.
- Of the funds awarded for Summer 2025 and Fall 2025, **$4,157** remained unreimbursed. To maximize resource utilization and student impact, these supplemental funds were redistributed as follows:
    - $2,660.48 (64%) in the Travel funds category
    - $997.68 (24%) in the research funds category
    - $415.70 (10%) in the professional development category
    - $83.14 (2%) in the programming category
- Our initial Spring 2026 semester budget was **$18,612.93**, funded by student fees, but by the end of the semester we had allocated an additional **30% for graduate students**, bringing the total to **$23,430.26**. This amount was used to fund **69 applications ($23,038.26)** and **1 application ($392.00)** for GSO operations.
- The total of $23,420.26 was distributed across three funding cycles:
    - General Meeting 1: **$5,895**
    - General Meeting 2: **$6,362.40**

    - General Meeting 3: **$7,171.17** plus extra funding
    - Extra funding for Meetings 1 and 2 applicants totaled **$4,001.69**.
- The total amount requested this semester is **$31,826.08** (**$31,434.08** by department plus **$392** for GSO Operations).

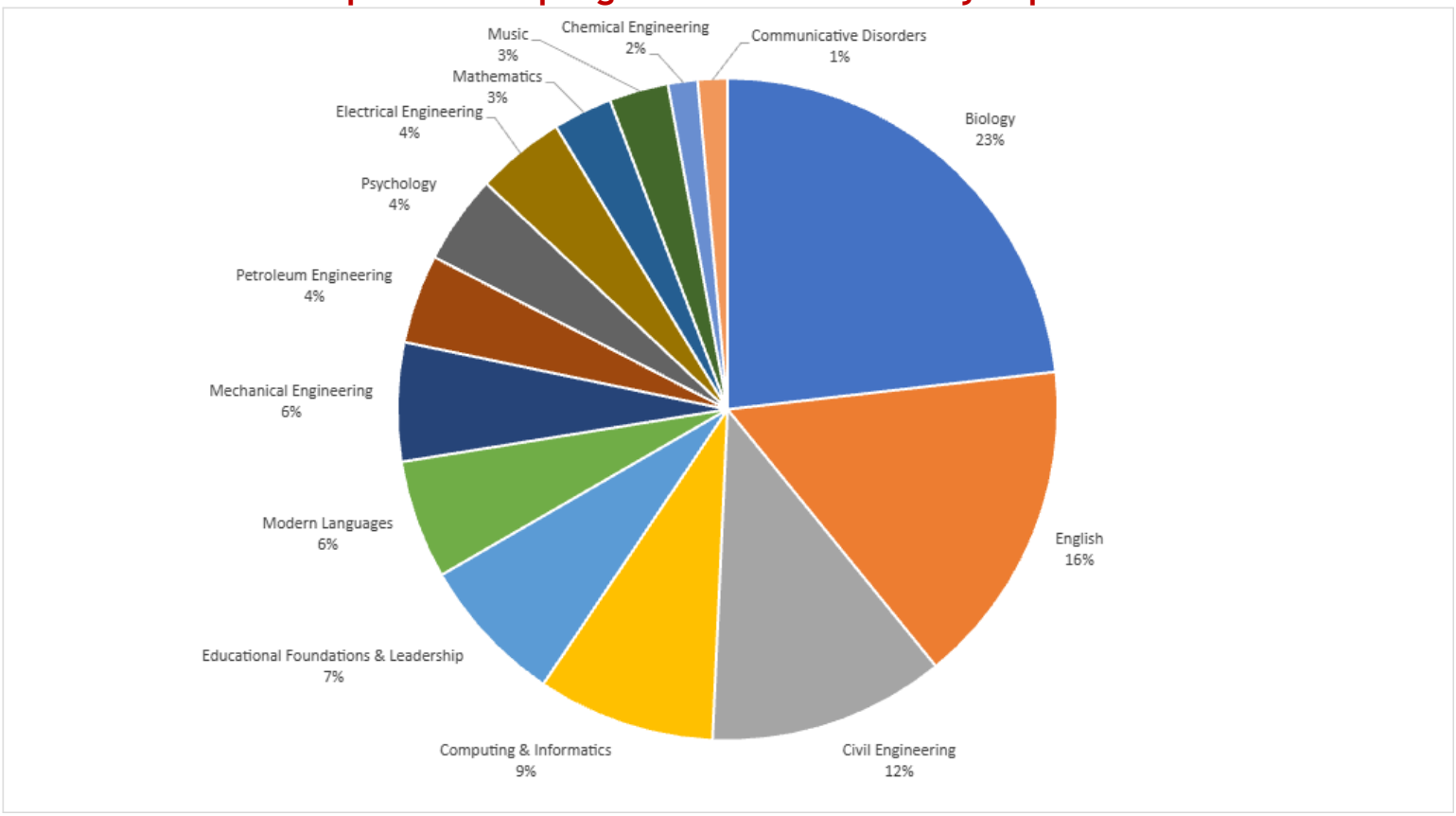
- The following departments were not funded either due to **lack of representation or funding request**:
    - Accounting (ACCN)
    - Architecture (ARCH)
    - Chemistry (CHEM)
    - Communications (COMM)
    - Counselor Education (CNED)
    - Criminal Justice (CJUS)
    - Educational Curriculum Instruction (EDCI)
    - Geosciences (GEOS)
    - History (HIST)
    - Industrial Technology (ITECH)
    - Kinesiology (KINE)
    - Nursing (NURS)
    - Physics (PHYS)

GSO Spring 2026 Funding Table

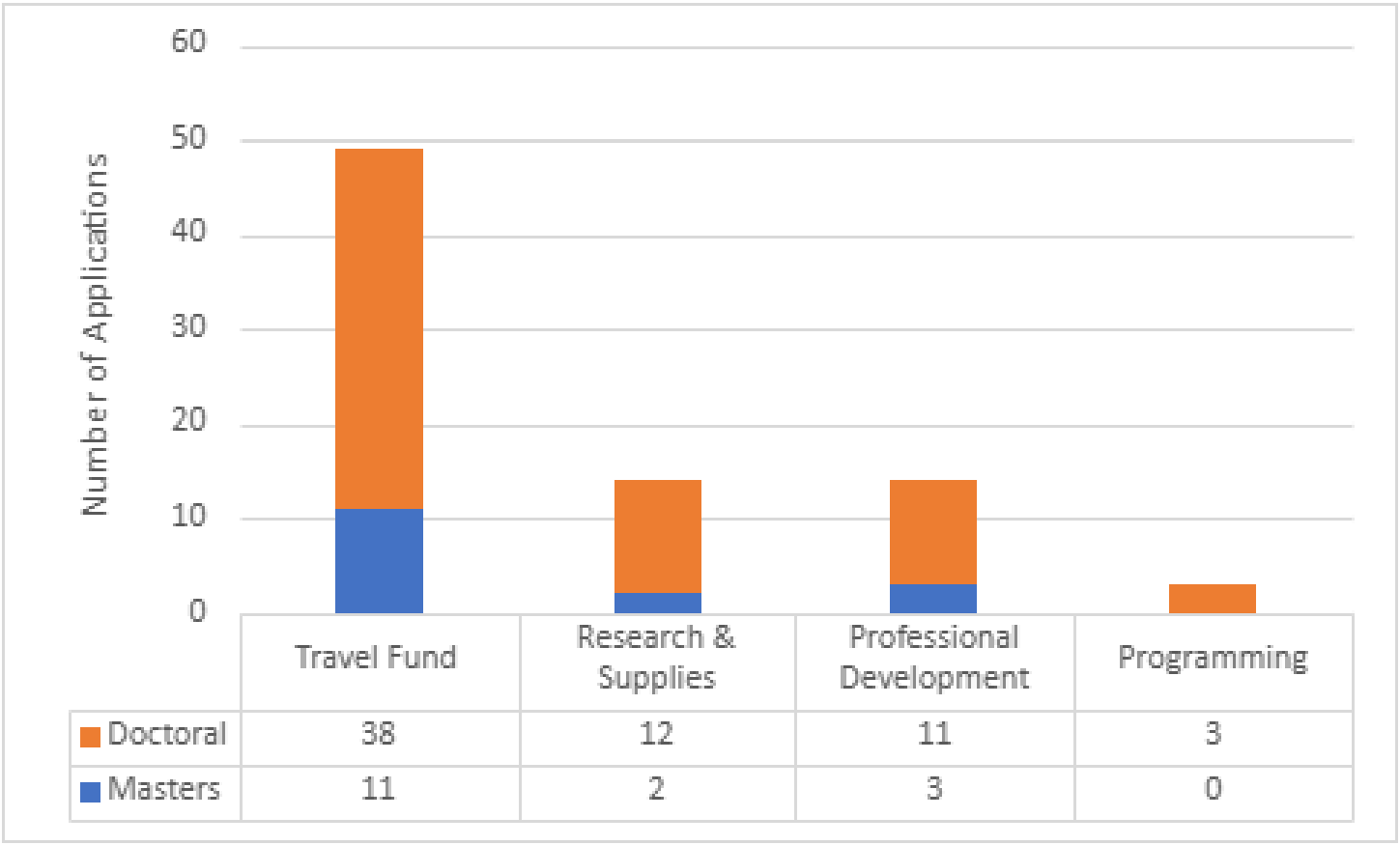
DEPTS	TRAVEL		RESEARCH		PROF. DEV.		PROG	TOTAL FUNDED		TOTAL REQ.	
	W/ Duties	W/O Duties	Supplies	Printing	Fees	Exams		(#)	($)	(#)	($)
ACCN	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ARCH	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BIOL	12	-	7	-	1	-	-	16	5258.18	20	7787
MBA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CHEE	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	140	1	140
CHEM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CIVE	4	1	-	-	-	3	-	8	4169.59	8	5510.22
COMM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CODI	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	300	2	800
CMIX	4	1	-	-	1	-	-	6	2131.77	6	2131.77
CNED	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
CJUS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EDCI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EDFL	1	1	-	3	-	-	-	5	969.46	5	969.46
EECE	2	-	-	-	3	-	-	3	88.50	5	688.50
ENGL	7	1	-	-	2	-	3	11	3597.59	13	5411.6
GEOS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
HIST	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
ITEC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
KINE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
MATH	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1279.15	2	1633.56
MCHE	3	-	-	1	-	1		4	1617.43	5	2260.15
MODL	1	-	1	-	3	-	-	4	871.59	5	1286.82
MUSC	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	800	2	800
NURS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PETE	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	740	3	940
PHYS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PSYC	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1075	3	1075
TOTAL	**45**	**4**	**8**	**6**	**10**	**4**	**3**	**69**	**23038.26**	**80**	**31434.08**

Total apps: 80 Total requested funds: **$31,434.08** Total eligible requested funds: **$23,038.26**

Composition of Spring 2026 Allocated Funds by Department

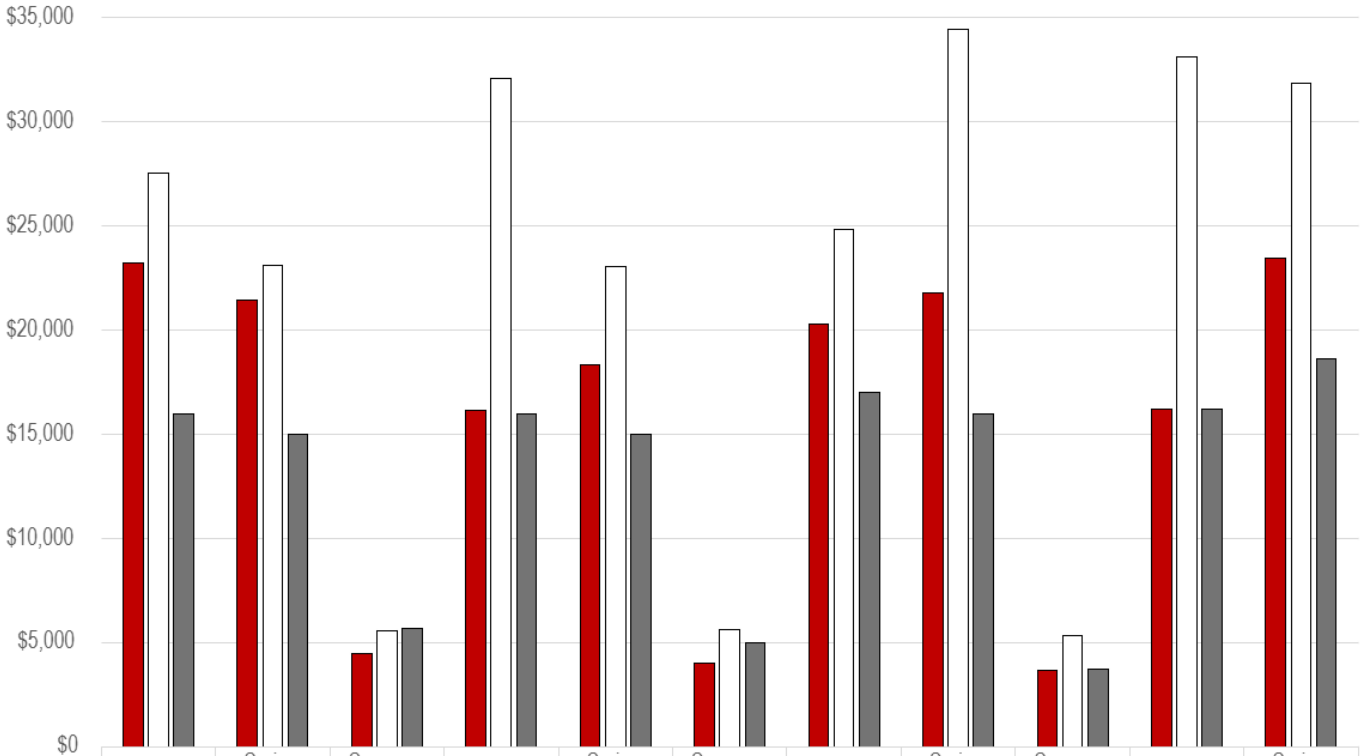


Composition of Spring 2026 Applications



	Travel Fund	Research & Supplies	Professional Development	Programming
Doctoral	38	12	11	3
Masters	11	2	3	0

Total Funding Requests Across the Past Years



	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Summer 2023	Fall 2023	Spring 2024	Summer 2024	Fall 2024	Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Fall 2025	Spring 2026
Total Funded	$23,240.00	$21,419.88	$4,457.86	$16,154.82	$18,307.24	$4,000.00	$20,257.97	$21,791.00	$3,662.00	$16,218.80	$23,430.26
Total Requested Funds	$27,535.00	$23,082.88	$5,563.86	$32,057.98	$23,023.92	$5,600.00	$24,806.97	$34,427.80	$5,342.00	$33,118.52	$31,826.08
Initial Budget	$16,000.00	$15,000.00	$5,700.00	$16,000.00	$15,000.00	$5,000.00	$17,000.00	$16,000.00	$3,700.00	$16,219.07	$18,612.93

Other Photos Through the Semester



GSO Executive Board welcomed Spring 26 Graduate Assistants and Fellow at the Orientation



GSO President Clement Okolo with SGA President Onyeka at the 2026 Mardi Gras King's Day Parade