

ACUI Region VII Grad & Grow Institute 2026

August 5, 2026 | Rutgers University–New Brunswick & Daemen University

The Grad & Grow Institute is designed to support graduate students and emerging professionals as they develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to thrive in higher education and beyond. Participants may follow a recommended track based on experience level or select sessions that best meet their professional development needs.

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM

Coffee & Conversation

Start the day by connecting with colleagues, meeting fellow participants, and engaging in informal networking before the institute begins.

9:00 AM – 10:00 AM

Welcome & Opening Session

Kick off the day with a welcome from host institutions and an opening keynote focused on professional growth, leadership, and maximizing the graduate student experience.

10:00 AM – 11:00 AM

First-Year Graduate Student Track

Supervision: Managing Undergraduate Student Staff Transitioning from peer to supervisor can be challenging. This session explores how graduate students can establish credibility, build trust, set expectations, and balance mentorship with accountability while supervising undergraduate employees.

Second-Year & Beyond Graduate Student Track

Developing New Staff Training & Onboarding Resources Learn strategies for creating effective onboarding and training experiences that help new student employees feel prepared, connected, and confident from day one while continuing to challenge and develop returning staff members.

Professional Staff & Graduate Supervisors Track

Roundtable: Hot Topics in Student Affairs Engage in facilitated discussion around emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities impacting student affairs and higher education today.

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

First-Year Graduate Student Track

Communication: Delegation & Difficult Conversations Strong communication is essential for effective leadership. Participants will explore strategies for delegating responsibilities, communicating expectations clearly, and navigating difficult conversations with professionalism and confidence.

Second-Year & Beyond Graduate Student Track

Grad Life: Managing Up Discover practical approaches for building productive relationships with supervisors and colleagues, communicating needs effectively, and navigating workplace dynamics while maintaining professionalism.

Professional Staff & Graduate Supervisors Track

How to Remain Strategically Adaptable in a Changing Higher Education Landscape Explore approaches for leading through uncertainty, responding to institutional change, and maintaining flexibility while supporting staff and students in evolving environments.

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Lunch & Career Hour

Participants will have the opportunity to engage with higher education professionals and career development resources while enjoying lunch.

Career Hour Opportunities

- Resume Review
- Interview Tips
- Grad to Career Transition
- Budgeting and Salary Negotiation
- ACUI Involvement/Professional Development Beyond Grad School
- Ask Me Anything (AMA) with Higher Education Professionals
- Table Topics Networking Conversations

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM

All Participants Session

Creating an Inclusive Staff Environment: Staff Development & Team Building

Building an inclusive and supportive workplace begins with intentional staff development. This session focuses on fostering positive team culture, strengthening collaboration, creating opportunities for growth, and developing environments where all team members can thrive.

2:00 PM – 3:00 PM

First-Year Graduate Student Track

Imposter Syndrome Many graduate students and emerging professionals experience feelings of self-doubt despite their accomplishments. This session explores the causes of imposter syndrome and provides practical strategies for building confidence, resilience, and self-awareness.

Second-Year & Beyond Graduate Student Track

Career Development & Life After Graduation Prepare for the transition into full-time professional life by exploring career readiness, interviewing strategies, networking, workplace expectations, financial wellness, and work-life balance.

Professional Staff & Graduate Supervisors Track

Supervising Graduate Student Workers & Graduate Assistants Graduate students often balance professional responsibilities, academic demands, and personal commitments simultaneously. This session examines best practices for supervising, mentoring, and supporting graduate student employees while fostering autonomy and professional growth.

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM

First-Year Graduate Student Track

Grad Life: Boundaries Maintaining healthy boundaries is critical to long-term success and well-being. Participants will explore strategies for managing workload, setting expectations around availability, protecting personal time, and preventing burnout.

Second-Year & Beyond Graduate Student Track

Professional Identity: Building Confidence Develop a stronger sense of professional identity by exploring personal strengths, leadership styles, communication practices, and opportunities for continued growth and development.

Professional Staff & Graduate Supervisors Track

Staff Accountability Accountability is an important component of student employee development. This session focuses on creating clear expectations, addressing performance concerns, and using coaching and feedback to foster growth and responsibility among student staff members.

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Closing Session

Reflect on key takeaways from the day, celebrate new connections, and identify actionable next steps for continued professional growth and development.