

Michael Cunningham joins President's Cabinet as graduate student representative

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Michael Cunningham, associate provost for graduate studies and research, a Suzanne and Stephen Weiss Presidential Fellow and professor in the Department of Psychology, joins the President's Cabinet as the graduate student representative. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

President Michael Fitts has added a longtime university administrator to his Cabinet to ensure that the needs, opportunities and contributions of postgraduate students are represented at the highest level of university leadership. Chaired by the president, the Cabinet consists of senior leaders who advise him.

“When anyone talks about Tulane students, I want them to say Tulane students — undergraduate, graduate and professional – because those three groups are very distinct, and have very distinct experiences at Tulane,” said Cunningham, associate provost for graduate studies and research, a Suzanne and Stephen Weiss Presidential Fellow, and professor in the Department of Psychology.

Graduate and professional students represent between 35% to 45% of students. Every year the number of first-year graduate and professional students is equal to or greater than the number of first-year undergraduates. Cunningham’s work with the [Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies](#) and the [Graduate Studies Student Association](#) has helped him identify the common issues faced by this growing and essential portion of Tulane’s population.

“We are grateful that we have a veteran Tulane leader like Michael Cunningham to advise us on how we can best enhance the educational experience, opportunities and personal growth of our graduate and professional students,” Tulane President Michael Fitts said.

“Mike is a tireless supporter of, and advocate for, our graduate students, and has been, for many years, a trusted advisor on a wide variety of issues across all of academic affairs,” said Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Robin Forman. “I am confident that Mike’s addition to the Cabinet will enrich our conversations, and help guide us to better decisions that benefit all of our students, and everyone else engaged in the academic enterprise.”

Cunningham says he is looking forward to working even closer with the Office of Student Affairs, whose vice president is also a Cabinet member, to provide and coordinate resources specific to graduate and professional students.

“Graduate education at Tulane is very decentralized. Unlike the undergraduate students, who all belong to Newcomb-Tulane College, graduate students get admitted through the individual schools, so sometimes they don't know what's available to them,” Cunningham said.

Cunningham’s new role on the Cabinet will also give him the opportunity to take a closer look at the academic mission and the specific experiences of students within various graduate degree programs. He also envisions facilitating more collaboration between graduate programs.

“I would like to have an onboarding session where our new graduate students are welcomed. We have an undergraduate convocation, but the first-year graduate and professional students are just welcomed within the individual schools, so it takes some time for them to realize they're part of the larger university. Making their experience special is important. I want them to leave Tulane thinking of themselves as an alum of Tulane, not just the school.”