

In a rapidly evolving educational landscape, the role of leaders is pivotal in shaping the experiences of graduate students. Tracy Baynard, the new Associate Vice Provost for Graduate Education at UMass Boston, offers a glimpse into her vision and goals for the Graduate Education Office, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The interview begins with Tracy highlighting the multifaceted nature of her role. From overseeing graduate student appointments to collaborating with the director of finances and the assistant dean, her responsibilities extend to various facets of graduate education. Tracy emphasizes the importance of being aware of every aspect that touches a graduate student, even if the Graduate Education Office doesn't directly manage it. This holistic approach showcases a commitment to providing comprehensive support for graduate students. One significant aspect of Tracy's vision for the Graduate Education Office is the expansion of professional development opportunities. Acknowledging the diverse needs of graduate students, Tracy envisions workshops, seminars, and other formats focusing on essential elements like writing dissertations, collecting data, and building a strong CV. Her emphasis on the benefits of having a graduate degree and reaching out to undergraduates reflects a strategic approach to promoting advanced education. Furthermore, Tracy expresses her desire to enhance community-building among graduate students. Recognizing the potential isolation within individual programs, she aims to foster networking opportunities, both within and beyond disciplines. Collaboration with units like the grad student government for targeted networking sessions demonstrates a commitment to creating a robust and supportive graduate student community.

As Tracy delves into her goals for the coming years, she underlines the need for growth in the Graduate Education Office. This growth involves not only expanding opportunities for graduate students but also improving internal processes for increased efficiency. The emphasis on supporting the Provost and the university in responding to graduate student needs aligns with the broader institutional goals. The conversation takes an interesting turn as Tracy discusses her background as a physician clinical exercise physiologist. Despite holding a leadership role, Tracy remains actively involved in research, showcasing a hands-on approach to academia. Her ongoing research in areas like multiple sclerosis and exercise training reflects a commitment to staying engaged with her scientific roots. The interview concludes with a reflection on the challenges posed by the rapidly changing professional landscape, particularly with the omnipresence of AI. Tracy sees the role of the Graduate Education Office as facilitating learning opportunities and discussions around these emerging technologies. By providing spaces for seminars, workshops, and events like the launch of the Paul English AI Institute, Tracy aims to keep the academic community abreast of industry needs.

In a final piece of advice, Tracy encourages students not to fear taking risks. Drawing from her own experiences, she emphasizes the importance of self-ownership and confidence-building. Her journey from a shy undergraduate to a confident leader exemplifies the transformative power of education and self-determination.