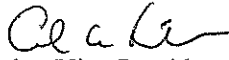January 23, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Carol Fierke
                 Provost and Executive Vice President

FROM: Karen Butler-Purry
                 Associate Provost

SUBJECT: Request to Establish a Graduate School

Vision 2020 recognized the importance of graduate education in achieving the university's aspirational goals. In particular, Imperative 2: Strengthen Our Graduate Programs states, "We must have a shift in our thinking about the role of graduate education to attain the level of excellence we desire. A substantially expanded graduate studies effort is critical to our academic aspiration and to our effectiveness as a great research university." As outlined below, there has been considerable progress toward this goal, and opportunities exist for further strides, still.

Following on one of the recommendations coming from the Academic Master Planning in 2009, a task force on the Graduate Experience was convened in December 2009. Its purpose was to identify a prioritized set of recommendations needed to enhance Texas A&M's graduate programs, thereby allowing us to meet the goals set in Vision 2020. The task force offered priorities and recommendations around three issues: (1) Quality of Life, (2) Practices: Compensations and Benefits, and (3) Professional Development. Over the next ten years, several major university investments were made and programs established to improve graduate student financial and programmatic support.

The Office of Graduate and Professional Studies (OGAPS) then gathered preliminary input to inform a decision on possible changes to the scope and structure of the university's graduate unit. To do so, OGAPS commissioned Hanover Research to perform a benchmarking analysis[1] of the structure of graduate units, program offerings, types of administrative staff in the unit, and graduate unit mission and focus at our Vision 2020 peer institutions. As of May 2018, ten of fourteen graduate units at Vision 2020 peer institutions have standalone graduate schools or colleges, and three have graduate divisions. Only one benchmarked institution—Georgia Institute of Technology—has a smaller "Office of Graduate Studies." Most benchmarked graduate units are decentralized. These units typically manage graduate admissions and student services but do not award degrees.

In Fall 2018, the Council of Principal Investigators (CPI) established three subcommittees, two of which identified issues related to graduate education. Specifically, findings were presented related to deficiencies in graduate student financial support, graduate program organization and structure, graduate education marketing, and incentives for graduate students to participate in interdisciplinary research. One of their recommendations was to establish a centralized graduate college.

To gather additional input, the Associate Provost for Graduate and Professional Studies, two members of her leadership team, and three faculty members (representing the CPI, Faculty Senate, and GOC Deans) made campus visits in Fall 2019 to the graduate units at the University of Texas at Austin, University of Michigan, and University of California Los Angeles. Feedback from CPI and the faculty participating in the campus visits supported forming a graduate school, noting that doing so would potentially (1) streamline programs, recruitment, and administrative processes; (2) enhance interdisciplinary efforts across colleges; (3) improve the student experience, particularly related to support, mentoring, and scholarship; and (4) improve diversity efforts, among other benefits. Also the faculty team expressed interest in maintaining the features of the current system where the process works well and benefits students and using the transition as a way to identify specific areas for improvement.

Moreover, benefits of a strong graduate education administration quoted from a 2019 Council of Graduate Schools publication entitled *The Organization and Administration of Graduate Education*[2] are stated below.

- Raises the profile of graduate programs on campus, communicating the value of graduate education to prospective students, the community, employers and funders.
- Helps create economies of scale when it comes to the administration and delivery of degree programs, potentially reducing costs, especially related to systems and technology.
- Promotes student success and well-being across programs and fosters collaborations among individual programs and disciplines.
- Helps to ensure consistency of policies and practices across graduate programs and may reduce the likelihood of legal challenges to administrative decisions.
- Collects and analyzes data to support university decisions, dissemination, and transparency about graduate education.
- Ensures strategic, comprehensive approaches to promoting student retention and success

Building on the aforementioned information and input, as well as feedback from the recent TAMU Strategic Plan discussions, I am requesting to shift the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies to a Graduate School model. To inform the transition, I propose to convene a task force to provide recommendations on the scope of the requested Graduate School. This process would also include addressing questions related to relationships among the Graduate School, colleges, and student services, such as admissions, career center, writing center, interdisciplinary degree programs, financial support and funding opportunities, and so on. The task force would include representatives from the GOC Deans, ABOC Deans, URC Deans, CPI, Faculty Senate, TAMUG, HSC, and GPSG.

References
1) Tamu.edu. (2019). *Vision 2020: Creating a Culture of Excellence.* [online] Available at: https://vision2020.tamu.edu/ [Accessed Jan. 23 2020].
2) Hanover (2018). *Graduate Unit Benchmarking report.* (May 2018)
3) Cgsnet.org. (2019). *The Organization and Administration of Graduate Education* | Council of Graduate Schools. [online] Available at: https://cgsnet.org/organization-and-administration-graduate-education-0 [Accessed Oct. 1 2019].