Dear Graduate and Professional School Students,

In September when I introduced myself to you as the new deputy provost for graduate education, I wrote that the success of our graduate programs at the University of Chicago relies on a collaborative effort among students, faculty, and staff. Reflecting on my experience as the first year of my term comes to an end, I am struck by just how important that collaboration is. Having open lines of communication with you has enabled us to identify specific graduate student needs and address them through expansion of existing services, development of new programs and services, and changes to policy. I have confidence that working together with your deans, deans of students, and faculty from across the academic divisions and schools, we can continue to improve the UChicago graduate student experience.

The University has made a broad, ongoing commitment to improving the graduate student experience. It has taken several forms in recent years, from increased financial and academic support to new social opportunities. There are still many areas where we want to make new strides, such as time to degree and career planning and placement. This email contains updates on several steps we have taken together in recent months as we address issues that you have identified as important:

- Graduate student survey
- Changes to graduate student parent policy
- Graduate forums on healthcare and childcare
- Graduate Student Affairs expanded services
- Family Resource Center increased hours
- Communication
- Student involvement

Please join me at Graduate Council on Monday, May 14, at 6:00 p.m. in Booth’s Harper Center (5807 S. Woodlawn), Lower Level, Room C09 or C10, where I look forward to talking with you about these updates and any other issues you may raise about your experience as UChicago graduate students.

Sincerely,

Debbie Nelson
Associate Professor of English and the College
Deputy Provost for Graduate Education

**Graduate student survey.** We had very good participation in the graduate student survey conducted earlier this year, and a summary report of the raw data from the survey is now available online [https://grad-education.uchicago.edu/pdfs/2012_Grad_Survey.pdf](https://grad-education.uchicago.edu/pdfs/2012_Grad_Survey.pdf). I hope the survey results, as well as subsequent reports based on this data, will catalyze thoughtful conversations among students, faculty, and staff as we identify and implement new graduate student initiatives.

**Changes to graduate student parent policy.** Beginning in the 2012–13 academic year, the graduate student parent policy will be modified to allow graduate students
who become parents while enrolled in University degree programs the chance to adjust to the extra demands of pregnancy and becoming new parents while continuing to receive University benefits for which they would otherwise be eligible. Deans of students will work with new parents to help them take an official leave or make academic modifications to their program of study, depending what makes the most sense given the student’s individual circumstances. In either case, students will be able to maintain their existing University benefits, including access to Student Health Services and University housing as well as stipends and health insurance coverage.

**Graduate forums on healthcare and childcare.** During my open meeting with doctoral students in March, questions were raised about healthcare and childcare concerns. In order to provide more detailed information on these topics to the wider graduate student community, I will be hosting two panel discussions later this quarter. These two events will be modeled on the highly successful tax workshop held in February and will include expert panelists to discuss relevant policies, answer your questions, and solicit your input. I hope you will join me at these events. The healthcare forum will be May 31, 12:30–1:30 in Kent 120, and we are still finalizing the date and location for the childcare forum. Stay tuned.

**Graduate Student Affairs expanded services.** This was a banner year for master’s degree and doctoral fellowship winners at UChicago—our 18 Fulbright IIE winners and 5 Boren winners are only the tip of the iceberg. In order to meet the demands of record-breaking numbers of applicants, Graduate Student Affairs has expanded its ability to manage applications and to provide fellowship statement review. It is never too early to think about funding opportunities, and I urge you to make an appointment to learn about the opportunities available. In addition to fellowship support and the variety of programs and services designed with doctoral students in mind, Graduate Student Affairs will be increasing services and programs for master’s degree students this summer and fall. I am also pleased to announce that beginning this summer, Graduate Student Affairs will become a part of the Office of the Provost because we understand that the needs of graduate students are inextricably entwined with academic and professional concerns.

**Family Resource Center increased hours.** Based on feedback from student users and increased demand, the Family Resource Center (FRC) will be open on weekdays this summer, and it will be expanding to include Saturdays in the fall. Beginning summer quarter, the FRC will be open Monday–Friday from 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m., and beginning in fall quarter 2012, the FRC will offer Saturday hours from 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m. in addition to weekly hours from 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Monday–Friday. If you have young children and have not yet checked out the FRC, please stop by to get acquainted with the space and the art, dance, music, drama, and other programs offered.

**Communication.** One of our biggest challenges is making sure that you are aware of the wide variety of programs and services available to you as graduate students. I hope you have found the new-and-improved Grad Guide Weekly useful and that you are following us on Facebook, where we have pages for Graduate Student Affairs and the Grad Gargoyle. “Like” us to find out first about upcoming events, fellowship opportunities, and other announcements.
**Student involvement.** You are our most important source for information about how best to improve the graduate student experience. Please send your ideas, questions, and comments to the Gargoyle at askthegargoyle@uchicago.edu, and if you are interested in participating in graduate student focus group discussions or serving on student, faculty, and staff committees, please let us know.