

## ***Graduate Student Educational Retreat to Wormsloe Historic Site***

### **Overview of initiative:**

To promote graduate student retention, inclusion and belonging, the Odum School of Ecology (OSE) is proposing an inaugural research and diversity retreat for our graduate students. OSE is committed to supporting graduate student success by facilitating community building activities and opportunities related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. For example, OSE hosts weekly coffee hours and monthly socials as well as different community-building activities throughout the year. In addition, OSE recently organized a DEI workshop led by the UGA Office of Institutional Diversity, and OSE graduate students have developed and taught course material relating to identities and representation in ecology. Owing to the ongoing covid pandemic, much of our in-person programming and activities shifted to hybrid or virtual formats, and some events were paused. Throughout this time, students have expressed a lack of connection to the community, feelings of loneliness, and discontent. A research and diversity retreat is an opportunity for an innovative blend of both research development through exposure to an active research site with rich natural history, and diversity exposure through lessons in the historical and cultural context of the site. Furthermore, this retreat will facilitate community building among graduate students and an opportunity for cross-cohort connections, an area that has weakened dramatically throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The proposed retreat will be hosted at Wormsloe Historic Site on the Isle of Hope, Georgia. The UGA Center for Research and Education at Wormsloe (CREW) frequently hosts researchers from multiple UGA units, including the Odum School of Ecology. CREW staff have experience planning events related to the environmental and agricultural history of this coastal ecosystem and we are working with them to plan a rich and immersive experience for graduate students. Some ideas include: visiting Pin Point Heritage Museum (5-10 minutes from Wormsloe) to learn about the settlements and lives of the freed slaves from Wormsloe and nearby Skidaway Island; foraging oysters and food from the marsh and preparing a traditional Wormsloe meal; and visiting nearby Sapelo Island to talk to members of the Sapelo Island Cultural and Revitalization Society. All of these activities would serve the purpose of engaging students with the history and culture of these important ecosystems.

### **Goals of Proposed Retreat:**

- I. Promote OSE graduate student bonding and relationship building across cohorts, lab groups and research sites
- II. Learn about the history of coastal Georgia, its people and issues related to environmental justice and racism
- III. Expose OSE students to an important coastal ecosystem and encourage research collaborations and development of new research ideas

**Estimated costs and expenses:**

The expected costs of this retreat include housing, transportation, entrance fees, and activity cost. We expect that 30-50 students, or approximately half of our graduate students, would participate in this retreat. Housing at CREW will be free of cost as it is already a UGA facility, but can only accommodate 16 people. Remaining students will be hosted at Skidaway Oceanographic Institute. Transportation will be handled by renting multiple passenger vans. Entrance fees for Wormsloe Historic Site are \$10 per person and the cost of a group activity is budgeted at \$25 per person. Here is a detailed breakdown of these costs:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Price</b>
Lodging at Skidaway for 2 nights, 34 persons	\$2250
5 vans at \$100/day for 2 days	\$1000
Entrance fee at \$10/person for 50 persons	\$500
Activity at \$25/person for 50 persons	\$1250
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5000</b>

**Assessment:**

In order to assess the effectiveness of this initiative to promote retention, inclusion and belonging, we will design a pre- and post-survey to compare the feelings of respondents before and after the retreat. These surveys will address (1) how closely connected students feel to the ecology graduate student community, (2) whether they have a better understanding of the racial, environmental, and cultural history of the Georgia coast, and (3) in what ways the retreat helped with the exchange of research ideas and/or motivate potential future collaborations


If awarded, this retreat will provide a much needed opportunity for graduate students to once again engage face to face. A point of pride for OSE is our close-knit community that fosters a sense of belonging and collaboration. The pandemic has altered the way many of us have interacted and this has greatly impacted graduate student involvement in OSE programming and overall relationship building, especially between cohorts and lab groups. This retreat will improve these connections and also allow for students from multiple OSE facilities (such as the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory) to come together. Funds from the Graduate Retention and Inclusion Grants Program will allow us to provide this immersive learning and bonding opportunity for all OSE graduate students at no cost to them, removing financial barriers that may impede participation.



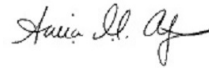
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