Dear Provost Robel:

On behalf of the graduate and professional student body, I would like to thank you and the Strategic Planning Committee on your commitment to an inclusive drafting process and accessible comment period. Overall, I believe the process has resulted in a targeted, yet comprehensive plan that will guide and ensure the development of IU Bloomington as a quality and student-centered campus in our next century of existence.

The Graduate & Professional Student Organization (GPSO) proactively sought feedback on the draft Strategic Plan over the last few weeks. Within this document I have summarized concerns and feedback gathered from graduate students via a focus group, a question and answer session at a GPSO Assembly meeting, and direct feedback from graduate students and GPSO officers. Most feedback concerns the Graduate Education section of the plan.

**Pedagogical Training**

When investing in graduate student success (Objective Three, Action 3), we stress the need for improved pedagogical training of graduate students. Pedagogical training opportunities will not only improve the graduate student experience but also benefit undergraduate education. Teaching certificates would be an excellent means to encourage graduate students to take advantage of these opportunities.

**Faculty Management and Mentoring**

We would like to stress the importance of adopting best practices in graduate advising and mentoring (Objective Three, Action 6). The program management and mentoring abilities of faculty is highly variable and can significantly influence a graduate student’s experience at IU. Lack of faculty awareness of opportunities available (sometimes outside their home department) and lack of mentor communication with their graduate students can be highly detrimental to the graduate experience. Faculty mentors should make an effort to think about the education of their graduate students in a holistic manner and point them towards opportunities discussed throughout the Strategic Plan.

**Degree Completion**

The aggressive reduction of time to completion for doctoral degrees (Objective Three, Action 1) will be more challenging for some programs. Therefore, obstacles to degree completion should be investigated and addressed at the program level, rather than wholesale. Dissertation process alternatives may be an avenue to explore; time-to-completion should be reduced without degrading student contributions to their field of study.
Online Education

We wish to express some worry in relation to the draft Strategic Plan mandate to create "high-quality online graduate programs" in every school (Objective Four, Action 1). While opportunities for advanced training should be extended to non-residential students, we believe that the phrasing of this provision and its context are worrisome. Considering the revenue-raising possibilities of online programs and concerns of the applicability of online education to all fields, the final Strategic Plan should more carefully define “high quality.” Revenue should not be raised at the expense of residential graduate degree reputation; degree dilution should be avoided at all costs.

Experiential Learning

Internship opportunities and overseas study opportunities (Objective Three, Action 4 and 5) are important means to achieve more comprehensive, cross-cultural, and experiential learning. Opportunities for networking and addressing global grand challenges should be developed around these initiatives. Funding for these experiences should be offered to graduate students specifically, to ensure that they are able to actually take part and benefit from these opportunities.

Health and Wellness

Becoming a national leader in graduate student well-being through health and wellness resource development (Objective Three, Action 9) is laudable. We believe most resources currently available are adequate but graduate students are largely unaware of what is available to them. The exception is mental health; the campus needs to proactively promote and develop mental health services.

Cross-Campus Collaboration

While interdisciplinarity is a main theme of the draft Strategic Plan, we hope that it can take a more prominent role in the Graduate Education section than it does that this point. Interdisciplinary initiatives seem to largely refer to online programs in the current plan (Objective Four, Action 2). Cross-campus collaboration should be encouraged throughout the residential graduate experience. Interdisciplinary masters programs and certificates should be created. Administrative challenges and barriers to dual-degree programs should be actively addressed. Services and opportunities that are unnecessarily replicated across programs should be centralized, streamlined, and advertised more effectively.

Sustainability

The draft Strategic Plan contains nearly no mention of the campus commitment to sustainability; this oversight should be remedied. The University and campus have already expressed commitments to sustainable development and energy efficiency.
This commitment should be more substantially expressed in and, thereby, cemented in the Strategic Plan.

Please consider this feedback from the graduate student body as you create the final version of the Strategic Plan and as decisions are made about the implementation of that plan. I hope that your office will continue to involve GPSO and graduate students throughout all steps of the plan’s implementation.

Sincerely,

Brady Harman
GPSO President