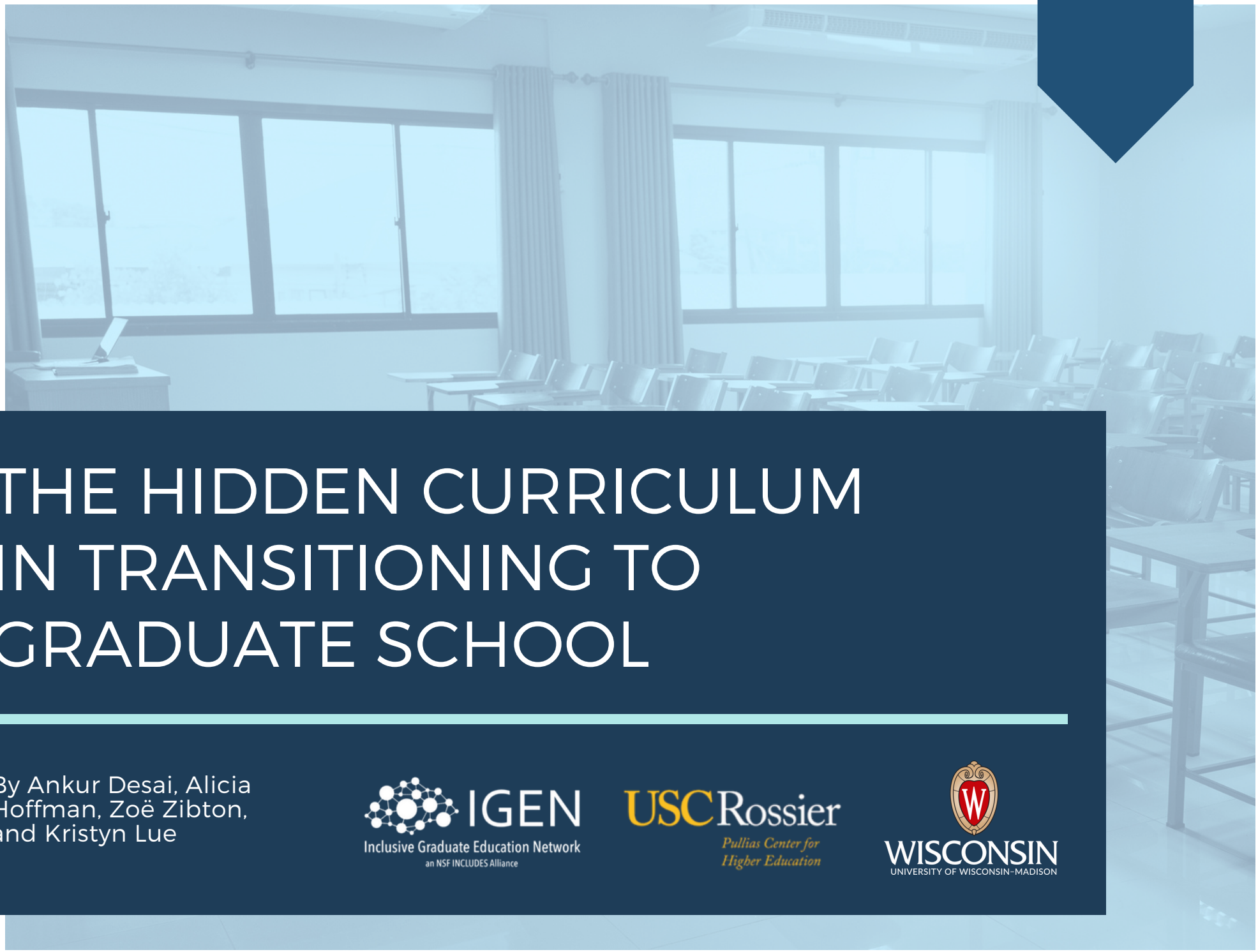

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN TRANSITIONING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

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THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN TRANSITIONING TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

The learning curve that accompanies educational transitions can involve culture shock as students adjust to new environments, demands, networks, and responsibilities. Educational institutions have unwritten, implicit rules and expectations within their culture—otherwise known as the "**hidden curriculum**." Navigating the hidden curriculum is part of what can make the transitions to college and graduate school challenging.

The hidden curriculum may also function as a barrier to equity and inclusion: students from higher socioeconomic communities and college educated families are more likely to have gained knowledge about academia's unwritten cultural rules before transitioning to college or graduate school. This reduces their risk of culture shock, allows them to focus on academics, and can enhance their sense of belonging. Students with fewer resources, on the other hand, are less likely to have had exposure to the hidden curriculum during their schooling, which may result in more abrupt culture shock and a more difficult transition to college.

Without intentional efforts to make the hidden curriculum explicit, graduate programs may unwittingly reproduce social inequalities.

The specialized nature of graduate school requires graduate students to acclimate to their individual departments and academic disciplines rather than the broader campus environments as they may have during their undergraduate degrees. As a result, many individual departments facilitate their own graduate student orientations which are separate from the college-wide graduate student orientation. This resource is geared towards helping graduate programs in that task.

THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

FROM THE IGEN HIDDEN CURRICULUM ORIENTATION

"In education, there is an official curriculum and a hidden one. The official curriculum refers to those components of the educational experience that are clearly stated as learning outcomes or goals, such as on a syllabus. Conversely, the hidden curriculum (HC) is those components that are not explicitly taught but are instead the behaviors, norms, values, or implicit understandings gained through prolonged exposure to the culture of a particular field or department. The HC can present barriers to your success in higher education."

EQUITY IN GRADUATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

EXAMPLES OF THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

- Finding mentors
- Building social networks and community
- Time management
- Understanding academic and disciplinary jargon
- Publishing and presenting
- Navigating the job market
- Knowing departmental expectations and milestones

(continued from previous page) Although there are a variety of resources available for colleges working to improve their undergraduate orientation and first-year experience programs in the service of equity and inclusion, fewer resources are available for graduate schools or graduate programs seeking to improve their orientation programs. This resource provides a brief overview of one tool that departments can use in developing and implementing more inclusive graduate student orientation programs—the **IGEN Hidden Curriculum Orientation**. This orientation is the outcome of an IGEN Research Accelerator seed grant and provides departments with tips for how to create inclusive graduate orientation programs that help to expose the hidden curriculum of graduate school. Such programs can enhance the adjustment, belonging, and success of graduate students as part of promoting equity.

THE IGEN HIDDEN CURRICULUM ORIENTATION

The IGEN Hidden Curriculum Orientation is a five-day course developed by Alicia Hoffman and Zoë Zibton, two graduate students in the Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences (AOS) Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Under the supervision of department chair Dr. Ankur Desai, Hoffman and Zibton developed and implemented the orientation program in 2021 (with support from the AOS program) and 2022 (with additional funding from IGEN). This optional orientation, which Hoffman and Zibton based off of the HydroShare resource, was designed to provide incoming graduate students opportunities to socialize with one another and introduce them to the hidden curriculum of graduate school. Approximately 30% of the AOS incoming graduate students at UW Madison attended this optional Hidden Curriculum Orientation in 2021; however, participants in the orientation found the program to be extremely helpful. Although the program remained optional, 100% of incoming AOS graduate students participated in the Hidden Curriculum Orientation in 2022.

On the following page, Desai, Hoffman, and Zibton share their top five tips for creating inclusive graduate orientation programs, based on their experience developing, implementing, and refining the IGEN Hidden Curriculum Orientation.

	TIP FROM UW-MADISON TEAM	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE
1	**Prioritize social interaction** over learning new material at the beginning of orientation programs in order to build a sense of belonging through cohort-bonding and team building events with other students.	Creating a sense of belonging and community is a critical part of a positive graduate student experience. When students start with strong relationships, it sets them up for success in learning the hidden curriculum both with and from other students.	The first day of the IGEN Hidden Curriculum Orientation is dedicated entirely to introductions and community building, and each day starts with an icebreaker to help students continue to get to know each other better and socialize.
2	Don't gatekeep participation! **Open events to all types of graduate students** in your program, including master's, doctoral, professional, and clinical degree-seeking students.	Especially if students of color are underrepresented in a particular graduate program, the opportunity to connect with minoritized students from other programs can send a powerful message about opportunities for connection and reduce the risk of isolation	The AOS department at UW-Madison has a research master's degree program, a research doctoral degree program, and a professional master's degree program. The IGEN Hidden Curriculum Orientation is open to students in any of these programs.
3	In addition to a summer orientation, **provide routine reminders** or portfolio building exercises to help students navigate graduate programs and terminology over the academic year.	Providing navigational instruction over the entirety of the first year of graduate school —or longer—can help students learn about the hidden curriculum at an accessible and relevant pace, which can result in more effective learning.	Beginning in Year 3, AOS graduate student orientation at UW-Madison will include a 1-credit course students take during their first year that will extend the work of the IGEN Hidden Curriculum Orientation during the academic year.
4	As a department, develop formal seminars or other structures during the academic year to **institutionalize the work of inclusive orientation** into the curriculum.	Departments who are dedicated to equity should institutionalize inclusive programs to ensure sustainability and the prioritization of these programs, rather than relying on the labor of individuals who are passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion work.	The IGEN Hidden Curriculum Orientation was started by two graduate students who were passionate about diversity, equity, and inclusion work. Rather than rely on the passion and labor of graduate students, the AOS department moved to adopt and formalize the inclusive orientation work Hoffman and Zibton developed.
5	Through the orientation and first year, **provide new students with opportunities to develop relationships with multiple faculty** to help navigate next steps in advancement.	A single faculty member is unlikely to be able to meet all of the needs of an individual student. Programs can help formalize and make explicit the need for students to have a team of mentors, and provide opportunities to create such teams.	Every new student who will conduct a thesis or dissertation, whether a masters or PhD student, is assigned an initial committee to advise their work. This committee can be modified over time.

LOOKING AHEAD

As a result of the success of the program, the AOS department at UW Madison moved to formally adopt and institutionalize the Hidden Curriculum Orientation in its third year and beyond—with a key change. Going forward, the summer orientation will focus on providing opportunities for incoming students to socialize with each other, as well as current AOS students and faculty. The hidden curriculum component of the orientation will be developed into a required 1-credit course that graduate students will take during their first semester. This 1-credit course on the hidden curriculum of graduate school will now be part of a 3-unit sequence of 1-credit courses that AOS graduate students will take as part of their program requirements.

The 5-day summer curriculum utilized in the summers of 2021 and 2022 is now publicly available on Canvas Commons for other departments that are interested in implementing their own Hidden Curriculum Orientation.

To view the IGEN Hidden Curriculum on Canvas Commons,

CLICK HERE

FURTHER READING

Calarco, J. M. (2020). A field guide to grad school: Uncovering the hidden curriculum. Princeton University Press.

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Zimmer, M., A. Donaldson, G. Gorski, C. Murphy, J. Pensky, A. Price, C. Richardson, A. Serrano (2021). Hidden curriculum in the geosciences graduate course, HydroShare, http://www.hydroshare.org/resource/60b4def2ee034f4b8a0b488704770905

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