Accessibility and Graduate Education: Update on Project Findings & Recommendation Framework

Dr. Mahadeo A. Sukhai
Chair, National Graduate Experience Taskforce

OCGS Retreat
April 22-23, 2015
Contact Information

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  – Email: m.sukhai@utoronto.ca

• Taskforce and Graduate Project website:
Statement of Need

• There is a significant need to better understand the overall experiences of disabled students in graduate studies

• Currently, there is a critical lack of information in this area
  – Need to understand the “student experience tapestry”
  – Need to catalogue institutional leading practices
Project Goals

• To examine the experiences of, and barriers faced by, graduate students with disabilities across Canada

• To develop a discussion paper outlining the current system issues for graduate students with disabilities

• To produce information and develop strategies to facilitate the success of students with disabilities in graduate programs

• To develop recommendations for the continued improvement of graduate experience for students with disabilities, that can be translated into policy at an institutional, provincial, or national level

• Long term: To develop “tool-based” approaches for students, faculty and institutions to use in addressing issues faced by graduate students with disabilities
# Taskforce Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010 April</td>
<td>Issue of the experiences of graduate students with disabilities first raised to NEADS’ attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Summer/Fall</td>
<td>Initial design of National Graduate Student Experience Survey (C. Mohler, D. Fourney, M. Sukhai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 November</td>
<td>First presentation of project to NEADS 2010 National Conference (Winnipeg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 November</td>
<td>Taskforce concept first presented (N. La Monica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 December</td>
<td>NEADS Board of Directors approves establishment of National Graduate Experience Taskforce, and appoints its chair (M. Sukhai)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Taskforce Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012 August</td>
<td>1st meeting of Taskforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 Spring/Summer</td>
<td>First presentations on work of Taskforce; completion of work on student survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 June</td>
<td>Presentation of work of the Taskforce to the Council of Ontario Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 August</td>
<td>Work begins on “Accessible Science Labs” spinoff project funded by COU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 October</td>
<td>National Graduate Student Experience survey launched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 November</td>
<td>Presentation of work of Taskforce to the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Taskforce Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014 January</td>
<td>Schedule of discussion papers added to the work of the Taskforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 March</td>
<td>National Graduate Student Experience Survey closes with 300+ consented responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 Spring/Summer</td>
<td>Presentations on work of Taskforce; data analysis ongoing in earnest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 September</td>
<td>Publication of 1st discussion paper on CAGS website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Winter</td>
<td>Completion of work on Disclosure, Financial Aid and Universal Design discussion papers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Taskforce Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015 Spring (projected)</td>
<td>Completion of work on Student-Supervisor Relationship, Mental Health and Academic Employment discussion papers; discussion and finalization of recommendation framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Spring/Summer</td>
<td>Presentations on work of Taskforce; report drafting in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 July</td>
<td>Final in-person meeting of Taskforce to review report and recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 Fall</td>
<td>Launch of Taskforce Publications and Resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Status of Data-Gathering Efforts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature review – Canada, US and International literature</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data mining – relevant prior surveys</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic profiling – CSLP statistics</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Graduate Student Experience Survey</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic profiling – program type and discipline</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative data analysis – understanding the quality of the graduate student experience</td>
<td>IN PROGRESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative data analysis</td>
<td>IN PROGRESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant comparisons with the general graduate student population (e.g., through CGPSS)</td>
<td>IN PROGRESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up key informant interviews of students</td>
<td>PENDING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of student financial aid administrators</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of SFAA survey data</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial focus group outreach – CAGS, CACUSS, CASFAA, STLHE</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional focus group outreach of service providers, student life professionals and academic administrators</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Status of Project Outputs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach and Timeline</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational and Professional Development Resource – student financial aid administrators (piloted March and June, 2014)</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational and Professional Development Resource – graduate registrars (pilot pending, October 2014)</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Discussion Paper – Essential Requirements (published)</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Discussion Paper – Disclosure in the Graduate Environment (current status: final draft completed)</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Resource – Disclosure in the Graduate Environment: A Tipsheet for Students in Transition</td>
<td>COMPLETED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Discussion Paper – Mental Health (current status: research and writing in progress)</td>
<td>IN PROGRESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Discussion Paper – Financial Aid (current status: completed)</td>
<td>IN PROGRESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Discussion Paper – Mentorship and the student/supervisor relationship (current status: outline stage; based upon presentations delivered at STLHE and HER Conferences, summer 2014)</td>
<td>IN PROGRESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim Discussion Paper – Academic employment</td>
<td>IN PROGRESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Principles – Universal Design in Graduate Education</td>
<td>IN PROGRESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafting of recommendations (completion date summer 2015)</td>
<td>IN PROGRESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafting of final report (completion date summer 2015)</td>
<td>PENDING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Project Findings
Time to Completion Statistics

• Students were asked:
  – What is the EXPECTED time to completion based on information provided by the Department/School?
  – What was their program start date?
  – What was their (projected) program end date?

• Data from NEADS’ National Graduate Student Experience Survey
Time To Completion – Absolute # Extra Months

- Master’s
  - 1 yr: 8 months
  - 2 yr: 4 months
  - 3 yr: 2 months

- Doctoral
  - 4 yr: 8 months
  - 5 yr: 8 months
  - 6 yr: 2 months
Time To Completion – Relative to Expected Program Completion

- Master’s
  - 1 yr: 1.6
  - 2 yr: 1.1
  - 3 yr: 1.1
  - 4 yr: 1.1
  - 5 yr: 1.1
  - 6 yr: 1.1

- Doctoral
  - 1 yr: 1.5
  - 2 yr: 1.4
  - 3 yr: 1.3
  - 4 yr: 1.2
  - 5 yr: 1.1
  - 6 yr: 1.1
Student-Supervisor Relationship

Master's

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree / Strongly Agree</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>100%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good rel'p supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervisor understand/supportive disab needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervisor helpful in providing accom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervisor treats me different research standpoint b/c disab</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervisor treats me different personal standpoint b/c disab</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61%</td>
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Doctoral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree / Strongly Agree</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good rel'p supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>79%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervisor treats me different personal standpoint b/c disab</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>63%</td>
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</table>
Purpose of Meetings with Supervisor

**Doctoral**

- Research: 50% Frequent, 20% Occasional, 10% As needed, 10% Never
- Career: 40% Frequent, 30% Occasional, 20% As needed, 10% Never
- Disability: 60% Frequent, 20% Occasional, 10% As needed, 10% Never

**Master’s**

- Research: 50% Frequent, 20% Occasional, 10% As needed, 10% Never
- Career: 40% Frequent, 30% Occasional, 20% As needed, 10% Never
- Disability: 60% Frequent, 20% Occasional, 10% As needed, 10% Never
Access to Competitive Scholarships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No thesis</th>
<th>With thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>external tricouncil</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>external private or government</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internal institution</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship with Disability Services Office

No - thesis

DSO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Yes or Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>registered with DSO</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSO helpful with coursework</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSO helpful with research</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good working rel'p with DSO</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSO and supervisor work closely</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thesis

DSO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Yes or Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>registered with DSO</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSO helpful with coursework</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSO helpful with research</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good working rel'p with DSO</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSO and supervisor work closely</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Provision of Accommodations

No – thesis

- Supervisor: 7%
- Department: 17%
- Dso: 49%
- Another group w/in U.: 1%
- Don't know: 3%
- Other: 8%
- Not applicable: 2%

Thesis

- Supervisor: 11%
- Department: 14%
- Dso: 30%
- Another group w/in U.: 4%
- Don't know: 2%
- Other: 12%
- Not applicable: 4%
### Access to Accommodations

#### No Thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>No Thesis</th>
<th>Positive Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev or Modify</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accom Differ</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Accom</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accom Needs</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require Accom</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Thesis</th>
<th>Positive Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disability Related</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev or Modify</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accom Differ</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Accom Able</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accom Needs</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require Accom</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Experience Taskforce*
What is academic integrity?

• Graduate deans/faculty use this term to refer to the rigor of the academic discipline
  – Concerns around the impact of disability-related accommodation

• Student interpretation of the term associated with “cheating”
• A student has violated academic integrity if they are guilty of research misconduct, either inadvertently or through deliberate action.

• Research Misconduct
  – Data falsification
  – Data fabrication
  – Plagiarism
  – Other questionable research practices
  – Definition in constant evolution
The Academic Integrity Challenge

• Plagiarism is the most challenging issue with respect to disability-related accommodation

• Easy to envision scenarios where essential requirements and academic integrity are synonymous
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Answering YES</th>
<th>Academic Integrity Standards</th>
<th>RCR Standards</th>
<th>Intellectual Property Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student awareness of departmental policies</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student awareness of institutional policies</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students trained</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Do Students Identify with Academic Integrity Issues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Answering YES</th>
<th>Academic Integrity Standards</th>
<th>RCR Standards</th>
<th>Intellectual Property Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students informed of impact of disability?</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objections raised about ability to meet standards?</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When training occurred</td>
<td>Beginning/Orientation</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Have you experienced any academic integrity or intellectual property challenges due to your disability?”
Discussion Paper #1

Defining a New Culture: Essential Requirements in the Graduate Environment

Published online as a 3rd Party Publication by the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies
Essential Requirements

• "Essential requirements of a course or program refer to the knowledge and skills that must be acquired or demonstrated in order for a student to successfully meet the learning objectives of that course or program" (Rose, 2009).
Essential Requirements

• Defined by two factors:
  – Skills that must be necessarily demonstrated in order to meet the objectives of a course
  – Skills that must be demonstrated in a prescribed manner

• It is extremely important to not confound the evaluation method with the actual competency.

• For example, if a student must understand how to design, interpret, analyze and troubleshoot a scientific experiment (“competency”), does this mean that the student must perform the experiment unaided (“measurement”)?
Essential Requirements for Graduate Education

• “General” Essential Requirements (applicable across all disciplines)

• Discipline-Specific Essential Requirements

• Technical Essential Requirements

• “Philosophy of graduate education” issue – what are the universal definitions of essential requirements?
Questions for Consideration

- What is being tested?
- What is the nature of the task?
- Does it have to be done in only one way?
  - If so, why?
- Will performing this task in an alternative manner ultimately interfere with the student’s successful performance in the discipline, program or course?
Position Statement: Accessibility of Graduate Education

In Development
Reactive vs. Proactive Approaches

• Reactive = individualized accommodation
  – Issues must be identified prior to evolving a solution
  – Delay between identification and implementation

• Proactive = Universal design approach
  – Potential systemic issues are identified in the context of an accessible and inclusive graduate environment
  – Actions taken to reduce or remove barriers at the environmental level
  – Students with disabilities may not identify with issues in this context due to removal of barriers
Guiding Principles for Accessible Graduate Education Environment

• Flexibility

• Dynamic Environment

• Collaborative

• Fosters positive attitudes and relationships among students, faculty and staff

• Does not contravene the academic or professional rigor of a graduate program, discipline or university

• Encompasses research, teaching and fieldwork, as well as campus-based instruction
The accessible graduate environment...

• ...Doesn’t yet exist!
  – “Making it up as we go along”

• Opportunity for faculty to develop their own solutions and adapt them to their particular student’s needs

• Need to be flexible, solution oriented and creative in designing an appropriate graduate thesis project and environment
Recommendation Framework

- Higher education policy makers
- Provincial/federal agencies
- Disability service providers, student services professionals, and other relevant practitioners
- NEADS, students, student service professionals
Effort vs. Impact

- LOW effort, HIGH impact
- HIGH effort, HIGH impact
- LOW effort, LOW impact
- HIGH effort, LOW impact
# Evaluation of Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of recommendation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target audience(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy required to target audience?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential impact if recommendation is implemented</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy effort required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort required by target audience(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential resources required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline for implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendation Principles

• Recommendations must be SMART
  – Especially actionable

• Recommendations must be smart
  – Chosen intelligently, for high impact

• Recommendations must be directed
  – Aimed at the right target audience
Recommendation Themes

• Evolved from data/findings to date and from Taskforce discussions:
  – Demographics and Data Collection
  – Funding Models
  – Accommodation Models
  – Standards
  – Exceptionality
  – Collaboration
  – Professional Development
  – Student Preparedness
Overall Conclusions

• Issues faced by graduate students with disabilities in Canadian postsecondary education are complex and multi-faceted
  – Disability-specific considerations (disclosure, accommodation)
  – Systems issues influenced by disability (student-supervisor relationships, employment)

• Perceptual disconnects can exist among students, faculty and service providers as to the “real” issues

• Student expectation vs. reality – importance of the systemic differences between undergraduate and graduate education

• Community ownership of the project outcomes is required in order to move toward a universally accessible graduate environment
The Need for Collaboration

- GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
- GRADUATE SUPERVISORS
- DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS
- GRADUATE SSDs, DEANS, ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS
Acknowledgements

• Taskforce Membership
• Participating Organizations
• Council of Ontario Universities
• Adaptech Research Network
• Canada Student Loans Program
• Canadian Association of Graduate Studies
• Discussion Paper Authors
• National Educational Association of Disabled Students
When We Don’t Know, We Tend To Think The Worst