The National Graduate Experience Project:
Resources, Recommendations and Data Collection

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Contact Information

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• Taskforce and Graduate Project website:
Axioms

• Graduate education is not “one size fits all”

• Graduate programs are dynamic and evolve in the lifetime of a student’s path to degree

• Disability issues in graduate education require collaboration – information/accommodation compartmentalization is inefficient

• Graduate education requires the participation of the student
Accessibility and Graduate Education:
Educational and Professional Development Resources
Recommendation Framework

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

- LOW effort
- HIGH impact
- Resources

- HIGH effort
- HIGH impact

- LOW effort
- LOW impact

- HIGH effort
- LOW impact
Resource Development

- **FACULTY AND STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
  - **INSTITUTIONAL RECEPTIVITY AND AWARENESS**
  - **STUDENT PREPAREDNESS**

**RESOURCES GUIDES AND TOOLKITS**
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<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Target Audience</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essential Requirements</td>
<td>Essential Requirements “thought frame” for faculty and students</td>
<td>Faculty; Students</td>
<td>1st Draft (presented for feedback at OCGS Retreat)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essential Requirements</td>
<td>Essential Requirements Tipsheet</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Published on accessiblecampus.ca</td>
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<td>Essential Requirements</td>
<td>Essential Requirements and the IDP</td>
<td>Faculty; Students</td>
<td>Concept presented at OCGS Retreat</td>
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<td>Disclosure</td>
<td>Student Disclosure Tipsheet</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Published in <em>Career Options</em>, winter 2015</td>
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<td>Student Disclosure decision worksheet</td>
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<td>Student with a Disability</td>
<td>Officers; Financial Aid</td>
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<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>Financial Literacy and Planning for Graduate Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Concept Design in Progress</td>
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<td>Graduate Disability Issues</td>
<td>Professional Development Exercise: Thought-Frame on Working on Graduate Disability Issues</td>
<td>Graduate Deans and Student Services Directors</td>
<td>Piloted in 2014-2015; Resource Available on request</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition Guide</td>
<td>Transition Guide for Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>Concept Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>Third Party Publication: “More Feet on the Ground” website and COU Mental Health Handbook</td>
<td>Faculty, Service Providers, Students</td>
<td>Website live</td>
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<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>Workshop on Mental Health in Research Training</td>
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# Educational and Professional Development Resources

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<tr>
<td>Student- Supervisor Relationship</td>
<td>Section on Disability for Supervision Guides</td>
<td>Faculty; Students</td>
<td>Suggested at OCGS Retreat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student- Supervisor Relationship</td>
<td>Rubric for Presentation at Departmental Orientations</td>
<td>Faculty; Graduate Administrators</td>
<td>Suggested at OCGS Retreat</td>
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<td>Student- Supervisor Relationship</td>
<td>Individual Development Plan Guide – modified to be reflective of universal access</td>
<td>Faculty; Students</td>
<td>Concept Design</td>
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<td>Student/ Supervisor Relationship</td>
<td>Mentorship and Effective Faculty/Student Communication tipsheets</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Published on accessiblecampus.ca</td>
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<td>Universal Access</td>
<td>Elements of Universal Design in Graduate Education</td>
<td>Graduate Deans; Faculty</td>
<td>Concept Design</td>
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<td>Others?</td>
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Accessibility and Graduate Education:
Data Collection, Benchmarking and Impact of Policy/Practice Improvements
Current Landscape

- Established, new and evolving legislative frameworks
  - *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*
  - *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
  - *Provincial Human Rights Codes*
  - AODA and associated standards (in particular, Customer Service; Information and Communication; Employment)
  - AMA (2014)
  - Accessibility legislation in Nova Scotia (pending)

- Increasing numbers of students with disabilities entering graduate education

- Evolving needs
  - Mental health
  - Developmental disabilities

- Institution-specific policy and best practice frameworks

- No available data on issues, barriers and experiences
  - Extant studies limited in scope (small numbers; heuristic methods; local/regional)
Available Demographic Data

• ~65 universities with graduate programs (CAGS membership)

• 1,030 graduate students with disabilities receiving federal financial aid (CSLP data, current through 2012-2013)
  – ~5% of the overall graduate population receiving federal financial aid

• Lack of accurate reporting on numbers of graduate students with disabilities registered with disability services providers nationwide
  – Ontario has the best tracking data nationally
  – Demographic not captured in reporting to provincial ministries
Statement of Need

• Currently no comparison datasets
  – Students with disabilities vs. general student population

• No longitudinal analysis of the experiences of the population of graduate students with disabilities

• No institutional tracking of this population
Approach

• Advocacy to the CGPSS organizers for the inclusion of a pair of disability demographic questions

• **Question a:** Have you been diagnosed with or do you self-identify with any disability or impairment?
  1. no
  2. yes
  3. I prefer not to respond

• **Question b:** [If answered ‘yes’] Which of the following has been diagnosed or do you self-identify with?
  1. A sensory impairment (vision or hearing)
  2. A mobility impairment
  3. A learning disability (e.g. ADHD, dyslexia)
  4. A mental health disorder (e.g. depression, bipolar)
  5. A neurological impairment
  6. A disability or impairment not listed above
  7. Multiple disabilities
Potential Areas of Interest
(drawn from 2013 CGPSS question set)

- Demographics
- General satisfaction
- Professional skills development
- Financial support
- University resources and student life
- General assessment
How do we use these data?

Nationally

• Building a national demographic profile of students with disabilities in graduate school
  – Comparison against general demographic trends
  – Identification of nationwide systemic educational trends

• Building a national “student experience” profile of graduate students with disabilities in comparison to the general population

• “Numbers case” for national/provincial policy changes – for e.g., within the financial aid system

• Standards creation – establishment of nationwide benchmarks based on institution class for the graduate experience of students with disabilities
How do we use these data?

Institutionally

• Institutional benchmarking to identify gaps to be addressed by policy and practice change
  – Areas of concern where students with disabilities are profiling significantly differently than the general population

• Ability to identify areas where further probing on disability-specific concerns may be warranted
How do we use these data?

Longitudinally

• Inclusion of disability demographic data in 2016 allows for the establishment of the baseline against which progress can be measured
  – National progress based on advocacy efforts
  – Institutional progress based on policy and practice changes and/or improvements in training and professional development

• Ability to measure impact of project recommendations over time
Gap

• CGPSS does not ask some granular questions we may need to revisit on a regular basis
  – Specifically relationships with disability services offices; accommodations provision

• Need to seek a community-oriented and community-driven way of collecting these data
Data Curation

• CGPSS consortium will have access to all individual responses
  – National aggregate data available for analysis, upon request

• Institution-specific data to be provided to the participating institutions

• Need a community-oriented mechanism to follow data over time
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
The Need for Collaboration

GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

GRADUATE SUPERVISORS

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