

Institutional Strategic Directions Document: Faculty of Graduate Studies
March 9, 2015
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Graduate Studies, Barbara Crow

This document was prepared for the Faculty of Graduate Studies as an administrative unit. See FGS Program Administrative PIF.

It is with pleasure that the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) shares our efforts in the pursuit of **oversight, advocacy and academic excellence** for graduate education and post-doctoral fellows by addressing three fundamental pan-university objectives related to quality and research intensification: **1) meeting graduate enrollment targets and increasing the number of post-doctoral fellows; 2) transitioning graduate programmes to cognate Faculties;** and most importantly, **3) enhancing the academic experience of our graduate students.**

Graduate Studies at York has grown from a single program with 11 students in 1963 to 6,000 students across 75 Masters, Doctoral, and Graduate Diploma programs. Today, graduate students make up the largest group of active researchers and scholars in the university and their success contributes to York's capacity for research intensification, reputation and our ability to recruit competitive students. From theoretical cosmology to the quality of intervention for children with autism, from the potential of public housing policy and design to alleviate urban ethnic conflict to the critical role of photography in shaping our notions of culture and national identity, the research currently undertaken by the graduate award and scholarship recipients at York contributes to both fostering and maintaining a culture of world-class research.

In response to increasing demand for graduate education in the province of Ontario and its *Reaching Higher* initiative, the scope of graduate studies at York has increased dramatically: 40 new degrees and 16 new programs since 2005 and a 22.5% increase in our student population over six years. With this exponential growth, FGS, which has been historically understaffed, has faced a number of external and internal challenges including: increased internal and external service demands; budget constraints and program sustainability; increased Ministry enrollment targets and intensified competition in Ontario; the changing nature of graduate education and post-degree pathways; dramatic/significant increase in funding-ineligible students and time-to-completion; decreased external funding applications and awards; major increases in administrative demands for external scholarships; administration of the complex CUPE 3903 CA; and the need for better integration of graduate and undergraduate planning.

As FGS transitions to an administrative unit with oversight and advocacy as part of its mandate, various tasks, strategies and process issues will be evolved. Some of these changes will be reflected in how do we meet graduate enrollment targets,

transition academic and funding decisions to Faculties, and continue to work to enhance the graduate student experience.

1) Meeting Graduate Targets

Since the inception of the Ontario government's *Reaching Higher* strategy 2005, York's applications and registrations, Tri-Council scholarships, and researchers' contributions to graduate student funding have declined. There are many factors that partially explain these declines, including the increased competition for graduate spaces provincially, labour disruptions, the rise of graduate funding models, governance structures, and the increase in student demand for graduate degree education with professional applications.

In this context, FGS has made significant efforts to provide analytics, digital tools, and evidence-based benchmarks to better understand graduate education at York, provincially, nationally, and internationally. These efforts have been important to address some myths of and trends in graduate education at York. Many of our colleagues are committed to graduate education yet few were aware of our trends in declining enrolments, and most importantly, the financial and reputational implications of not meeting provincial targets, and/or how provincial graduate funding is awarded (for example, we can neither count towards targets nor receive funding for international students). It has been the task of FGS to engage our colleagues on these matters and, as a result, we have begun to work more collaboratively to develop a deeper understanding of the effects of declining enrollments on the financial sustainability of the program and to enhance the graduate student experience. Moreover, as a result of empirical evidence, comparators, and faculty contributions, we have been able, for the first time in five years, to increase the number of registered students and decrease the number of ineligible.

While we have had some of the tools to perform graduate analytics, most of our programs do not employ them to inform the decision-making process for a variety of reasons. FGS, through working with Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis (OIPA) and Vice-President Students' office, has been able to forward data and projects to support graduate students from their application to post-graduation experience. Moreover, in partnership with a number of units, we are working on a system to support a comprehensive student record from application to post-graduation (See Appendix A).

In York's Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA), representations were made to maintain our *Reaching Higher* targets and that we would forward new graduate programming in engineering and digital media.

In order to meet these targets, FGS in consultation with graduate programs will continue to:

- Revitalize our website and enhance social media strategies
- Develop recruitment intelligence, workshops and tools with Student Services

- Fully engage graduate program directors in graduate recruitment
- Identify and make strategic investments in graduate programs with high demand
- Reorient graduate funding to include more scholarships for graduate students
- Survey applicants to understand why they do and do not accept York offers
- Review and share provincial and national data on graduate trends
- Consult with programs on academic requirement
- Monitor provincial key performance indicators for graduate education
- Fundraise for more graduate scholarships
- Intensify efforts to recruit world-class students and postdoctoral fellows and promote outstanding graduate research
- Pursue strategic enhancement of FGS's staff complement in recruitment, postdoctoral support, graduate professional development, SEM, and awards
- Continue process improvement, including the creation of new technological solutions
- Introduce initiatives to facilitate early completion and post-degree success
- Enhance communication and collaboration with pan-university partners, including anchor Faculty Deans, to ensure the effective integration of graduate and undergraduate planning UG and recruitment
- Strategic development of scholarship and fellowship applications and of York's graduate research culture

2) Transitioning Graduate Governance, Administration, and Funding from FGS to Faculties

FGS has been preparing graduate programs for the transition of resource responsibility and accountability from the FGS to the Faculties. There have been numerous consultation meetings with students, staff and faculty discussing this transitioning. These meetings have focused on how to facilitate the financial and governance transfer of the programs. As a result of this process, there have been some exciting initiatives of rethinking how we deliver graduate education. For example, Mathematics and Statistics, Communication and Culture, and Biology have engaged in name changes, streamlined fields, and reduced course redundancy.

To facilitate this transition, the following three items will be reconfigured during the next UAP exercise: a) governance; b) administration; and b) funding.

a) Governance:

FGS will continue to provide oversight of graduate appointments, supervisory committees, academic petitions and appeals, thesis, dissertation and supervision guidelines, research ethics, adjudication of external scholarships, graduation and

convocation, transcripts, quality assurance, graduate learning outcomes, coordinating post-doctoral research, and professional skills development.

FGS will continue the administration of FGS Council and its five Standing Committees (APPC, Petitions, AAHC, Awards, Nominating); advising graduate programs re: curriculum changes, new program development and QA processes; faculty appointments to graduate programs (policies, procedures, approvals, records); maintenance of course repository and academic calendar; review, development and administration of graduate academic policies and related forms/processes, including thesis and dissertation, petitions and appeals, academic honesty, research ethics; oversee internal/external award nomination and adjudication; FGS representation on Labor Management Committee (LMC), Senate and its subcommittees, MAAC, PACHR, ensure compliance with external requirements (MTCU, COU, Tri-Council, QC, LAC, AODA) and internal CAs.

b) Administration:

As the central service provider for graduate studies, FGS will continue to provide the following oversight services to the York community (with partner units in these activities are included in parentheses).

- Enrollment/admission and registration (Registrar's Office, Admissions)
- adjudication and administration of external scholarships/awards/bursaries (Office of Student Financial Services (OSFS), Advancement)
- thesis and dissertation proposal review (including research ethics review), oral exam scheduling and examiner payments, thesis/dissertation submission, review and approval
- petitions and appeals (Graduate Programs (GPs), Office of Research Ethics, Libraries)
- funding commitment letters, student financial account advising, scholarship/bursary postings, refund cheque assessments (GPs, OSFS, Payroll)
- student and fund matching for faculty research grants (VPRI, ORUs, GPs)
- tuition payroll deduction (Payroll)
- Unit 1 and 3 CUPE 3903 contract approval and payments (HR, Payroll, CUPE 3903)
- HRDC (SIN) letters, UHIP premium reimbursement for international students (YI, GSA)
- administration of Ontario Visiting Graduate Student (OVGS) program
- administration of special institutional agreements (ORS, YI)
- GSPD (YUL, KMb, WC, Mitacs, TC, CC, YURA, graduate faculty)
- policy development; e.g. Dean's Task Force on Graduate Students with Disabilities (CDS, Senate)
- assistance in negotiating complex university and union policies/structures
- GPD/GPA training and advising (GPs)

- Collection and provision of graduate studies data and recommendations (all partners)
- Advice and support for curricular and academic changes (GPs)
- Provision and oversight of governance structure (GPs)
- Reporting and representation to pan-university committees (Labour Management Committee(LMC), Senate, Finance, Treasury, OSFS, VPRI/ORs, RO, Advancement, QA, HR, PRASE)
- Promotion and coordination of Mitacs research funds and training programs (Mitacs, ORS)
- Creation of funding commitment letters, approval of student employment contracts (GPs, HR, CUPE 3903)
- Provision of student funding information to other Offices of the Dean, matching of students with faculty researchers, matching of faculty research funds budgeted for graduate researcher stipends (anchor faculties, VPRI, ORUs)
- Creation and promotion of graduate-specific supports and GSPD activities
- Link graduate studies financial and human resources to its priorities and objectives
- Identify and promote investments in graduate studies/programming within Faculties and departments/schools
- Identify capacity for graduate growth (teaching and supervisory) through Faculty level PBRAs
- Provide sensitivity analysis capabilities for graduate student services
- Strengthen graduate support and accountability in QAP
- Provide systematic basis/metrics to track graduate education, costs and growth
- Strengthen accountability for graduate supervision, teaching and enrolment management

c) Funding

With the Activity Based Budget Model (ABB), graduate funding will be located in cognate Faculties. It is anticipated that this transfer of funding will create new and more innovative possibilities for graduate funding. It will be the task of FGS to organize information sessions and provide training about graduate funding to Faculty executive officers and Associate Deans with graduate education in their portfolios. While the Faculties will have direct responsibility for graduate funding from academic programs to student funding, FGS will be responsible for the administration of oversight of the CUPE 3903 CA and external scholarships.

3) Enhancing Graduate Student Experience

Fundamental to achieving the research intensification goals as set out by the UAP is ensuring the best possible academic experience for our graduate students. **A critical point of departure for the FGS has been to rethink what we do, when we put students at the centre of what we do.** How do we support graduate

students through their studies? How easy it for students to access services? How do we articulate the value and contributions of graduate students to the wider community? How do we serve graduate students? How do we support academic programs to provide the most stimulating academic experience for our students? This shift has changed how we engage with graduate students and what we offer them. Some of the changes include creating supervisory workshops offered through the Teaching Commons, launching the Graduate Professional Skills Programs, personal invitations and the offer of grant proposal writing support for students with the minimum GPA to apply for scholarships (we have had a 1200% increase in applications), inviting retired faculty to provide feedback on graduate student conference presentations, and developing better mechanisms to bring graduate students and funded researchers together.

In the last two years, FGS has facilitated three working groups specifically designed to enhance the graduate student experience: graduate students with disabilities; international graduate students; and enhancing the graduate student experience (Appendix B). The working groups have consulted students, graduate data, related research in the area, the AAPR recommendations, and comparative practices at other institutions. The results of these working groups will be forwarded to FGS Faculty Council with recommendations in Spring 2015.

In the interim, we do know that graduate students need to foster a strong sense of community. Over the last three reiterations of the Canada Graduate Professional Student Survey (CGPSS), York students have consistently identified space and community for areas of improvement. As well, there are three significant pressure points for graduate students, particularly doctoral students, during the course of their studies: 1) funding; 2) comprehensive examinations; and 3) writing dissertation.

In terms of these last three items, graduate students and faculty are interested in timely completion of degree studies. Students have relayed concerns about complicated and contradictory expectations of comprehensive examinations. Some students have had difficulties securing comprehensive and dissertation committees. There is also wide variation in supervisory and supervisory committees from daily interactions to one supervisory meeting per year. Many students very much want to continue with their intellectual post-comprehensives. Hence, it is important for graduate programs to review their course offerings, comprehensive examination requirements, and what kind of infrastructure to provide as students move to writing their dissertations. For example, one of the FGS' most popular workshop is "Shut Up and Write." Deliberative and overt measures to move students through their program in a timely manner would be welcomed by students, staff and faculty.

Finally, FGS is committed to supporting Faculties in ways to strengthen graduate programming and administration. These opportunities include:

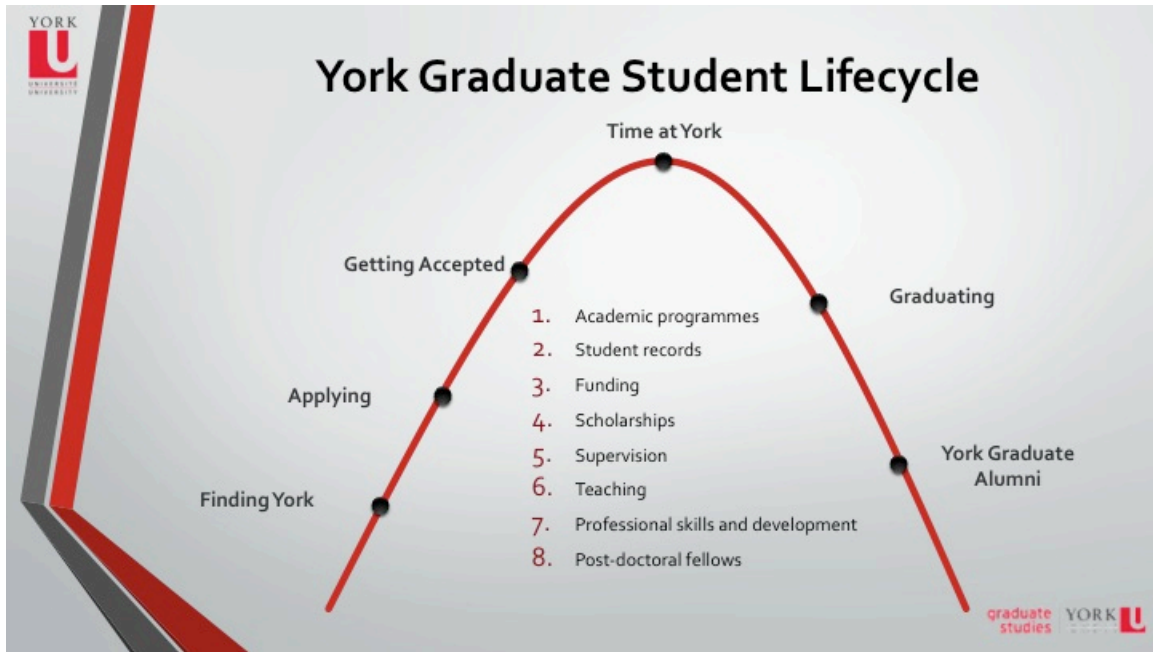
- Faculties have significant opportunity to change graduate funding allocation (GAs/RAs/Gas) to better support timely completion
- FGS continue to administer matching funds through a competitive process to encourage researchers to use external funds to support graduate students
- FGS to work with Faculties in developing and enhancing best practices for scholarship success
- Faculties to take up Mitacs more overtly
- Designated graduate strategic enrolment personnel in Faculties
- Social media strategies
- Commit to training and service development for staff
- Create Faculty budgets for recruitment
- Integration of graduate education in Faculty websites
- Better representation and articulation of university students as undergraduates and graduates
- Profile graduate/faculty research and partnerships
- Encourage third and fourth year students to consider graduate school through course outlines and workshops
- Four plus one master's program
- Change programs for doctoral degrees
- Integrate professional skills development in graduate programs
- Mobilize graduate alumni for fundraising and networking
- Continuing Education – Graduate diplomas and possible laddering to full-time graduate programs
- Support and increase number of post-doctoral fellows
- Partner with YUELI GP3 program to transition international graduate students to programming at York

Finally, it is critical that the next UAP represent and engage graduate education on parity with undergraduate education. The equal emphasis on both graduate and undergraduate education will create a more defined space necessary for undergraduate and graduate education to closely interact with each other to achieve many of the UAP priorities, including research intensification of York. Creating a stronger understanding of the place of graduate education at York University requires that we:

- Acknowledge and adequately support our excellent graduate programs;
- Make more explicit in University documents the important contributions graduate students make to research and scholarly innovation;
- Better facilitate research and scholarship opportunities for graduate students;
- Celebrate graduate student contributions to research and scholarship;
- Fundraise for graduate student scholarships, conference travel and field research costs;
- Integrate professional skills development in graduate curriculum; and

- Significantly increase the number of post-doctoral fellows.

Appendix A: Graduate Student Lifecycle



Appendix B: Task Force on Graduate Students with Disabilities, International Working Group, and Enhancing the Graduate Student Academic Experience

Task Force on Graduate Students with Disabilities

(Task Force commenced under the leadership of Dean Hutchinson)

Action item: Handbook for Graduate Students with Disabilities, February 2015

Membership:

International Working Group

The primary task of the international working group is to enhance international graduate students experience at York. Our hope is that the group will help us develop a thorough understanding of the specific challenges international students face in successfully pursuing their graduate programmes. The group is expected to put forward concrete recommendations designed to improve further enhance the existing support mechanisms available for international graduate students.

Membership:

John Greyson; GPD

William Jenkins, GPD

Dina Ning, York International

Philip Shea, York International

Jolin Joseph, Doctoral Candidate in GFWS (nominated by the GPD)

Marta Silva, Doctoral Student in Sociology (nominated by GSA)

Pavla Kristkova, Doctoral Student in Law and (GA for FGS)

Heather Moore, Staff, FGS

Fahim Quadir, Associate Dean, (Chair)

Meetings: October 8 and 22, November 19 and December 10, 2014

Three Focus Groups were organized with international graduate students (the call was sent out through the grad students, GPDs and GPAs listservs. It was also posted on our web page and a registration form was created for the participation of the students in the FGDS. Focus Groups were conducted on November 4, 10 and 19, 2014.

Working Group on Enhancing the Graduate Student Academic Experience

The primary focus of the Working Group on Enhancing the Graduate Student Academic Experience is to identify critical issues related to graduate studies at the PhD and Masters level and make recommendations aimed at the successful and timely completion of students' program of study. To this end, the group has identified three areas of focus: 1) Supervision, 2) Opportunities for Research and Professional Skills Development, and 3) Facilities/Space.

Membership:

Karen A. Krasny, Associate Dean, Academic FGS, Chair
Julie Falck, PhD (FT) student, Osgood Law (nominated by GPD)
Maris Grundy, MA student, (FT) Environmental Studies (nominated by GPD)
Sonya Sachar, PhD student, (FT) Education (nominated by GPD)
Nasra Smith, MA student, (FT) English (nominated by GPD)
Sujanthan Sriskandarajah, PhD student, (FT) Mathematics
Lisa Sloniowski, Reference Librarian and PhD student (PT)
Adrienne Perry, Graduate Program Director, Psychology