

## FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES UNIT REVIEW

### Summary Report

The Site Visit of the Unit Review Team for the Faculty of Graduate studies took place from December 5-6, 2016. The Unit Review Team consisted of:

Brenda Brouwer, Queen's University  
Brian Corman, University of Toronto  
Patrick Osmer, Ohio State University  
Susan Graham, University of Calgary

Following the Site Visit, the Unit Review Team prepared a written report containing comments and recommendations. The Faculty of Graduate Studies subsequently provided responses to the recommendations. General comments and the recommendations and responses follow.

#### General Comments of the Unit Review Team

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The Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) is a highly-valued unit, demonstrating strong leadership in all aspects of graduate education and service (program development, student support, unit support). It plays a crucial role in insuring consistency in policy, regulations, and best practices, supporting new directions that align with institutional priorities, and providing highly responsive leadership in meeting the ever-changing challenges of a research-intensive, international university.

FGS is well staffed and the staff are very well invested in the success of the unit. Staff morale is high and individuals take pride in working as a cohesive team. They are well-informed and responsive in addressing the needs of the various stakeholders. These stakeholders report that they are uniformly satisfied with their interactions with staff, the support of their needs, and the quality of the information provided. Representatives of different stakeholder groups often expressed amazement with the speed and the value of the responses provided by FGS staff.

FGS provides institutional infrastructure for the efficient enabling of new initiatives and effective operation of graduate education; it is also dedicated to supporting new initiatives by providing advice and hands-on help to assist units in realizing the benefits of those initiatives. The strong and positive relationship FGS has established with the Graduate Students' Association is evidence of its successful demonstration of its dedication to enhancing the experience of Calgary's graduate students.

The impressive collaborative nature of FGS in policy development takes into account the individual needs and natures of different programs, recognizing that one size does not fit all. The FGS provides resources to aid graduate units toward realizing their individual aspirations as well as the collective aspirations of the University.

Under the leadership of the current Dean, FGS has achieved considerable positive recognition as an essential element in the success of the graduate programs offered by the teaching faculties. We concur.

## General Response from the Faculty of Graduate Studies

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The unit reviewers provided a generally positive evaluation of the work of FGS, noting that it is a “highly-valued unit, demonstrating strong leadership in all aspects of graduate education.” We interpret this as an endorsement of the quality of the service provided by the FGS staff as well as of the significant initiatives that have been pursued in recent years.

Each of the review team’s recommendations will be discussed below. They have been divided into those that fall primarily within the scope of the unit to address, and those that require institutional resources or actions.

## Detailed Reviewer Recommendations and Faculty Response

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### **Faculty Level Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** Clear funding letters should be provided for all graduate students on an annual basis, itemizing sources of funding, amounts and taxation

**Recommendation 2:** Require external scholarship applications as a condition for receiving internal funding

### **Faculty Response:**

In January of 2017, we initiated a full review of graduate funding policies and practices. The scope of this review includes discussion of:

- Minimum funding requirement for all students in thesis-based programs
- Establishing University-level or Program-level regulations governing student funding (i.e. interaction of external scholarships, teaching assistantships with minimum funding guarantees; requiring application for external scholarships for continuing students)
- Allocation of scholarship and other funds among programs

The first recommendation – clear letters on an annual basis – can be folded into the funding review. The more pressing issue, from the perspective of students, is to clarify programs’ approach to funding so that funding arrangements are predictable. Both of these should be addressed in the funding review.

The second recommendation – mandatory scholarship applications – has considerable merit when applied to continuing students. It is considered too onerous for incoming students, as it would require them to apply for funding before applying for admission. Many SSHRC programs already require this; discussion at FGS Council will focus on whether this should become a university-level requirement.

**Recommendation 3:** Moderate pace of new initiatives while graduate units absorb & adapt to recent changes

**Faculty Response:**

This is an entirely reasonable recommendation and will be respected to the best of our ability. Focus is shifting toward implementation of these new policies and procedures, and providing support for graduate program directors and administrators involved in their implementation. The policy governing supervision is particularly demanding from an administrative point of view, and adjustments to implementation are being made to lessen the administrative burden on graduate program directors.

**Recommendation 4:** Continue to consult with programs about alternative means of ensuring a match between applicant and supervisor to mitigate against limiting the applicant pool

**Faculty Response:**

As is the case at many Canadian universities, admissions into many graduate programs (particularly in Engineering and Medicine) tends to involve individual decisions by supervisors that are then approved by the Director of the graduate program. We will continue the conversation with these programs to discuss the merits of competitive admissions processes.

**Recommendation 5:** Clearly articulate processes with respect to multidisciplinary programs so that they can adhere to policies and ensure they can be implemented as intended

**Faculty Response:**

The governance of multidisciplinary graduate programs is a challenge that is not unique to the University of Calgary. The concerns expressed in the course of the unit review focused in particular on the renewal of graduate supervisors who supervise in interdisciplinary graduate programs. Although processes were articulated during the first round of renewals, they were not followed by all graduate program directors involved. As we revise these processes in order to streamline them, we will work to clarify and increase compliance.

**Recommendation 5:** Maintain Sharepoint site, ensure old documents archived, file names meaningful

**Recommendation 6:** Copy GPAs on communications to ensure they are apprised of requirements and/or requests

**Faculty Response:**

The Sharepoint site is a critical tool for communication and shared record keeping with graduate programs. The reviewers' comments regarding its upkeep have been noted, and will affect practice moving forward. One obstacle is the sharepoint site itself; site and file maintenance has been prevented by the outdated version of sharepoint being used. We understand that a new version is being made available through IT, and we have requested early implementation through our IT partner.

The second recommendation is being implemented regularly.

## **Institutional Level Recommendations**

**Recommendation 6:** FGS should play active role in unit reviews

### **Faculty Response:**

The Faculty of Graduate Studies assists Faculties preparing for Unit Reviews by assisting with provision of data, if not available through OIA. The Dean sits in on the closing meeting for the unit review, and is sometimes invited to participate as part of a panel of cognate Deans during the review. Departmentalized faculties vary in their processes for reviewing departments; the Faculty of Arts invites the Dean of Graduate Studies or designate to meet with review teams to discuss the graduate program in the department. In the absence of formal reviews for graduate programs, there is merit to including the Dean of Graduate Studies in departmental reviews.

The quality assurance framework for graduate education will be reviewed in 2017, to make the metrics-based review process for graduate programs more rigorous. This should improve the oversight of graduate program quality on an ongoing basis.

**Recommendation 7:** Development/implementation of online scholarship application system

### **Faculty Response:**

A proposal for this system was included in a recent budget submission. It is our understanding that it has been funded to be developed in 2017/18 and 2018/19. The Scholarships office is reviewing its staffing levels in order to ensure it can provide appropriate involvement in the development.

**Recommendation 8:** Consider revising post-candidacy fee reductions

### **Faculty Response:**

Tuition fees fall within the jurisdiction of the Board of Governors, and are regulated by the Government of Alberta. In the event that the current provincial Tuition Review results in an opportunity to revisit graduate tuition fees, this proposal might be considered.

**Recommendation 9:** Adapt the budget model such that a portion of the revenue flows in accordance with enrolments

### **Faculty Response:**

The University's budget model falls outside the jurisdiction of the Faculty of Graduate Studies.

## **Follow-up**

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The Review Team recommendations will be revisited mid-way through the Unit Review cycle. At that point, the Faculty of Graduate Studies will be required to report on its status in acting on the recommendations, providing explanations and timelines for those which have not been met. This

interim report should be submitted to the Provost in June 2019, with the next full review scheduled in 2021-2022.