

Meeting Notes
Graduate Education Council
Tuesday, February 23, 2021

The Dean called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. and welcomed members and guests.

The Dean began the meeting by acknowledging the land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work and study on this land.

1) Approval of the Agenda of the Graduate Education (GEC) Meeting of February 23, 2021.

MOTION (*duly moved by Professor Charmaine Williams and seconded by Professor Gretchen Kerr*)
THAT the agenda of the Graduate Education Council meeting of February 23, 2021 as circulated with the agenda, be approved.

The motion is **CARRIED, unanimous.**

2) Approval of the Minutes of the Graduate Education Council Meeting of October 20, 2020.

The Dean noted that the minutes of the October 20, 2020 meeting were distributed with the agenda.

MOTION (*duly moved by Professor Charmaine Williams and seconded by Professor Gretchen Kerr*)
THAT the minutes of the Graduate Education Council meeting of October 20, 2020, be approved.

The motion is **CARRIED, unanimous.**

3) Business Arising from the Minutes

There was no business arising from the minutes.

4) Dean's Remarks

- a) **Response and Adaptation Committee (RAC) and Fall 2021 Assumptions and Modelling** –The Dean is member of RAC, which is responsible for planning for the summer and fall terms in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a rapidly evolving situation, it being a race between the COVID-19 variants and the vaccine roll-out. It is expected that the summer session will be almost exclusively held on-line, with exceptions made for essential in-person courses and other activities, such as essential research. Vaccinations are targeted to begin April through June, and there is optimism that in the fall there will be opportunities to be back in-person in a significant way, but with significant constraints around numbers of people being able to gather, physical distancing, masking, etc. We have shown that we are able to shift from in-person back into an online environment, but the other direction is more challenging. It will be prudent to plan for a good amount of in-person activity in the fall, but the University will defer to public health guidance in these matters. Travel restrictions are an area that will be slower to change in order to protect against the new variants. Online delivery is likely to be needed for international students, and possibly for those requiring health accommodations.
- b) The [Provost's Postdoctoral Fellows Program \(PPFP\)](#) funding initiative for underrepresented groups, black and indigenous scholars, has been made a permanent UofT offering. The three-year pilot was very successful and inspired similar programs at other Universities such as York University which just announced a very similar program. A call for applications for the next round has gone out with results to be announced in May 2021.

- c) The [Doctoral Completion Award](#) (DCA) has gone through some revision and will see its budget increased by 20% over the next two years. This award is directed at students who have just left the funding cohort in their research stream program and is designed to provide them with financial support in that critical phase.
- d) The Dean is launching a series of **Virtual Coffee Chats** with graduate students and postdoctoral fellows who wish to share their experiences and concerns. The group this morning were second-year students in the research stream from various faculties. They are doing well and have had good experiences in terms of support from their supervisors. One of the challenges highlighted was the absence of opportunities for more serendipitous interactions that are so often at the heart of new learning and discovery, i.e., the hallway chats and interactions that take place around normal meetings, an advantage of being in-person. SGS will continue to learn from these meetings and to formulate our approaches to graduate education based on what we are learning.
- e) SGS is in the beginning stages of rolling out a new **graduate application system**. Brian Desrosiers-Tam, Director of the Office of the Vice-Provost, Graduate Research and Education, explained that the update to the new graduate application system (SLATE) was required, in part, to meet OADA standards and to provide a user-experience that will be more friendly for students and faculty administrators. SGS has recently completed the first phase of the project where five graduate units (Law, Dentistry, Information, Nursing, and the A&S Department of Chemistry) started reviewing a subset of their applications in the new system. Phase two and three of the project will begin shortly and involves the migration the remaining graduate units into the new system in order for them to start accepting new applications for Fall 2022 in Slate, at which time the old system will be retired. SGS is guided through this project by a Consultant Team and a Steering Committee that meets regularly to provide advice and to make decisions on the implementation.
- a) **Question:** A member asked if SLATE would have an EDI Lens. **Answer:** With the rollout of the new system, SGS has taken the opportunity to include the questions that the Office of the Vice-Provost, Students is using for its Student Census. Many units across the University are working hard to put EDI initiatives into place that will improve the level of representation of underrepresented groups in their programs.
- b) SGS will be hosting an **Award Ceremony** in April for the ~2,000 graduate students who are the successful recipients of some highly competitive and prestigious awards valued at ~\$36 million. This event will take place virtually.
- f) **gradSERU Institutional Survey** - SGS runs two major student surveys every three years. One is the CGPSS which captures all universities in Canada, and the other is the gradSERU, which is a consortium of research intensive universities who have agreed to share survey results for inter-university comparison on topics such as learning remotely during COVID, student life, and student well-being. SGS first participated in the gradSERU survey in 2017; this time a survey of undergraduate students will be taking place at the same time. Last time we learned that 25% of respondents were interested in more information from their supervisors about networking opportunities and career development. This helped SGS improve supports in the Centre for Graduate Professional Development and launch the new Centre for Graduate Mentorship and Supervision.
- g) Professor Gretchen Kerr has accepted the role of Dean in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education effective July 1, 2021. Professor Kerr joined SGS as the **Vice Dean, Programs and Innovation** in 2018, and over the past few years she has made a real impact on graduate education across the University. She led the Working Group on the Dissertation, oversaw a formative review of both our Graduate Center for Academic Communication (CGAC) and the Graduate Professional Skills (GPS) Programs, and she helped set a new strategic direction for Graduate Professional Development that will come to fruition over the next months. She has been the SGS point person on graduate program reviews, Joint Educational Placements, International Doctoral Clusters, Graduate Faculty Memberships, and much more. This past year she has been instrumental in shaping and implementing the SGS COVID-19 response. The Dean thanked Professor Kerr for her service and congratulated her on her new role.
- h) The Dean provided highlights on the impact of COVID on graduate students, acknowledging that we will only fully understand the longer-term impacts of COVID on student progress in the coming years. SGS will continue to track numbers to gain a better understanding of the impact and adapt our response accordingly.
- Fewer doctoral students reached candidacy in 2019-20 than in previous year.
 - The number of Final Oral Exams decreased in 2019-20 compared to previous years.

- Student attendance at Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 SGS Orientations, as well as offerings from the Graduate Centre for Academic Communications and the Graduate Professional Development Skills programs have increased three to four-fold with the move to online offerings.

5) SGS Updates

a) Vice Dean, Programs & Innovation, Professor Gretchen Kerr

- Professor Gretchen Kerr, Vice-Dean Programs and Innovation reported on priorities of the **Academic Continuity** Working Group. They are developing calendar notices for the Fall session which identify the current and evolving circumstances. Planning continues for Fall 2021 with modeling different teaching scenarios with 20%, 50% capacity, etc. In terms of the summer term, it is *status quo* with online delivery except for those activities that have been deemed essential for in-person.
- In partnership with the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Planning and the Director of Online Learning, SGS has developed [Guidelines for Online Learning in Graduate Academic Programs](#). Advantages and disadvantages were identified with the pivot to online learning in March 2020. As we start to prepare for the post-pandemic time, we need to consider what to keep about online delivery and what to change. The [document](#) will be helpful in defining different models of online learning, as well as the requirements for program approval.
- **Revision to the Final Oral Examination SGS Guidelines** - In response to feedback from Units regarding final decision confusion between “minor corrections” and “minor modifications” during Final Oral Examination committee deliberations, SGS undertook a review of voting procedures to provide greater clarity and streamline options. Professor Kerr explained the current decision options and SGS’ proposed modified options for discussion and information:
 - Thesis is accepted in its present form
 - Thesis is acceptable with editorial changes, specifying that these are editorial corrections and nothing more of substance.
 - Thesis is acceptable with minor revisions. There is a slight change in wording, but it makes one category specific to editorial changes, and the other to small or minor revisions, keeping the current one and three-month time periods.
- Following receipt of additional feedback, this will be brought forward to the April GEC for information.
- **The Graduate Pulse Survey** was administered November 2020. Designed to mirror the pulse survey given to faculty and staff earlier in the year, the survey will help SGS better understand some of the challenges students are experiencing as they advance through their academic programs during the pandemic. Topics cover health and well-being, building a sense of community, and awareness of/feedback on supports and resources available. The low response 10% response rate represents 2,000 students. A report will be available on the SGS website shortly. Here is a summary of feedback:
 - Approximately 2/3 of research-stream respondent reported disruption to their research
 - Only 1/3 of respondents engaged in internships or practica agreed or strongly agreed that these are high-quality experiences
 - Respondents reported are aware of health resources and ~40% of respondent accessed these
 - Academic progress, social isolation and poor mental health remain major challenges
 - Support from supervisor/program directors and peers have been key facilitators. Approximately 80% of the respondents *agreed or strongly agreed* that they feel supported by their supervisors/program directors and their peers.
 - Flexibility in expectations, processes for meeting program requirements, when and where work is conducted, has been fundamental to the graduate student experience.

b) **Vice-Dean Students, Professor Charmaine Williams**

- i. The [SGS Mental Health Working Group](#) was established last year as a complement to the activities of the Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health. The SGS group focused on the graduate student experiences and met over 2019-2020 to develop recommendations for integration and more effective responses to graduate student mental health and well-being in SGS activities. The report of the working group is available on the [SGS website](#), as is the response from Dean Barker, accepting all of the recommendations, including the recommendation to form an Advisory Committee that would provide advice and guidance on the implementation of the working group recommendations. The Advisory Committee is Co-Chaired by Professor Charmaine Williams and four (4) graduate students. There are members representing all UTM, UTSC and the St. George Campuses - 18 graduate students, three (3) faculty members, and three (3) staff members, all of whom have a long-term commitment to issues of student mental health and wellness. GEC members are encouraged to reach out with feedback, ideas.
- ii. **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**
 - The SGS EDI website will soon go live. Previously a plan was presented to create a hub within the SGS website to addresses EDI within SGS, a place where people can learn about our commitments in those areas as well as find their way to resources, initiatives and activities that are happening. The community will also be able to share information about what they are doing regarding EDI in the graduate study space. This page will be regularly updated so we continue to welcome feedback and ideas from members of this group, and the SGS community.
 - **Demographics data collection in admissions** - The student census is using this first year to get feedback from students on the experience and utility of providing an expanded range of demographic information. SGS will be happy to hear feedback that will inform how we move forward with this initiative, which should roll out in the next admission cycle.
- iii. **New Early Career Supervisory Award** - Through the JJ Berry Smith Doctoral Supervision Awards SGS recognizes individuals who have been supervisors for at least 15 years and who have demonstrated excellence in their supervision. SGS has recently established an new [Early Career Supervision Award](#), which is an opportunity to recognize the excellent supervision of faculty members that are within the first six years of their graduate faculty appointment. A joint call for nominations to these supervision awards will be circulated shortly.

c) **Student Academic Services Update** – Josie Lalonde, Director of Student Academic Services provided a summary of graduate admission, deferral, registration, and graduation trends.

- Nearly 8,000, or 58% of admitted applicants ultimately enrolled, which is slightly lower than the 60% from the previous year.
- There was an increase in deferrals compared to previous cycles but given the travel restrictions and other barriers students have faced this is not surprising.
- Registrations have increased slightly from last year.
- 847 students received the COVID-19 fee exemption in Fall 2020, introduced to assist students whose academic progress was impeded due to the pandemic.
- Leave of absence requests decreased.
- The International Visiting Graduate Student program has been heavily affected by pandemic travel restrictions.
- Over 7,000 students crossed the virtual stage in November 2019, March 2020, and June 2020, an 8% increase over the previous year.

d) Graduate Awards and Financial Aid Update

- i. As previously mentioned by the Dean, Laura Stathopoulos, Director reported that there will be a 20% increase in [Doctoral Completion Award](#) (DCA) funds over the next two years. The DCA is supported through SGS funds and managed/administered locally by graduate faculties and units to their eligible students. The DCA provides financial assistance to full-time doctoral students who are beyond the funding cohort, and within the time limit for the degree.
- ii. The **SGS Emergency Grant Program** aims to assist registered full-time graduate students who have encountered an unforeseen financial emergency during the course of their program. While the grant is not intended to replace or make up a shortfall in OSAP or other graduate funding packages, it can serve to provide short-term immediate relief during a financial crisis, or from unexpected expenses due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Since mid-March of 2020 SGS has issued over \$500,000 in emergency grant funds to students, and ~\$350,000 of the support was issued to students impacted by COVID-19. SGS is currently working with UofT quarantine program staff to assist those who may not be able to cover the costs of the federally mandated hotel quarantine upon entry to Canada.
- iii. Two reports were distributed with the agenda for information.
 - The **Graduate External Award Report** aims to maintain transparency with regard to the administrative processes at SGS for the centrally adjudicated federal and provincial awards. There is a new section this year regarding Tri-Agency COVID-19 Award extensions. In May 2020 the Canadian government announced that all Tri-Agency student scholarships and fellowships that were due to end between March -August 2020, which had been directly impacted by COVID-19, were eligible for a four-month extension. As a result of these available extensions the SGS Graduate Awards Office distributed award funds to more than 350 Tri-Agency award holders, almost \$3M in COVID support.
 - The **Internal Award Report** summarizes the newly created graduate awards made possible through the generous donations gifted to graduate faculties during the 2020 calendar year. Sixty-four (64) new graduate awards were created across graduate divisions, more than \$6.8M in donor contributions, with a potential annual income of over \$600,000 available for graduate students. Forty-one (41) of these new awards were created in response to the COVID pandemic.

6) Motions

a) New SGS Regulation – Doctor of Public Health

The Dean called on Professor Charmaine Williams to present the first motion

MOTION #1 THAT Graduate Education Council approve the proposed new Doctoral Degree Regulation for the Doctor of Public Health, to be included as section 12.6 under the School of Graduate Studies Degree Regulations (section 12 in the SGS Calendar), effective September 1, 2021.

MOTION (*duly moved and seconded by Professor Gretchen Kerr*)

A member asked if there was an experiential learning component to the program. Professor Erica Di Ruggiero, Director of the Centre for Global Health, confirmed that there is an applied placement component to the program that would allow for students to get an opportunity for more experiential learning. This will also be built into many other facets of the program.

Another member asked how many other universities in Canada have this program. Professor Di Ruggiero reported that it is an established program in several major schools of public health in the United States and United Kingdom, and DLSPH would be the first in Canada to have this program, although the University of Montreal is in the planning stages.

There being no further discussion, the Dean called the vote.

The motion was **CARRIED, unanimous.**

7) Other Business

There was no other business.

8) Closing Remarks

There being no further discussion or questions, the Dean thanked Council members for their participation and adjourned the meeting.

9) Reports for Distribution

Full reports were distributed with the agenda for information. Feedback is welcome to sgs.dean@utoronto.ca.

- a. Report on Postdoctoral Fellows, 2019-2021
- b. Report on Graduate Admissions, Registration and Graduation Trends 2020-2021
- c. Graduate Award Report on New Internal Awards 2020
- d. Graduate Award Report on Federal and Provincial Awards 2020-2021

The Dean called on Professor Charmaine Williams to present the motion to adjourn the meeting

Be it resolved THAT the Graduate Education Council meeting of February 23, 2021 be adjourned.

MOTION (*duly moved and seconded by Professor Gretchen Kerr*)

The motion was **CARRIED, unanimous.**