

## SGS Response to the Report on Graduate Professional Development at the University of Toronto

### Overview

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In light of the growing demand and recognized need for Graduate Professional Development (GPD) among graduate students and postdoctoral fellows at the University of Toronto, Locke Rowe, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) and Vice-Provost Graduate Research and Education, commissioned a report from Professor Reinhart Reithmeier, Special Advisor to the Dean of SGS on Professional Skills Development and Engagement. The purpose of the report was to:

- Define GPD and the need for GPD programming.
- Survey the current landscape of GPD at the University of Toronto.
- Identify issues and challenges in the organization, scale, and understanding of GPD at U of T.
- Suggest strategies to address these challenges.
- Suggest a new vision for GPD and a pathway to achieve the vision to benefit graduate students at U of T.

Dr. Reithmeier has submitted his “Report on Graduate Professional Development at the University of Toronto,” which concludes with a set of recommendations focusing on: increasing awareness of the changing landscape our graduates face, promoting the value of GPD as an integral part of graduate education, and expanding GPD opportunities. We would like to thank Dr. Reithmeier for his work over the past year in consulting with the University community and preparing this report. We are pleased to provide this response.

### Context and Background

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Graduate Professional Development (GPD) is competency- or skills-based training that complements the discipline-based coursework and research required for graduate degrees.

Why is GPD important to graduate education? Our graduates are being employed in an increasingly more diverse labour market. For instance, recent studies of employment outcomes for PhD graduates from all disciplines indicate that less than half of graduates move into an academic career; the remainder move into diverse professions in a remarkable array of sectors. Research and personal stories suggest that transitioning from graduate student to professional can be challenging. Graduate Professional Development can help ease this shift by giving graduates from doctoral-stream and professional programs the tools they need to help smooth the transition into the labour market.

It is clear that the importance of GPD is widely recognized across the University of Toronto. A large and diverse set of GPD courses and programs are offered by graduate programs (e.g., Biochemistry, Immunology, Rotman) and Faculties (e.g., Arts & Science, Medicine, Applied Science and Engineering) as well as the Career Centre, The Office of English Language and Writing Support (ELWS), Robarts Library, UTSC Centre for Teaching and Learning.

## The Role of SGS in GPD

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Since 2009, SGS has played a key role in coordinating and organizing GPD offerings at the University. With currently over 100 courses offered through its Graduate Professional Skills (GPS) program and The Office of English Language and Writing Support (ELWS), the School of Graduate Studies is already providing significant GPD opportunities to graduate students at the University of Toronto. However, student and faculty awareness of these offerings is not as strong as it should be and the range of GPD offerings should be expanded and broadened. Moreover, SGS is well placed to play a leading role in driving creative and innovative approaches to GPD for our students. Therefore, it is critical that SGS continues to develop a strong identity and presence for GPD at the University of Toronto.

## Response – Vision and Recommendations

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The report submitted by Dr. Reithmeier has allowed us to formulate a vision for GPD at the University of Toronto and to propose a set of action steps, with an eye to the short, medium and long term. The next steps will be for SGS to consult on the vision and proposed actions and to assemble a GPD Implementation Committee that will refine the recommendations and build a strategy to achieve the vision.

**Vision:** The goal of Graduate Professional Development at U of T is to provide graduate students and postdoctoral fellows the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and tools to develop both a transferable skill set and a professional network, enabling them to take advantage of diverse career opportunities in academia and beyond.

### Steps to Achieving the Vision

#### 1. Strengthen the identity of GPD as a core value of our graduate education.

- a. Define the objectives of the GPD program at the University of Toronto through the identification of a set of core competencies as the focus for curriculum development.
- b. Define the organizational levels (programs, Faculties, SGS) at which components of GPD should be offered.
- c. Promote GPD as a value-added component of graduate education that better equips students and postdoctoral fellows for their entry into the academic as well as the non-academic employment market.

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- d. Provide pathways by which GPD can be integrated as a core component of graduate education and post-doctoral positions.
- e. Create a modular GPD curriculum that allows students to self-select core competencies to complete and individualize their GPD learning.
- f. Develop tools to measure outcome data on an ongoing basis in order to evaluate the success of the GPD program (e.g. time to completion, employment outcomes, student experience).

## 2. Position SGS and U of T as leaders in GPD.

- a. Further strengthen the role of SGS as promoter, coordinator, and innovation engine for GPD at the University of Toronto.
- b. Work collaboratively with Divisions, Faculties and programs across the three U of T campuses to encourage, promote and support GPD at all levels of graduate education.
- c. Develop and promote active involvement of employers in developing and offering GPD components at U of T.
- d. Provide resources to allow SGS to:
  - i. Develop its role as a promoter of GPD at all levels of the University;
  - ii. Provide support and guidance to academic units; and
  - iii. Develop its own GPD offerings when appropriate.

## 3. Increase the visibility and recognition of GPD at the University of Toronto.

- a. Increase awareness and acceptance of the value of GPD among students, postdoctoral fellows, faculty and administrators.
- b. Better coordinate and promote GPD activities on campus and as part of recruitment.
- c. Create an online GPD site, within the SGS website, that provides students, faculty and employers access to relevant information on core competencies, published research, literature, online tools, etc.
- d. Provide a central online portal for access to GPD offerings across the University.

## 4. Provide stronger value-added recognition for students who complete the GPD curriculum.

- a. Provide students and postdoctoral fellows who have completed a minimum number of GPD modules with official recognition of their GPD completion.
- b. Develop an efficient online tracking tool to document GPD completion for students and postdoctoral fellows.
- c. Promote the value of GPD in graduate education to employers.

## Implementation Strategy

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### Shorter-term goals:

1. Appoint a GPD Director and provide staff support to lead and coordinate the GPD program.
2. Clearly articulate the vision for GPD at the University of Toronto.
3. Develop the GPD online portal.
4. Develop material to promote the value of GPD within our U of T community.

### Medium-term goals:

1. Establish funding and resources to stimulate GPD initiatives and innovation.
2. Identify and promote best practices and innovation in offering GPD curriculum across the University.
3. Establish SGS as the central GPD hub providing support and resources to the U of T academic community.
4. Develop GPD pathways by:
  - i. Creating a modular GPD curriculum structure.
  - ii. Identifying and promoting best practices for integrating GPD in graduate curricula.

### Longer-term goals:

1. Create ways to measure GPD program outcomes on an ongoing basis.
2. Integrate GPD as a core component within all graduate programs.
3. Engage employers as active participants in GPD programming at the University of Toronto.
4. Gain recognition for the School of Graduate Studies and the University of Toronto as a national and international leader in GPD.