Online Resources

Academic Support & Professional Development

- Accessibility Services: http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as

- Career Exploration & Education: http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/cc

- Graduate Professional Development (GPS) Programs: https://uoft.me/gps

- Graduate Centre for Academic Communication (GCAC): https://uoft.me/GCAC

Financial Support & Resources

- Base Funding: http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/about/explore-our-data

- SGS Grants, Bursaries, & Emergency Funding:
  https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/awards-category/financial-assistance/

- Financial Aid & Advising:
  https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/awards-funding/financial-aid-advising/

- Scholarships & Awards:
  https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/awards-funding/scholarships-awards/

Wellness Resources

- Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre (CRC): http://gradcrc.utoronto.ca/

- Graduate Counselling Services: https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/resources-supports/graduate-wellness-services-at-sgs/

- Grad Wellness: https://uoft.me/wellnessportal

- Safety & Support: http://safety.utoronto.ca/

Supervision Resources for Students

- *Graduate Supervision Guidelines - Student edition*: http://uoft.me/gradsupervision

- *Guidelines for Departmental Monitoring of Progress Through the PhD*:
  https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/policies-guidelines/monitoring-doctoral-progress/

- Checklist for Students: https://uoft.me/students-checklist

Best Practices for Doctoral Students

Best Practices for Doctoral Students

1. **Take an Active Role in Your Supervision**

2. **Get Involved Early and Often in Research**

3. **Build Community within Your Program**

4. **Become Familiar with University Supports and Resources**

5. **Know the Details of Your Funding Package**

6. **Enhance Your Professional Skills**

Have feedback?

The School of Graduate Studies welcomes your feedback and innovative ideas on how to support students in their programs and improve time to completion. Please contact sgs.vdeanstudents@utoronto.ca with suggestions.

Background

Completing your doctoral program requirements in a timely manner has far-reaching benefits. Rather than prolonging the mental and financial stresses of a demanding workload, you can focus on launching your career, whether you choose to remain in academia or pursue work elsewhere.

In 2015, the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) initiated a research project to better understand Time to Completion (TTC) and improve TTC and graduation rates for doctoral students at the University of Toronto. This project resulted in two research-informed and data-driven sets of Best Practices: one for Graduate Units and one for graduate students, both published in 2016.

Best Practices for Doctoral Students

1. Take an Active Role in Your Supervision

If your supervision is frequent, consistent, supportive, and transparent, you'll be able to focus your research sooner and make better progress.

How can you make the most of supervision?

▶ If you didn't select a supervisor before applying to the program, **ask** your department for resources that will help you make an informed decision and connect you with potential supervisors.

▶ As early as possible, **meet** with your supervisor to establish a common understanding about program milestones, meeting frequency, evaluation style, form of communication, and feedback (consult the *Graduate Supervision Guidelines - Student edition*, which includes a Supervision Checklist for Students). Together, create an independent development plan that will provide you with a clear roadmap to graduation.

▶ As you continue in your program, **meet** regularly with your supervisor and at least once a year with your supervisory committee to monitor your progress.

▶ **Address** challenges as early as possible: if you encounter difficulties achieving program milestones, speak with your supervisor or Graduate Coordinator/Director/Administrator (as appropriate to your program).

2. Get Involved Early and Often in Research

You'll be better prepared to meet your dissertation requirements if you have early opportunities for research, supervision, and academic collaboration.

How can you prepare yourself for advanced research and writing?

- ▶ **Ask** your supervisor about potential opportunities for research and collaboration early in your program.

- ▶ **Present** at and/or attend conferences and professional meetings early in your program.

- ▶ **Consider** getting thesis writing support through dissertation writing groups organized by your Grad Unit, the Graduate Centre for Academic Communication (GCAC), and Academic Success on St. George campus.

- ▶ **Familiarize** yourself with research ethics and integrity requirements and resources.

3. Build Community within Your Program

Feeling part of a larger graduate community helps you maintain a positive attitude and stay motivated personally and academically.

How can you build community in your program?

- ▶ **Participate** in social events, forums, speaker series, retreats and workshops.

- ▶ **Use** dedicated common spaces at the University where you can meet with other graduate students and faculty both socially and academically.

- ▶ **Help** maintain community by organizing social events and other initiatives.

- ▶ **Seek** out collaborative ways to connect with faculty and other graduate students (blogs, newsletters, e-mail bulletins).

- ▶ **Make** community a priority for yourself and your fellow graduate students by promoting your program's common purpose and goals in addition to other opportunities (both academic and non-academic) after graduation.

4. Become Familiar with University Supports and Resources

Graduate school is a challenging environment. Before problems arise, create support systems and find out what resources are available to help you.

How can you ensure you'll find the right resources when you need them?

- ▶ **Attend** orientation sessions to learn about policies, procedures, resources, support initiatives, and timelines.

- ▶ **Read** your Graduate Unit/Program Student Handbook carefully and consult the SGS website.

- ▶ **Look** for early opportunities to improve your time management skills so you can plan your work at all stages of your program (e.g. take a workshop or speak to a Learning Strategist at Academic Success on St. George campus).

- ▶ **Consider** taking a course to develop your proposal-writing skills before applying for grants or scholarships.

- ▶ **Familiarize** yourself with conflict resolution and counselling services offered through SGS and the University (e.g. the Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre, SGS Counselling Services, Grad Minds, the Health & Wellness Centre on St. George campus, the Health & Counselling Centre at UTM, counselling services at UTSC, and Academic Success on St. George campus).

- ▶ Early in your program, **get acquainted** with writing support services for graduate students, including courses and intensives offered by the Graduate Centre for Academic Communication (GCAC) at SGS.

5. Know the Details of Your Funding Package

Being well-informed about financial support will alleviate your stress, allowing you to feel more in control of your academic future and have a more positive experience of your program's culture.

How can you better understand the financial support available to you?

- ▶ **Read** your annual funding letter carefully and ensure you know details concerning the annual amount, source, and timing of the financial support you will be receiving.

- ▶ **Go** online to read your department's funding policy, and ask your department questions to clarify, as needed.

- ▶ **Share** with your department any feedback you have on funding structures and opportunities so that communications or processes can be refined.

- ▶ **Be aware** of additional resources that can help you, such as SGS emergency funding and bursaries and the dedicated financial counsellor at SGS.

- ▶ **Look** for awards opportunities regularly posted to Ulife and the SGS website, and check SGS Events for information sessions led by Graduate Awards staff.

6. Enhance Your Professional Skills

With professional skills, you'll be better equipped to find employment sooner, whether inside or outside of academia. You'll also be more motivated to complete your program requirements with these opportunities in view.

How can you develop your professional skills?

► **Seek** out professional development offerings and workshops, such as those offered by the Graduate Professional Skills Program (GPS) at SGS.

► **Reach out** to potential mentors: alumni, faculty, and representatives of industries outside academia.

► **Attend** speaker sessions representing a wide range of industries.

► **Network** with other students to share ideas about potential professional opportunities beyond graduation.

► **Consider** experiential learning programs such as internships, service learning programs and industry placements.

► **Use** career services such as Career Exploration & Education through Student Life.