School of Graduate Studies
Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC)
Terms of Reference
November 2020

**Purpose**

In the Spring of 2020, the SGS Mental Health Working Group was formed to complement the work of the Presidential and Provostial Task Force on Student Mental Health in recognition of the importance of considering the specific, and sometimes unique needs of graduate students.

The SGS Mental Health Working Group developed recommendations with consideration of the diverse graduate student population and the unique nature of graduate education. The recommendations were grounded in the understanding that the graduate community can:

- do more to proactively acknowledge, address, and respond to mental health challenges;
- better understand the range of needs and identify gaps;
- improve mental health awareness by promote existing resources and supports;
- design student-focused tools and approaches that are appropriate, inclusive and responsive.

The Working Group recommendations included: improving SGS communications to increase clarity and transparency and decrease stress for students; conducting a student-centered review of SGS policies and procedures with attention to where stress and barriers can be reduced; identifying, implementing, and improving practices and dynamics in supervision and mentoring that promote graduate student mental health; encouraging mental health literacy across all aspects of graduate education; and collaborating in new initiatives that will inform policy and procedures to address student mental health. The Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Vice-Provost, Graduate Research and Education, Joshua Barker, accepted all of the recommendations in his written response to the SGS Mental Health Working Groups’ Final Report.

In order to ensure the timely implementation of the Working Group’s recommendations and ongoing accountability in this area, SGS is establishing a new SGS Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC). The remit of the Advisory Committee will be to provide advice and guidance on the implementation of the SGS Mental Health Working Group Recommendations.

**Context**

The graduate student population is diverse in a variety of ways including age, citizenship, family status, ethnicity, culture, ability and disability, economic and social capital, and mental and physical health. Graduate students are also engaged in a range of experiences and dynamics that are specific to graduate education, such as managing supervisory relationships, meeting highly demanding academic milestones, completing professional internships and placements, working in isolation or in remote locations or group laboratory environments, preparing for future professional and academic careers, and managing academic work while managing other life demands. It is critically important to acknowledge and better understand the impact these multiple demands can have on graduate student
mental health and to implement strategies that promote graduate student mental health, and mental health literacy and inclusion, at the School of Graduate Studies. The Mental Health Advisory Committee will advise SGS on the development and implementation of these strategies.

Membership

The membership of the MHAC will be student focused and will include student voices that represent the graduate student population with priority assigned to representing a range of identities, personal experiences, and life experiences of our students. The Committee will also include involvement of staff and faculty members who are engaged with graduate student mental health issues. The MHAC will be Co-Chaired by the Vice-Dean, Students and 1-2 graduate student selected from the Advisory Committee membership. Members will serve a 2-year term.

Student Members (15):

- Two master’s students from the 4 divisions at the University of Toronto (Social Sciences, Humanities, Life Sciences and Physical Sciences).
- Two doctoral students from the 4 divisions at the University of Toronto (Social Sciences, Humanities, Life Sciences and Physical Sciences)
- One student member representing the University of Toronto Graduate Students’ Union
- Five students representing other graduate student groups
- Five student representatives from graduate student mental health/wellness groups

Faculty Members (5):

- Vice-Dean, Students Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, or delegate (Co-Chair of Committee)
- One faculty member from each of the 4 divisions at the University of Toronto (Social Sciences, Humanities, Life Sciences and Physical Sciences)

Staff Members (5):

- One staff member from each location (UTM, UTSC, and UTSG) Health & Wellness
- One staff representative in a Faculty-based Mental Health Program Officer role
- One Accessibility Advisor

Nominations

A request for nominations will be circulated to the graduate community each year in September and nominations will be reviewed by the School of Graduate Studies.

Meetings

The Mental Health Advisory Committee will schedule 4-5 meetings per year with fewer or additional meetings determined in consultation with the Committee.