



The Graduate Transformative Skills Project

Focus Group Summary



Data Presented at the Focus Groups

Table 1: Graduate Student Percentage Responses Regarding Wants and Expectations

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
I want more opportunities for career skills training	49	22		19	7	1	2
I feel too busy to pursue additional career skills training	30	40		9	13	7	1
I expect career skills training to be embedded into my program.	44	40		12	4	0	1

Table 2: Graduate Student Percentage Accessing Training Now

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure
I participate in career skills training opportunities offered by the University.	16	35		20	12	8	9
I participate in career skills training opportunities offered outside the University.	12	32		13	14	15	14

Table 3: Comparisons between Faculty and Graduate Student Responses – Want to Develop their Career Skills during their Graduate Degree

	Faculty, RE: Masters	Faculty, RE: Doctorate	Graduate Students
Strongly Agree	54	65	82
Agree	35	26	15
Don't Know / Neutral or Lower	11	5	2

Table 4: Comparisons between Faculty and Graduate Student Responses – Want More Opportunities for Career Skill Training

	Faculty, RE: Masters	Faculty, RE: Doctorate	Graduate Students
Strongly Agree	22	31	49
Agree	38	32	22
Don't Know / Neutral or Lower	19	16	19

Table 5: Top Three Skills Students Should Learn Based on Ranking of “Very Important”

	Faculty (Masters)	Faculty (Doctorate)	Graduate Students
SKILL 1	Exercise integrity and ethical behaviour 95 %	Display comprehension of basic foundational knowledge relevant to their field of study 99 %	Critical Thinking 91 %
SKILL 2	Critical Thinking 94 %	Critical Thinking 99 %	Exercise integrity and Ethical behaviour 87 %
SKILL 3	Display comprehension of Basic foundational knowledge Relevant to their field of study 94 % (Students 14 % lower)	Work Independently 97 %	Communicate complex Information to a variety of Audiences orally 86 % (Faculty 10 % lower)

Table 6: Confidence that Students Learn those Things Based on Ranking of “Very Confident”

	Faculty (Masters)	Faculty (Doctorate)	Graduate Students
SKILL 1	Exercise integrity and ethical behaviour 55 %	Display comprehension of basic foundational knowledge relevant to their field of study 70 %	Critical Thinking 73 %
SKILL 2	Critical Thinking 34 %	Critical Thinking 60 %	Exercise integrity and Ethical behaviour 74 %
SKILL 3	Display comprehension of Basic foundational knowledge Relevant to their field of study 54 % (Students 74 % very confident)	Work Independently 65 %	Communicate complex Information to a variety of Audiences orally 44 % (Faculty 29 % very confident)

What surprised you about the data?

What did not surprise you about the data?

- Faculty and graduate students seem to have different understanding and expectations of the outcomes of a graduate program.
- Graduate students want to develop their career skills, but not to the same extent that they want opportunities for career skill training.
- Some of the importance put on specific career skills seems unusual, although this may be discipline dependent.
- There are large gaps between importance and confidence in obtaining specific career skills, both between faculty and graduate students, and within faculty and graduate students.

“Anything that would require a rethink and redevelop of significant courses, or one or two courses, might be the reluctance to put more opportunities in there because it means more work in design from the beginning.”

Graduate Chair

“It looks like the faculty member have not thought of career training as a task or objective.”

Graduate Chair

“Graduate students want to develop their career skills, but not to the same extent that they want opportunities for career skill training.”

Graduate Chair

“The challenge here is that for a lot of the departments, what we see as the primary outcomes will vary significantly.”

Graduate Chair

“Most faculty don't really know their students very well. They don't understand what their students really want. I guess they never sit down with them and ask them the question where would you like to be in a year from now.”

Graduate Chair

“The gap that I'm seeing is the fact that for faculty, communication doesn't even show up but our students think that's a really important skill, but that they don't feel very good about their ability to communicate orally.”

Graduate Chair

“Part of me wonders whether there are any differences in undergraduate background, maybe some undergraduate backgrounds are more strong than others and that's leading to differences in critical thinking skills, sort of before they even come here.”

Graduate Chair

“There's an inherent paradox that we repeatedly see in our programs. Students want more, but they don't have time for more. And so when things are created for them, they don't engage.”

Graduate Chair

“I was a little surprised how the prioritized skills are kind of academic in nature; foundational knowledge, critical thinking, ability to communicate knowledge, as opposed to more, I guess kind of professional career oriented skills that would travel outside of the university.”

Graduate Chair

“Most of what is being done has to do with Saskatchewan and many of us are coming from international backgrounds and it may not have a lot of meaning to us.”

Graduate Student

“I would say what's not surprising is that, I guess the professors and students seem to have different understandings or ideas about what they need or what they want to have out of their professional graduate programs.”

Graduate Student

“I think what they think they need or what they think is necessary. It's not always necessary to the students. Like I feel like some of the programs need to be revamped, they are a bit archaic.”

Graduate Student

“What surprised me, at the same time doesn't surprise me, is the little engagement that we have. Because for me, it's like sometimes the students, maybe they are busy and just focused on their projects and they don't see the importance of doing something else.”

Graduate Student

“I think, the response gotten from the graduates, is that we want to get that option to develop our career skills. At the same time, we get the responses from the supervisors, which they do agree or strongly agree with it. Now one thing that I haven't seen, it's options and it hasn't been a conversation with my supervisors on how to get this done.”

Graduate Student

**Based on your experience,
what types of graduate career
skills training options would be
preferable?**

- Expanding knowledge base to allow graduate students to be better prepared for non-academic careers.
- Promote discussions with graduate students to understand career expectations.
- Promoting and integrating tangible and practical/hands-on career skills relevant to the field.
- Encourage participation in training outside of the department.
- Redefine and take advantage of the 990's.
- Incorporating digital technological skills and intercultural communication.
- Collaboration and diversify opportunities that can be accessible to any individual.

“I'm conscious to have conversations about what are you planning to do for your career? Like, what are you thinking about? How can I reach out to my network or who can I connect you with as faculty? What are your career goals?”

Graduate Chair

“We deliberately talk a lot about leadership skills within our courses and we've been intentionally revamping each one of our 800 level courses, with that in mind.”

Graduate Chair

“Students present their work. And then they're asked questions. This structure very much prepares the students for being able to speak to others about their work. That's very much embedded in the structure of our program. And they're used to getting feedback on a regular basis as well.”

Graduate Chair

“I know students that have a large gap in their oral capabilities, I have to send them to Toastmasters and they go for half a year to a year to that.”

Graduate Chair

“I think we do need to start rethinking the way in which we understand the way that we can help our students acquire these skills. So for example, I'm entirely supportive, eager in fact, to work with somebody in the library to help get students in our program, students in any program, what I call knowledge management skills.”

Graduate Chair

“And we need to find ways to cross boundaries, work with others in a way that's mutually beneficial.”
Graduate Chair

“My suggestion is to have a university wide course, better team, taught with hands-on experience for our students.”
Graduate Chair

“We do sort of a career skills training course like 990 where we kind of go through all of these different items a little bit, like indigenous perspectives.”
Graduate Chair

“We also have a journal club, that all students take for three terms. That was really meant to address both reading and communications skills.”
Graduate Chair

“Things where you must teach a certain amount in order to get your PhD candidacy. And there should be a certain amount of professional development that's required.”
Graduate Chair

“The courses are important, but even social events are important. Departmental functions, guest speakers, being able to kind of interact, networking professional environments.”
Graduate Chair

“In my first year, they brought in a few persons who told us how they did their resumes, even though they studied X thing.” *Graduate Student*

“There is some element in my program to defining skills and focusing on those skills, but at the end of the day, we don't really talk about what to do with those skills once we're out of the program.” *Graduate Student*

“I think we're living in a technological age and I think we need to learn some technological skills outside of Microsoft word.” *Graduate Student*

“I think it is very important for those who are coming internationally in order to teach them how to critically think and critically write.” *Graduate Student*

“I think intercultural communication training within the university is important.” *Graduate Student*

“I think there should be more talks/workshops in 990, not only just science talks but more about things like entrepreneurship.” *Graduate Student*

“I think one way of doing this is to perhaps offer graduate students an option to do an entrepreneurship class. Like getting to the stage where you can actually ask funding from angel investors. Another thing perhaps is to have an optional internship or co-op program inside of our grad programs.” *Graduate Student*

“Develop a coaching program. Sometimes people think that we have results all of our life, and we know what we are going to do next. But sometimes, even with a PhD, we are still lost in the next step. With a coaching program, we can meet with some people who have experience, who have gone through the same path we are going through, and we can just have a conversation with those people so that we can look at other options, other sources so that we feel less lost in the way that we going through.” *Graduate Student*

“Self Growth, self-development, leadership, topics related to managing our lives in a well-balanced manner.” *Graduate Student*

“Maybe we should invite some successful people to come back and give presentations. Maybe some scenarios for us to communicate in Canadian culture, how to do job interviews, and work skills.” *Graduate Student*

In your opinion, what would be required to incentivize increased engagement in graduate career skills training?

- Improve knowledge of opportunities available on campus through the different units.
- Encourage supervisors to encourage and allow graduate students to pursue opportunities.
- Incorporating time within the program for students to pursue additional training.
- Ensure training opportunities are not demanding on the time.
- Incentivize graduate students by providing credit courses or certificate courses.
- Some of the programs need to be revamped as they don't fit the goals of what a global education is supposed to provide.

“Maybe more TA supportive of people who have intentionally been trained with what to look for, have some ideas to support career training, some more general ones, and then maybe even you would have a GTF or something that could department specific.”

Graduate Chair

“I feel like at the university, there's so many great skills across the different departments. I wonder if even an exchange of some of those skills could be something that could be looked at.”

Graduate Chair

“Those bursaries, if there was journal type of setup, training opportunity, like the English writing or conversation and bursaries could be distributed, I think that would go a long way. I'm talking about intensive training not just an afternoon doing something. “

Graduate Chair

“Draw on people's expertise. Maybe there are more of us as graduate chairs who have areas of expertise who can actually do some 990 together. So we don't have to repeat across 10 different programs, but maybe we bring all our students together for some of these things.”

Graduate Chair

“If we provide faculty with this information about what students will end up with what type of job, the options, and also talk with the students about what's their career aspiration at the beginning.”

Graduate Chair

“There's possibilities here for making other requirements part of the thing. And it could be even a menu approach, you might need so many credit units or equivalent in various activities from which you can pick from that's offered at the university and you have to assemble those credit units in order to advance in your program.”

Graduate Chair

“Another idea would be to somehow increase the money for students that we are going to pay them X amount more than we already pay them now. And part of that will be they'll get training and teaching, there'll be taking part in teaching activities.”

Graduate Chair

“I think money solves a lot of problems. I mean, if you can somehow find the money to give everyone the ability to at some point lead tutorials or whatever, you could build that into offer letters.”

Graduate Chair

“Almost all these opportunities I think were always student initiated and I think it works so much better when it is student initiated.”

Graduate Chair

“I personally think that you want to have sort of an opt-in experience to some of these things.”

Graduate Chair

“I think two things come to mind. One: awareness. Some students don't know that some of these things exist. Two: time. Sometimes we can get super busy and we do not necessarily have the time to participate in the necessary skills training that might be available.”

Graduate Student

“What I would ask is that if they could build in some credits into it, I think it would encourage students.”

Graduate Student

“I think part of it is where the information comes from because I think having your professor reach out and tell you, Hey, you should check out this thing or having a supervisor reach out and tell you this is significant for students, is much more impactful.”

Graduate Student

“If the independent departments all come together and gave us a workshop for a week. Cross-disciplinary access to opportunities has been valuable.”

Graduate Student

“I could imagine a non-supportive supervisor, one that would be a deterrent to you because they want you to go in the lab and do as much research as possible to pump out as many papers as possible. That may be one hurdle to grad students.”

Graduate Student

“Grad students are not aware what real life outside academia is. So they don't think that it's important. Academia is like a bubble, so they don't know the reason why they need this kind of skills.”

Graduate Student

“I think defining the graduate skills that you're supposed to get from that specific program will help.”

Graduate Student

“And sometimes in some areas, maybe not related to our field, we need some more training or more guidance or people that can walk with us at least at the beginning, during that transition. Like it's hard transitioning between bachelor's degree to doctoral degree. And often there are not those tools, or if there are in the colleges, nobody talks about them.”

Graduate Student



For more information,
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