The topic of the session was strategies for improving times to degree completion.

Considerations

- The government provides “per student” funding for up to 2 years of a Master’s program and up to four years of a PhD program. It is, therefore in the best interest of the University to have compatible times to completion while maintaining the high quality of the program and its students.
- All graduate programs were developed and approved with these time frames in mind.
- The new quality assurance processes require a method of monitoring student progress to ensure timely completion (a performance measure).
- There is the possibility that Tri-Agency funding might be linked to times to completion.
- Over time, students continue to use resources which can limit the ability to accept new students into the program.

Strategies

- General strategies
  - Master’s students are expected to start their research in the summer of their first year (term 3), which is facilitated by a course module to stimulate the development of the research proposal.
  - Departmental research presentations required at specific times in the program to encourage progress and a culture of moving forward in a timely fashion.
  - Clear expectations of students and supervisors.
  - Admission letter clearly articulates expected length of the program and directly links funding to satisfactory progress.
- Progress Reports (note: A SGPS Committee will be submitting a report concerning the use of progress reports to the Graduate Studies Executive Council in the near future)
  - Departments should have an established regime for annual progress reports, with appropriate follow-up if not submitted on time.
  - Reports should include milestones appropriate to the program
  - Progress reports are an important part of the academic process; they are not punitive or only for those who are not demonstrating satisfactory progress;
  - Progress reports include comments from the student and the supervisor and should be signed by both.
  - Include strategies that address deficiencies and acknowledge accomplishments
If deficiencies in progress are noted then the student must meet with the Faculty Associate Dean/Graduate coordinator/department head and a revised completion plan may be devised.

- Progress reports should be reviewed by the graduate committee and a letter sent to student from graduate coordinator.
- Progress reports should be mandatory – some programs hold back funding if not submitted.
- Link conference travel support to positive progress.
- Include a current CV with progress report submission.

- **Establish target dates and milestones**
  - Help guide the student to establish an appropriate schedule for their research and program.
  - The student should be held accountable to achieve milestones/targets; explanation of delays and action plan to get back on schedule required.
  - Helps both the student and the supervisor to establish clear expectations.

- **Other issues**
  - Supervisors may wish to keep highly trained and productive PhD students around and working. This is not fair to the student; graduate training is not a career and not a combined PhD plus post-doc.
  - Part-time students can get lost and risk prolonged completion times. Mitigate risk through regular communication, clear plan to completion, support structures
  - Consider time management workshops offered through Expanding Horizons and the Ban Righ Centre for women balancing home and studies.
  - Times to completion must consider provincial and national benchmarks.
  - May require a ‘cultural shift’ to work toward more timely completions – attitudinal change (faculty and students), curriculum restructuring, consistent and effective monitoring (student progress and supervisor record of completion times).

The SGS provides departmental and council based data on completion times to be circulated shortly. The SGS will further explore strategies to encourage and facilitate timely completions.