Disclosure, Accommodation, Disability and Graduate Education

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Equal Opportunity vs. Equal Outcome

Equality = SAMENESS
Equality is about SAMENESS, it promotes fairness and justice by giving everyone the same thing.

BUT it can only work IF everyone starts from the SAME place, in this example equality only works if everyone is the same height.

Equity = FAIRNESS
EQUITY is about FAIRNESS, it’s about making sure people get access to the same opportunities.

Sometimes our differences and/or history, can create barriers to participation, so we must FIRST ensure EQUITY before we can enjoy equality.
Project Goals

• To examine the experiences of, and barriers faced by, graduate students with disabilities across Canada

• To develop a discussion paper outlining the current system issues for graduate students with disabilities

• To produce information and develop strategies to facilitate the success of students with disabilities in graduate programs

• To develop recommendations for the continued improvement of graduate experience for students with disabilities, that can be translated into policy at an institutional, provincial, or national level

• Long term: To develop “tool-based” approaches for students, faculty and institutions to use in addressing issues faced by graduate students with disabilities
Student-DSO Relationship

- DSO and supervisor work closely to provide accom: 23% THESIS, 59% NO THESIS
- Good working rel'p with DSO: 49% THESIS, 76% NO THESIS
- DSO helpful with research accom: 49% THESIS, 73% NO THESIS
- DSO helpful with coursework accom: 71% THESIS, 81% NO THESIS
- Registered with DSO: 95% THESIS, 97% NO THESIS
Provision of Accommodations

DSO Provides Accommodation Provisions

- THESIS: 30%
- NO THESIS: 49%
Disability-Related Accommodations

- Accommodations differ from undergrad:
  - THESIS: 61%
  - NO THESIS: 51%

- Developed or modified own:
  - THESIS: 67%
  - NO THESIS: 62%

- Disability related accommodations:
  - THESIS: 59%
  - NO THESIS: 70%
Successful Accommodations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>THESIS</th>
<th>NO THESIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation needs not met</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With accommodations able to manage program</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>70%</td>
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</tbody>
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Breadth of Accommodations

- Require accommodations to prepare for publication: 19% with thesis, 9% without thesis.
- Require accommodations to present at conferences: 10% with thesis, 5% without thesis.
- Require accommodations from institution to write a thesis: 36% with thesis, 20% without thesis.
- Require accommodations for presentations: 18% with thesis, 9% without thesis.
IP and Accommodations

- **Authorship issues b/c of disability accommodations needed to write manuscript**
  - THESIS: 6%
  - NO THESIS: 0%

- **Disability related issues around developing work for pub**
  - THESIS: 14%
  - NO THESIS: 2%
Student Disclosure in the Graduate Environment

Submitted, CACUSS Communique

Student tipsheet in press, CACEE Career Options
Disclosure in the Graduate Environment

• At the graduate level, disclosure of a disability or accommodation need is as much a process as it is an event, and will evolve throughout a student’s course of study

• Disclosure of the accommodation need by the student may occur to several individuals (faculty, department heads, etc) before the accommodations can be discussed by a team
Disclosure in the Graduate Environment

• As graduate departments vary dramatically with respect to their structures, policies and procedures, both within and between institutions, it can often be challenging for DSO staff and students to navigate the accommodations process.

• Students with disabilities are thought to still be under-represented in graduate school compared to the undergraduate level
  – DSO staff may have limited experience assisting a graduate student to access accommodations within the program and/or be unfamiliar with the requirements of a specific graduate program.

• Policies and practices for accommodating graduate students often translate into a lag between the identification of an accommodation need and its implementation
  – Potentially interfering with milestones that students are expected to meet during graduate programs.
Graduate Students are Developing their own Accommodations

Develop your OWN accommodation?

Registered with disability services office?

YES  NO  YES  NO
Four Domains of the Student-DSO Relationship

Graduate Student with Disability

Student Discloses Accommodation Need

Research and Coursework Accommodations

Student Self-Accommodation Successful

Acute/Crisis Situation Evolves

Student Does Not Disclose Accommodation Need

Coursework Accommodations Only

Student Tries to Self-Accommodate in Research Setting
Academic Employment

In Development
Academics vs. Student Employment

• Understanding of the coordination of the accommodations a graduate student needs in their various roles (academic accommodation, and employment accommodations)?

• Accommodations for graduate students in coursework do not necessarily translate into the accommodations they get as TAs or RAs, or in the research setting; who handles these?

• Relationship with granting agencies – accommodations are not necessarily allowed as eligible costs on grants
  – No special fund to draw on
  – Inappropriate for community service agencies to cover costs
Challenges from the Employment Perspective

• Where does the academic program end and the employment relationship begin?
  – Particularly evident for TA/GA/RA situations
  – Who provides the accommodations?
  – Legal framework is clear but not always executed in practice

• Distinction between working within and working outside of the academic program

• Many accommodations require creativity or financial commitment from employer
Implications Inherent within the Employment/Academic Interface

• TA/GA/RA-ships as components of the funding guarantee
  – Inability to work = decreased funding?

• “Lines in the sand”
  – Blurring distinctions in working for one’s supervisor outside the academic environment
  – Clarity of duties and expectations in different contexts is important
Increasingly, graduate faculties are introducing collaborative co-curricular professional skill development programming for graduate students

- For e.g., University of Toronto’s Graduate Professional Skills Service (GPSS)
  - Documented on graduate transcripts
  - [www.mygradskills.ca](http://www.mygradskills.ca)

Such programming overtly identifies and builds upon the “nontechnical” essential requirements of graduate education

Accessibility and universal design of such programming an open question

- Mechanism for accommodation?
- Engagement of students with disabilities in co-curricular programming?
Overall Conclusions

• Issues faced by graduate students with disabilities in Canadian postsecondary education are complex and multi-faceted
  – Disability-specific considerations (disclosure, accommodation)
  – Systems issues influenced by disability (student-supervisor relationships, employment)

• Perceptual disconnects can exist among students, faculty and service providers as to the “real” issues

• Student expectation vs. reality – importance of the systemic differences between undergraduate and graduate education

• Community ownership of the project outcomes is required in order to move toward a universally accessible graduate environment
Axioms

• Graduate education is not “one size fits all”

• Graduate programs are dynamic and evolve in the lifetime of a student’s path to degree

• Disability issues in graduate education require collaboration – information/accommodation compartmentalization is inefficient

• Graduate education requires the participation of the student
Discussion Questions

• What kind of resources, training etc would enable you to better assist graduate students with disabilities in obtaining the supports they need to help them with the completion of their program?

• How do you feel that the tension between academia and employment might best be addressed?

• What action do, or have, you taken to help students feel comfortable in disclosing their disabilities to you?
The Need for Collaboration

GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

GRADUATE SUPERVISORS

DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

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When We Don’t Know, We Tend To Think
The Worst