

Accessibility and Graduate Education: Understanding the Character of Graduate Students with Disabilities

An Overview of the Work of the National Graduate Experience Taskforce

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<http://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/index.php?id=106>

Statement of Need

- There is a significant need to better understand the overall experiences of disabled students in graduate studies
- Currently, there is a critical lack of information in this area
 - Need to understand the “student experience tapestry”
 - Need to catalogue institutional leading practices

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

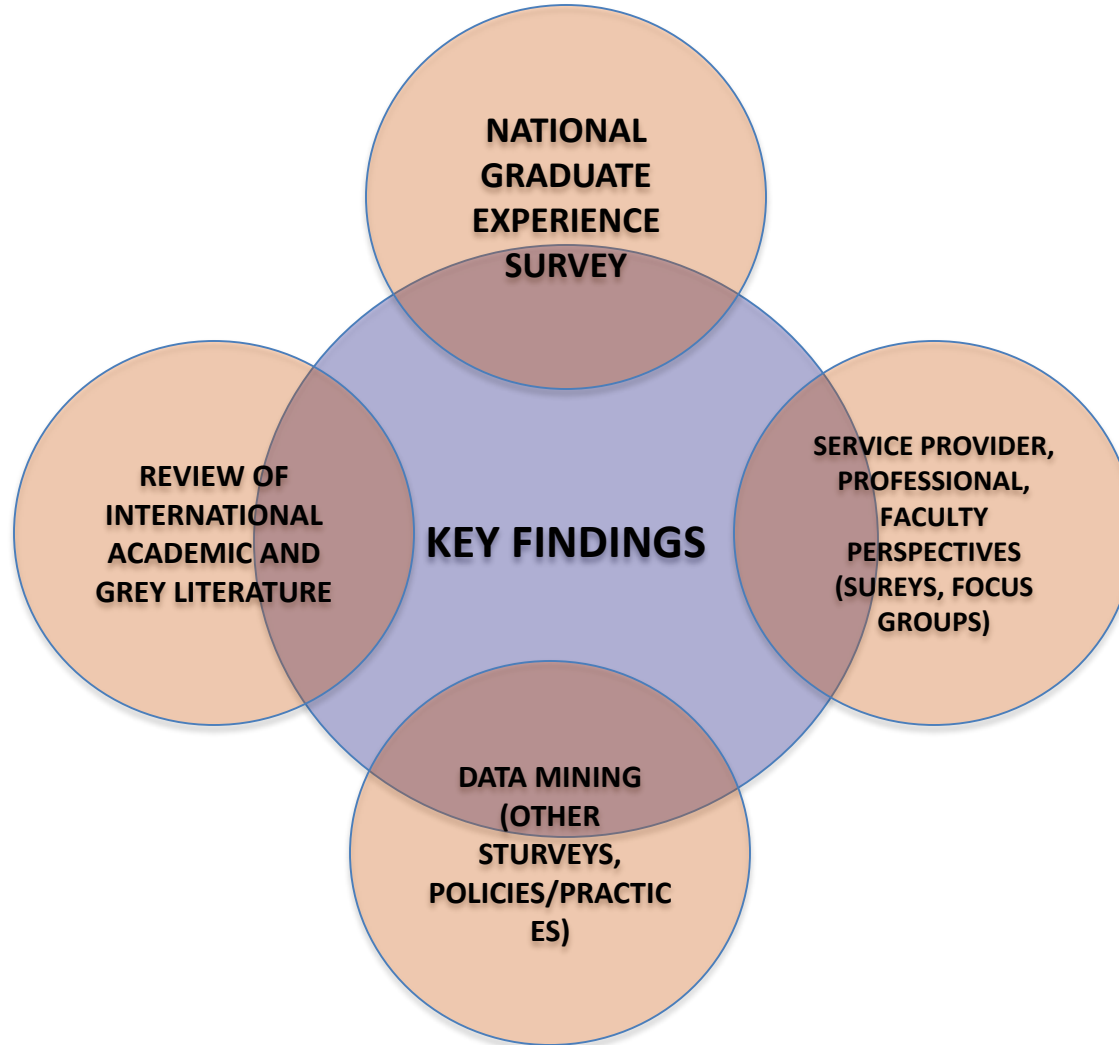
Current Landscape

- Established, new and evolving legislative frameworks
 - *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*
 - *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*
 - *Provincial Human Rights Codes*
 - *AODA* and associated standards (in particular, Customer Service; Information and Communication; Employment)
 - *AMA (2014)*
 - Accessibility legislation in Nova Scotia (pending)
- Increasing numbers of students with disabilities entering graduate education
- Evolving needs
 - Mental health
 - Developmental disabilities
- Institution-specific policy and best practice frameworks
- No available data on issues, barriers and experiences
 - Extant studies limited in scope (small numbers; heuristic methods; local/regional)

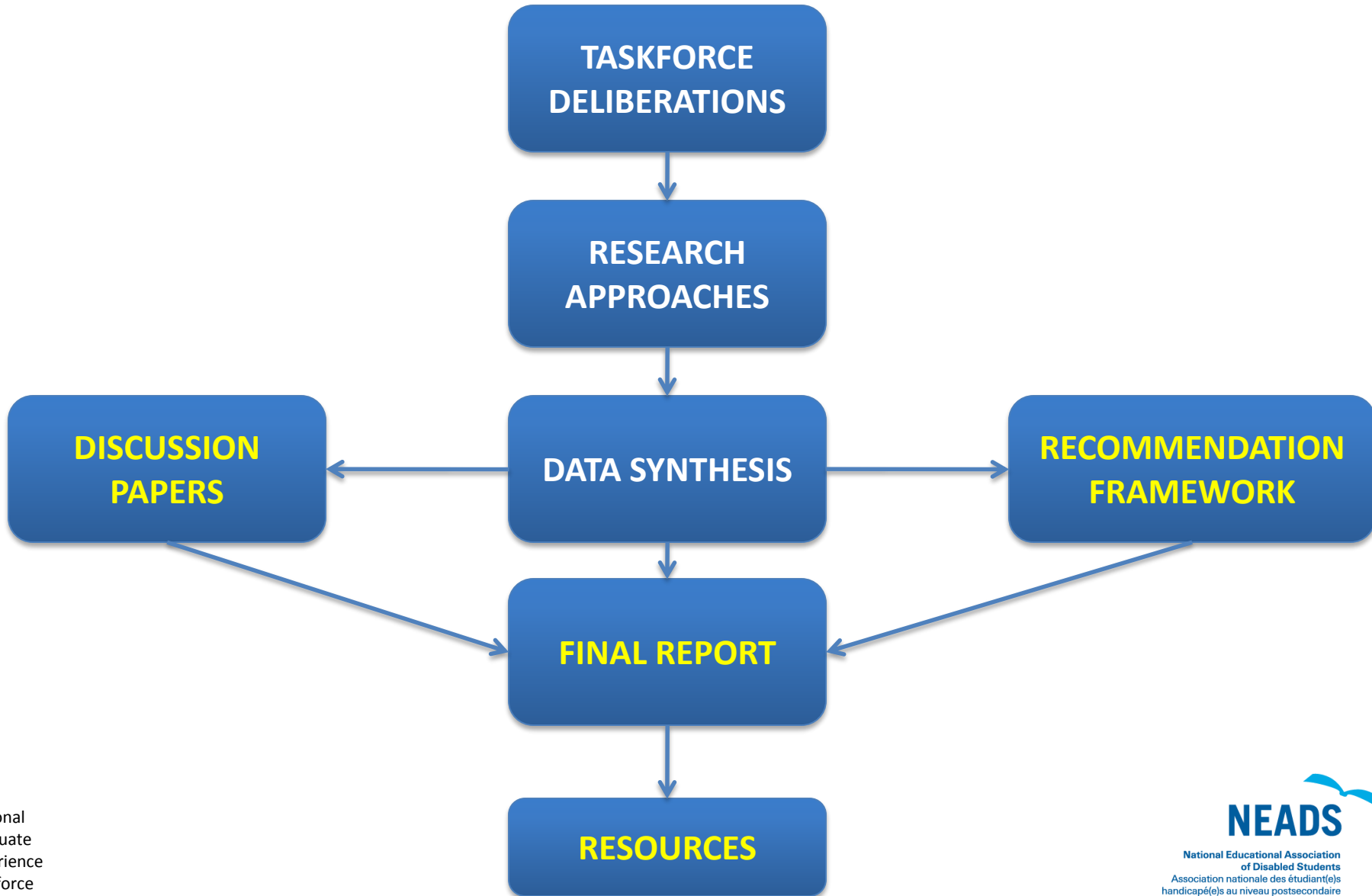
Available Demographic Data

- ~65 universities with graduate programs (CAGS membership)
- 1,030 graduate students with disabilities receiving federal financial aid (CSLP data, current through 2012-2013)
 - ~5% of the overall graduate population receiving federal financial aid
- Lack of accurate reporting on numbers of graduate students with disabilities registered with disability services providers nationwide
 - Ontario has the best tracking data nationally
 - Demographic not captured in reporting to provincial ministries

Research Methodology



Project Outputs



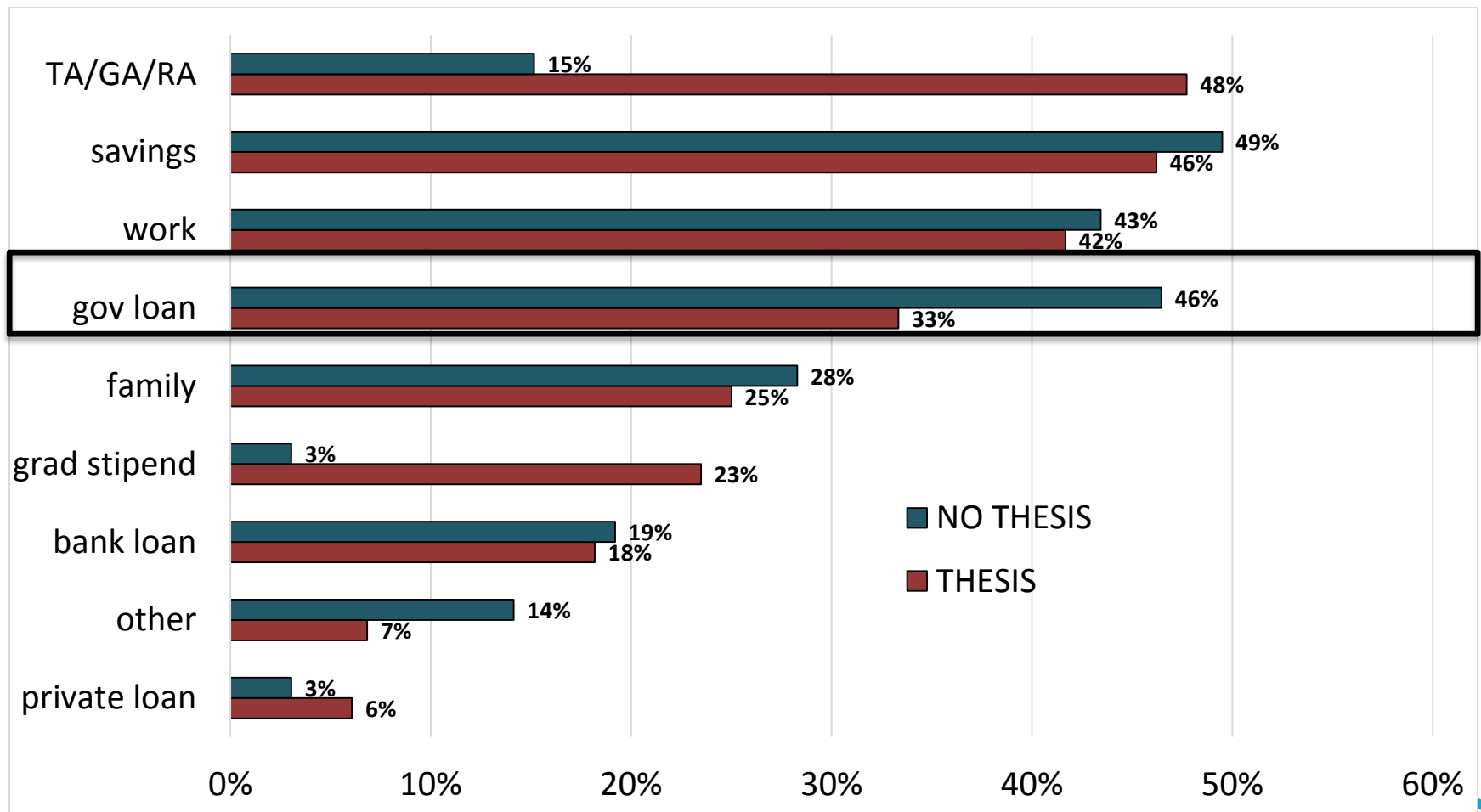
Discussion Papers

- Essential Requirements (Published online on CAGS website)
- Disclosure in Graduate Education (in press, *CACUSS Communique*)
 - Student tipsheet (published, *CACEE Career Options*)
- Student Financial Aid Landscape
- Disability and the Student-Supervisor Relationship
- Academic Employment and Accommodation
- Mental Health in Graduate Education
- Universal Design Principles in Graduate Education

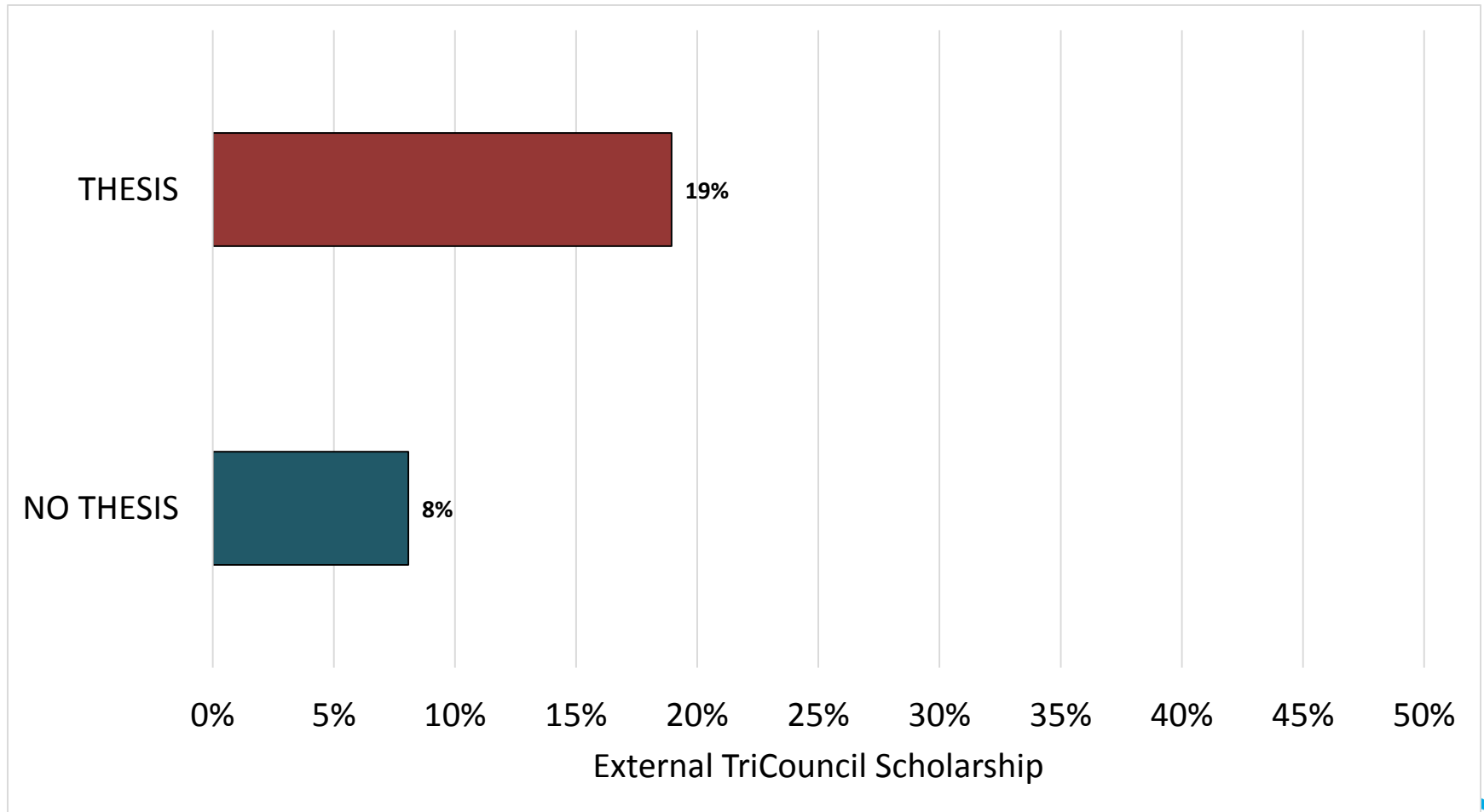
Case Study: Funding and Accommodation

In Development

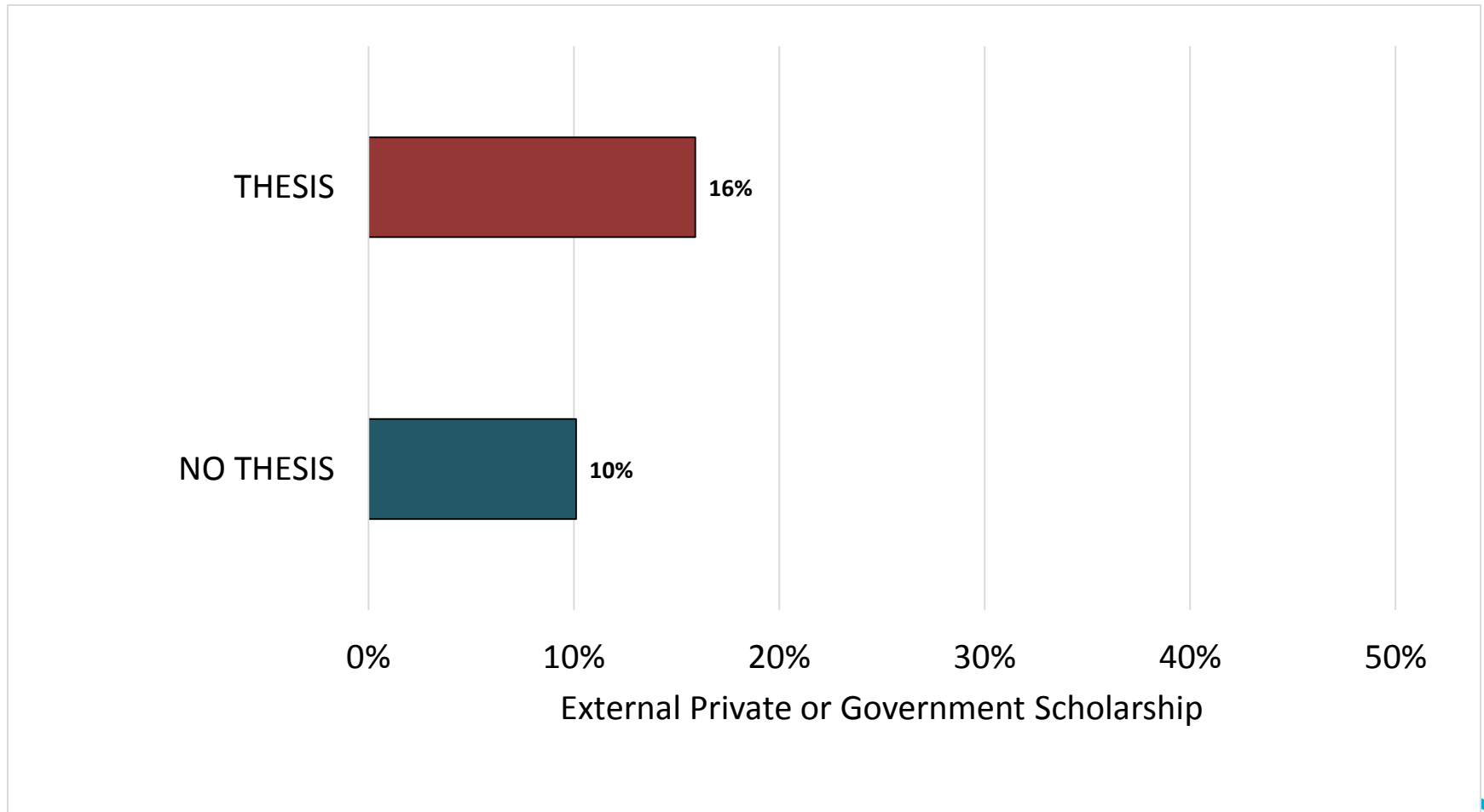
Access to Financial Aid



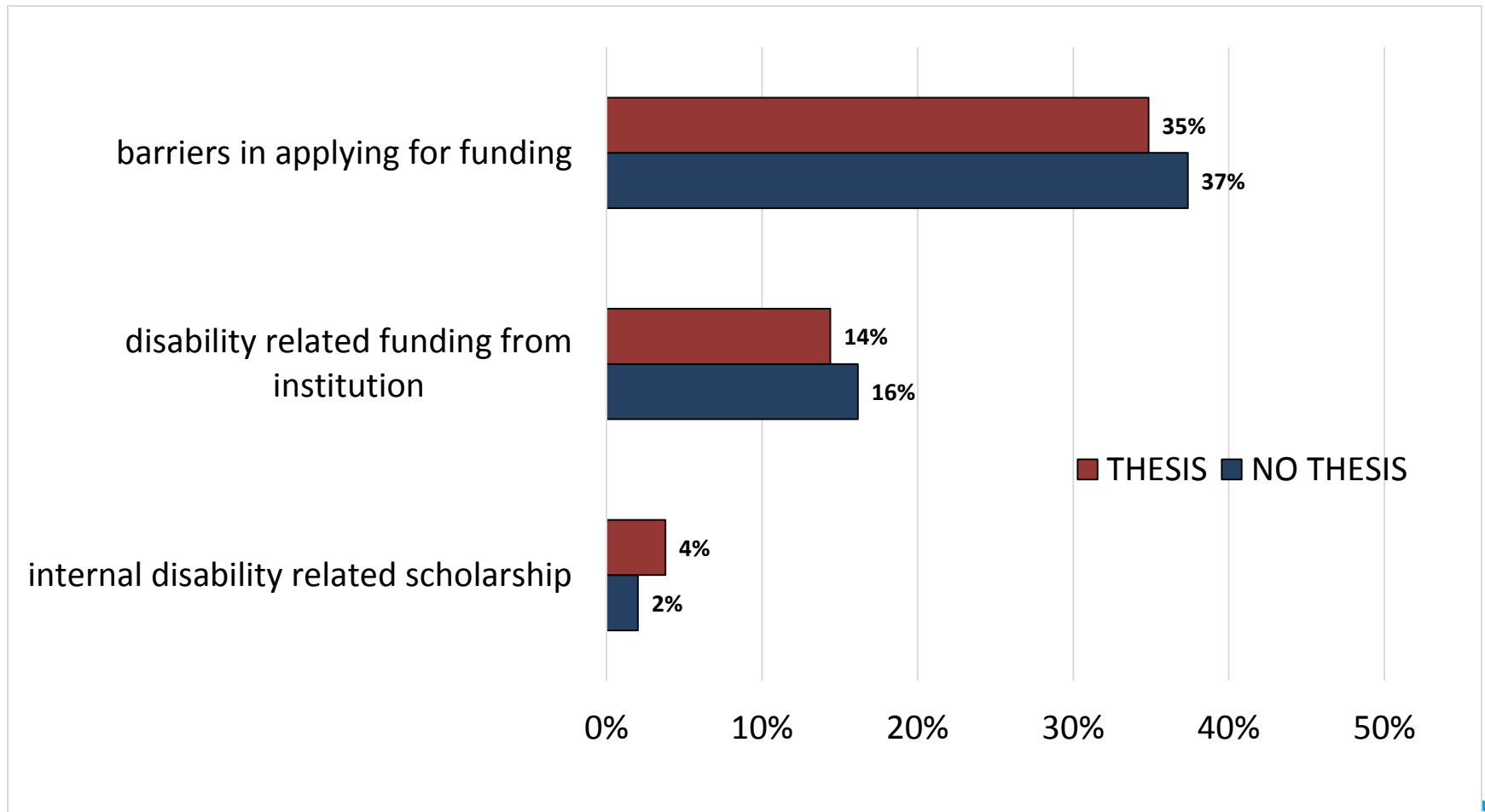
Access to Tri-Council Scholarships



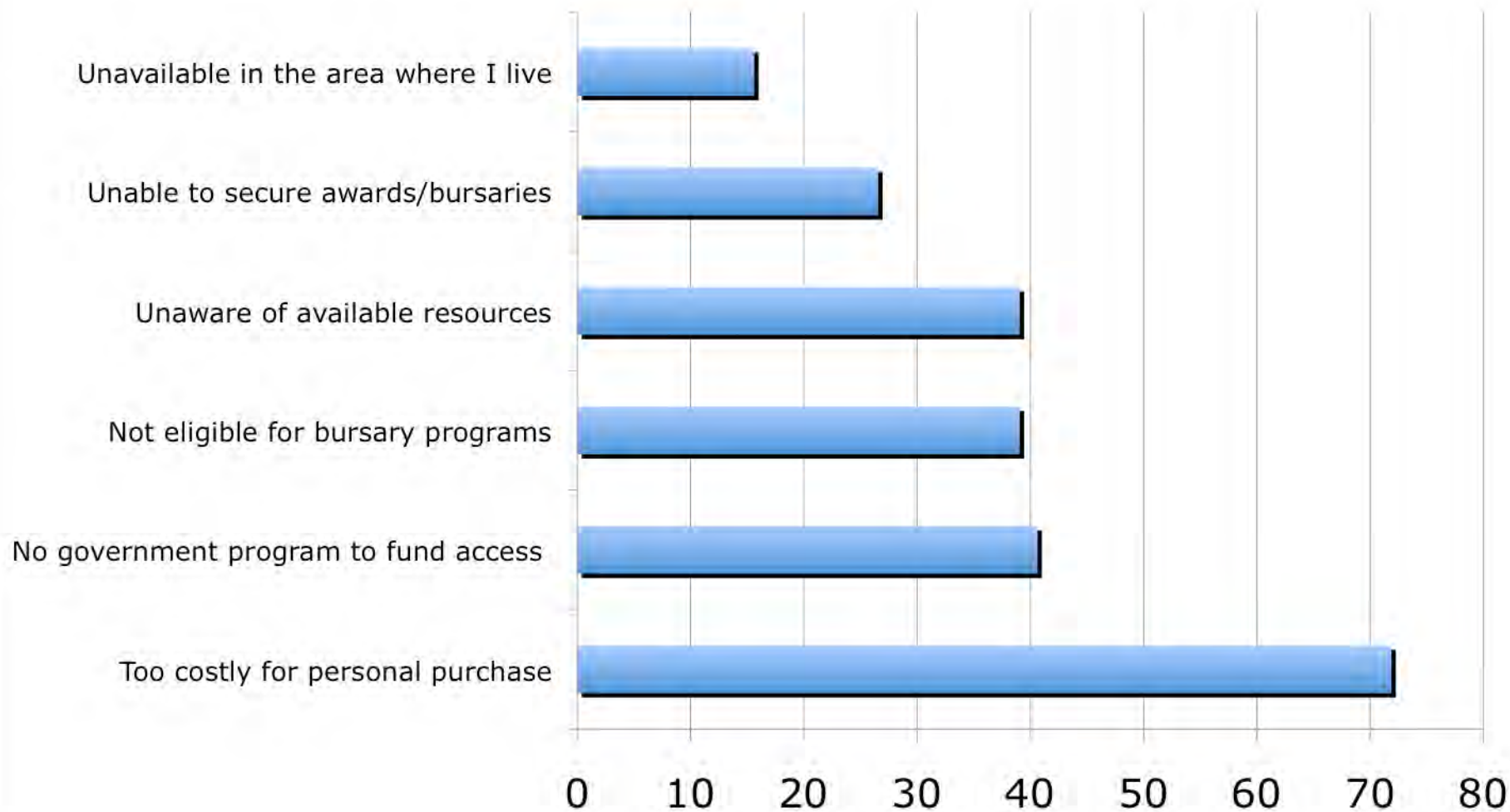
Access to External Scholarships



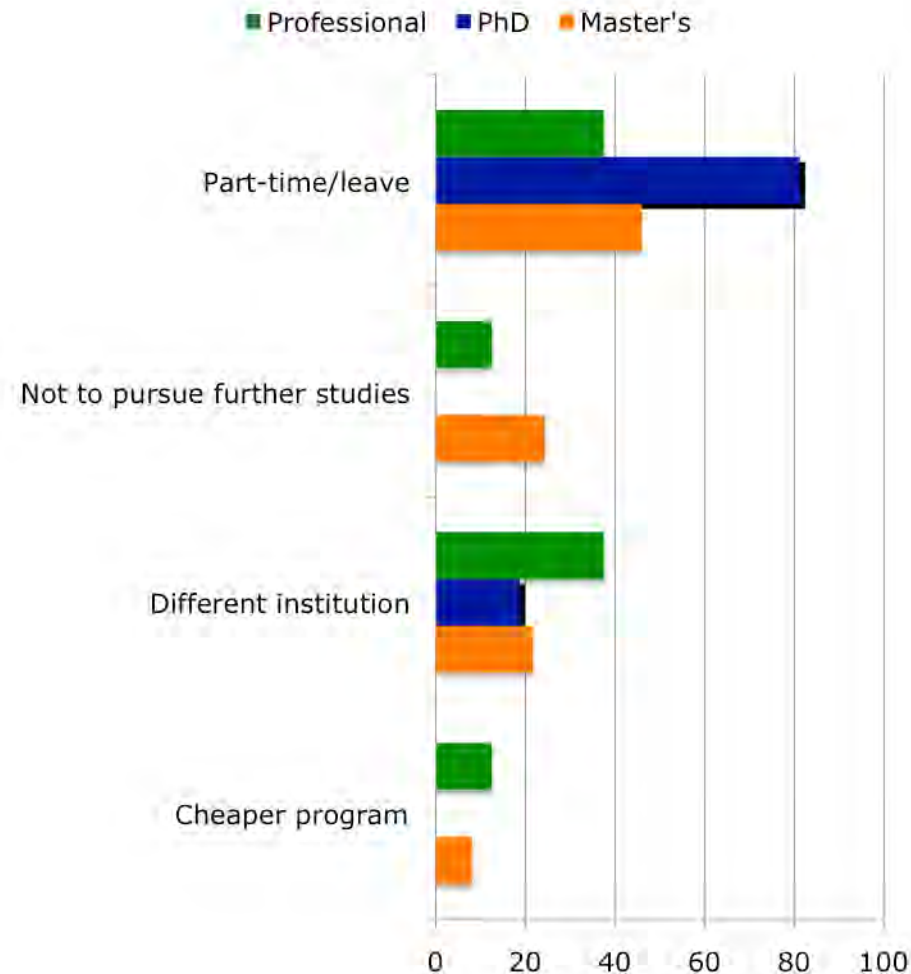
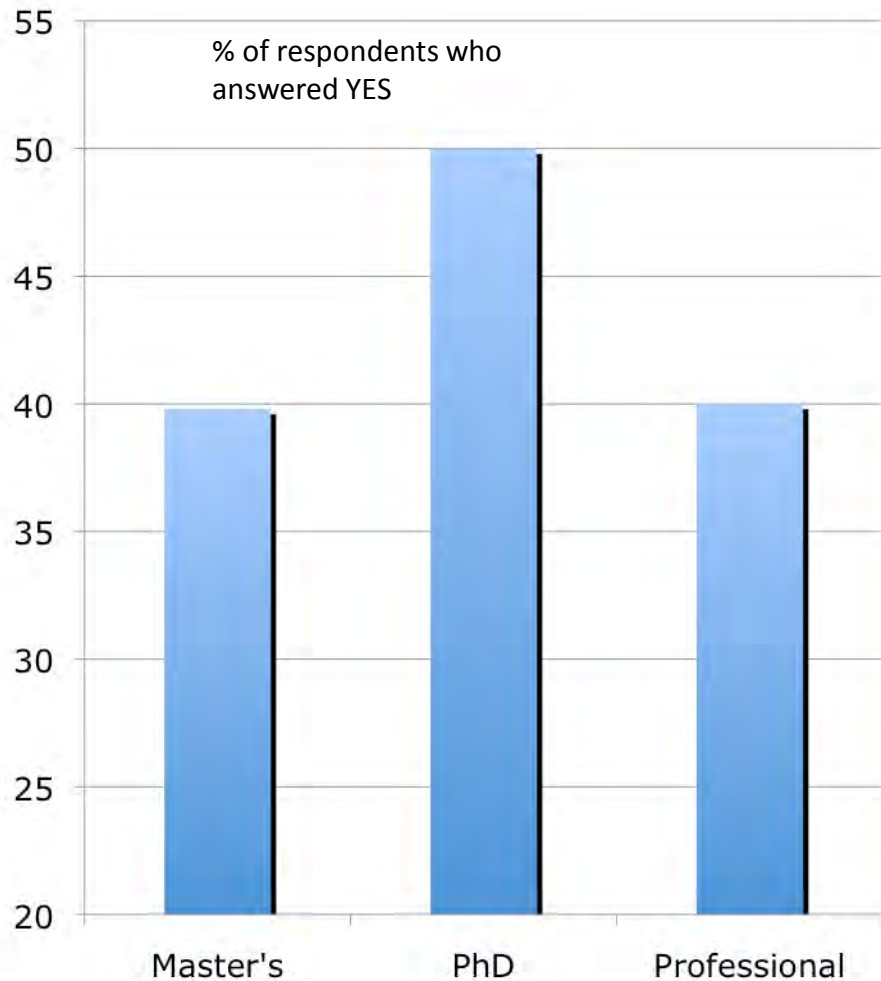
Access to Disability Funding



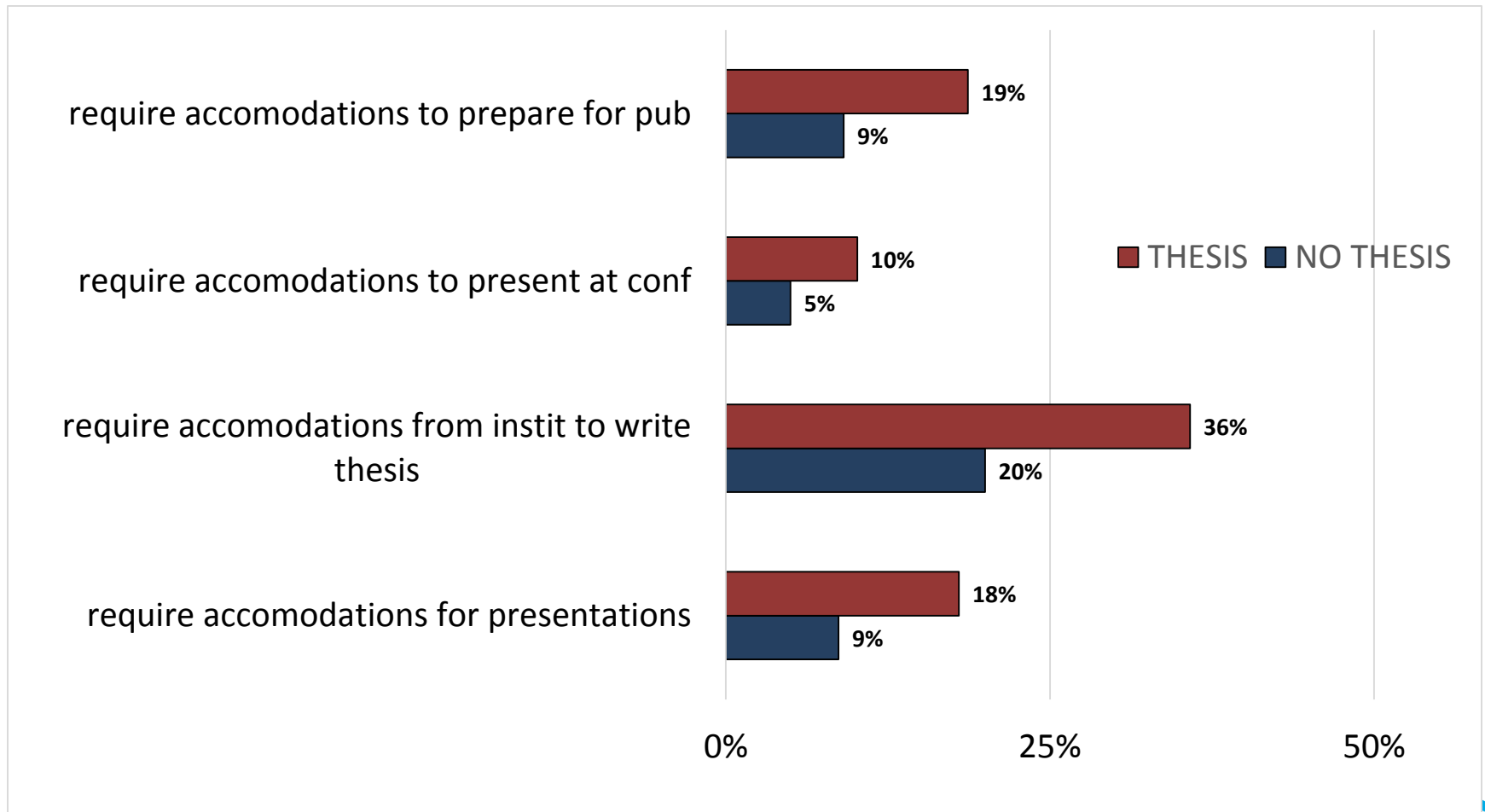
Reason for lack of access to financial aid for disability-related accommodations?



Financial barriers' effect on educational pursuits



Breadth of Accommodation Needs



Funding Landscape for Graduate Students with Disabilities

- Significant differences in funding profile for doctoral vs. master's students with disabilities
 - Doctoral students more likely to receive funding through external and internal scholarships, stipends and academic employment
 - Master's students more likely to receive funding through loan and family/self contributions
- 37% of students with disabilities in graduate school receive government loans and are eligible for disability grants through the CSLP
 - 27% of doctoral students
 - 41% of master's students
- Institutional student financial aid mechanisms are often reliant on student eligibility for federal/provincial financial aid

Funding Landscape for Graduate Students with Disabilities

- As students progress through their graduate degrees, they will potentially lose eligibility for provincial/federal financial aid programs
 - Concomitant loss of eligibility for institutional assistance
 - Progressive reduction in ability to fund accommodations
- Students on external scholarships are often not eligible for federal/provincial financial aid programs and the linked disability grants
 - Scholarships/fellowships have no provision for associated academic accommodations expenditures
 - Inadvertent penalty for student success?

Intersectionalities

GRADUATE
STIPEND

PROVINCIAL
DISABILITY
ASSISTANCE

TIME IN
PSE

EXTERNAL
SCHOLAR-
SHIPS

DISABILITY-
RELATED
LEAVES

FINANCIAL AID
LANDSCAPE

GRADUATE
VS.
UNDERGRAD

ACCOMMODATION
NEEDS

RESEARCH VS.
PROFESSIONAL
PROGRAMS

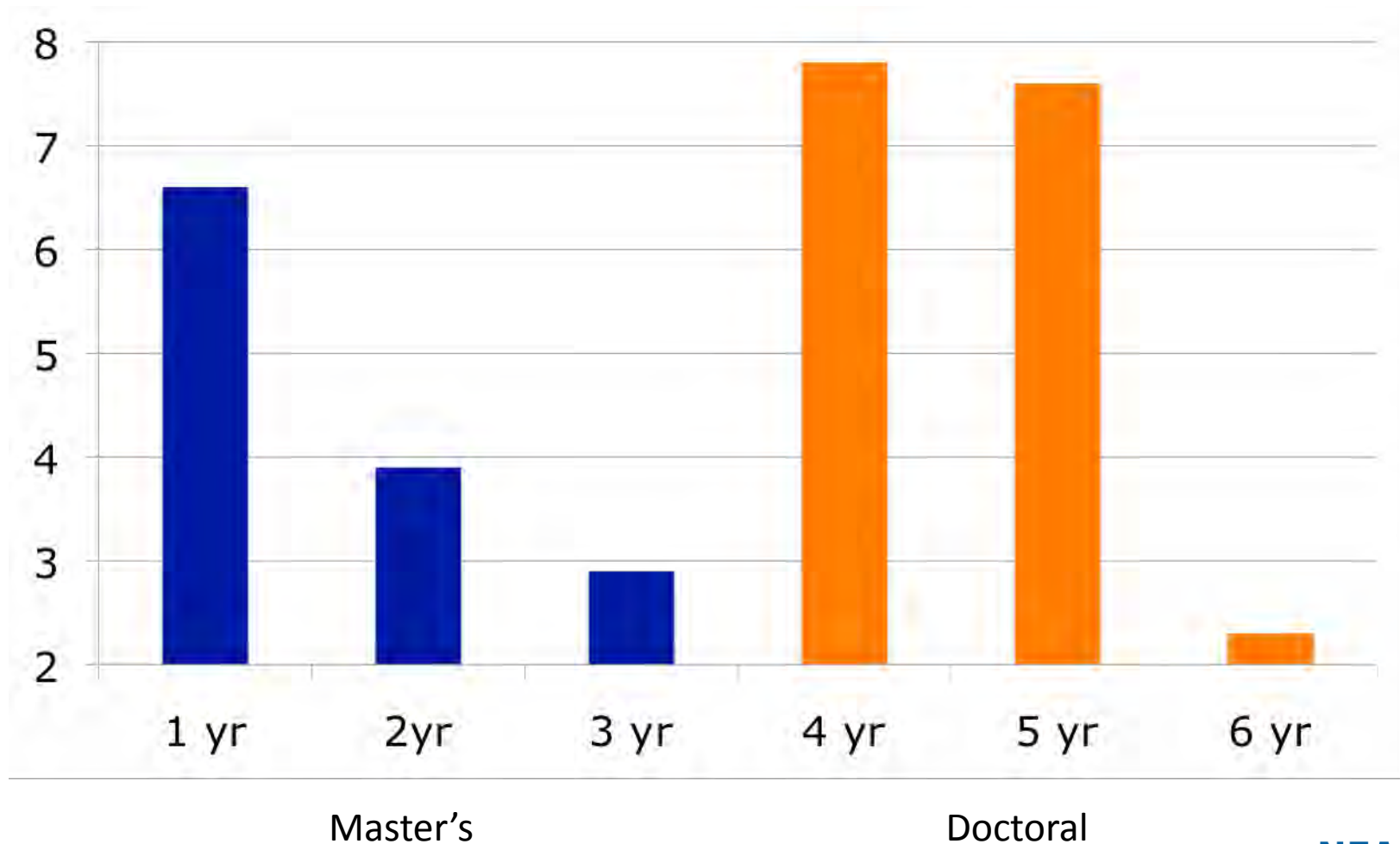
Case Study: Time to Completion

In Development

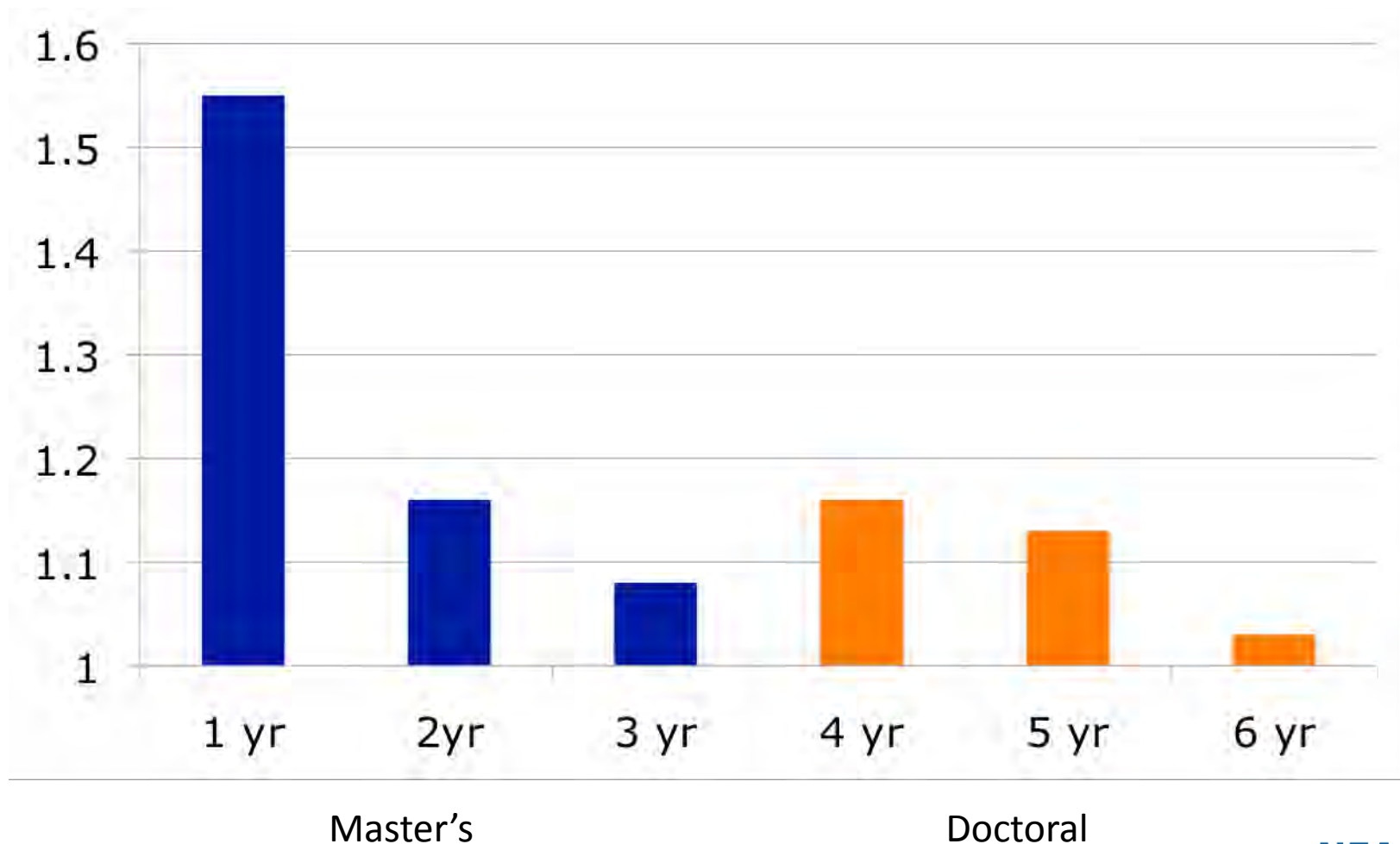
Time to Completion Statistics

- Students were asked:
 - What is the EXPECTED time to completion based on information provided by the Department/School?
 - What was their program start date?
 - What was their (projected) program end date?
- Data from NEADS' National Graduate Student Experience Survey

Time To Completion – Absolute # Extra Months



Time To Completion – Relative to Expected Program Completion



Synthesis

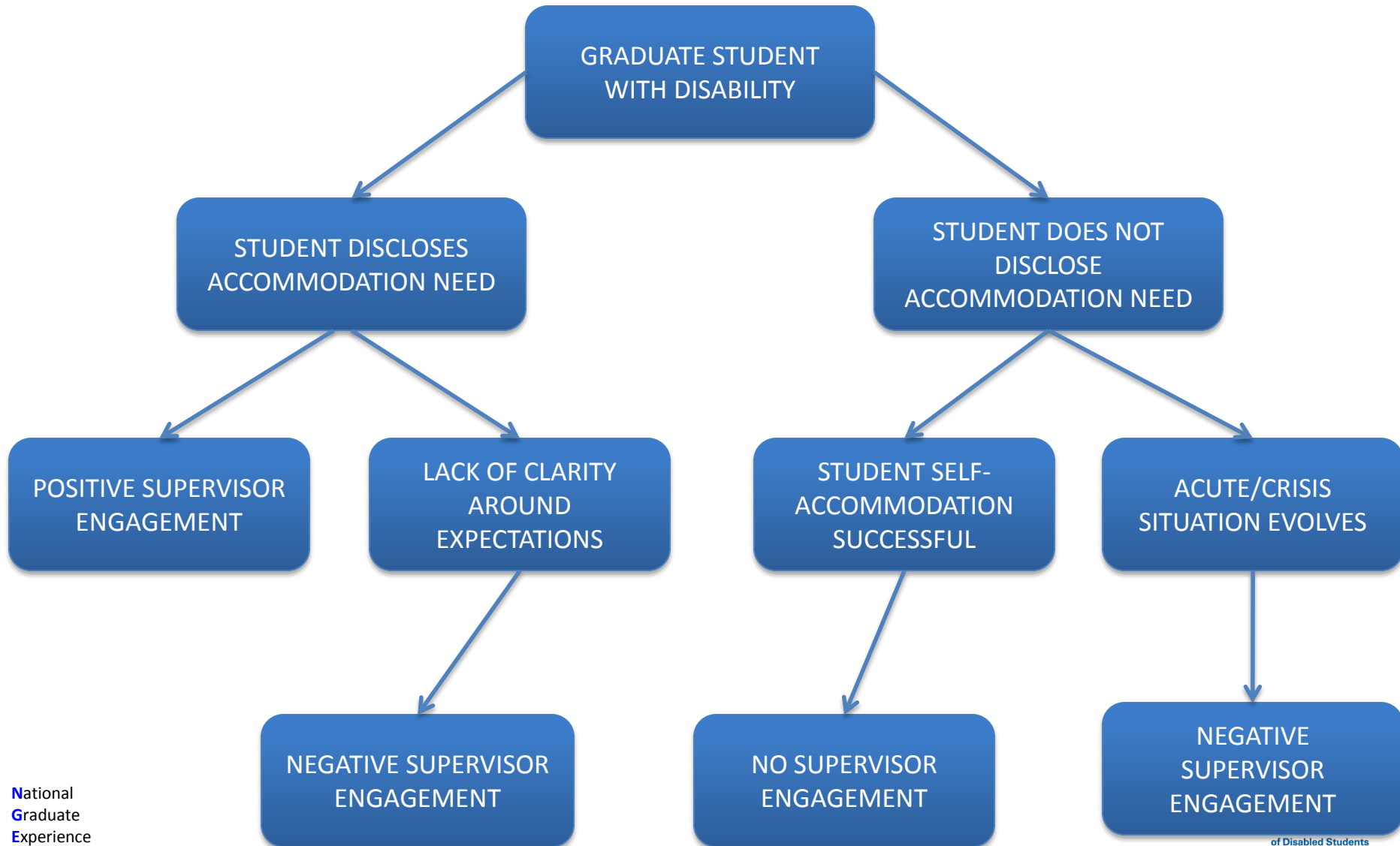
In Development

“Gaps” in Graduate Experience for Students with Disabilities

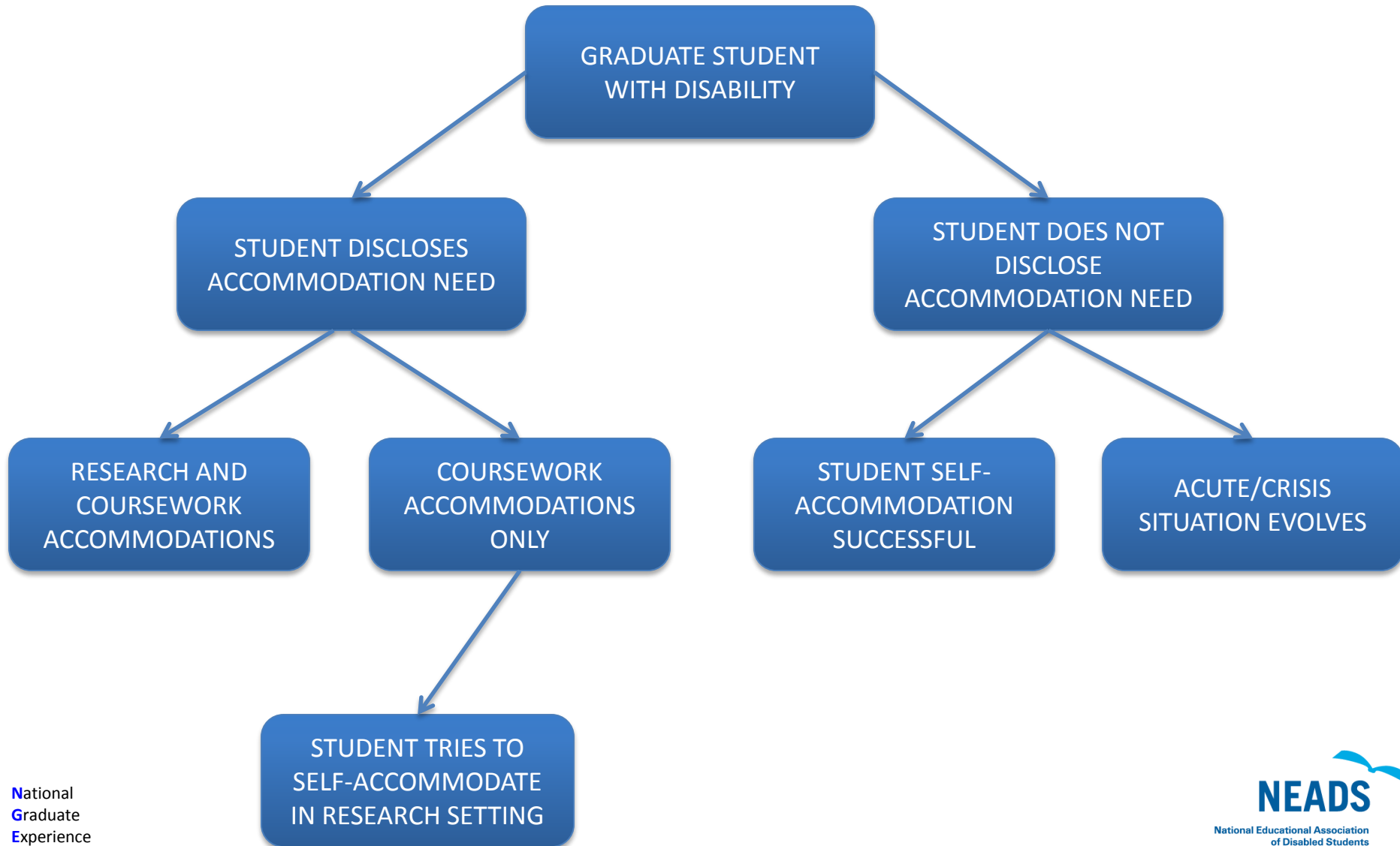
- Relative time to completion is highest for professional-stream Master’s students and lowest for PhD students
- Although students with disabilities report overall good working relationships with their supervisors, room for improvement around essential requirements and accommodation management remain
- Professional-stream students report better relationships with department and faculty, which are more respectful of disability and accommodation, than those of research stream students - BUT are more likely to attribute a bad relationship to disability-related issues

- Professional-stream students fund their graduate studies differently than research-stream students, but this is a reflection of the structural differences between those types of programs
- Research accommodations identified as a gap by students with disabilities in research-stream programs – DSOs are less likely to be reported to be helpful with research accommodations than course accommodations, and less likely to be helpful compared to professional-stream students
 - DSOs and faculty are less likely to collaborate on accommodations for students in research-stream programs
 - Accommodations are more likely to come from different sources than the DSO for students in research-stream programs
- Graduate students with disabilities are likely to modify or develop their own accommodation
 - Students in research-stream programs report accommodation needs across the breadth of their program requirements

Four Domains of the Student-Supervisor Relationship



Four Domains of the Student-DSO Relationship



Position Statement: Accessibility of Graduate Education

In Development

Reactive vs. Proactive Approaches

- Reactive = individualized accommodation
 - Issues must be identified prior to evolving a solution
 - Delay between identification and implementation
- Proactive = Universal design approach
 - Potential systemic issues are identified in the context of an accessible and inclusive graduate environment
 - Actions taken to reduce or remove barriers at the environmental level
 - Students with disabilities may not identify with issues in this context due to removal of barriers

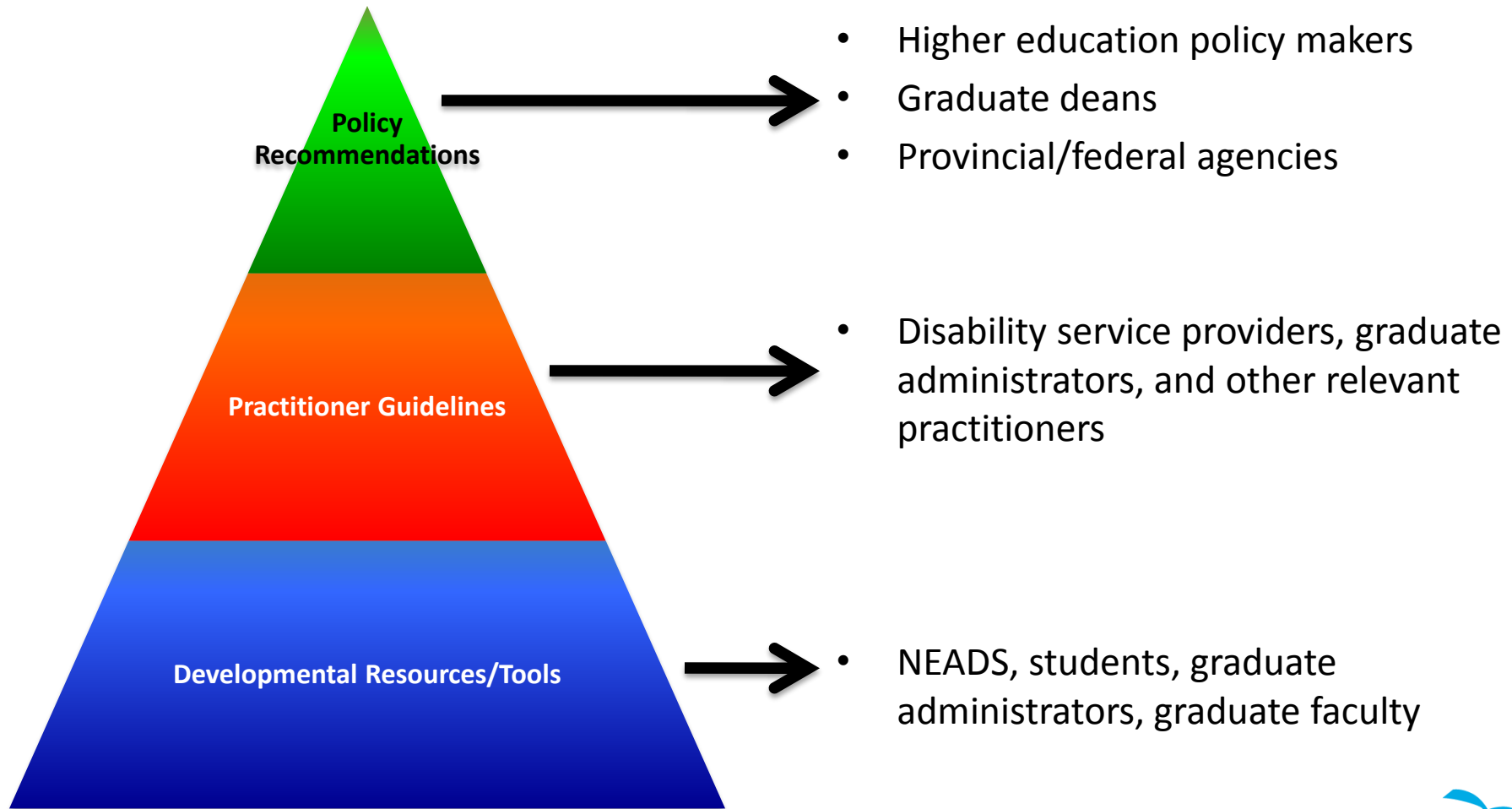
Guiding Principles for Accessible Graduate Education Environment

- Flexible and dynamic environment
- Continually evolves to meet the changing needs of students and their programs
- Fosters positive attitudes and relationships among students, faculty and staff
- Does not contravene the academic or professional rigor of a graduate program, discipline or university
- Encompasses research, teaching and fieldwork, as well as campus-based instruction

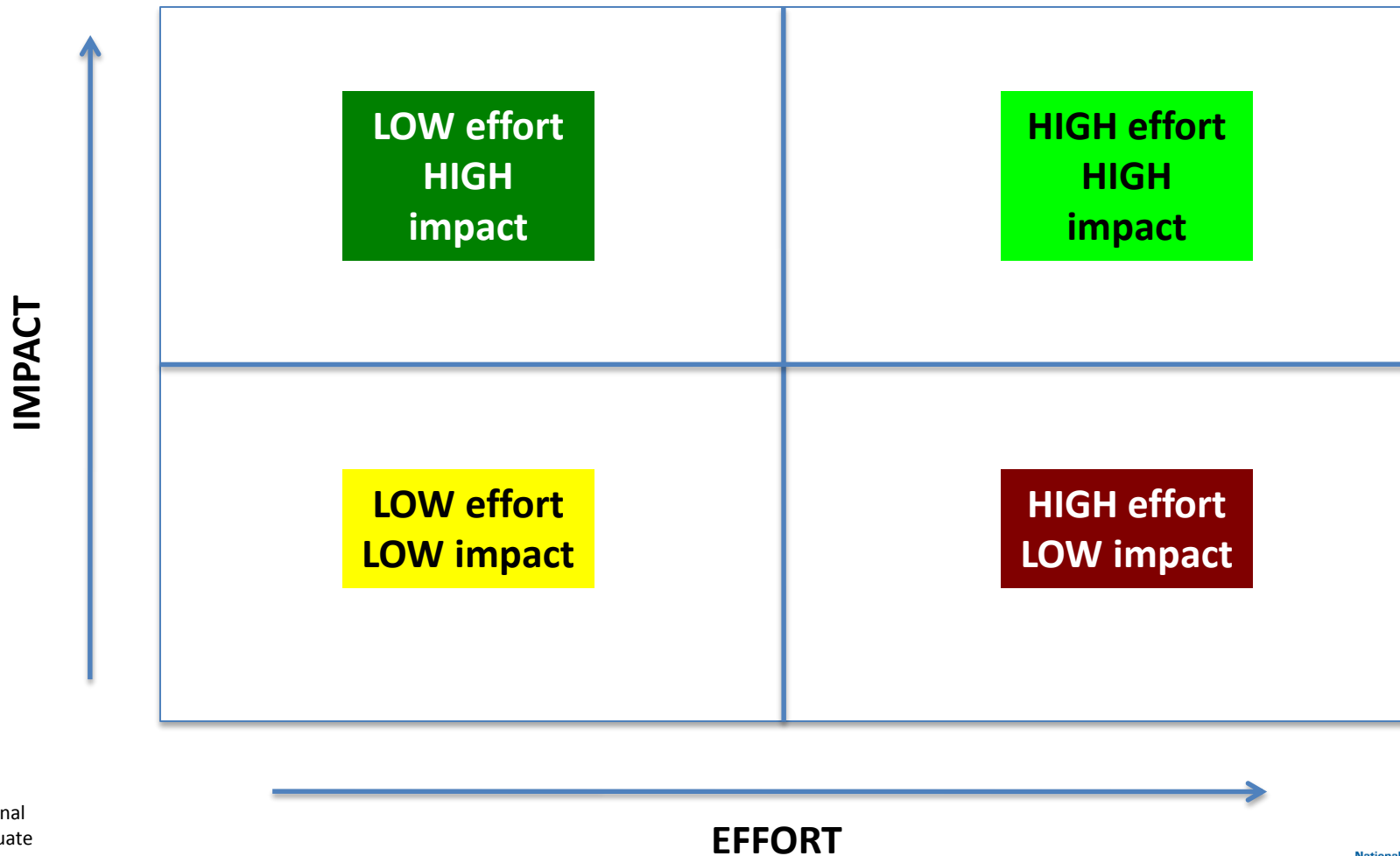
The accessible graduate environment...

- ...Doesn't yet exist!
 - “Making it up as we go along”
- Opportunity for faculty to develop their own solutions and adapt them to their particular student's needs
- Need to be flexible, solution oriented and creative in designing an appropriate graduate thesis project and environment

Recommendation Framework



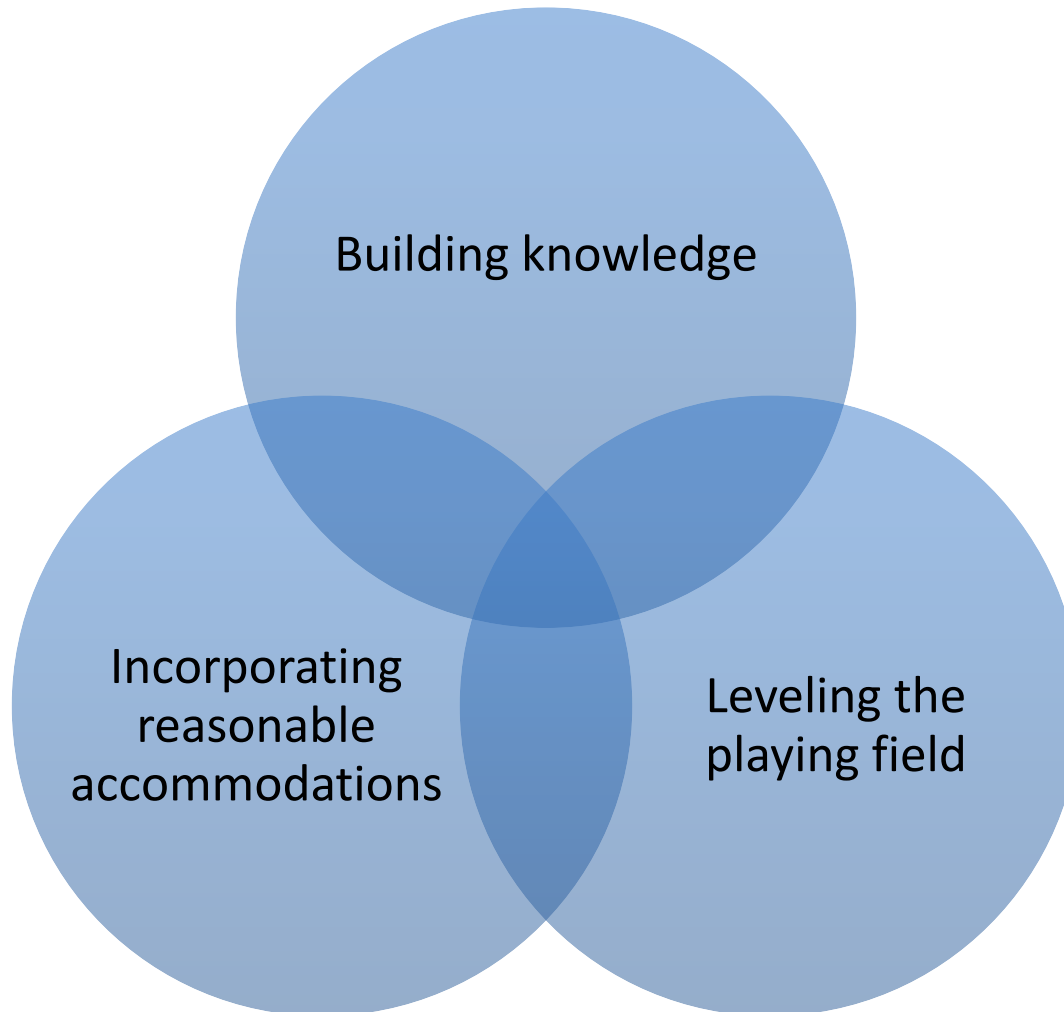
Effort vs. Impact



Recommendation Principles

- Recommendations must be SMART
 - Especially actionable
- Recommendations must be smart
 - Chosen intelligently, for high impact
- Recommendations must be implementable
 - Resources and supports in place
- Recommendations must be directed
 - Aimed at the right target audience

Taskforce Recommendations



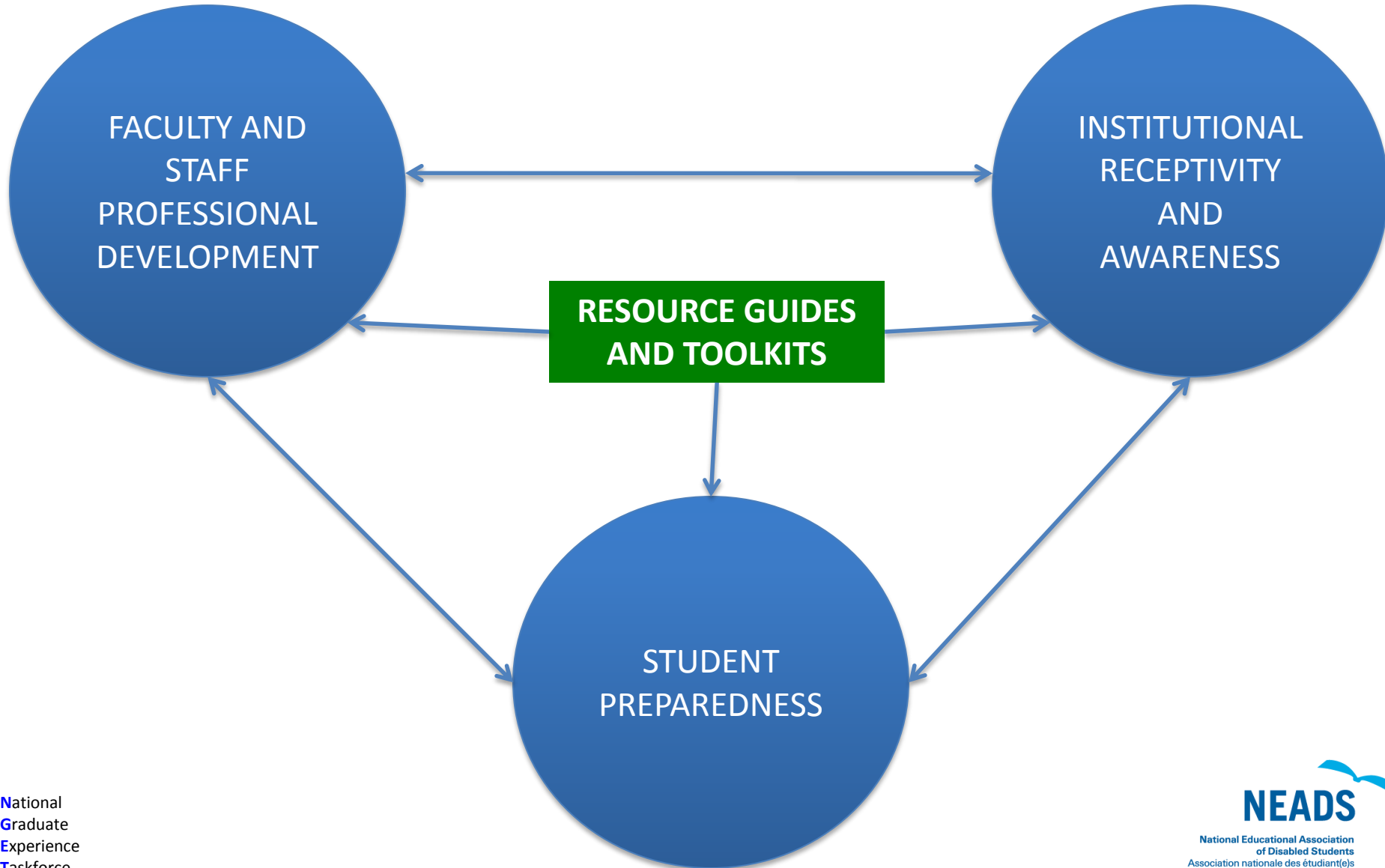
Recommendation Themes

- Evolved from data/findings to date and from Taskforce discussions:
 - Demographics and Data Collection
 - Funding Models
 - Accommodation Models
 - Standards
 - Exceptionality
 - Collaboration
 - Professional Development
 - Student Preparedness

List of Recommendations

- Data Gathering
 - Demographics, data collection, data management, data sharing
- Funding and Financial Aid
 - Financial aid landscape, grants and fellowships, accessibility of application processes and information
- Student-Supervisor Relationship & Essential Requirements
- Disclosure and Accommodation
 - Disclosure, accommodation framework, part-time status, leaves and remote residency, alternative formats
- Breadth of the Graduate Experience
 - Online learning, academic employment, admissions, career transitions
- Mental health
- Universal design
- Sustainability & future directions

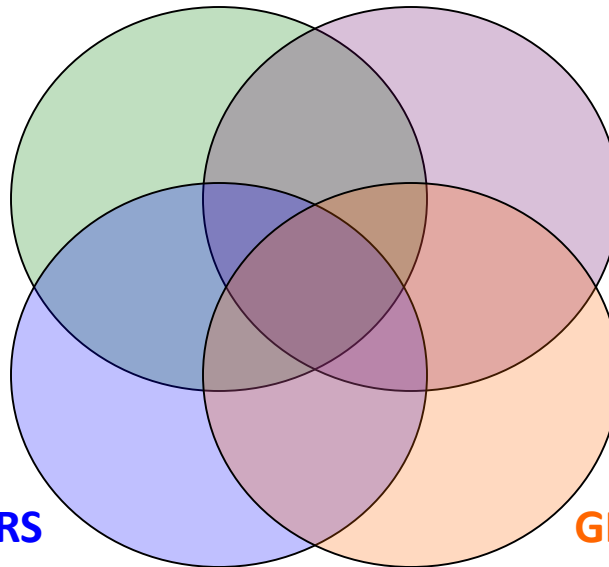
Resource Development



The Need for Collaboration

**GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES**

GRADUATE SUPERVISORS



DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

**GRADUATE SSDs, DEANS,
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS**

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

Equal Opportunity vs. Equal Outcome

equality

equity

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.