

Disclosure, Accommodation, Disability and Graduate Education

Dr. Mahadeo A. Sukhai

Chair, National Graduate Experience Taskforce

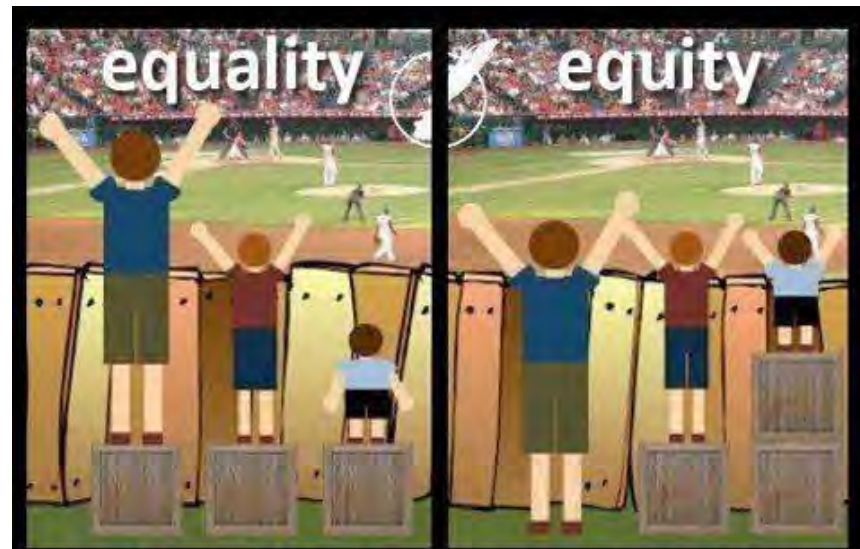
Queen's University

November 12, 2015

Contact Information

- Dr. Mahadeo A. Sukhai, Taskforce Chair
 - Email: m.sukhai@utoronto.ca
- Taskforce and Graduate Project website:
<http://www.neads.ca/en/about/media/index.php?id=106>

Equal Opportunity vs. Equal Outcome



equality

equity

Equality = SAMENESS

Equity = FAIRNESS

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

EQUITY is about **FAIRNESS**, it's about making sure people get access to the same opportunities.

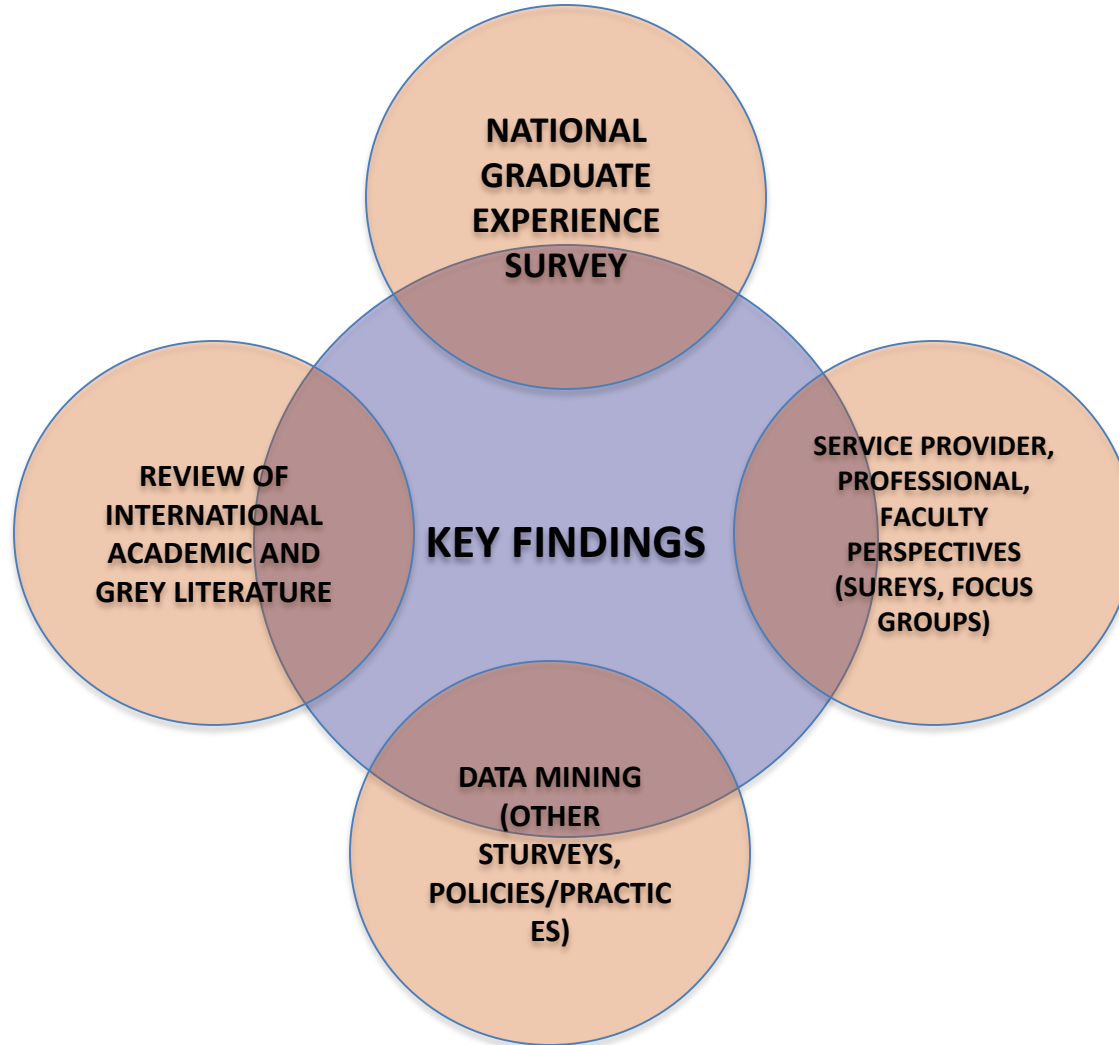
BUT it can **only work IF everyone starts from the SAME place**, in this example equality only works if everyone is the same height.

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

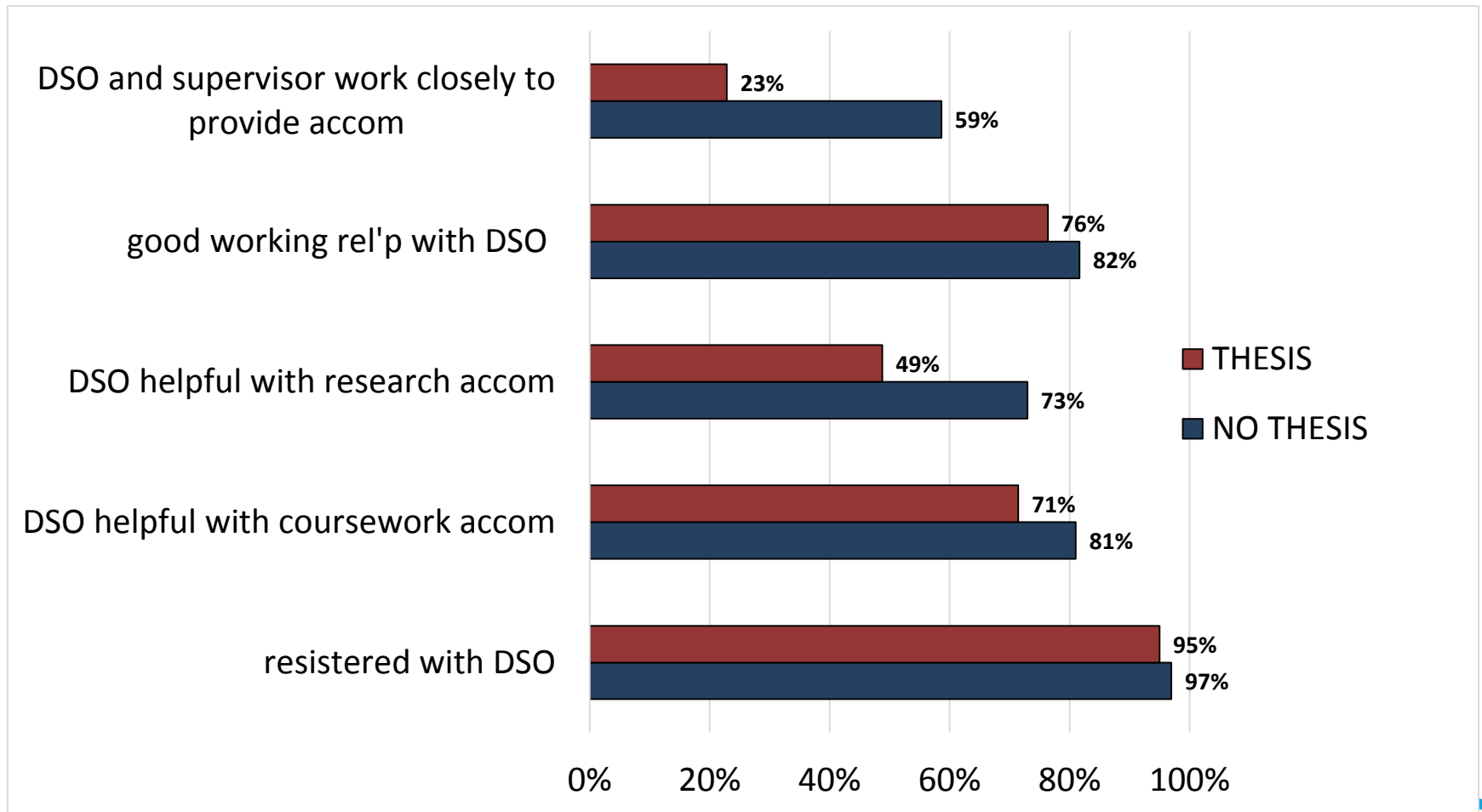
Project Goals

- 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

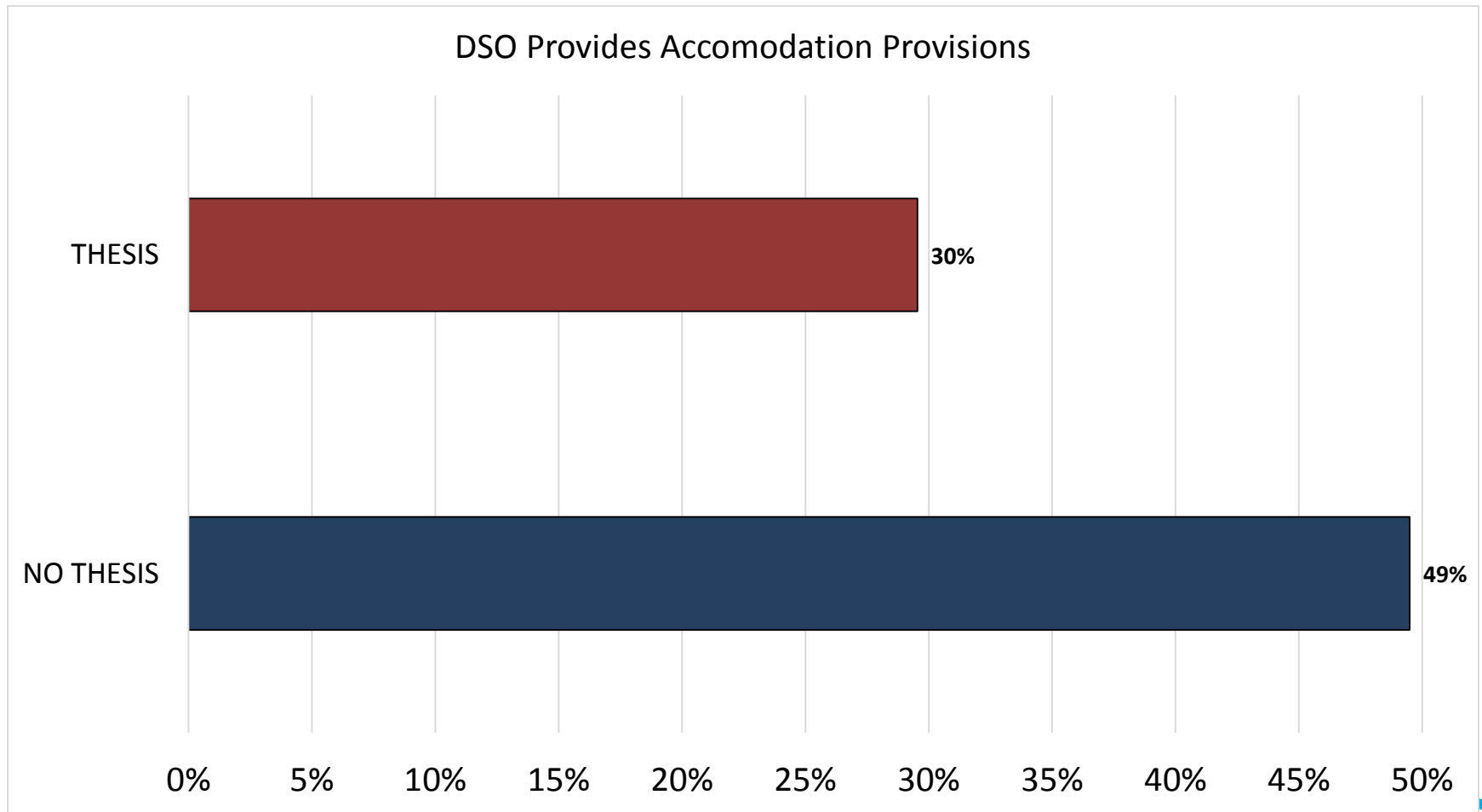
Research Methodology



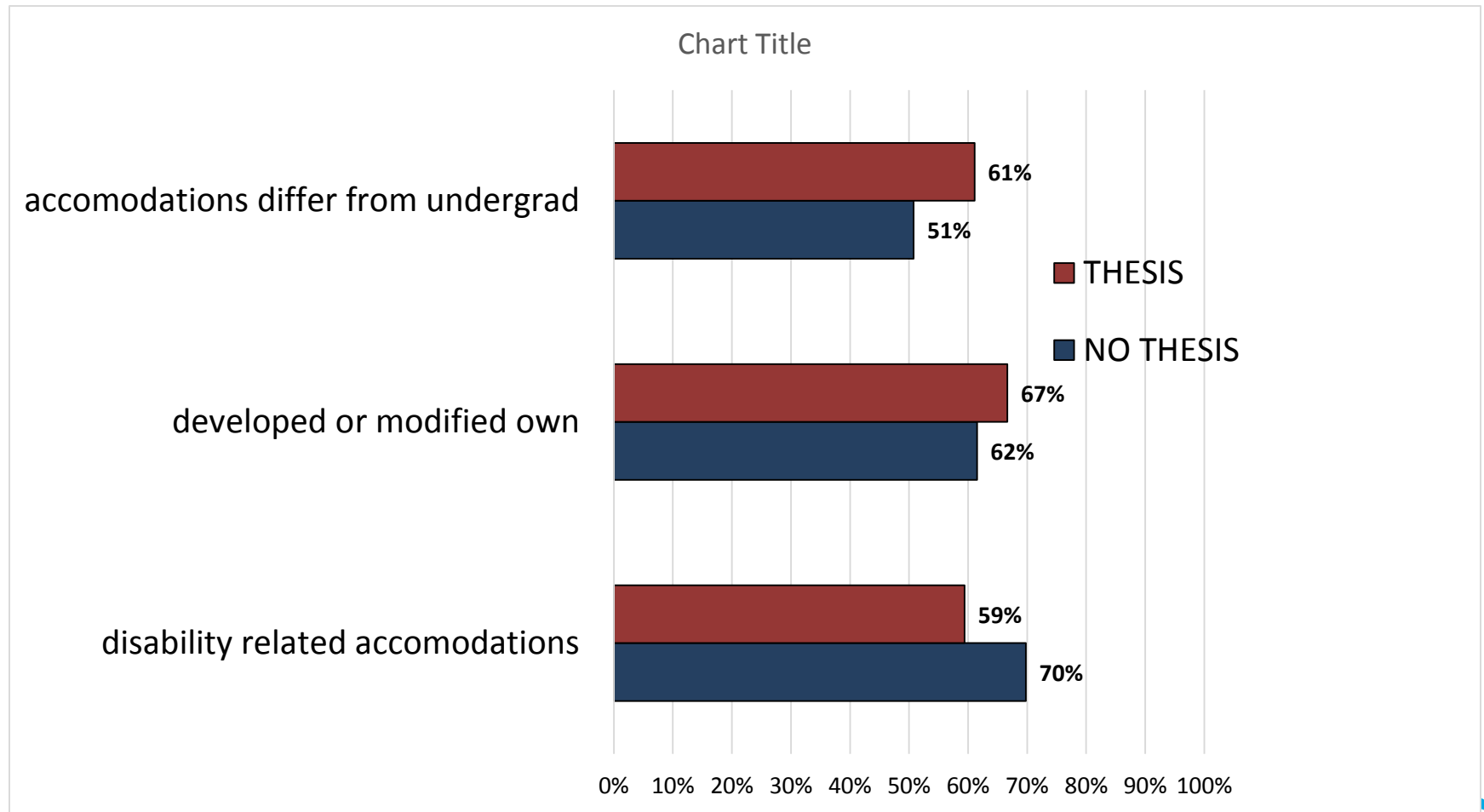
Student-DSO Relationship



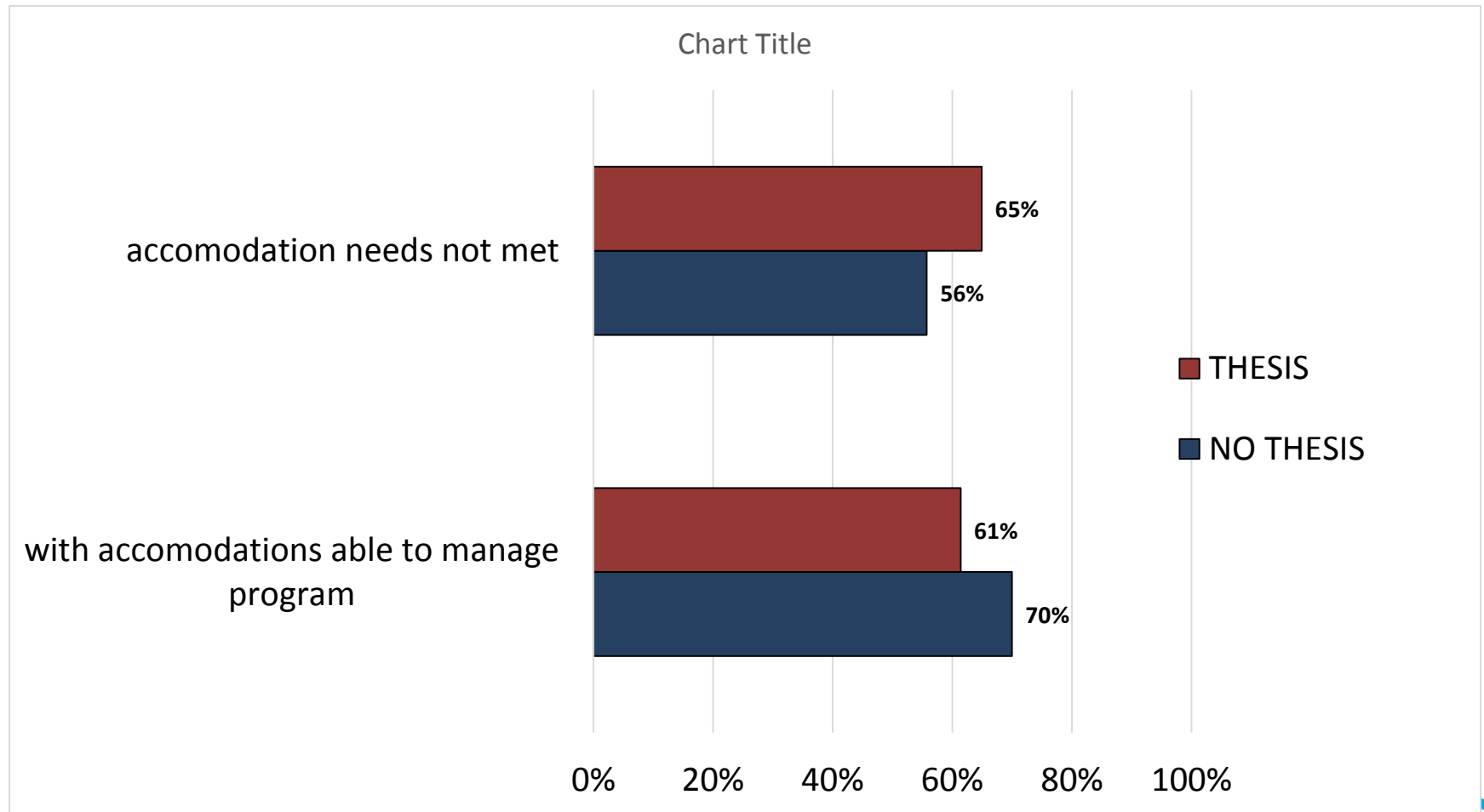
Provision of Accommodations



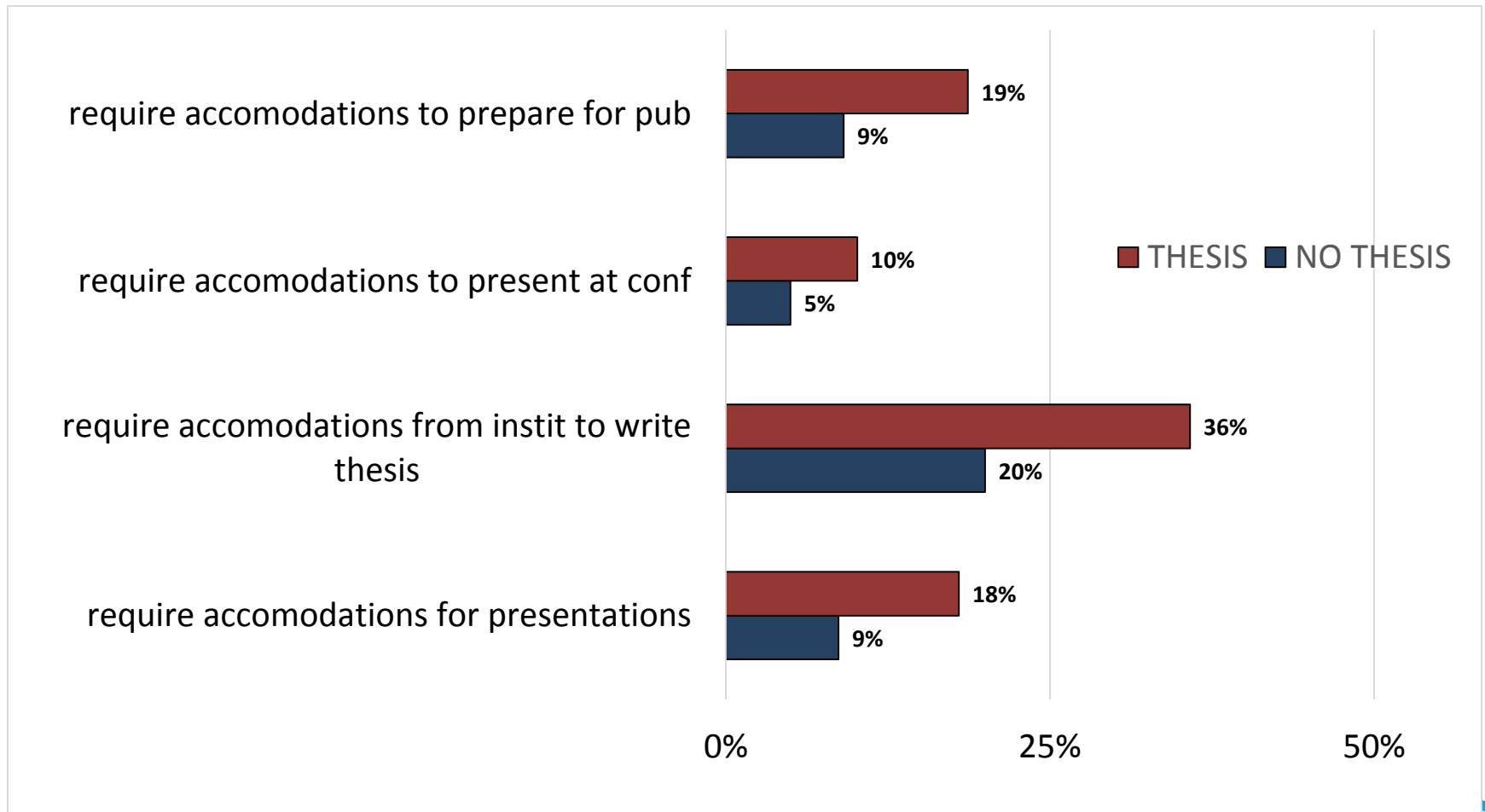
Disability-Related Accommodations



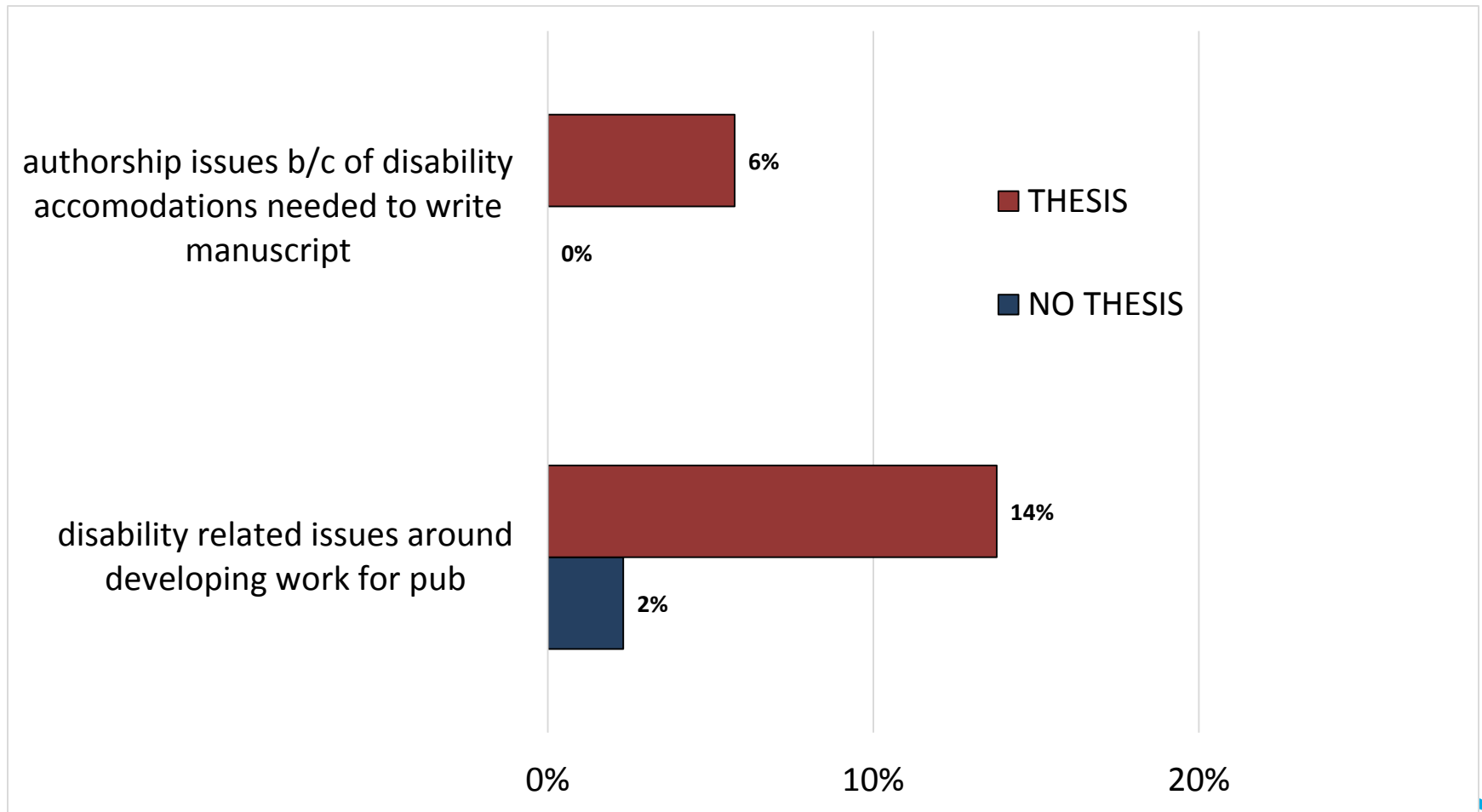
Successful Accommodations



Breadth of Accommodations



IP and Accommodations



Student Disclosure in the Graduate Environment

Submitted, *CACUSS Communique*

Student tipsheet in press, *CACEE Career Options*

Disclosure in the Graduate Environment

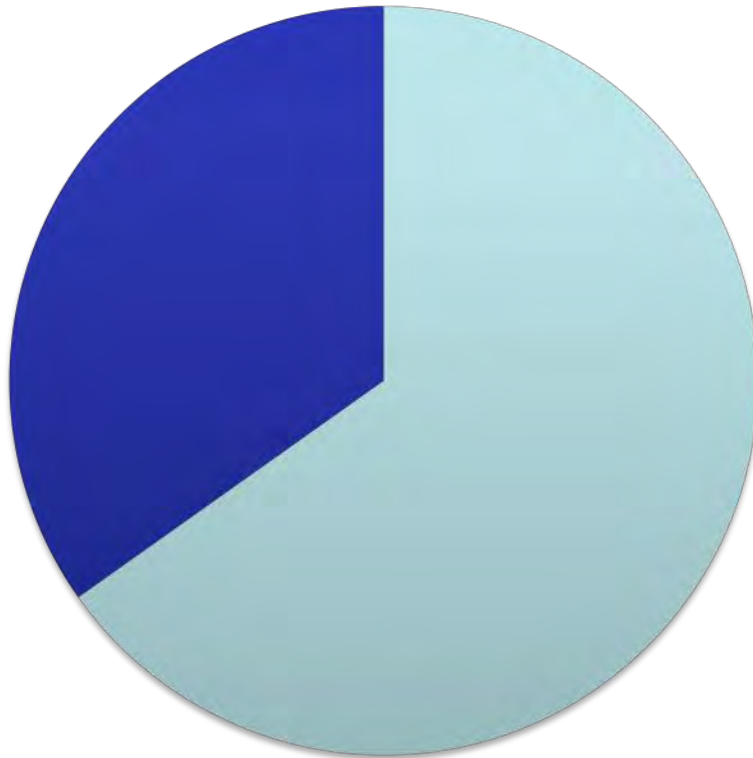
- At the graduate level, disclosure of a disability or accommodation need is as much a process as it is an event, and will evolve throughout a student's course of study
- Disclosure of the accommodation need by the student may occur to several individuals (faculty, department heads, etc) before the accommodations 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.

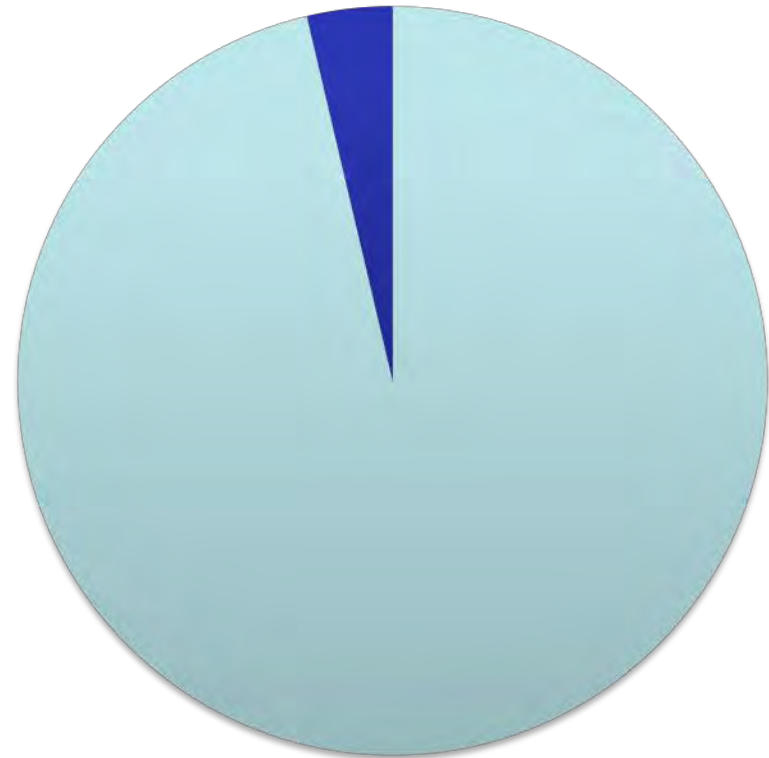
Graduate Students are Developing their own Accommodations

Develop your OWN accommodation?



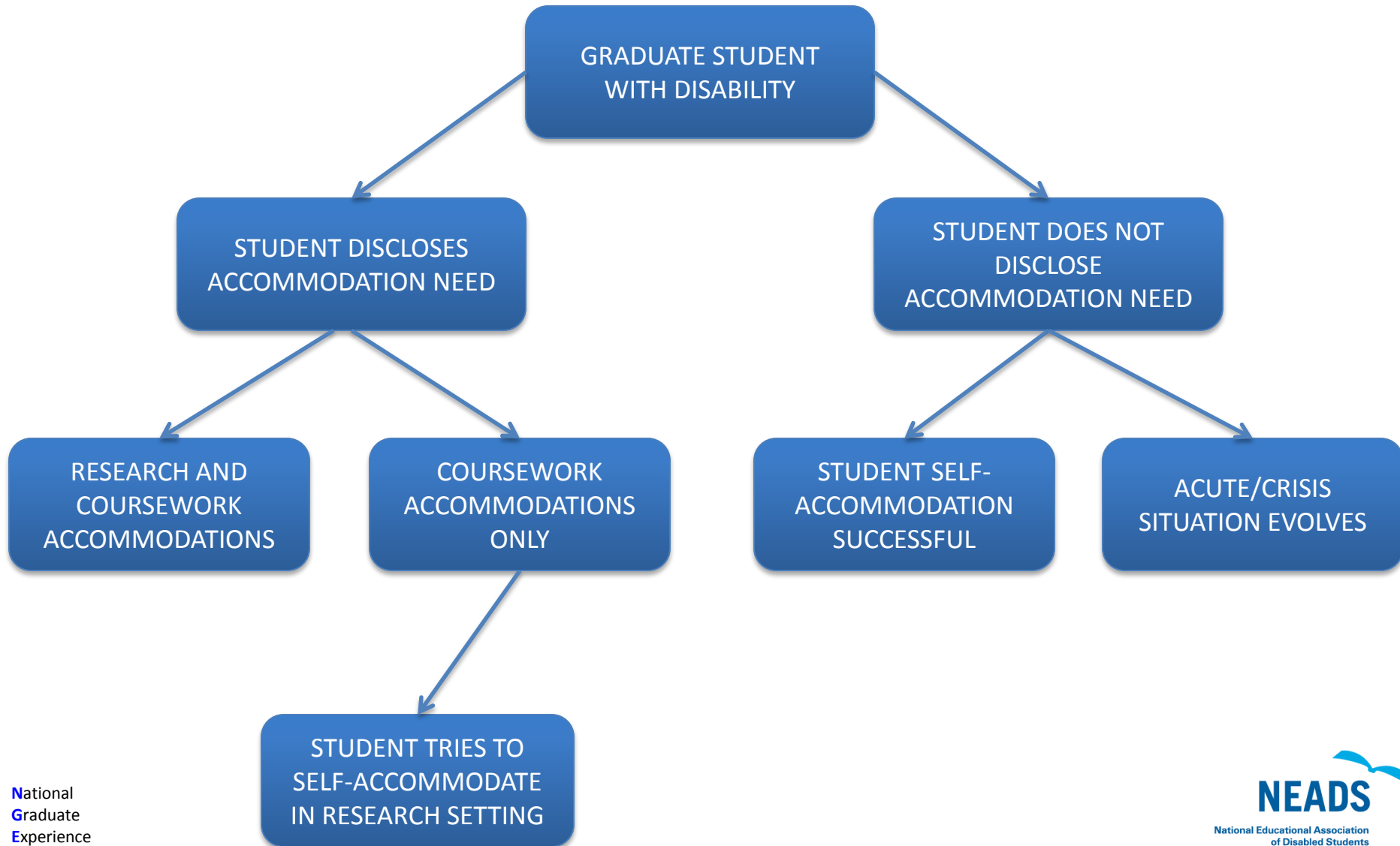
■ YES ■ NO

Registered with disability services office?



■ YES ■ NO

Four Domains of the Student-DSO Relationship



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

Professional Skill Development for Graduate Students with Disabilities

- 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
- 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

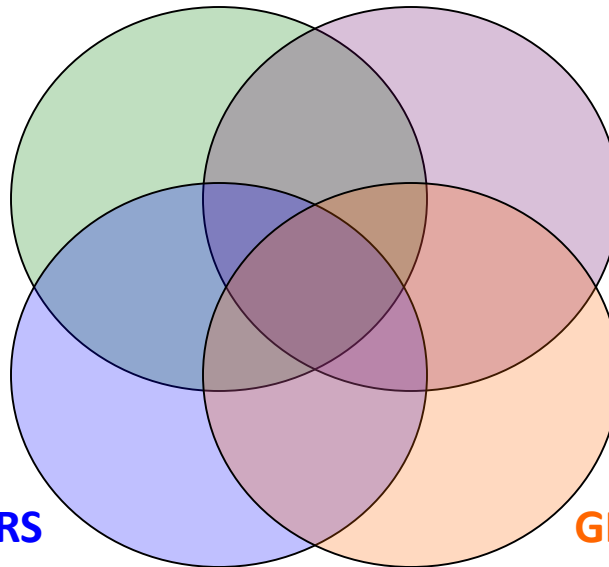
Discussion Questions

- 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

**GRADUATE SSDs, DEANS,
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS**

Acknowledgements

- Taskforce Membership
- Participating Organizations
- Council of Ontario Universities
- Adaptech Research Network
- Canada Student Loans Program
- Canadian Association of Graduate Studies
- Discussion Paper Authors
- National Educational Association of Disabled Students

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

