

Students, Supervisors, Expectations and Essential Requirements

The Impact of Disability on Journeys Through Graduate Education

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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

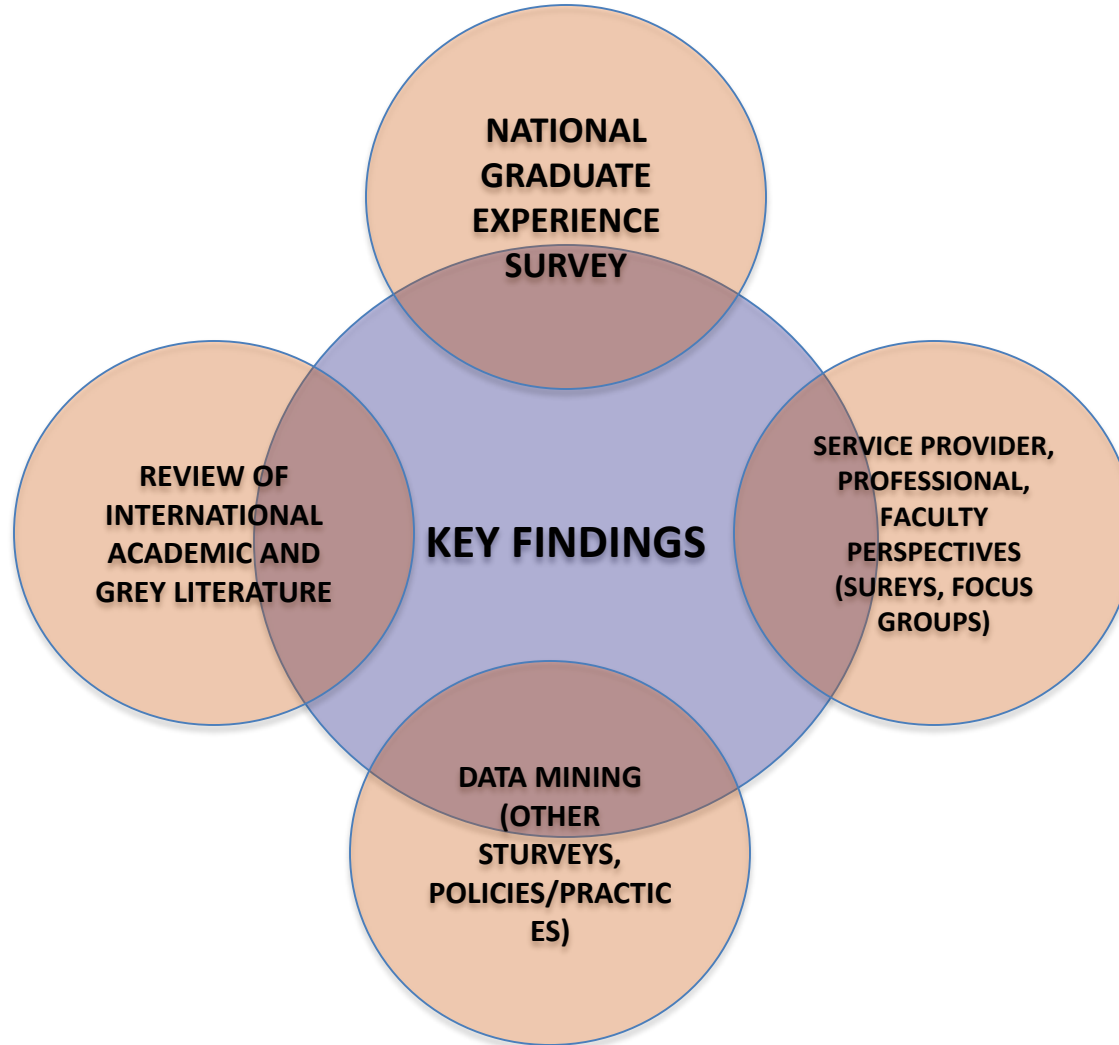
National Graduate Experience

Tasforce

Launched in 2012

- 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



Disability and the Student-Supervisor Relationship

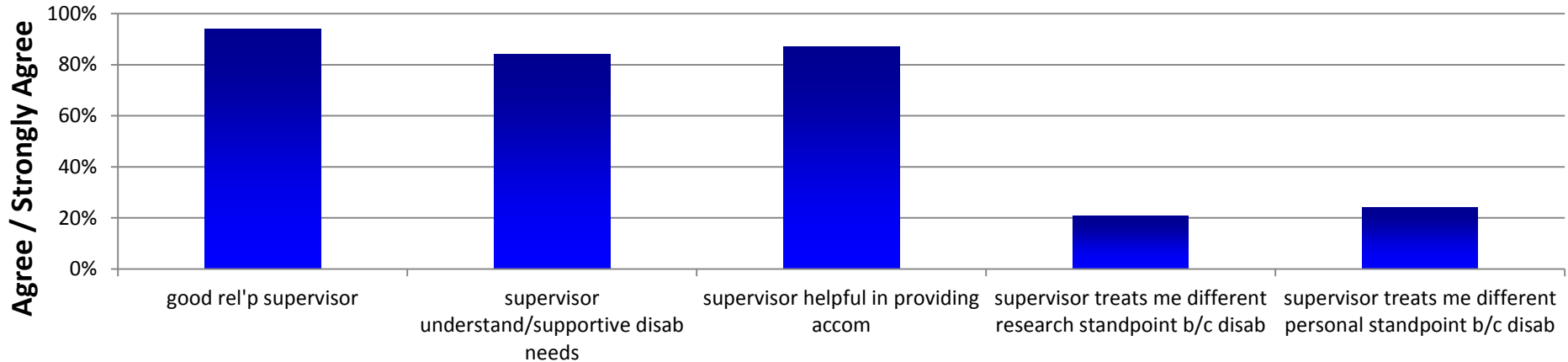
Discussion Questions

In relation to graduate students with disabilities...

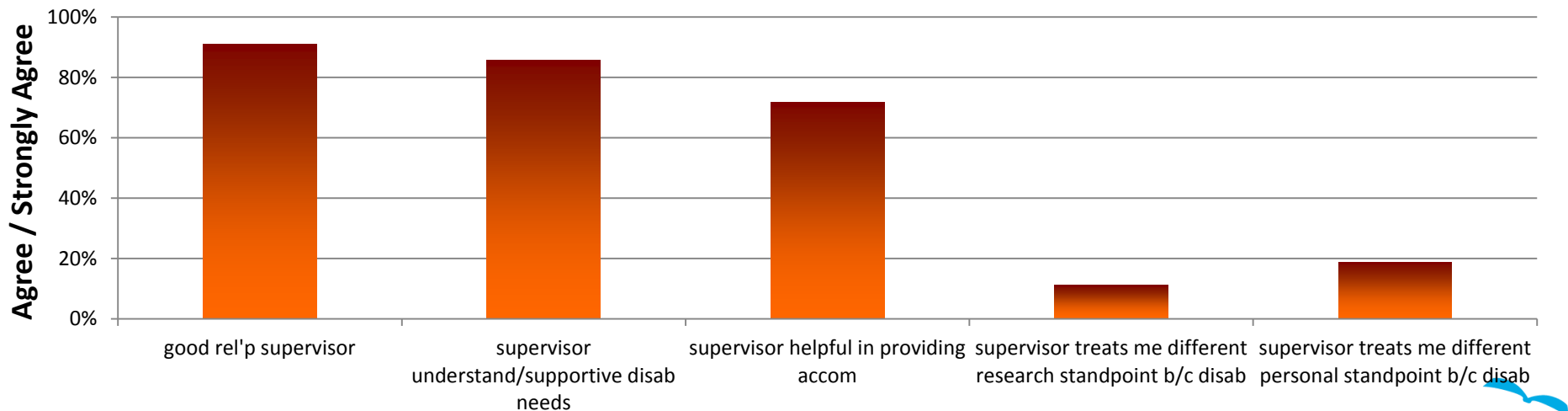
- What do you think a good student-supervisor relationship looks like?
- What do you perceive as challenges to establishing a good student-supervisor relationship?
- What have, or would, you do to address these challenges?

Student-Supervisor Relationship

Master's

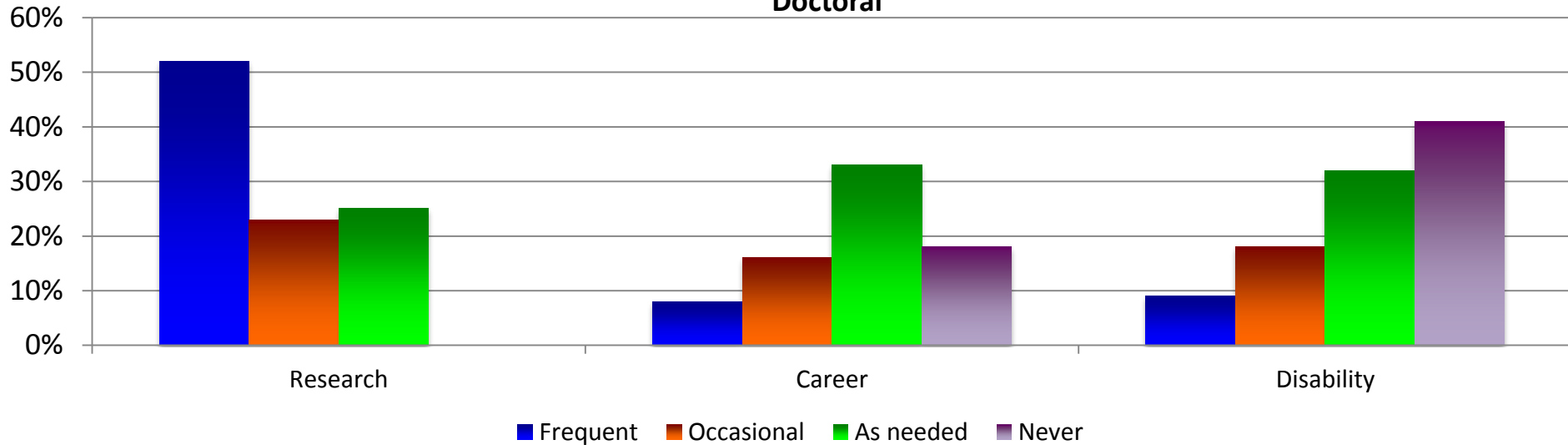


Doctoral

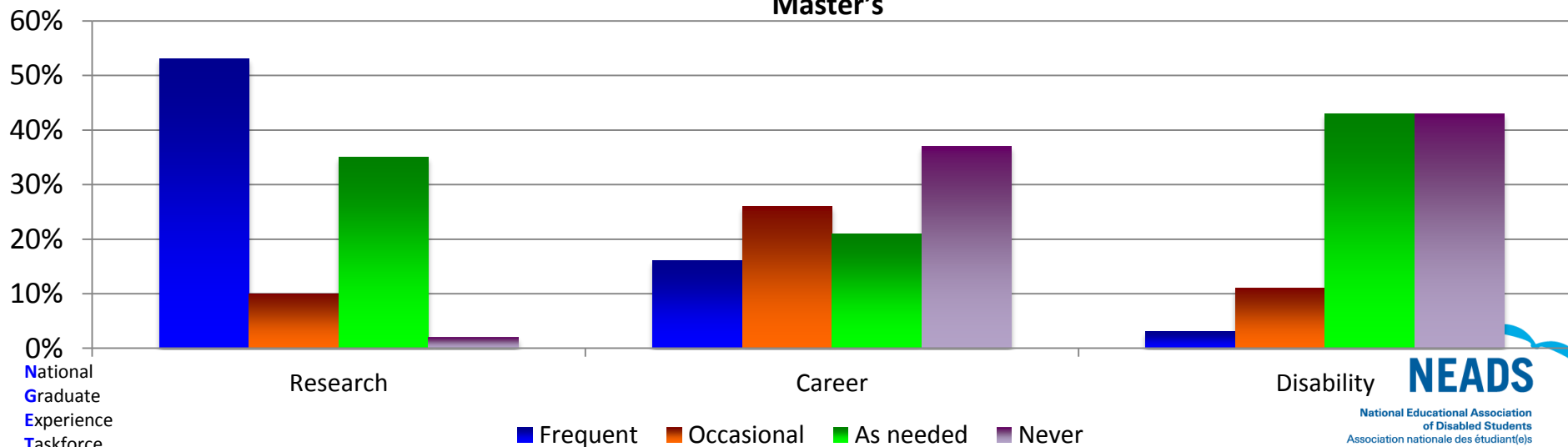


Purpose of Meetings with Supervisor

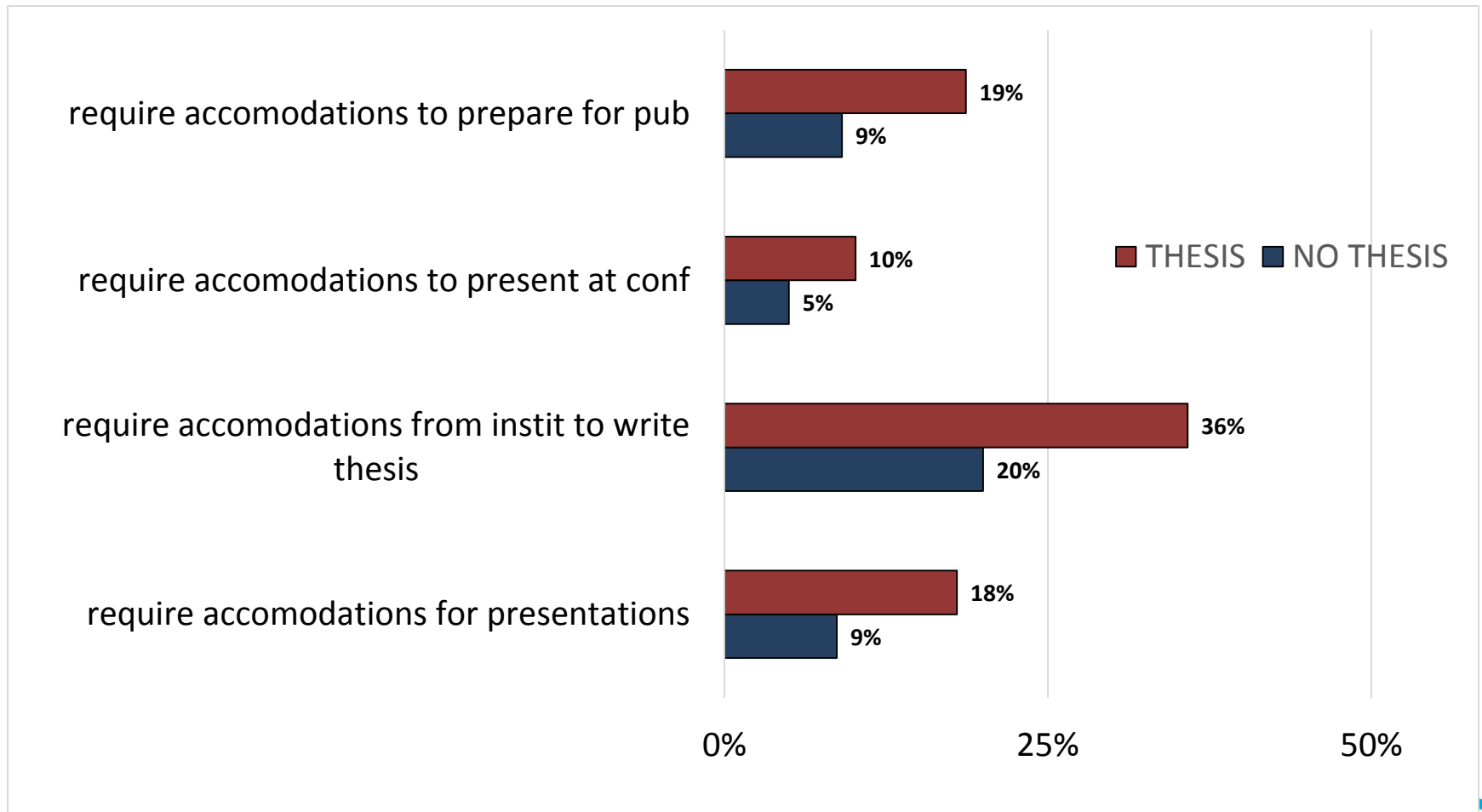
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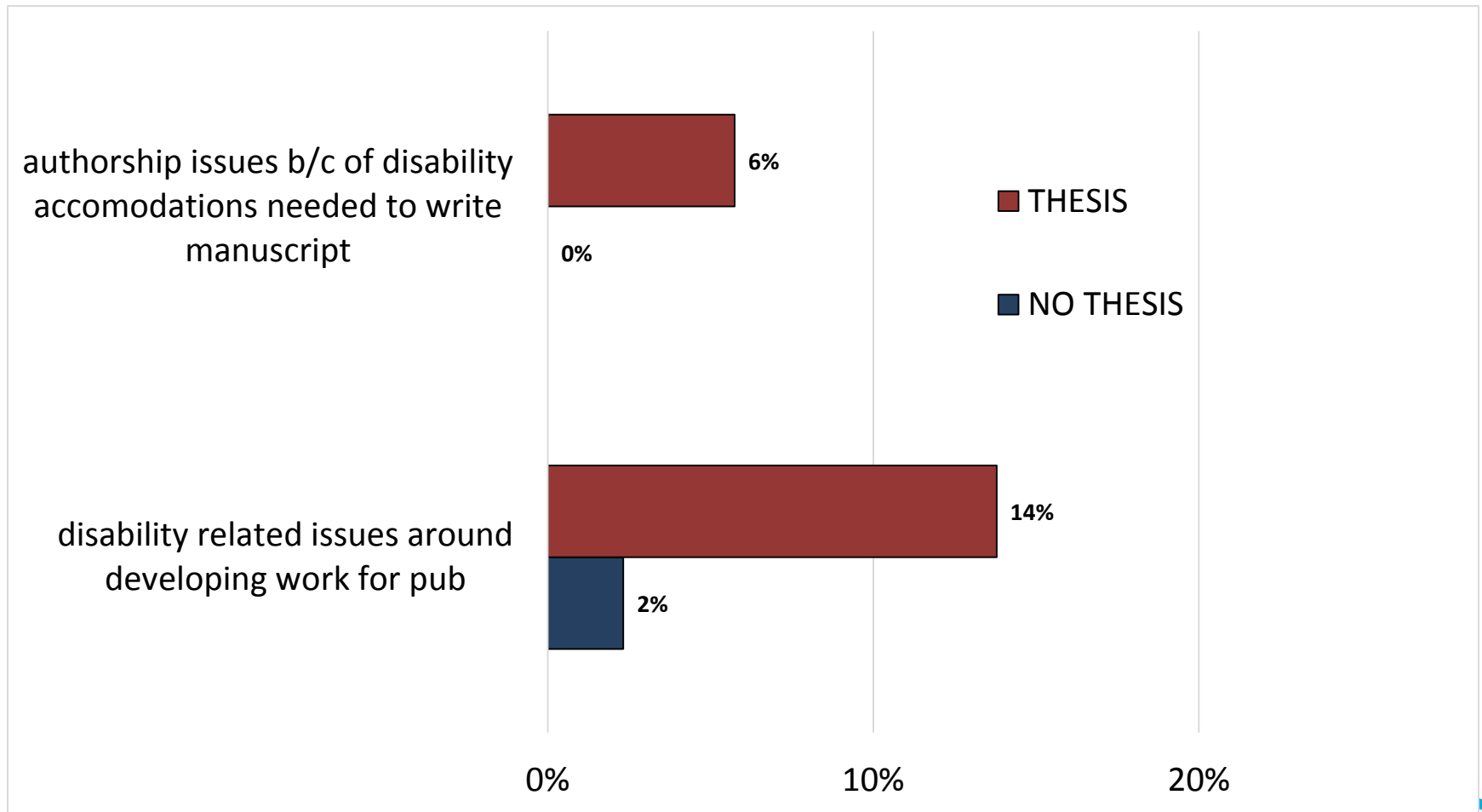
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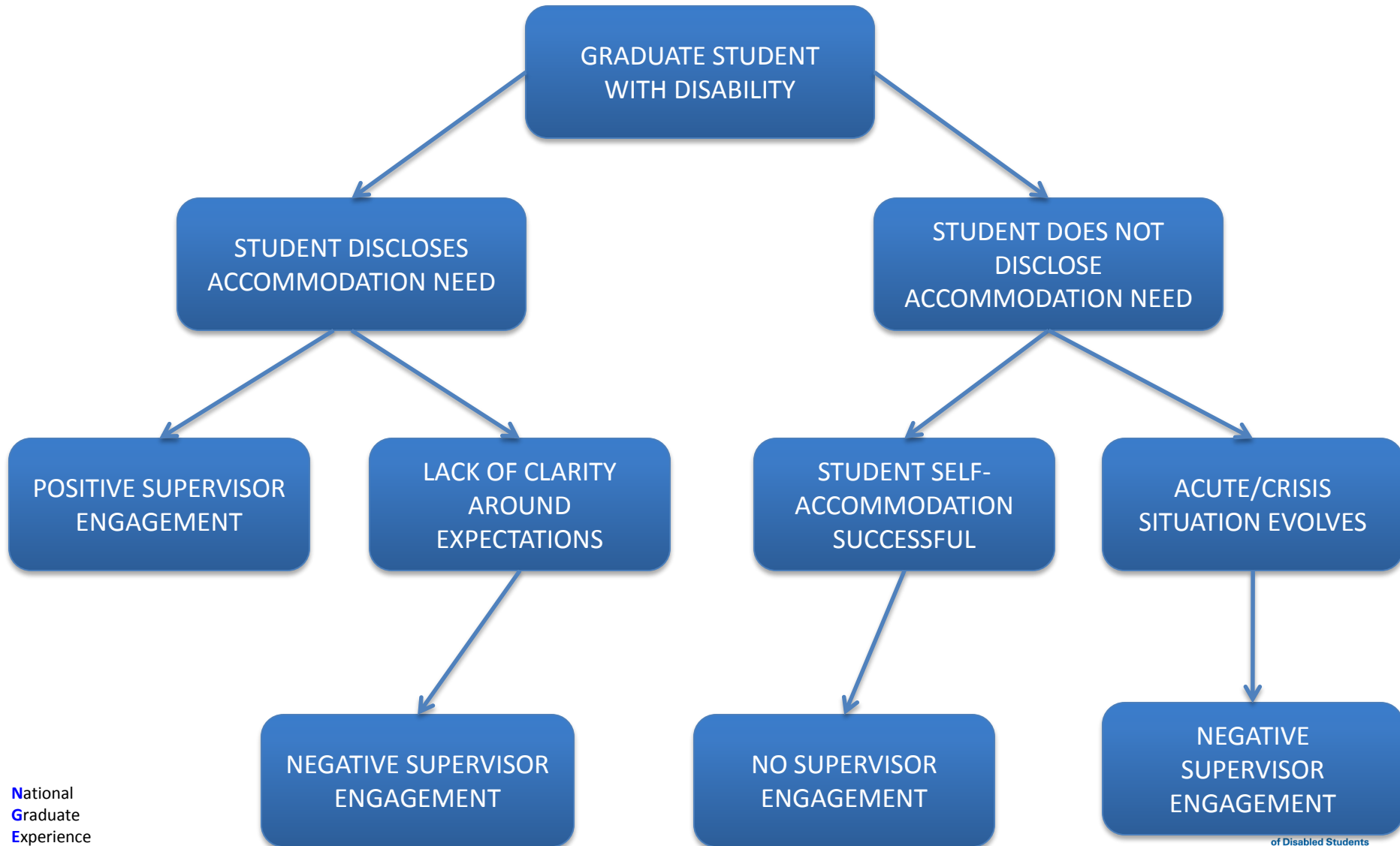
Breadth of Accommodations



IP and Accommodations



Four Domains of the Student-Supervisor Relationship



Factors Influencing the Student/Supervisor Relationship: Supervisor Perspective

- Supervisor's Knowledge of and/or Willingness to Participate in Disability Related Processes
- Supervisor's Knowledge of the Interface between Essential Requirements and Academic Accommodations
- Research Integrity and Accommodations: Authorship Issues
- Academic and Social Integration into the Academy
- Boundary Issues
- Funding Issues
- Students in Crisis

Factors Influencing the Student/Supervisor Relationship: Student Perspective

- Disclosure and Stigma
- Student Preparedness for and Expectations of Graduate School
- Student Awareness of the Role of the Student/Supervisor Relationship in Graduate Education
- Student Identity: Timing and Comfort Level with Disability(ies)
- Student Engagement with DSO vs. Self-Accommodation

Recommendation

- Recognizing the central and critical importance of the relationship dynamic between the graduate student and their thesis supervisor (or curriculum and practicum advisors) to the success of any graduate student, and also recognizing the confusion and myths often surrounding disability, we recommend that efforts be undertaken to educate both students and supervisors about their rights, obligations and responsibilities, in particular, those that pertain to disability in the context of graduate education, in order to foster strong relationships and student success.

Recommendations

- New faculty member orientations, as well as ongoing offerings through relevant university offices (e.g., centres for teaching and learning, faculty conferences, etc.) include training and resource materials around graduate studies, disability, and the student-supervisor relationship;
- Guidelines be provided to supervisors to help them identify the essential requirements for trainees (i.e., students and postdoctoral fellows) successfully conducting research in their research environment;
- Guidelines for students and supervisors, patterned after best practices in other contexts, be developed for framing ongoing conversations around the interaction of disability and the graduate education environment;

Recommendations

- Awareness of students, faculty and DSOs of the requirements of graduate study, both at the program and curriculum levels, and the interfaces between disability and graduate education, be increased through appropriate educational and professional development programming;
- Faculty liaisons be established within an institution, with resources and supports for students with disabilities at the graduate level; liaisons should act as advisors to faculty members seeking resources, information and advice on accommodating graduate students with disabilities;
- Where appropriate, existing graduate faculty leads/officers of academic units within an institution should be provided with resources and supports for students with disabilities at the graduate level; these individuals should act as advisors to faculty members seeking resources, information and advice on accommodating graduate students with disabilities; and,
- Institutions, higher education administrators and graduate faculty be provided with resources around the impact of disability and accommodation issues on the student-supervisor relationship in graduate education.

Defining a New Culture: Essential Requirements in the Graduate Environment

Published online as a 3rd Party
Publication by the Canadian
Association of Graduate Studies

Essential Requirements

- **"Essential requirements** of a course or program refer to the knowledge and skills that must be acquired or demonstrated in order for a student to successfully meet the learning objectives of that course or program" (Rose, 2009).

Discussion Questions

- What are the essential requirements of your discipline or program?
- In your experience, how have you thought about the issue of accessibility for students with disabilities in the context of the essential requirements of your discipline?

Essential Requirements

- Defined by two factors:
 - Skills that must be necessarily demonstrated in order to meet the objectives of a course
 - Skills that must be demonstrated in a prescribed manner
- It is extremely important to not confound the evaluation method with the actual competency.
- For example, if a student must understand how to design, interpret, analyze and troubleshoot a scientific experiment (“competency”), does this mean that the student must perform the experiment unaided (“measurement”)?

Essential Requirements for Graduate Education

- “General” Essential Requirements (applicable across all disciplines)
- Discipline-Specific Essential Requirements
- Technical Essential Requirements
- “Philosophy of graduate education” issue – what are the universal definitions of essential requirements?

Questions for Consideration

- What is being tested?
- What is the nature of the task?
- Does it have to be done in only one way?
 - If so, why?
- Will performing this task in an alternative manner ultimately interfere with the student's successful performance in the discipline, program or course?

Thought Frame for A Discussion of Essential Requirements in Graduate Programs

- Is the student in a research-stream or professional-stream graduate program?
 - IF professional-stream, have essential requirements been defined for the program or profession?
- Does the student have to TA/RA as part of their stipend requirements?
 - IF yes, then there are TWO sets of essential requirements that apply to the student – those for the academic program AND those for the employment component of graduate education
 - The student's ability to meet both sets of essential requirements ought to be discussed, but accountabilities and accommodation responsibilities will be different between these two scenarios
- Has the student discussed the essential requirements of the program with their supervisor and/or thesis advisory committee?

Discussion of Essential Requirements

- As part of the student's training in their graduate program, the following points of discussion should take place among the student's supervisor/advisory committee, the student, the department, the graduate faculty and the disability services office on an ongoing basis:
 - Identify the essential requirements (skills, tasks, thought processes) of the student's program
 - Ensure that the identified essential requirements pass the tests defined by legal precedents
 - Identify disability-related areas of concern with the student and together develop strategies to address those areas (e.g., through project modification)
 - Identify, with the student, a process for evaluation
 - Identify, with the student, a schedule for review and monitoring
 - In regular reviewed, determine whether the evolution of the student's program/project have led to changes in essential requirements

Recommendation

- Recognizing the different aspects of essential requirements in graduate education, as well as the inconsistent application and understanding of essential requirements across disciplines and program types, we recommend that efforts be undertaken to educate both students and supervisors about essential requirements and their interfaces with disability and accommodation.

Recommendations

- Essential requirements for trainees ought to be inclusive of accommodation-related needs of students with disabilities;
- Where these have not yet been developed, guidelines be developed and provided to practicum supervisors to help them identify the essential requirements for trainees successfully conducting the practical components of their programs;
- Changes to standards for essential requirements in professional accreditation bodies be advocated for, in order to integrate issues faced by students with disabilities;

Recommendations

- Professional accreditation bodies consider the impact of disability on time to completion in professional graduate programming for students with disabilities in their accreditation process;
- A values and principles of essential requirements guidance framework for institutions and programs be developed and shared;
- A faculty guide on essential requirements in the context of disability be developed and shared; and,
- Creativity, flexibility and cooperation among the student, faculty, supervisor(s), and graduate program staff be fostered to better enable access to accommodations in the context of essential requirements,

Student Disclosure and Accommodation in the Graduate Environment

Disclosure Discussion Paper, Submitted, *CACUSS
Communique*

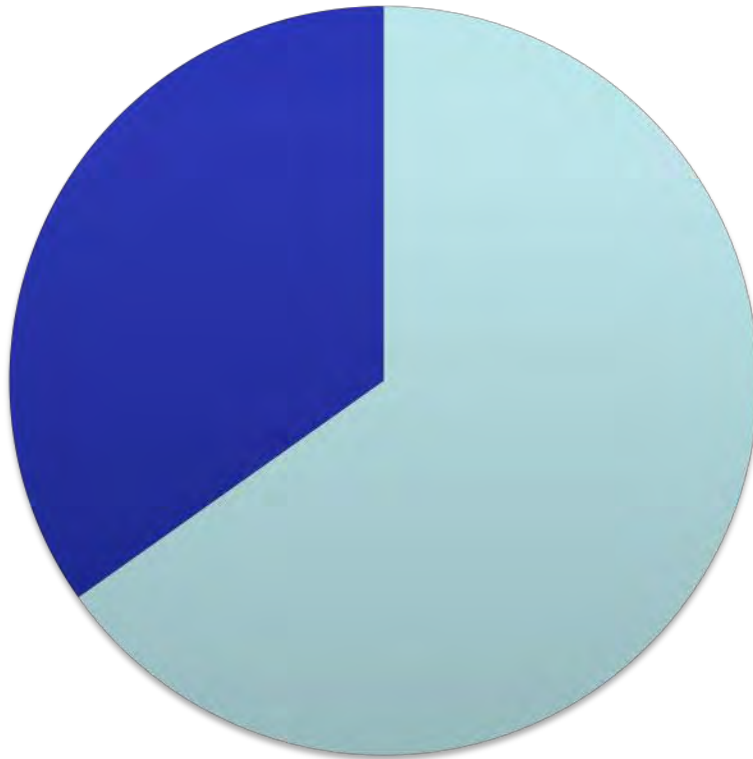
Student Disclosure tipsheet published, *CACEE Career
Options*

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

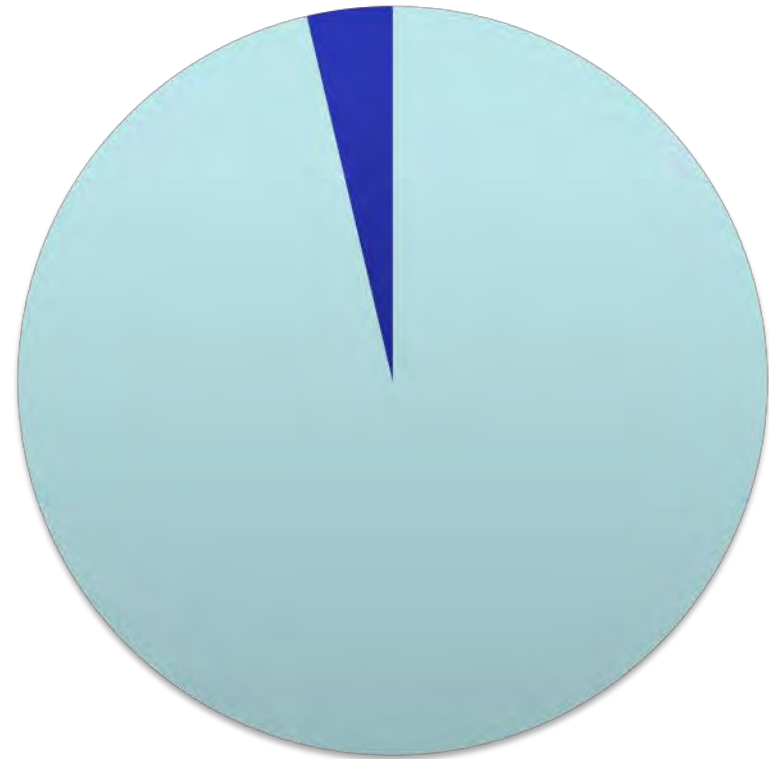
Graduate Students are Developing their own Accommodations

Develop your OWN accommodation?



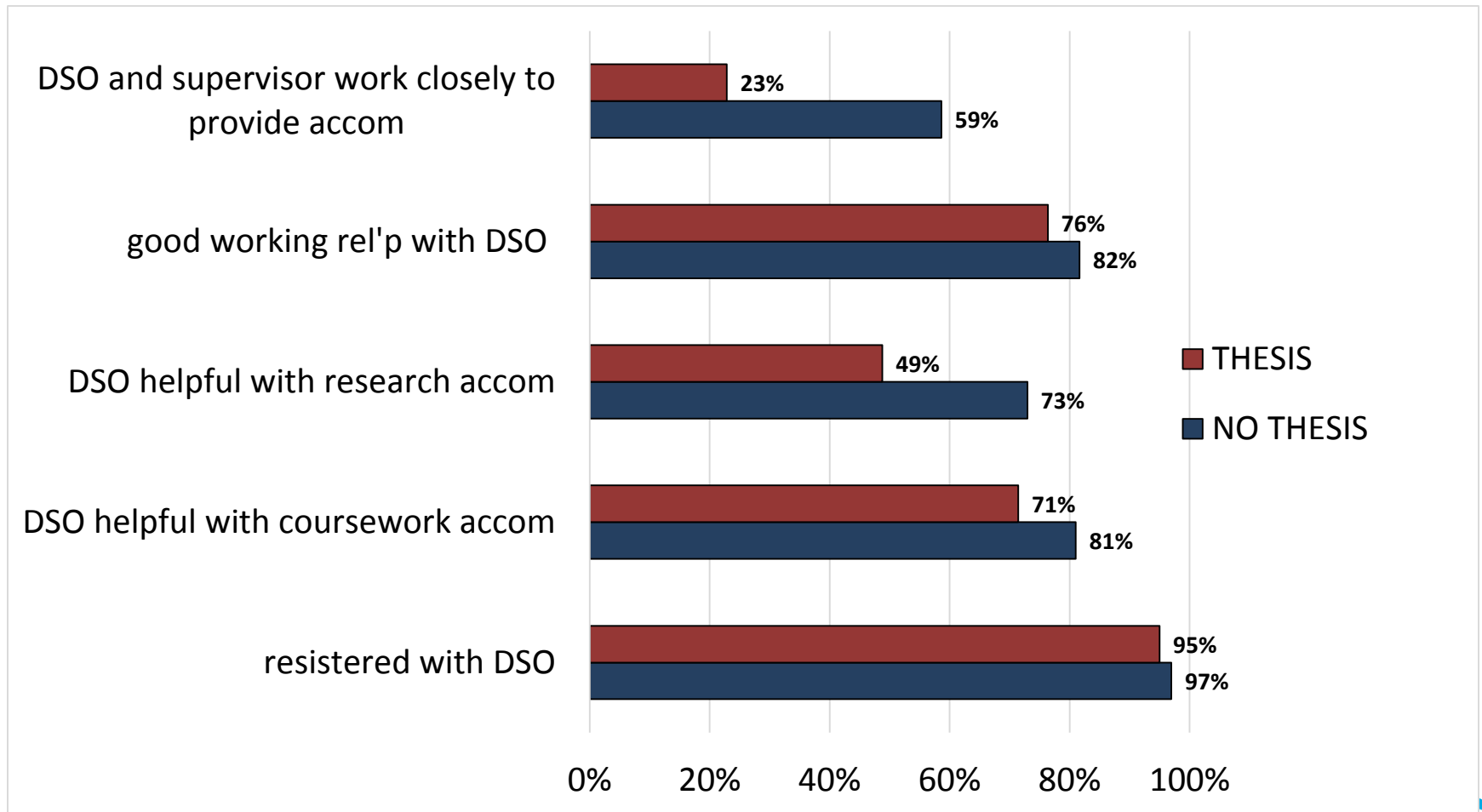
■ YES ■ NO

Registered with disability services office?

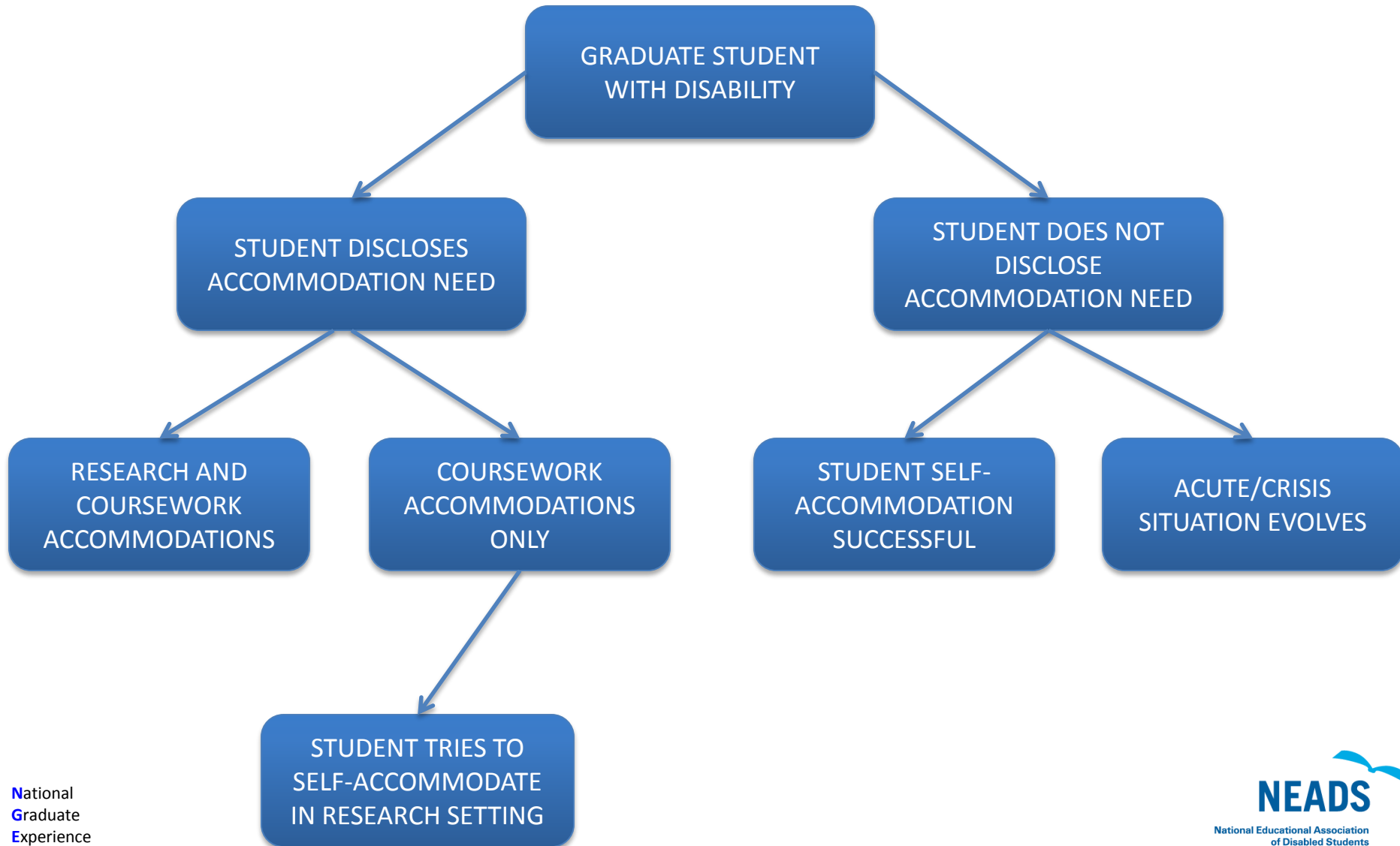


■ YES ■ NO

Student-DSO Relationship



Four Domains of the Student-DSO Relationship



Mental Health and Graduate Education

Context and Framing Thoughts

- High-Stress Environments
- Mental Health Stigma
- Invisible and Ignored
- Critical areas to be addressed:
 - Self-assessment
 - Awareness of signs of undue stress
 - Challenge as a disability
 - Needed resources
 - Best practices
 - Accommodations for a healthy workplace

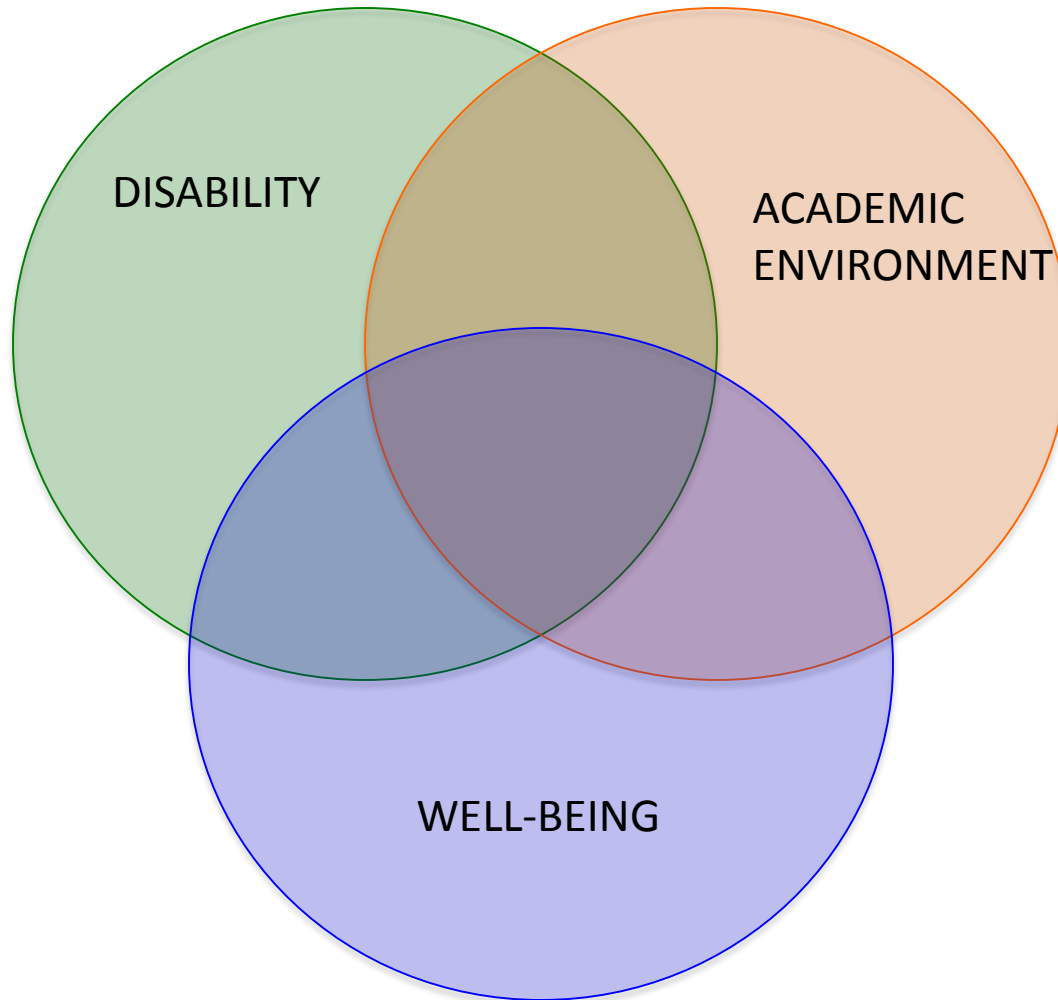
Research Trainees Face Unique Challenges

- Establishing a professional identity
- Seeking balance
- Competing for fellowships/grants
- Launching career
- Self-promotion
- Relating and working with supervisor
- Coping with perfectionism
- Getting adequate sleep
- Dealing with research and graduate culture

Where can Mental Health Issues evolve from?

- Power dynamic between trainee and mentor
- Culture shock and acclimatization/assimilation
- Separation from family and support network
- Isolation
- Imposter syndrome
- Earlier stresses (e.g., undergrad, life events)
- Family situations
- “Confounders” (e.g., disability)

Factors Influencing Mental Health in Graduate Education



Key Findings – Students with Mental Health Disabilities in Graduate Education

- Two populations:
 - Students with mental health and psychiatric disabilities primarily
 - “Co-occurrence” of multiple disabilities
- Disclosure, Stigma, and Advocacy
- Attitudinal Barriers
- Student-Supervisor Relationship, Support Systems and Identification of Times of Acute Stress

Key Findings – Students with Mental Health Disabilities in Graduate Education

- Institutional Provision of Accommodation vs. Self-Accommodation
- Leaves and Funding, Financial Aid and Scholarship Eligibility
- Safe Spaces for Dialogue; Peer Mentorship
- Interface between Academic Employment and Academic Program Environments

Recommendations

- Institutions develop policies and procedures to support exceptions for leaves of absence greater than the institutional standard for disability-related circumstances outside of the student's control;
- New faculty member orientations, as well as ongoing offerings through relevant university offices (e.g., centres for teaching and learning, faculty conferences, etc.) include training and resource materials around mental health, and the student-supervisor relationship;
- Institutions develop policies and procedures to foster open and up-front dialogue with students with respect to systemic and evolving issues that may contribute negatively to mental health disabilities in graduate education;

Recommendations

- Institutions establish a staff/faculty position with expertise in mental health and wellness to assist faculties of graduate studies, to work with academic units and departments to ensure that students with mental health disabilities are treated equitably across disciplines, and to ensure uniform application of relevant policies and practices;
- Institutions periodically review policies and practices surrounding mental health to ensure that they remain up-to-date with current relevant research findings;
- The creation of safe spaces in which people feel comfortable discussing mental health issues in recognition of the fact that students hold myriad responsibilities and encounter unique demands in graduate school which can have an impact on their mental health be encouraged;

Recommendations

- A toolkit for students with disabilities transitioning to graduate education to educate them on issues relevant to disclosure of mental health in the graduate setting be developed; and,
- A follow-up effort addressing institutional best practices and resources around mental health in graduate education be established.

Resources

Framework for Application: The IDP

- From FASEB:
 - “Individual Development Plans (IDPs) provide a planning process that identifies both professional development needs and career objectives. Furthermore, IDPs serve as a communication tool between individuals and their mentors.”
- As applied to graduate students with disabilities:
 - [Graduate students with disabilities] will have a process that assists in developing long-term goals. Identifying short-term goals will give them a clearer sense of expectations [of their program requirements and performance] and help identify milestones along the way to achieving specific objectives. The IDP also provides a tool for communication between the [student] and a faculty mentor.

Implementing an IDP

For graduate students with disabilities

- Conduct a self-assessment
 - What are my skills?
 - What do I know of the program requirements?
 - Are there areas of potential concern I need to discuss with my supervisor?
- Longer-term and short-term goals – research, performance, coursework, professional development and career
- Develop an IDP framework, share with supervisor and revise based on their feedback
- Implement IDP
- Check-ins with supervisor and thesis advisory committee as needed

For supervisors

- Understand the essential requirements of the specific program your student is in
- Understand available resources and opportunities to assist students with disabilities on campus
- Become familiar with available career and professional development opportunities for students
- Discuss opportunities with the student
- Review IDP and help revise
- Establish regular review of progress and help revise IDP as needed

*Adapted from the Federation of American Societies for
Experimental Biology*

Thought Frame for Interacting with Issues faced by Students with Disabilities

- What is/are the issue(s) the student faces?
- Are they disability-related?
Systemic/structural? Both? Neither?
- Is there any information that you don't have that you feel like you need? Who might have this information? Where can you go to get it?
- Can the student's issues be solved without accommodation or the application of universal design principles?

Thought Frame for Interacting with Issues faced by Students with Disabilities

- Do they impact on the student's opportunity to participate fully in graduate education?
- What are the likely solutions to these issues? What precedents do you have within the institution?
- Which solutions will meet the duty to accommodate without...
 - Contravening the essential requirements of the program?
 - Demonstrating undue hardship?
- Who do you need to work with to implement these solutions?

Scenario

- Karyn is a new Ph.D. student in a chemistry department. She uses a wheelchair for mobility, and while the undergraduate lab is accessible, Karyn does not have access to the newly built lab where faculty members conduct related research, and where the main faculty lounge and conference room are located. Karyn has asked that a ramp or lift be installed as an accommodation of her disability. The department feels a lift is too expensive, and Karyn can work in the undergraduate facility.

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

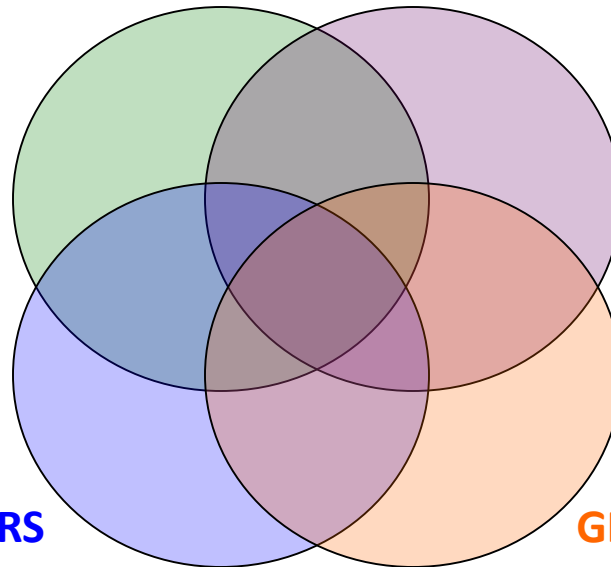
Axioms

- 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

The Need for Collaboration

**GRADUATE STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES**

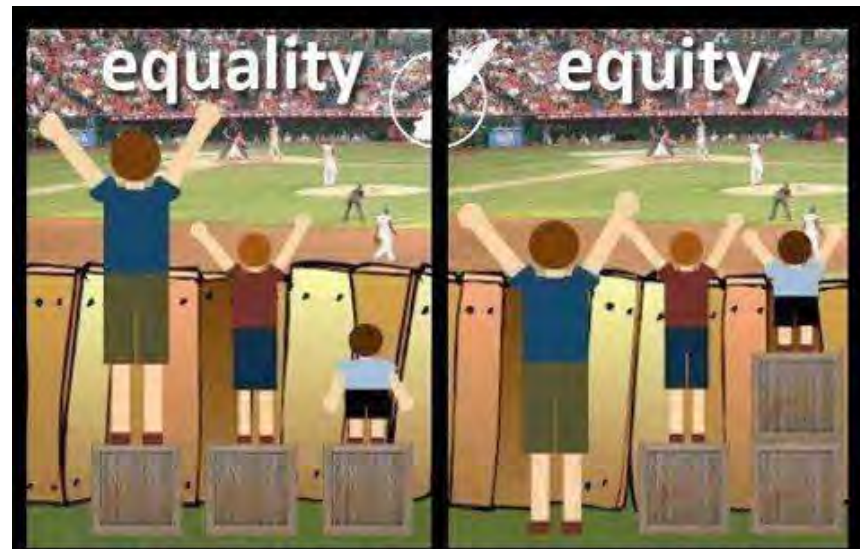
GRADUATE SUPERVISORS



DISABILITY SERVICE PROVIDERS

**GRADUATE SSDs, DEANS,
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS**

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.