Report on Graduate Student Professional Development at SFU: Findings and Recommendations

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Executive Report

This report grows out of a commitment from a number of service units on campus and Graduate Studies to recognize and support the diverse skills, knowledges and aspirations of graduate students. The proposed program will exist to support graduate students as they identify their individual strengths and goals and as they
work to achieve these aspirations. The program will provide regular opportunities for graduate students to articulate their goals, to recognize their developing skills and to identify areas for their growth and development. The program will recognize varied and intersecting modes and spaces for this development to take place, including academic disciplines, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs, employment and life experience.

Tasked with developing a professional development program in support of these goals and of graduate students at Simon Fraser University, this report will provide an overview of scholarly literature on the best practices in the kinds of skills and the methods of delivery; the existing supports for graduate students at SFU both at institutional and departmental levels, and the self-described needs of graduate students. It will also survey professional development programs at comparable universities to take stock of what practices might work well and less well in the particular context of SFU. Finally this report will issue recommendations on the design, implementation and assessment of professional skills programming at Simon Fraser University.

A review of recent scholarship on graduate student professional development reveals that there is no longer a question of whether Canadian graduate students require additional professional skills training; it is instead a question of the modes of delivery and the kinds of assessment.

Existing supports for graduate students’ professional development takes the form of a wide and inconsistent range of disciplinary offerings, institutional level supports from service units like Career Services, Health and Counseling Services and the Teaching and Learning Centre, as well as supports from Graduate Studies and the Graduate Students Society. While there is considerable breadth in the kinds of programs offered, according to the graduate students surveyed, these supports are sometimes of limited relevance and often offered at inconvenient times and locations.

A comparison of Simon Fraser’s offerings with other Canadian institutions demonstrates that SFU needs to develop a coordinated and branded set of programs if it hopes to keep pace with its contemporaries. Comparable programs offer models for what could be developed at SFU, including noncredit and certificate programs.

It is the recommendation of this report that Simon Fraser University adopt a coordinated, branded, self-directed program that integrates disciplinary offerings with institutional offerings in order to allow individual students to shape the program to their individual needs. From specific skill-set areas, students will participate in these elements (both disciplinary and institutional) according to their perceived needs and interest. Students can record their participation and learning in a personalized ePortfolio which will develop over the length of their graduate experience.
Introduction

A National Conversation

In 2008 the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS) released the *Report on Professional Skills Development for Graduate Students*, in which the national organization outlined the “responsibility” of universities “for providing graduate students with the best possible preparation for their future roles whether within academia or in other sectors” (p.4). As administrators, instructors and students grapple with the purpose and value of graduate degrees, the question implicitly circulating is what skills and knowledge graduate studies should provide if educational activities are to align with the demands of the “other sectors” in which the degree holder might be employed.

Indeed, the public discussion of the value of graduate education often appears in the context of a “crisis” in graduate education and *employment* (Charbonneau, 2011; Newhouse, 1999; Tamburri, 2010). A brief analysis of Statistics Canada data supplies evidence of a gap between the expectations of graduate students in terms of their employment outcomes and the realities of the job market. For instance, the 2006 Statistics Canada “Census of Population” reported that 31% of PhDs employed full-time held tenure-track or tenured positions. The impact of this statistic - that less than one-third of PhD graduates assume tenure track positions – begs the question of how many PhD graduates intended or sought such a position. A 2011 study by Statistics Canada reported that of those PhD graduates with full time plans, 41% had “firm plans” to work in post-secondary institutions. These “firm plans” offer no specifics on the nature of the intended work, but a 2005 comparison of permanent teaching positions at universities and colleges found that while in 1999 15.5% of professors held non-permanent positions, in 2005 the figure more than doubled to 31.7% (“Education Indicators”).

Specific outcomes for 2005 doctoral graduates from Ontario universities reveal a similar story (Desjardins, 2012). Census data reveals that while the number of university professors has more than doubled in the last three decades, the number of full time positions has declined and the number of positions held by persons under the age of 35 has dropped dramatically (Desjardins, 2012, p.7). Yet, more than two thirds of graduates from Ontario doctoral programs pursued a doctorate with the intention of becoming university professors; it is worth noting that nearly 9 out of 10 graduates in the humanities intended to become professors (Desjardins, 2012, p.20). If public discussions of the availability of tenure track positions in Canada are any indication then these statistics confirm growing gaps between PhD holders, ambitions for tenure track positions and the availability of such positions (Tamburri, 2010). At the least, these statistics reveal a mismatch between the interests of those pursuing graduate studies and the availability of these forms of work in the academy.
Where, then, do graduate school graduates find employment? The happier news is that these students *do* eventually find employment that they self-report as fulfilling and engaging (Desjardins, 2012). But as employment opportunities shift in ever-greater numbers away from the tenure-track position, the current curriculum that trains the future professor is at odds with likely employment outcomes. Graduate schools thus face something of an ethical dilemma. Knowing that the majority of graduate students *will not* secure tenure track positions, the schools have two principled options: maintain the current curriculum and adjust the admission rates of graduate students to better align with the job market; or, maintain current admission numbers, but adjust the current curriculum to better align with employment outcomes.

As universities take a principled response of reconsidering curriculum, they heed the call from the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) to act responsibly in preparing graduate students for “other sectors” as well as academic employment. The outcome of this, albeit gradual, shift has been an increased awareness of and attention to the introduction, practice and evaluation of “professional skills” or “transferable skills” as core components of the graduate curriculum. With little federal of provincial government guidance, universities have independently acted in designing, marketing and assessing professional skills development programs – or not.

To this end, in the interests of developing professional skills in graduate students at Simon Fraser University, this report will provide a statement of values for a professional development program, an overview of scholarly literature on the best practices in the kinds of skills and the methods of delivery; the existing supports for graduate students at SFU both at institutional and departmental levels, and the self-described needs of graduate students. It will also survey professional development programs at comparable universities to take stock of what practices might work well and less well in the particular context of SFU. Finally this report will issue recommendations on the design, implementation and assessment of professional skills programming at Simon Fraser University.

**Situating Simon Fraser University**

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**What are professional development skills?**

According to the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies and for the purposes of this report, “the phrase ‘professional skills’ is used in the broad sense to describe skills that complement the disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary technical skills that remain the most important aspects of any graduate training. By skills we mean behaviors that can be learned, that can be improved with practice, that require reflection, and that benefit from ongoing coaching” (CAGS, 2008, p.1).
A Tri-Agency *Statement of Principles* (2007) identified **nine** professional skills that graduate students should have practiced and refined. These include:

- Communication and Interpersonal Skills
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal Effectiveness
- Integrity and Ethical Conduct
- Teaching Competence
- Leadership
- Research Management
- Knowledge Mobilization and Knowledge Transfer
- Societal/Civic Responsibilities

In a 2012 SSHRC-funded report, *Graduate Student Professional Development: A Survey with Recommendations*, Marilyn Rose surveyed the professional development programs offered at Canadian universities and ranked the depth and breadth of these programs according to how the programs were organized, recognized, and perceived by internal and external stakeholders (e.g. students and employers). Rose ranked Simon Fraser University as “Category Three,” which:

Consists of a sub-set of universities that offer considerable GSPD [Graduate Student Professional Development] programming, but of a dispersed nature. There may be considerable GSPD activity occurring across the university, but it tends to reside in the partner areas of the university and/or in the Academic Faculties. Graduate Studies will promote GSPD activities in ways commensurate with the information it receives, but tends not to offer GSPD programming itself. The graduate studies website most often directs students to partner operations: Student Services, Career Services and the like. The Graduate Studies website tends not to attempt to collect and promote activities centrally. Institutions in this category may be thought of as embodying a decentralized approach, but a number of them indicate the creation of recent positions or the assignment of Graduate Studies personnel whose task it will be to begin to move towards greater development and coordination of GSPD activity on their campuses. (p.21)

Aligning with the “Category Three” designation, in the spring of 2012 six units at Simon Fraser University began collaborating to provide an organized and accessible platform for graduate student professional development programs and services. The participating units – Health and Counseling Services, Career Services, the Teaching and Learning Centre, the Research Commons, Graduate Studies and the Graduate Student Society – agreed that the disparate programs and services offered by each unique unit should be aggregated on a central website so as to allow graduate students easy access to all available professional development offerings.

These six units jointly sponsored a summer research student, Jamie Hoskins, to collect information on current and comparable Canadian programs, to survey the graduate student population and to issue a preliminary set of recommendations.
Together with Jamie’s work, the decision by the Office of Graduate Studies to hire a Coordinator for Post Doctoral and Professional Development programs suggests that these disparate offerings may soon be more coherently organized and advertised, that disciplinary training may be better recognized and that greater development and coordination may well take place. How, then, to proceed?

**A Short Literature Review**

Much of the available scholarship on graduate student professional development focuses on graduate students in the United States and/or graduate students working toward an academic career (Weidman, 2003; Austin, 2004, 2006; Gardner, 2008; Sweitzer, 2009). What little work there is on graduate student professional training for non-academic careers focuses on the gap between graduate school and the expectations of non-academic employment (Gaff, 2002; Charbonneau, 2011). The missing scholarship on the efficacy of non-academic skills training, or professional skills training, will likely emerge in the coming years as an increasing number of universities begin to consciously and consistently provide support for graduate student professional skills development. That said, the area of program evaluation and assessment remains one of intense need for scholarly inquiry; should Simon Fraser consider adopting early and rigorous assessments of their professional skills programs the entire Canadian graduate community would benefit.

That said there has been a recent spate of policy statements from granting agencies and CAGS with respect to the development and implementation of graduate professional skills programs. In particular, Marilyn Rose’s work in *Graduate Student Professional Development: A Survey with Recommendations* not only provides reviews of existing programs at Canadian institutions, but makes clear recommendations for the development of programs that not only align with the Tri-Agency’s professional goals, but also draw on existing institutional services and departmental expertise. Her work has heavily influenced the recommendations in this report, as they draw on the best available statistical data (AUCC, 2011) and consciously align with the national mandate for graduate development (Tri-Agency, 2007; CAGS, 2008, 2011; OCGS, 2011).

For institutions like Simon Fraser University that are embarking on the development of these programs, Rose and her compiled sources recommend the following:

- Prioritize professional skills training in vision statements, strategic plans and public relations materials;
- Dedicate institutional resources for professional skills training so as to ensure the sustainability and the rigour of programs;
- Combine academic and professional skills training so as to support the transferability of these skills and the integration within academic programs;
• Coordinate professional development activities in a branded and centralized source so as to promote the value of the programs and to ensure the quality of constituent parts;
• Locate professional skills leadership in Graduate Studies in order to ensure oversight and to convey the value attached to these programs to graduate students and faculty;
• Provide direct access to programs through the Graduate Studies homepage in a ‘one-click’ link;
• Include international graduate students and postdoctoral fellows;
• Recognize graduate professional development activities in some manner, whether a co-curricular credit or certificate;
• Assess ongoing activities to evaluate successes and possible changes;
• Ensure faculty engagement and buy-in so as to ensure the viability of the programs and so as to not impact time-to-completion;
• Encourage the formation of external and internal partnership in the form of industry representatives, employers, alumni and internal advisors;
• Encourage granting council support to help bridge the gap between academic and work skills.

(Rose, 2012)

Rose’s recommendations reinforce the need to collaborate among service units, to secure lasting resources, to borrow ideas from multiple sources, to evaluate the success of the program, to emphasize the role of the Graduate Dean and to acknowledge the program as a work in progress.

In effect the literature reveals that there is no longer a question of whether Canadian graduate students require additional professional skills training; it is instead a question of the modes of delivery and the kinds of assessment. This shift from justifying the need to exploring the method may take some time to gain wide acceptance among faculty members and graduate students, as the move to include “transferable skills” in the core curriculum of a graduate degree is a change perceived by some as unnecessary given the prevailing view of graduate school as training for an academic career. Part of the task, then, of any professional development program at SFU will be to communicate the findings of the scholarly literature that reflect a shift in employment outcomes and expectations for graduate students and a necessary, concomitant shift in training and development regimes.

In terms of the modes of delivery and assessment, the literature on program models is scarce, but generally consistent. While workshops are the prevailing mode of delivery in comparable programs in Canada, there is scope for contiguous programming that draws on workshops as well as self-directed and discipline specific offerings. Self-directed selection ensures the perceived relevance and utility of programs and services; discipline specific offerings invite an identification and transfer of knowledge and skills from the disciplinary context to non-academic or co-curricular settings. Taken together, workshops, self-directed or selected offerings
and discipline specific training provide a breadth and scope that should meet the professional development objectives.

A useful means of compiling and assessing this somewhat disparate range of offerings comes in the form of ePortfolios. For instance, Blair and Monske argue that ePortfolios are a “powerful way to profile professional roles for both academic and professional audiences” (2009, p.41), a crucial reminder that professional development programming need not serve as a supplement to academic direction, but rather can be used for both academic and non-academic professional and career development. Preparing ePortfolios has the added advantages of enhancing technological literacy and allowing flexible models of inclusion. Students might, for example, develop an academic portfolio at the same time as a professional portfolio. This model of organization is beneficial to students in terms of development, reflection and organization; the ePortfolio is also reasonable and practical from an administrative and assessment standpoint.

Jones (2011) recommends the use of ePortfolios to enhance student's personal and professional growth and promote student engagement. In online learning systems, the ePortfolio can house digital artifacts such as spreadsheets, word processed documents, photo files, digital presentations, and video files. Using the ePortfolio method, the learner is encouraged to think critically upon what the artifact represents in terms of their own learning (the use of metaphors is often used). The invitation for graduate students to define their own set of relevant artifacts from a list of suggested topics ensures the students see the project as useful and relevant (a key concern expressed in the survey of graduate students – see section 5, “Graduate Student Perspectives).

Where workshops could be useful is in consolidating the professional development skills of senior graduate students and addressing discipline specific topics and issues. Fugate, Jaramillo and Preuhs (2001) describe a peer mentoring program operating at the Department/Program level that invites senior graduate students to present on topics of interest to junior graduate students – e.g. “writing a grant proposal” or “surviving comprehensive exams.” In effect the workshops offer the senior students a chance to solidify their understanding of these topics and practice presentation skills, while the Department benefits from a sustainable and relevant suite of workshops.

As the following two sections of this report will demonstrate, many of Rose’s recommendations have already been adopted at Simon Fraser. This report will make further recommendations that will both draw on Rose’s suggestions and the relevant literature on modes of delivery and assessment and will situate these recommendations to reflect the context and community at SFU.
Existing Institutional Supports

Simon Fraser University already has several rich areas of support for graduate students and their professional development. This section will describe the services and supports offered by Health and Counseling Services, Career Services, the Research Commons, the Teaching and Learning Centre, the Graduate Student Society, and Graduate Studies. The next section of this report will consider those development opportunities embedded in academic degree programs, either in the core curriculum itself or in supplementary disciplinary offerings.

The current website that lists all institutional professional development opportunities is housed within the Dean of Graduate Studies site, under “professional development.” The information on the site is organized so that users can select course by “topic stream” or by “when” they need support (first year, mid-degree, etc.).

The topic streams loosely correlate to the service units providing programming. The streams – Career and Employment, Academic and Research, Teaching and Learning, Workplace and Professional Skills, Community and Wellness – tied to Career Services, the Research Commons, Graduate Studies, and Health and Counseling Services, respectively.

Within each of these topic areas users can find a list of upcoming workshop sessions. At the present time the scope of supports is heavily weighted toward a workshop delivery model. There are some other options, including peer support for careers, Mitacs internships and the Graduate Student Society’s interdisciplinary conference. However, the majority of offerings are provided in discrete workshops.

Sponsored by multiple levels of government, Mitacs provides workshops for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows on professional skills topics, facilitates internships for graduate students in industry positions and funds graduate student and postdoctoral research. Simon Fraser University provides a location for these sessions, while Mitacs sponsors the instructor, materials and catering. Where these sessions once attracted STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, Math] discipline students, the sessions are now attended by an interdisciplinary group of students with the program mandate and internships open to graduate students from any discipline.

In the fall 2012 semester the following workshops/professional skills opportunities were offered to graduate students and amalgamated on the Professional Development website (unfortunately, without a reliable registration or tracking system there is no way to ascertain how many graduate students attended these sessions):

- CV and Resume Writing Workshop
- Career Peer Educators
• GSS Think Again! Interdisciplinary Conference
• Mitacs Accelerate Internships
• Instructional Skills Workshop
• The Art of Teaching: Demonstrations
• Mitacs Step: Basics of Intellectual Property
• Mitacs Step: Build your Scientific and Technical Writing Skills
• Mitacs: Foundations of Project Management 2
• Mitacs Step: Managing Projects
• Mitacs Step: Practice Your Presentation Skills
• Mitacs Step: Proactive and Practical Communication
• Mitacs Step: Proactive and Practical Communications and Teamwork
• SFU Volunteer Services
• Venture Connection for Future Entrepreneurs
• What’s Your Impact? An Introduction to Citation Analysis and Research Impact Measures
• Finding Statistics for Your Research
• Grad Café
• Reference Management Tools: Which One is Right for You?
• Research Commons: Data Librarian Services
• Research Commons: Liaison Librarian Services
• Research Commons: Writing Services
• Theses: Tables, Images, PDFS, High Quality Print
• Theses Template and Submission Demonstration
• Thesis Template: Fine tuning and trouble shooting
• Media Training Workshop
• Systematic Searching in Health-Related Database, Including Medline and PsychINFO
• Dealing with Students in Distress and Distressing
• Just for the Laugh of It: Laughter Yoga
• Mindfulness
• Support Over Suicide
• Academic Integrity Workshop
• Online Ethics Tutorial
• Tri-Agency Scholarship Application Workshops

As the range of sessions suggests, there is no shortage of professional skills offerings at Simon Fraser University. What the institution lacks at the present time is a coordinated effort – as recommended by Rose and implied by the CAGS Report – with meaningful assessment and recognition of graduate students’ efforts. Furthermore, at the present time these offerings do not have shared curricular goals or measures of quality control. While there is every reason to expect graduate students are receiving high quality information and services, without comparison or coordination it is difficult to be sure that students receive a consistent message from all providers.
**Existing Disciplinary Supports**

A 2011 Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS) report found that while “the majority of skills training is provided in the student’s home faculty or in a teaching or skills centre” (p.2), very little professional skills training come directly from Graduate Studies. In most cases Graduate Studies is responsible for grant writing and academic integrity. Consistent with these findings Faculties and Departments at Simon Fraser University offer a wide, if inconsistent, range of professional skills opportunities for graduate students.

Without interviewing graduate chairs and graduate students from each Department, School or Program directly it is difficult to definitively describe the range of supports offered across the three SFU campuses; however, after sending an email inquiry to all graduate chairs and receiving responses from just over half, this report can detail the range of available disciplinary offerings, if not the specific frequency in which they are offered.

In many of the received responses the graduate chair expressed excitement about the possibility of a coordinated professional development program citing a perceived need for such a program and the lack of sustainability in offering these programs at the Departmental level.

Marilyn Rose’s report reminds graduate student program developers and administrators to be cognizant of the professional skills embedded within the academic degree. Indeed for each of the nine skill categories Rose details the ways in which these skills might be *already* taught, practiced and assessed within degree requirements. For instance, the dissertation demands that students make use of “communication skills” as well as “critical and creative thinking” and “research management.” Conference presentations require “knowledge mobilization and translation” and “communication and interpersonal skills.” What Rose does not mention is the possibility that these implicitly taught and practiced skills might do well to be *explicitly* taught and practiced in the discipline, such that a graduate student might recognize and refine the “transferable skills” embedded in the degree requirements.

That said, what follows are a selection of Departmental supports as identified by graduate chairs:

- **Business** – an extensive internal career development system including resume and interview skills, distinguished speakers series, diagnostic testing, networking training, presentation skills, business etiquette, individual career advising and a writing course.
- **Biological Sciences** – Publishing de-mystified workshop, networking events with industry partners, graduate student hosted speaker events on developing research projects.
• Chemistry – Social events with industry representatives in attendance
• Earth Sciences – Conference attendance, working as teaching assistants and research assistants, accreditation by NSERC for HQP.
• Economics – Weekly research seminar for mid-stage PhD students.
• English – course on “Research and Teaching Skills,” grant and job application workshops, mock interviews.
• Engineering Science – Internships.
• Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies – individual mentoring.
• Geography – Success in Graduate School workshop, writing and publishing workshop and a conference-attendance workshop.
• Gerontology – Internship required and service learning opportunities.
• Liberal Studies – Conference presentations, symposium and mentoring.
• Linguistics – Credit course including research and teaching topics and grant writing, on-demand workshops and individual mentoring.
• Mechatronics – A course “Writing for Publication,” with a planned course for Fall 2013 on Research Methods.
• Physics – A course in “Presentation Skills” and a course in “Research and Teaching Skills.”
• Political Science – Orientation, Co-op program, grant writing workshops, publishing workshops, job search workshops, dealing with research challenges and mock job talks.
• Public Policy – Co-op, resume development, cover letters, network building and interviews, portfolios and informational interviews.
• Publishing – project courses to simulate workplace, internship and project report.
• Statistics and Actuarial Sciences – Software training.
• Urban Studies – Industry representatives, co-op program.

After reviewing the responses to the open ended question “what, if anything, is offered in x Department that might broadly be understood as ‘graduate student professional development’ it is clear that a follow-up set of questions needs to be asked of graduate chairs and graduate students. Given that many chairs did not identify the embedded professional skills – e.g. communication, presentation and writing – an interview or survey with more structured questions could easily elicit more systematic and comparable results. However, at this point in the development of an institutional professional development program it is useful to know the range of “transferable skills” training at work at the Departmental level, as it is to be aware of the stark disparity of offerings between a traditionally “academic” departments (e.g. History) and a “professional” program (e.g. Publishing). What these differences suggest is that within the institution there exists an acceptance that some programs are geared toward professional employment and so deserve and require professional development training, while other “academic” programs train students for “academic” careers. This binary supports the continued obfuscation of transferable skills from within the academic curriculum, as well as the acceptance and implementation of supplementary skills training for professional employment in the traditionally academic departments.
The compilation of disciplinary supports for graduate student professional development also suggests that whatever form an institutional professional program might take it must take into consideration the disciplinary/Departmental offerings and find ways to meaningfully recognize and integrate these elements.

Two key recommendations, then, for the continued development of this project are:

1. To consult again with academic units with more specific questions about existing embedded professional skills training and compile results; and,
2. To compare these results and explore: the differences between professional and academic programs in terms of professional skills opportunities for graduate students and those disciplinary areas that could most use institutional support in shoring up their offerings.

Graduate Student Perspectives

A survey of graduate students and their desires for professional development formed a part of the work Jamie Hoskins completed in the summer of 2012. This section of the report captures the results of this survey and draws on the survey results to suggest some of the professional development supports that graduate students at SFU see as useful and desirable.

Qualitative questions in the survey asked graduate students to comment on three questions:

1. Are there any specific supports or professional development opportunities that you wish the university had provided when you started your graduate studies?
2. What are the other factors that influence my ability/willingness to participate in career or professional development programming?
3. What are your greatest concerns about your personal career and professional development?

Before providing a sample of the most frequently cited responses it is worth noting that the language of the survey questions in terms of “career” and “professional skills” may have inadvertently shaped the range of responses. While many graduate students comfortably discuss alternative academic careers or non-academic (Holaday, Weaver & Nilson, 2007) for many the perceived stigma of a non-academic career prevents not only an open discussion of employment expectations, but a failure to register questions about alternative careers as at all applicable to their circumstances. For this reason, the survey results with respect to career/employment must be read with an awareness of the tension inherent in asking
graduate student to consider non-academic careers in the first place. In future conversations with graduate students about their desires for professional development it might be worth allowing the students themselves to determine the vocabulary.

Before exploring the qualitative responses, it will be useful to share some demographic information in order to see how representative the data might be.

Of those responding, two disciplines far outweighed others, that of the Faculty of Education and the Public Health Program, which may reflect the career-oriented nature of their current programming. These two academic units provided more than double the response rate of other units and so the particular kinds of professional development supports embedded in their programs will necessarily have affected the survey results.

Another critical demographic question is the year of the program in which the survey respondents are enrolled. As some respondents pointed out in the qualitative responses professional development only becomes of interest later in the degree. This perception of the utility of professional development work in the earlier stages of the academic degree may be one worth addressing; however, in the meantime, consider the data on year of study. Of 109 responses:

- 29% had studied for > one year
- 19% for one year
- 23% for two years
- 12% for three years
- 5% for four years
- 5% for five years
- 4% for six years
- 1% for seven year

The survey did not ask respondents to indicate whether they were studying for a Masters or PhD, and so these results are less useful than they might be. Indeed, the
high percentage of respondents from the first year – 48% - suggests that the responses may express the programming needs of early graduate students and/or Masters students and not graduate students as a representative whole.

In terms of qualitative responses, of 103 respondents, 40 respondents offered concrete replies when asked, “Are there any specific supports or professional development opportunities that you wish the university had provided when you started your graduate studies”? A content and frequency analysis of the responses yielded the following results, with the most participants requesting “non-academic career” support and the fewest requesting support for preparing a teaching dossier and project management. These results may have been shaped by the option for respondents to self-identify the areas of additional professional development; that is to say, the open-ended nature of the question may have limited responses from those participants who had not considered the range of other opportunities. Follow-up focus groups could be used to evaluate the representative nature of this sample, as well as the priority students assign to each opportunity.

Figure 2: Additional Professional Development Opportunities

When prompted with the statement “The other factors that influence my ability/willingness to participate in career or professional development programming” 42 of 103 respondents overwhelmingly indicated that the perceived relevance of the programming and the timing of it influenced willingness and ability to participate.
Again, a content and frequency analysis revealed the following breakdown of reasons:

![Figure 3: Factors Influencing Participation](image)

This qualitative question had a corresponding, related quantitative question: “Which two of the following would you consider as the most important factors influencing your ability/willingness to participate in career or professional development programming?” with the overwhelming majority referencing academic workload (77%). Interestingly, the choice of the “relevance” of the program was not provided, and so a comparison with the qualitative data is not possible. However, the high responses in terms of timing in the qualitative data and the high responses with respect to time/workload in the quantitative data suggest that professional programming ought to be integrated with academic curriculum requirements.

Finally, when asked “What are your greatest concerns about your personal career and professional development” 95% of respondents cited concern about finding a job. Some respondents specified the kind of job – academic or “good” jobs – while others simply expressed concern about availability. The extremely high percentage of respondents must, however, be evaluated in relation to the phrasing of the question, as the leading nature of the question (the phrasing implies that the respondent already has concerns) and the introduction of the language of “career” may have inadvertently inspired respondents to express concerns about finding a career, rather than, as may have been intended by the question, to describe challenges with professional skills development (e.g. finding programs, timing of programs, cost, etc.). That said, the extremely high percentage of graduate students concerned about future employment should not be discounted.
Taken together, the survey of graduate students offers an initial attempt at understanding the needs and motivations of graduate students with respect to professional development support and programming. The survey results offer some insights into the kinds of programming graduate students would like offered, as well as an explanation of the concerns and questions related to participation, including most notably the relevance of programming and its timing. This report recommends the integration of professional programming with academic content and the optional embedding of these offerings in disciplinary settings.

Institutional Comparisons

In Rose’s exploration of existing graduate professional development programs in Canada she divides programs into four categories from the most coherently organized and branded to the least. She describes Category One institutions as those:

Whose GSPD activity level is high, whose GSPD activities are collected under one aegis or ‘brand,’ the management of which resides in the Faculty, School or College of Graduate Studies. They can be thought of as having a strongly centralized GSPD operation. Their branded ‘bundle’ of offerings includes activities homed in or housed by internal partners within the institution as well as, in some cases, activities homed in and run by Graduate Studies. Every effort is made to include Faculty-specific offerings for graduate students as well […] The braded GSPD activities become a selling point for the university’s graduate studies programs and are used as recruitment and retention tools. (19 – emphasis added)

The universities who currently hold the Category One designation include UBC, Concordia, McGill, and other comparable institutions. As Rose points out, the Category One schools share a commitment to central support of the graduate professional development programs. As Simon Fraser University has expressed an interest in a similar structure in hiring a Coordinator for Professional Development Programs, the branding and centralization of such a program will follow Rose’s recommendations for the institutional valuing of the program and the promise of sustainability.

Incentive to Participate

At many comparable institutions reward and remuneration for graduate students is explicitly advertised. McGill University and Western University’s programs do not provide co-curricular credit; rather, their programs make the case for participation by way of the increased likelihood of employment and the diversification of skills. Queen’s University allows students to take workshops as part of a “Certificate in Professional Development” or for interest. Rose recommends the investigation of a co-curricular credit as a means of attracting and retaining students to the professional development program. But, as there is no existent research at this time
on the efficacy of certificates either for attracting participants or in higher placement rates for graduating participants, no clear recommendation on the kind or scope of reward comes through in either the literature or the institutional comparison.

**Modes of Delivery**

In looking to other institutions for models and best practices, the University of Alberta offers a model of a portfolio-based program (see Appendix A for the U of A Professional Development Record Book) that allows students to self-select some elements of the portfolio (i.e. students self-select what workshops to attend within three required categories), while some elements are mandatory (e.g. a teaching dossier, research philosophy, current CV).

The University of Alberta also offers graduate students “Professional Development Week” – the first week of January in 2013 – that sees an intensification of professional development offerings such that graduate students might complete several workshops or programs before classes and concomitant work pressures resume.

Memorial University holds a Category One designation by virtue of its brand and organized division of workshop sessions into categories that reflect Tri-Agency recommendations. The workshops closely align to those currently offered at Simon Fraser University and suggest that the implementation of a professional development program need not be unduly onerous or involved in order to be successful.

The University of Toronto organizes its programs by observing existing service units workshops and granting these existing workshops status within the professional development program if the workshops meet a minimum standard. This practice ensures consistency in quality and promotes a shared message communicated in disparate sessions. This speaks to the need for some coherence in terms of curricular messages and expressed values across disparate service units’ offerings.

**Assessment**

As Rose points out, “assessment is an area that still requires work” (2012, p.24). As most institutions either require or invite students to take a certain number of discrete workshops without a capstone project, the only model of a comprehensive option is the portfolio through the University of Alberta. That said, even this portfolio does not track student success post-graduation in terms of job placement. Most often these sessions are evaluated immediately after completion in terms of student enjoyment or “engagement.” While this information can be useful for revising and refining offerings, it does not provide any scope for understanding the impact of the programming on skill development. Assessment of programming should be forefront in programming to ensure it is meeting the needs of the participants presently and as they leave the institution. Simon Fraser University is
well positioned to make assessment a conscious practice as the institution develops and implements programming.

Based on a review of comparable institutions in terms of incentive to participate, modes of delivery and assessment, it is the recommendation here that Simon Fraser University adopt a self-directed ePortfolio program, with optional and required elements embedded in both disciplinary settings and at the institutional level.

Values and Goals for a Professional Development Program

Because Simon Fraser University values the diverse skills, knowledges and aspirations of graduate students, the proposed Professional Development Program exists to support graduate students as they identify their individual strengths and goals and as they work to achieve these aspirations. The Program should provide regular opportunities for graduate students to articulate their goals, to recognize their developing skills and to identify areas for their growth and development. The Program should recognize varied and intersecting modes and spaces for this development to take place, including academic disciplines, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs, employment and life experience.

Principles

• Professional skills may be learned and practiced in both academic and non-academic settings;

• Individual interests, strengths and aspirations of graduate students will be acknowledged and supported by encouraging self-directed discovery and learning;

• Academic curriculum devoted to disciplinary professional skills development will be recognized and integrated with existing and proposed translational skills development;

• The efforts of graduate students towards broad professional development at the individual, departmental and institutional levels will be recognized and valued.

Recommendations

Given the available data from the literature review, the institutional and departmental analysis, the survey of SFU graduate students and the comparison among other Canadian institution, we propose the following recommendations for
the development, implementation and assessment of professional skills development for graduate students.

**Professional Skills Goals**

Based on the Tri-Agency recommendations and on the specific interests and goals of Simon Fraser University's graduate students, on completing a graduate degree at Simon Fraser University, every graduate will:

- Communicate research and interests to a diverse audience;
- Pose critical questions and propose novel solutions inside and outside of the classroom;
- Model personal effectiveness in terms of time management and goal setting;
- Conduct academic research to the highest standard of academic integrity;
- Practice and reflect on teaching in an academic and non-academic setting;
- Demonstrate leadership in an academic and non-academic setting;
- Identify and transfer individual strengths, skills and knowledge to a variety of contexts, including academic and non-academic.

**Program Structure**

Following Rose’s recommendations, the program requires a brand and central position within Graduate Studies. In the interests of creating interest and enthusiasm within the graduate student population, we recommend a “naming contest.” This contest should take place as soon as possible in order for the complete branding of the program materials and website. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the program as the PD Program in these recommendations, with the awareness that this title is a placeholder until an appropriate title is determined.

As suggested, based on a review of comparable institutions in terms of incentive to participate, modes of delivery and assessment, it is the recommendation here that Simon Fraser University adopt a self-directed ePortfolio program, with optional elements embedded in both disciplinary settings and at the institutional level. The incentives to participate in such a program include the improvement and diversification of academic and alternative workplace skills, resulting in an increased likelihood of employment post-graduation, the enhancement of personal efficacy, and an enlarged capacity for engaged participation in society as a whole. The required elements of the ePortfolio should include a blend of participation in each of the skill set categories. Each student should be issued with a personal ePortfolio which they can use to track and record their participation in the program elements. Face-to-face opportunities will exist for participants to share what they have learned/observed, and to revisit discussion generated through an online platform. In this way, university-led and disciplinary-specific workshops will no longer remain ‘stand alone’ programs – based on students’ initiative they will be shared, discussed and evaluated with peers.
What follows are preliminary examples of initiatives within each of the skill categories that graduate students could choose to participate in as part of their individualized Professional Development Program.

**Research**

**Institutional**
- Reference Management Tools: Which One is Right for You?*
- Research Commons: Writing Services
- Theses: Tables, Images, PDFs, High Quality Print
- Theses Template and Submission Demonstration
- Thesis Template: Fine tuning and trouble shooting
- Systematic Searching in Health-Related Database, Including Medline and PsychINFO
- What's Your Impact? An Introduction to Citation Analysis and Research Impact Measures
- Finding Statistics for Your Research
- Academic Integrity Workshop
- On-line Ethics Tutorial
- Mitacs Step: Basics of Intellectual Property*
- Mitacs Step: Build your Scientific and Technical Writing Skills*
- Grant writing seminar*
- Publishing seminar*

**Discipline Specific**
- Grant writing workshops
- Conference presentation
- Research methods course
- Publishing workshop

**Individual**
- Research plan and philosophy
- Publication of a peer reviewed article
- Working as a research assistant

**Teaching**

**Institutional**
- Certificate in University Teaching and Learning
- Teaching Dossiers and Philosophies workshop*
- The Art of Teaching workshops
- Mitacs Step: Practice Your Presentation Skills
- TA/TM Day participation
- Dealing with Students in Distress and Distressing
- Course design seminar*
- Instructional Skills Workshop*
Disciplinary
- Delivering a discipline specific teaching workshop/talk
- Peer mentorship or observation of teaching
- Discipline specific community of practice

Individual
- Working as a teaching assistant
- Annotated bibliography of 5-10 articles on discipline specific pedagogy

Community

Institutional
- Media Training Workshop*
- GSS Think Again! Interdisciplinary Conference
- Mitacs Accelerate Internships
- Grad Café
- Mitacs Step: Proactive and Practical Communication*
- Mitacs Step: Proactive and Practical Communications and Teamwork*
- SFU Volunteer Services

Disciplinary
- Co-op or internship
- Invited Speakers – Industry Representatives

Individual
- Volunteer work <25 hours/year
- Opinion piece in newspaper
- Blog/personal website

(Personal) Leadership

Institutional
- Conference Organization
- Mitacs: Foundations of Project Management 2*
- Mitacs Step: Managing Projects*
- SFU Volunteer Services
- Venture Connection for Future Entrepreneurs
- CV and Resume Writing Workshop*
- Career Peer Educators
- Just for the Laugh of It: Laughter Yoga
- Mindfulness*
- Support Over Suicide*

Disciplinary
- Peer mentorship participation
- Committee participation
**Individual**
- Meeting with career advisor
- Complete and current curriculum vitae and/or resume
- Complete and current cover letter

**Relevance of Programming**
The program must be responsive to students’ needs and give graduate students a range of choices. A program of professional development must work in conjunction with disciplinary offerings related to students’ professional needs. The Office of Graduate Studies will work closely with key stakeholders across academic units in order to obtain feedback on the relevance of university-led programming. Academic units will be invited to engage in developing more discipline-specific components to compliment the offerings by student service delivery units. The Office of Graduate Studies will invite faculty members across academic units to recognize the relevance of a professional development program and encourage them to promote student engagement with the program.

*The program will be designed to be responsive to individual needs to ensure maximum relevance and utility.* Once the schedule is determined, students will be able self-select appropriate sessions. Students may choose to select an eclectic array of individual workshops but holistic sessions will be developed to offer students a more comprehensive approach to professional development.

**Program Assessment**
Such a program requires assessment, querying:
- What motivates students to participate in professional development opportunities?
- What relationship might there be between participation in an ePortfolio program and employment rates?
- How has program implementation conformed to or contributed to the revising of the goals of the program?
- How satisfied are the students with the program?

A steering committee of key stakeholders (faculty, graduate students, service unit staff) will develop a plan of assessment for the program. Assessment will probe student satisfaction with the program, areas of improvement, organization and timing of delivery, relevance, integration of academic/disciplinary practices and perceptions of usefulness of program elements in the immediate, intermediate and long-term. Post-completion survey tools and focus group questions will be developed for assessment purposes.

**Ongoing Consultation**
As this program will be new for SFU, this report recommends ongoing consultation including:
• Wide dissemination of this report with opportunities for feedback and revision;
• Further consultation with academic units on existing embedded professional skills training;
• Further consultations with graduate chairs with more specific questions about existing embedded professional skills training;
• Consideration of the feasibility of and funding for using senior graduate students to deliver workshops on discipline specific topics and/or to participate in mentorship programs.

Conclusion
This report has revealed the depth and breadth of professional development programming already at work at Simon Fraser University and has suggested some of the ways in which professional development programming might be augmented and/or refined, as well as ways programs could be organized to better support graduate student professional development.

This report builds on the work completed by Jamie Hoskins and is very much indebted to his thoughtful work in the summer of 2012. This report is provisional and preliminary and will benefit and rely on the input and suggestions of current committee members and further campus consultations. In the meantime, we hope these findings and recommendations will be useful in developing and supporting graduate student professional development.
References


Polziehn, R. (2011) *Skills Expected from Graduate Students in Search of Employment in Academic and Non-Academic Settings*. Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Alberta. (Obtained through University of Alberta’s website, and available as pdf)


Tri-Agency *Statement of Principles on Key Professional Skills for Researchers* (November 20, 2007). (Available for download from the University of Guelph’s website: [http://www.uoguelph.ca/](http://www.uoguelph.ca/))

Professional Development (PD) for graduate students is becoming an increasingly important factor to funding agencies and future employers. They are looking for graduate students who display great communication and interpersonal skills, creativity and imagination, teaching competence and leadership abilities.

This Professional Development Record Book provides a single resource for you to record any professional development sessions you attend during your graduate studies at the University of Alberta.

Add your CV, resume, and outstanding reference letters—create a comprehensive Professional Development package that highlights the skills you garner throughout your graduate career.

Name: ______________________________________________________________

E-mail: _________________________________________

Program: ____________________________________________________________________

Department: __________________________________________________________________

Campus Address: ____________________________

Campus Phone #: ____________________________

Program Start Date: ____________________________________________________

Personal information on this form is collected under the authority of Section 33(c) of Alberta’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act for authorized purposes including admission and registration; administration of records, scholarships and awards, student services; and university planning and research. Students’ personal information may be disclosed to academic and administrative units according to university policy, federal and provincial reporting requirements, data sharing agreements with student governance associations, and to contracted or public health care providers as required. For details on the use and disclosure of this information call the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at 492-3499 or see www.ualberta.ca/FOIPP.

Professional Development Checklist

☐ Attend and record University of Alberta professional development sessions (Section 1)
☐ Attach a copy of your current CV or resume (Section 2)
☐ Attach a Research Dossier (Section 3)
☐ Prepare and include a Teaching Dossier (Section 4)
☐ Record community service and volunteer activities (Section 5)
☐ Explore and track career opportunities (Section 6)
☐ Compile reference letters or a reference contact list (Section 7)

See www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca for a list of graduate student professional development resources on campus
Section 1: Professional Development Sessions, Presentations, Courses and Workshops

This section allows you to record any UofA session you attend based on the three categories below. Examples of topics that fall under each category are provided. You may record attendance at seminars offered by other organizations that relate to your professional development. Use your best judgment to categorize each session you attend within one of the following three categories.

### Communication (C)

- Teaching
- Writing
- Presentation Skills
- Administration
- Publishing Reports and Papers

Explore and attend sessions offered by:

- University Teaching Services (UTS) seminars: [www.ualberta.ca/UTS](http://www.ualberta.ca/UTS)
- Learning Shop: [www.learningshop.ualberta.ca](http://www.learningshop.ualberta.ca)
- Library Instruction and Training: [www.library.ualberta.ca](http://www.library.ualberta.ca)
- FGSR Professional Development (WebCT) Communication Module: [www.ualberta.ca/ELEARNING](http://www.ualberta.ca/ELEARNING)

### Career Development (D)

- CV and Resume Preparation
- Cover Letters
- Interviews
- Job Searching Skills

Explore and attend sessions offered by:

- Career and Placement Services (CAPS): [www.ualberta.ca/CAPS](http://www.ualberta.ca/CAPS)
- FGSR Professional Development (WebCT) Career Development Module: [www.ualberta.ca/ELEARNING](http://www.ualberta.ca/ELEARNING)

### Professional Practice (P)

- Intellectual Property
- Ethics
- Mentoring
- Workplace Etiquette

Explore and attend sessions offered by:

- University Teaching Services (UTS) seminars: [www.ualberta.ca/UTS](http://www.ualberta.ca/UTS)
- Learning Shop: [www.learningshop.ualberta.ca](http://www.learningshop.ualberta.ca)
- Technology Training Centre: [www.ualberta.ca/TRAINING](http://www.ualberta.ca/TRAINING)
- FGSR Graduate Ethics Training (GET) Course: [www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca](http://www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca)
- FGSR Professional Development (WebCT) Professional Practice Module: [www.ualberta.ca/ELEARNING](http://www.ualberta.ca/ELEARNING)

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### APPENDIX A

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**Note:** If you have more sessions than chart allows, an additional blank chart is available from the Professional Development section of the FGSR website at www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca
**Section 2: CV or Resume**

- Prepare and attach a professional CV or resume containing detailed information about your research, teaching, community service and work experiences.
- It is best to adapt your CV or resume for each specific circumstance, whether you are applying for a job or for a scholarship. A general CV template is available from the Professional Development section of the FGSR website at www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca
- Attend Career Development sessions to learn how to prepare an effective CV or resume (see Section 1).

**Section 3: Research Dossier (Research Philosophy)**

- Prepare an essay on your research philosophy.
- A research philosophy should profile your research within its broader discipline and describe how your research relates to other work. It can include why and to whom your research has importance, some of the questions that you may be addressing, the future direction of your research, and relevant sources of funding or collaborations.
- You will also want to include a list of publications, performances, presentations, exhibitions, internships and conferences attended.

**Section 4: Teaching Dossier (Teaching Philosophy)**

- Prepare a teaching dossier. It’s an effective method to capture your excellence as a teacher because it presents teaching as a scholarly activity in an orderly manner. It also provides supportive evidence of all that you do inside and outside the classroom, laboratory, or clinic.
- Your teaching dossier may be used in the future for annual reports, nominations for teaching awards, applications for research leaves, teaching development grants, employment positions, tenure, or promotions.
- University Teaching Services (www.ualberta.ca/UTS) has an online Teaching Dossier guide, plus a resource library with a selection of materials useful in preparing and maintaining a teaching dossier.

**Section 5: Community Service**

- Increase your civic engagement through community service and volunteering, and keep an up-to-date list of your work, both on- and off-campus. You should also compile thank you letters you have received for your community service participation.
- Community service not only assists you in meeting educational and social goals, but many workplace environments and future employers promote social responsibility and may ask that you participate in voluntary or community service events.
- At many universities, faculty members are expected to contribute time to committees and activities in the local community that promote relationship building.
- Community service can also be a factor for some scholarships where attention is given to the hours, level of responsibility, commitment, initiatives shown, and impact of involvement.

**Section 6: Career Opportunities**

- Career plan on a regular basis, even if you are not currently seeking a position. Take time to talk to people who are employed in positions that interest you, keep a list of these contacts and their job descriptions, and look for academic positions posted in research journals and on university websites.
- Explore your career options by arranging a job shadow, internship, or volunteering with organizations of interest.
- Review labour market trends, get information on employers, and search the job bulletins at Career and Placement Services on campus; view the FGSR Professional Development (WebCT) Career Development Module (see Section 1).

**Section 7: References**

- Keep track and compile reference letters, letters you receive for participation in various programs, and contact information for various people you meet that may be future referees—be sure to include their name, title, institution, address, phone numbers and current email address.