



# Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Strategic Plan

2019-2024



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies



Welcome to the 2019 UBC Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Strategic Plan! The plan sets out 5 goals and 16 strategies for advancing graduate and postdoctoral education at UBC for the next 5 years, in close alignment with the University's overall strategic plan, *Shaping UBC's Next Century*. We view this as a living document, and so welcome any input or suggestions as we continue to work collectively towards its implementation.

---

**GOAL: ADMISSION OF THE MOST PROMISING GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS, WITH DIVERSITY REPRESENTED IN ALL ITS DIMENSIONS**

- Strategy 1: Increase graduate student and postdoc funding and living affordability
- Strategy 2: Restructure central funding policies and processes to optimize for recruitment purposes
- Strategy 3: Enhance and coordinate recruitment efforts across the university
- Strategy 4: Increase Indigenous student enrolment

---

**GOAL: ENRICHED LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE OF GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POSTDOCS THAT FURTHER PROMOTES THEIR FORMATION AS SCHOLARS**

- Strategy 5: Promote research and learning opportunities across disciplines and units
- Strategy 6: Improve coordination, opportunities, and support for graduate student and postdoctoral professional development
- Strategy 7: Facilitate the generation of more vibrant student communities
- Strategy 8: Implement graduate student and postdoctoral wellbeing strategies
- Strategy 9: Improve support of Indigenous students

---

**GOAL: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE RIGOUR AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EDUCATION THAT GRADUATE PROGRAMS PROVIDE, AND ENSURE FACULTY AND STAFF ARE WELL-SUPPORTED TO ACHIEVE THIS**

- Strategy 10: Enhance the quality of graduate student supervision
- Strategy 11: Invigorate community among graduate program leaders and explore expanded models of support
- Strategy 12: Increase efforts to ensure graduate programs are effectively reviewed and the findings followed up
- Strategy 13: Work to ensure administrative processes are streamlined and effective

---

**GOAL: THROUGH INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE, INCREASED ASSURANCE THAT RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION ARE MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD**

- Strategy 14: Sustain and enhance the Public Scholars Initiative (PSI) and related work aimed at reimagining graduate education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Strategy 15: Increase understanding of and opportunities for knowledge mobilization and context-based scholarship for the public good

---

**GOAL: INCREASED SYNERGIES WITH UBC-O**

- Strategy 16: Increase coordination and collaboration between the two campuses

# UBC GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES STRATEGIC PLAN

## NOTE FROM THE DEAN AND VICE PROVOST, GRADUATE & POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES:

Graduate and postdoctoral education and research are core to the university's mission as an exceptional research-intensive educational institution, and to its vision to 'inspire people, ideas and actions for a better world'<sup>1</sup>. How can we build on our established excellence to increase our impact and value for today's learners and society?



To develop this plan, the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (G+PS) office embarked on a broad consultative process over the course of a year and a half, in parallel with the consultations for and development of the university's plan, *Shaping UBC's Next Century*. Both plans informed each other as they evolved, and the resulting documents are consistent and complementary.

In late 2016, the disciplinary Faculty Associate Deans, graduate student representatives, Graduate Council, and the G+PS Executive worked to devise a consultation and planning process, which included the articulation of priorities and focus in the current graduate and postdoctoral enterprise and the development of questions to help shape future goals. Over the course of the next year, all faculty, deans, graduate program staff, students and postdocs at UBC were invited to attend consultation sessions and/or submit their thoughts to the G+PS office. Over fifteen events were held, and administrative leaders, service providers, and other stakeholders on both UBC campuses were consulted individually or in small groups. These consultations have allowed us to reflect where we have come over the past five to ten years, to survey the current landscape from a broader perspective, and to assess how we can improve upon our current efforts and imagine an ambitious future over the next five years

This resulting strategic plan encompasses a breadth of graduate student and postdoctoral fellow education, support, and experience, and thus outlines a collaborative vision and map for a broad array of units and individuals on campus. It is our sincere hope that this collaborative and creative spirit will endure as we work together to act on these strategies, affecting positive and sustainable innovation and improvement in our institution and world.

My deepest gratitude goes to all who contributed to this plan, and to all who continue to work tirelessly for the development and support of graduate students and postdocs at UBC.

*Susan Porter*

*Unless otherwise noted, the actions in this plan are the responsibility of G+PS, generally in collaboration with campus partners.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Vision statement of the UBC Strategic Plan, *Shaping UBC's Next Century*

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY DISTINCTIONS RELEVANT TO GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

In its work crafting a strategic plan, the UBC community affirmed its deep commitment to the central role of the university in society and to its mission to contribute towards ‘a better world’ through education, the creation and mobilization of knowledge, and engagement with all sectors of society. In aspiring to be relevant and impactful in the world, it is important that we have some understanding of the context in which we find ourselves in 2019.

Several key qualities of our time have helped to inform our goals for graduate and postdoctoral education:

**Commitment to Indigenous relationships.** The completion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s report (2015), and Canada’s official adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2016) are among the many stimuli for Canada’s renewed commitment to reconciliation, deeper understanding, and enhanced relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities. UBC has likewise continued its strong commitment to engagement with Indigenous communities, support of Indigenous students, and to ‘reciprocity, knowledge curation and development’ with respect to Indigenous peoples and knowledges.

**Awareness of wellbeing and its impact.** Whether due to stressors in the academy, post-graduation uncertainties, greater awareness of mental health issues, and/or other factors, it is clear that graduate students (and likely postdocs) are experiencing significantly higher rates of mental unwellness than either peers in the general population or university students as a whole. This is a genuine concern from a human perspective, and so needs attention, but it also has ramifications for student progress, research productivity, student service capacity, and the future workforce.

**A post-truth era.** Although post-truth is variously defined, most will agree that we are confronted today with a society that increasingly values opinion over facts, dismisses expertise, and accepts or promotes dishonesty in communication. The academy’s role in modelling and promoting critical thinking and intellectual integrity is more crucial now than ever, as is its trustworthiness and engagement with the world in ways that are relevant, honest, and sensitive to the many dimensions of human nature, society, and the pressing issues of the day.

**Career diversity.** Career trajectories of graduate students and postdocs are much more diverse than in the past. At UBC, similar to other universities, less than 30% of PhD graduates become research-intensive faculty by eight years after graduation ([outcomes.grad.ubc.ca](https://outcomes.grad.ubc.ca)). The vast majority are still doing ‘scholarship’, broadly defined, but in ways and contexts and for purposes that may not resemble those that earned them their degree.

**Change and complexity.** The 21<sup>st</sup> century is, and will continue to be, characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and a state of continuous change. While discipline-based, curiosity-driven research will continue to be crucial to our future, our most critical challenges in this century are wicked problems that will also require us to go beyond traditional research modes. Knowledge will increasingly need to be generated in the context of application, involving diverse, multisectoral and multidisciplinary collaborative approaches, and the engagement of ‘every ounce of ingenuity, imagination, and creativity’<sup>2</sup> humans have.

---

<sup>2</sup> Sir Ken Robinson, in ‘[Why Creativity Now? A Conversation with Sir Ken Robinson](#)’

## ATTRIBUTES OF UBC RELEVANT TO GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

In addition to our societal context, we need to consider UBC's characteristics – especially those of our graduate and postdoctoral ecosystem – as we look forward. The following describes some of our particular strengths, challenges, and qualities, and the related thoughts gathered through our consultations.

Many of UBC's interests and strengths are to a large extent a consequence of our location and history. That the Point Grey campus was established on the ancestral, unceded territory of the Musqueam people has strengthened our commitment to engagement with Canada's and our local Indigenous peoples. Our place on the West Coast has fostered strong relationships with Asia and the Cascadia corridor, and our dedication to sustainability. Our stunningly beautiful location helps attract the finest faculty, staff, students, and postdocs; but disadvantages us in contributing to the very high cost of living here. Also undesirable is the unfortunate distinction of BC that it is the sole Canadian province without an established graduate student scholarship program.

Perhaps because of our relatively young age, UBC is known as risk-taker and innovator, and the importance of these qualities have been strongly re-affirmed in university-wide consultations. We have a clearly articulated ambition to foster global citizenship, and to be a force for good in the world through our outstanding research, innovation, engagement, and learning.

On a more operational level, UBC is in the early stages of an enormous undertaking to replace its enterprise systems in student administration, human resources, and finance. We anticipate that the Integrated Renewal Program (IRP) will result in a significant, positive impact on how graduate students are served at UBC, but the process of developing and implementing the system will entail considerable strain and disruption for the many individuals involved in student administration.

### **Graduate enrolment characteristics relative to comparator universities:**

- Within Canada, we have a higher than average proportion of international students
- PhD completion times are slightly longer than the Canadian average; completion rates are slightly higher
- Total funding for research students is about average for major Canadian universities
- The rate of federal scholarships per domestic PhD is the highest in Canada

---

## GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES – SIZE, STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES

UBC-V has close to 3600 doctoral students and 6200 master's students, the fourth largest graduate student population among Canadian universities. About 30% of master's students, and 44% of doctoral students at UBC are international. About 85 academic units at UBC offer over 250 research-based programs and 85 course-based master's programs. Most graduate programs (and all research programs) fall under the oversight of G+PS; the rest are under their corresponding disciplinary Faculty. The university hosts about 850 postdoctoral fellows.

Faculty, student, postdoc, and staff consultants identified many strengths of UBC's graduate and postdoctoral enterprise, among them:

- UBC is an exceptional institution with a reputation to match;
- It has an innovative mindset and track record;
- Our graduate students are excellent;

*UBC should be a living lab, with more collaborative research on campus...We need more systematic collaborations on specific projects and problems.*

*UBC is a commuter campus, which makes it really hard to build community...We need both faculty and student housing.*

*We need a stronger student intellectual community that is engaged and vibrant, especially for disciplines that aren't collaborative.*

- faculty members

- Programs have the freedom to structure their educational approaches in ways that are relevant to them;
- G+PS plays a vital role in support and leadership;
- The current central funding approaches (4YFs and GSI) are tremendously helpful;
- Postdocs are well-supported here

Where may we be falling short? How can we further advance the university's mission in graduate and postdoctoral education? The top concern expressed by faculty and students was insufficient student funding, especially considering the high cost of living in Vancouver. Also frequently raised was a sense that community life (among students, and between students and faculty) was not all it could be; that research supervision by some faculty continued to be problematic; and that much more could be done to help prepare students for their careers. Many faculty and students expressed a desire to break down barriers between units and disciplines; some were enthusiastic about the need to enhance problem-oriented research, others, that traditional, discipline-based scholarship should continue to be valued. Excellence was a universal goal of research and scholarship, irrespective of the forms they took.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND AREAS FOR ACTION:

The following guiding principles and areas of action for graduate and postdoctoral education were developed collaboratively at the start of the consultations and affirmed throughout the process.

As a community of educators, researchers and administrative facilitators and service providers, we uphold the following principles in our work with and for graduate students and postdocs:

- **Excellence** – creating and supporting an outstanding educational environment that fosters world-class achievement and impact for our graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.
- **A culture of integrity and high standards** – ensuring that our educational and administrative processes and interactions, and the academic and research work of our graduate students and postdocs, meet the highest standards of quality and integrity.
- **Relevance to the 21<sup>st</sup> century** – aligning our practices with the needs, realities and opportunities of contemporary society, and thinking forward, anticipating ongoing processes of change and its impacts.
- **Local and global engagement** – establishing strong, collaborative, responsive and mutually beneficial connections between our graduate students/programs/postdocs and local and global communities and partners.
- **Equity, diversity, and inclusion** – fostering a graduate and postdoctoral endeavour that upholds equity as a core value, strives to be accessible and inclusive to all those who wish to and do participate in it, and pursues diversity as an inherent good which enriches the academic and social learning experiences of participants.

- **Wellbeing** – actively cultivating an environment and practices that support the mental and physical health and thriving of all participants in graduate and postdoctoral studies, and confronting systemic and individual patterns that undermine wellbeing.

As a community of educators, researchers and administrative facilitators and service providers, we work collaboratively in the following areas of activity, into which the 16 strategies of this plan are categorized.

- **Recruiting the best graduate students and postdoctoral fellows** – actively strategizing and implementing initiatives to attract outstanding students and postdocs to UBC, working toward admitting optimal numbers of students by discipline, degree type, and visa status.
- **Supporting students and postdocs to succeed** – implementing practices, services and initiatives that provide students and postdocs with resources and opportunities (including adequate funding and outstanding teaching and supervision) to realize their academic/research potential, proactively address and resolve problems, and develop a wide range of skills and attributes that will contribute to positive career outcomes.
- **Supporting and promoting excellence in graduate programs and faculty** – identifying, sharing, supporting and implementing best practices in graduate student education, supervision, administration, funding, professional development, communications and data analysis.
- **Advancing effective innovation in graduate education** – designing and implementing innovative approaches to graduate education that optimize its value and outcomes for all stakeholders, including students, faculty, community partners, funders (including government and taxpayers) and society at large.

## RECRUITING THE BEST GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS

### *GOAL: ADMISSION OF THE MOST PROMISING GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS, WITH DIVERSITY REPRESENTED IN ALL ITS DIMENSIONS*

Although there was no consensus within the UBC community about graduate student enrolment numbers, there was a consistent and strong sense that ‘quality should trump quantity’. How ‘quality’ is defined varies across the university, and is a question very much worth reflecting on in the face of the ever-changing landscape of graduate education and post-graduation outcomes. Students with diverse experience, ethnicity, outlooks, passions, and abilities will be valued as the university broadens its own mandate for research and education.

Many academic units of the university are hoping to increase their engagement with postdoctoral fellows which, up to now, has not been seen as a university-wide priority. Postdocs are key contributors to the university’s advancement, and the university has much to offer them.

In the past two years, much has been done to enhance graduate student recruitment efforts. Funding clearly plays a critical role in recruitment and, to address that, an additional \$8M has been incorporated into doctoral scholarship programs (an approximate 30% increase) and a minimum funding policy for doctoral students was implemented. Significant digital recruitment initiatives have also been launched through G+PS, a university-wide task force was constituted to strategize about graduate student recruitment, and seed funding has been provided to programs for experimental recruitment initiatives.

There has also been a concerted effort to support Indigenous applicants and students, and we have seen a continuous rise in the proportion of Indigenous graduate students at UBC over the past decade.

Further improvements in our recruitment efforts will involve additional funding, optimized funding processes, advocacy for increased housing at UBC, and enhanced and coordinated recruitment efforts across the university. Systematic efforts to encourage a greater refinement in admission decision-making will also be made.

## STRATEGY 1: INCREASE GRADUATE STUDENT AND POSTDOC FUNDING AND LIVING AFFORDABILITY

Funding availability is a critical component of recruitment. Most universities with whom UBC competes for students and postdocs are located in more affordable cities, and this makes competitive funding levels even more important to maintain. We need to do our utmost to support our learners through generous funding and affordable housing.

---

### Key actions

- a. Increase focus on fundraising for graduate scholarships (e.g., the Blue and Gold Campaign)
- b. Continue advocacy with the provincial government for an ongoing scholarship program
- c. Explore the development of an additional internal postdoctoral funding program
- d. Pursue expansion of on-campus housing accessible to graduate students and postdocs

## STRATEGY 2: RESTRUCTURE CENTRAL FUNDING POLICIES AND PROCESSES TO OPTIMIZE FOR RECRUITMENT PURPOSES

The current internal funding schemes and processes do not always allow programs to easily use them for recruitment purposes; this is most often related to competition deadlines or the timing of funding allocation communications. Because programs can have vastly differing application and admission deadlines, a restructuring will likely entail a reduction in the use of university-wide competitions. G+PS will also seek to streamline policies and processes as much as possible to reduce administrative complexity for both programs and G+PS.

---

### KEY ACTION

- a. To better meet recruitment needs, complete the modification of funding policies and processes arrived at through broad consultation; assess after first year
- b. Reduce number of award competitions

## STRATEGY 3: ENHANCE AND COORDINATE RECRUITMENT EFFORTS ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY

Unlike undergraduate recruitment, graduate recruitment at the university tends to be quite decentralized, with some central support and effort. Although programmatic recruitment efforts will always be essential, much more can be done to support Faculties' and programs' efforts and to coordinate efforts where possible. Central initiatives can also be significantly expanded. A specific



suggestion raised by those responsible for professional master's programs was that the university could do much more to ensure those degrees are seen as valued and as integral to the UBC brand.

Given the changing societal context of graduate education, the changing career landscape, and an increasing sophistication in our understanding of excellence, it is an opportune time for the larger graduate community to revisit how we define and assess 'promise' in our applicants. While it may be that decision-making processes will not change dramatically, we believe that such reflection may help promote more nuanced planning of educational efforts and strategies more generally.

---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Complete and implement recommendations from the recruitment task force (these will likely include many of the strategies listed here as well as enhancements in strategic partnerships)
- b. Expand digital and traditional recruitment approaches
- c. Enhance support for program-level efforts through services, funding, and coordination
- d. Enhance the profile of professional master's degrees as part of UBC brand through story-telling, social media, and other avenues
- e. Engage the graduate community in reflection on admission decision-making

## STRATEGY 4: INCREASE INDIGENOUS STUDENT ENROLMENT

About 3.5% of domestic graduate students are Indigenous. Successful outcomes of our efforts in this sphere would be a proportion that is closer to the Canadian average (5%), and a more even distribution among Faculties. Strategic focuses should be on raising awareness and support for graduate school among undergraduates and working to enhance the graduate school environment as welcoming and supportive.

---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Undertake targeted recruitment of and graduate school preparation for undergraduate Indigenous students
- b. Enhance the G+PS web presence relevant to Indigenous students, including the creation of more Indigenous student profiles

## SUPPORTING GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POSTDOCS TO SUCCEED

### *GOAL: ENRICHED LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE OF GRADUATE STUDENTS AND POSTDOCS THAT FURTHER PROMOTES THEIR FORMATION AS SCHOLARS*

At G+PS, we have been defining graduate education as 'the formation of scholars<sup>3</sup> who make a difference for good in the world'. Here, 'formation' entails learning, but also cultivating habits of heart and mind, and developing a professional identity and sense of purpose; and the scholarship pursued

---

<sup>3</sup> Term taken from Walker et al (2008), *The formation of scholars: Rethinking doctoral education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

refers to the broad activities that bring knowledge, rigour, and creativity to the extension and transformation of knowledge, whether that is inside the academy, outside its walls, or crossing between. Success, then, encompasses all these areas in the development of learners, and the collaborative involvement of faculty, staff, and students themselves. By necessity, the strategies aimed at supporting graduate student success overlap with those oriented to supporting and enhancing graduate programs as well as those advancing innovations in education, and some will therefore be included in the next sections.

Over the past few years, the university has achieved a great deal in terms of academic renewal, the development of services aligned with graduate student needs, the facilitation of student and postdoctoral community-building, the refinement of student and postdoctoral professional and career development, and improved support for complex academic problems. However, we know that there is still a yearning for a stronger intellectual community among students and postdocs, that graduate students continue to experience a greater likelihood of mental health issues than the general population, and that students and postdocs often do not feel sufficiently prepared for their future careers. Practical advice and information is important for this, as well as the holistic development of the individual. An ‘interdisciplinary habit of mind’ is key for today’s world, and opportunities to develop this are frequently raised by students as extremely important to them.

#### STRATEGY 5: PROMOTE RESEARCH AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND UNITS

The ability to transcend and connect different ways of knowing and doing is recognized as critical to addressing the complex problems faced by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also a key focus of *Shaping UBC’s Next Century*, there is an urgent need to further break down silos within the university to enable and promote this intermingling of perspectives.

---

#### KEY ACTIONS

- a. Systematically identify problems and develop and implement solutions to logistical hindrances to the flourishing of interdisciplinary graduate programs, research, and teaching. These include courseload assignment practices for faculty, TAs assignments, and funding practices.
- b. Explore cultural barriers to interdisciplinary engagement, and seek to address these
- c. Increase opportunities to develop interdisciplinary intellectual communities and programming

#### STRATEGY 6: IMPROVE COORDINATION, OPPORTUNITIES, AND SUPPORT FOR GRADUATE STUDENT AND POSTDOCTORAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development – that is, the acquisition of transferable knowledge, perspectives, and skills that promote success in learners’ academic programs and post-graduation careers – is considered a key component of graduate and postdoctoral education, especially given the diversity of careers the graduates enter. Many units on campus (including graduate programs) provide excellent development opportunities, on wide-ranging subjects from career-building to teaching, research integrity, project management, grant-writing, and business communication. Although collaboration among the units is excellent, the offerings are not always coordinated or communicated in a way that helps students plan their own development. A ‘hub’ for graduate student (and potentially, postdoctoral) professional

development has been proposed, which would enable better coordination and cohesive framing and communication of the activities, and which would function as a key resource for academic units and students to develop their own offerings.

---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Create a graduate student professional development hub to help coordinate activities and provide resources to programs, faculties, and students
- b. Explore adequacy of English language support for graduate students, and advocate for improvement as needed
- c. Formalize career development for postdocs
- d. Advocate for and assist central office in providing Responsible Conduct of Research resources
- e. Expand the promotion of and resources for the use of Individual Development Plans among students and postdocs

## STRATEGY 7: FACILITATE THE GENERATION OF MORE VIBRANT STUDENT COMMUNITIES

Intellectual community, whether department-based, peer, or cross-disciplinary, is essential to the holistic development of learners and, more fundamentally, to the advancement of knowledge. Vibrant communities are also associated with student and postdoc wellbeing and retention. Unfortunately, many students and postdocs say that it is lacking – there can be ‘empty halls’ with little interaction with faculty members; some learners feel ‘siloes’ in their labs or isolated in the library; and many seek but don’t discover opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange.

A number of central initiatives have partially addressed this (e.g., PhD Connections Lunch series, online community forum), but there is a continuing need for diverse and enriching community. This may occur organically (which can involve support and encouragement from central units), or through more formal means.

*‘A graduate program is more than courses and examinations and hours in the archives. There needs to be an open engagement with ideas; public conversations about research, pedagogy, and professional issues; and discussions that place [the discipline] in a larger culture.’... Intellectual community is a condition, indeed the foundation, for the core work of doctoral education: building knowledge.*

– Walker et al., 2008

---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Complete the renovation of the Koerner Library to expand the Research Commons, providing dedicated learning and collaboration spaces for researchers, graduate students, and postdocs; work to ensure its broad and effective use
- b. Develop funding scheme for programs or students to develop community-building activities
- c. Provide space and infrastructure to support students connecting, including exploration of feasibility of Graduate Student Life Centre
- d. Explore possibility of expanded Graduate Colleges



## STRATEGY 8: IMPLEMENT GRADUATE STUDENT AND POSTDOCTORAL WELLBEING STRATEGIES

Almost every successful outcome of this strategic plan would be expected to have a positive impact on the wellbeing of learners. That is, sufficient funding, excellent mentoring and teaching, appropriate services, robust career development opportunities, and vibrant communities are among the key factors that contribute to a sense of wellbeing. Proactive measures to promote and support wellbeing specifically are also important, however, as is viewing all structures, policies, processes, and initiatives through that lens.

---

### KEY ACTIONS

- a. Complete implementation of the graduate student wellbeing strategy developed in 2017
- b. Model resource requirements and advocate for graduate student parental leave funding
- c. Develop and implement a wellbeing strategy for postdocs
- d. Support student-led wellbeing groups and equip them with resources
- e. Ensure wellbeing perspectives are included in faculty and student development activities

## STRATEGY 9: IMPROVE SUPPORT OF INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

UBC has core commitments to Indigenous student recruitment and support, and to enhanced understanding of Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary issues throughout the university. Key strategies to meet these and related commitments are outlined in the 2018 Indigenous Strategic Plan. To explore more fully what UBC has accomplished in the graduate education domain, and what further actions should be taken, an August 2017 forum on Mentoring Indigenous Graduate Students was organized by G+PS with key collaborators including the First Nations House of Learning. Among the many recommendations stemming from the forum were to increase Indigenous fellowships, expand the Faculty of Education's SAGE program (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement) to the rest of the university, and develop resources on Indigenous graduate student supervision.

---

### KEY ACTIONS

- a. Thoroughly review Indigenous student funding and develop means to address deficiencies
- b. Prioritize recommendations for enhancing the Indigenous student experience; further review systemic barriers and gaps in services and supports
- c. Expand the support provided by SAGE to Indigenous students across the university

## SUPPORTING AND PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN GRADUATE PROGRAMS AND FACULTY

**GOAL: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE RIGOUR AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EDUCATION THAT GRADUATE PROGRAMS PROVIDE, AND ENSURE FACULTY AND STAFF ARE WELL-SUPPORTED TO ACHIEVE THIS**

*If I had a magic wand I would ensure that all of us involved in graduate education were aware that 'it takes a village'...that there is still much to do to foster excellence and quality in graduate programming.*

- faculty member

The primary locus of learning in graduate education is the graduate program. Among other qualities, excellent graduate programs have outstanding faculty, high quality supervision (for research graduate programs) and teaching, effective and supportive staff, a vibrant intellectual community, transparent administrative practices that promote regular tracking and support of student progress, and an ethos that values learning and students' holistic development.

### STRATEGY 10: ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF GRADUATE STUDENT SUPERVISION

The relationship between a research graduate student and their supervisor has been described as 'the most important channel of intellectual inheritance between one generation and the next', and the quality of that relationship often largely defines the learner's experience at the university. There are many outstanding graduate mentors in our community, and in a recent survey, 84% of UBC-V research graduate students said they were satisfied with the mentoring they receive from their supervisor. Although that is encouraging, we are also acutely aware that much is still needed to ensure consistent pedagogical excellence and respectful interactions.

Supervision is often overlooked (and therefore unexamined) as a critical form of pedagogy. In addition to the regular workshops on supervision, G+PS has put recent effort on helping to build a culture that values, reflects on, and is increasingly expert on this unique teaching and learning paradigm. This involved the implementation of a six-month scholarly program for nominated faculty leaders, who went on to form the nucleus of a small community of practice tasked with developing campus-wide resources and policy proposals to strengthen, raise the awareness of, and improve assessment and recognition of graduate supervision. They have developed key resources for the graduate community, and their work is ongoing.

#### ***My supervisor...***

- *is an inspiration*
- *encourages me to think critically*
- *continuously challenges me to be an independent scientist*
- *pushes me to see different angles I had not thought of before*
- *is very encouraging, very supportive of my ambitions, very kind and very thoughtful*
- *is the kind of person I would aspire to be like*
- *is so busy that I have stopped getting the support that I need*
- *did not let me explore ideas that were important to me*
- *regularly got angry with me for reasons that were not clear*

- graduate students

---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Expand and disseminate resources on supervision, including the newly developed Principles of Excellence in Supervision
- b. Increase central (G+PS) and decentralized professional development opportunities on supervision
- c. Conduct an environmental scan on graduate supervision practices
- d. Establish pilot projects with departments to develop and evaluate means of assessing supervision effectiveness
- e. Complete and implement proposal for enhanced valuation of supervision in promotion and tenure and merit reviews
- f. Create guidelines for department heads and deans on addressing supervision issues
- g. Explore mandatory workshops for new faculty
- h. Encourage broadened communication and conversations about supervision

## STRATEGY 11: INVIGORATE COMMUNITY AMONG GRADUATE PROGRAM LEADERS AND EXPLORE EXPANDED MODELS OF SUPPORT

*We struggle a lot with staff turnover in our program. Could G+PS support that aspect better?* - faculty member

*It would be great to have more opportunities to share best practices – we have a lot in common.* - grad program staff

The G+PS office offers regular information sessions on graduate program administration for staff and faculty, and approximately bi-annual workshops for graduate program directors on management issues more broadly. We heard repeatedly in our strategic plan consultations, however, that graduate program directors and staff would appreciate more opportunities to develop community among themselves, to have more occasions to learn and share best practices and questions about graduate education, programming, and administration.

We also recognize that there is some urgency - brought into sharp focus by the experience of delegating final admissions decisions to graduate programs - to explore more robust ways of ensuring graduate program staff can effectively navigate the increasingly complex landscape of graduate administration and support.

A considerable amount of information is available to graduate programs through several different channels - the public G+PS website, the access-controlled Faculty-Staff website, email announcements, workshops and webinars provided by various G+PS teams, consultation sessions with specific programs, and so on. However, we have recognized the need to develop a **coordinated plan** for these various resources: to identify gaps, to schedule training at appropriate times throughout the year (a curriculum of sorts), and to develop a better system for sharing information and feedback between G+PS and graduate programs. That system will need to be consistent, easily navigable by and accessible to graduate programs and feasibly maintainable by G+PS. Doing so will require additional resources from G+PS; it will also require a commitment from graduate programs to free up their staff for a modest amount of participation in ongoing training and development. The payoff will be stronger support of students and faculty across the entire campus and a stronger partnership between G+PS and graduate programs.



---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Schedule regular group opportunities for both graduate program directors and staff on issues of interest and importance
- b. Complete and disseminate resources on graduate education and administration
- c. Coordinate interactions with graduate programs across G+PS themes
- d. Facilitate conversations on program requirements, alternative models of progression (e.g., fast-tracking or direct entry to PhD), in support of optimal program lengths
- e. Conduct environmental scan of graduate program staffing portfolios and student enrolment
- f. Work with VP-HR office to develop recommendations to improve and increase consistency and equity in decentralized graduate student administration

### STRATEGY 12: INCREASE EFFORTS TO ENSURE GRADUATE PROGRAMS ARE EFFECTIVELY REVIEWED AND THE FINDINGS FOLLOWED UP

The primary means of formal quality assessment in graduate education at UBC are through periodic external reviews of academic units. Of key importance are the unit's informed and reflective self-assessment of graduate programming, and effective follow-through after the review by all accountable units to ensure any needed changes are supported. In recent years, G+PS introduced changes in the self-study requirements, and now provides standardized graduate student data for all units undergoing review. However, there continue to be problematic issues with regard to the consistency of review processes, self-study content, and reliable follow-up post-review. Meaningful student input and advice during the review process are also often lacking.

---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Working with provost's office and deans: Streamline and improve creation of self-studies and improve the logistical aspects of review processes
- b. Develop more robust system for tracking and following-up reviews in the G+PS office
- c. Explore engaging and mentoring students to participate in program strategic planning and assessment

### STRATEGY 13: WORK TO ENSURE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES ARE STREAMLINED AND EFFECTIVE

UBC is in the midst of an unprecedented university-wide review and reconfiguration of its administrative processes and systems in the form of the Integrated Renewal Program (IRP) and implementation of the Workday software platform for the university's finance, human resources and student management systems. Participating effectively in IRP - both in the configuration of Workday (design) and the implementation of Workday (change management) must be the focus of our attention. The downstream impacts of those new processes will continue to occupy the attention of our staff and of graduate programs for several years, even after the IRP project itself is complete. Alongside IRP, we remain committed to improving the eVision online admissions system (which is out of scope for IRP).

---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Review and support existing business processes, including eVision and delegated admissions – across G+PS teams and programs
- b. Devote high-quality resources to IRP planning and implementation
- c. Advocate for processes and policies that are appropriate for and specific to graduate students and postdoctoral fellows wherever possible.

## ADVANCING EFFECTIVE INNOVATION IN GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL EDUCATION

**GOAL: THROUGH INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE, INCREASED ASSURANCE THAT RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION ARE MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD**

*A core principle [in graduate education] should be training for the needs of society...Universities aren't changing fast enough to meet these needs, to enable real innovation. We should be thinking about cross-boundary programs, we should reward interdisciplinarity, we should be more focused on solutions than subjects.*

- faculty member

UBC's strategic plan outlines a mission to shape our collective future. In the plan, we have committed to 'harnessing disciplinary excellence and multidisciplinary collaborations to address problems of significance to British Columbia and the world', and to supporting 'knowledge exchange beyond the academy' including 'new public scholarship and innovation pathways, ranging from changes in practice and policy to entrepreneurship and commercialization.' UBC strives to become better known for helping to solve the world's problems, and that will involve new strategies, new ways of thinking, and new pedagogies. We have a responsibility and opportunity to better prepare our graduate students and postdocs to excel in this changing environment and to be key

contributors to addressing the problems that plague our world. Can we envision UBC graduate and postdoctoral alumni who are consistently adept at understanding issues from multiple perspectives, and who are able to adjust their approaches to suit the problem at hand, to collaborate and communicate effectively with diverse audiences, and to think and act across disciplinary boundaries? While of course many of our graduates have these abilities, it is too often the case that students are not challenged to develop different perspectives on their research, to communicate effectively with non-peers, or to collaborate across disciplines or sectors. And if they have such opportunities, their mastery in these areas is often not assessed or valued. Mobilization of knowledge beyond the academy (or through teaching in the academy) is often not perceived as legitimate academic activity, and hence is also not taught or assessed.

The experimental **Public Scholars Initiative** has proven that the academy is ready to embrace (or at least accept) broadened conceptions of doctoral education, while still valuing and pursuing disciplinary, fundamental research. Our task now is to continue promoting and facilitating this cultural shift as well as expanding access to these forms of learning and experience for more students and postdocs. While learning is ideally integrated with the deep intellectual development occurring with the

student's/postdoc's research pursuits, that is not always feasible. We are thus also looking for other avenues to encourage and support these forms of learning and action.

The following areas of focus are those which we and the university as a whole have identified as strategically important for enhancing the relevance of graduate education and the impact the university can have in the world.

#### STRATEGY 14: SUSTAIN AND ENHANCE THE PUBLIC SCHOLARS INITIATIVE (PSI) AND RELATED WORK AIMED AT REIMAGINING GRADUATE EDUCATION FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

The PSI was founded to support and encourage doctoral students to contribute to the public good through multidisciplinary collaborative dissertation research and knowledge mobilization with different societal sectors. Engaging in these forms of scholarship was also intended to better prepare students for their careers either inside or outside the academy, and to raise awareness of the diversity of career path options. As outlined in the 2017 [Report on the PSI](#), the initiative exceeded our expectations, and has transformed from a pilot to an ongoing program. Work now has to be done to sustain and enhance the initiative as well as related initiatives such as the [Killam Connection](#) course and public speaker series.

*The fact that...present day employment trends suggest that breadth and versatility may be more useful than depth and specialization [requires] substantial new approaches to graduate education.*

- Michael Smith, Killam Lecture, 1998

---

#### KEY ACTIONS

- a. Fundraise and/or advocate for internal funding to ensure the sustainability of the PSI
- b. Enhance learning and community aspects of the program, accessible to students more broadly
- c. Research and publish learning and societal outcomes of the PSI
- d. Increase awareness through all processes, including program reviews, supervision, interfacing with graduate advisors and program staff and through student professional development
- e. Ensure funding for the Killam Connection course on an ongoing basis

#### STRATEGY 15: INCREASE UNDERSTANDING OF AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION AND CONTEXT-BASED SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

While knowledge mobilization is encouraged in the University's strategic plan, there are currently insufficient opportunities, especially for students and postdocs, to learn how to accomplish some forms effectively and ethically. At a time when the scholarship of knowledge mobilization is burgeoning, we need to ensure our students and postdocs have access to the most up-to-date, evidence-based, and thoughtful educational and practical resources to learn about and conduct knowledge mobilization.



As the University seeks to address today's complex problems, 'working from multiple perspectives – informed by a depth of expertise in different disciplines'<sup>4</sup>, there are rich opportunities to deeply and formally cultivate these necessary ways of thinking and working in our students and postdocs. In addition to the above strategies to remove barriers to interdisciplinary graduate programming and provide opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange, UBC can continue to push boundaries in graduate education by experimenting with different models of rigorous, transformative approaches to graduate programming and research.

---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Expand resources on examples, and supporting and evaluating non-traditional forms of scholarship
- b. Advocate for appropriate recognition of non-traditional scholarship in promotion/tenure processes
- c. Expand opportunities for research in partnership with those from other societal sectors
- d. Assess feasibility and develop learning opportunities across disciplines for knowledge mobilization (e.g. policy, communication, organizational/social innovation) and other needed academic or related subjects (e.g. management, Indigenous culture, data sciences) - through non-credit programs, for-credit certificates or other credentials
- e. Explore the possibility of a 'grand challenge' transdisciplinary collaborative PhD and/or training program(s)

## INCREASED SYNERGIES WITH UBC-O

Although the Okanagan and Vancouver campuses have distinct graduate schools, there is significant coordination and collaboration between the two on common issues and strategic vision. There continue to be areas where greater synergies could be realized, however, as well as avenues to enhance graduate education on both campuses through common endeavours.

## STRATEGY 16: INCREASE COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE TWO CAMPUSES

---

## KEY ACTIONS

- a. Complete policy amendments related to UBC-O faculty involvement in supervision and examination
- b. Extend the supervisor profile database to include UBC-O faculty
- c. Explore suggestions from a recent graduate community survey and strategic consultations, and implement as appropriate and possible
- d. Through the Integrated Renewal Program (encompassing both campuses) consider how to streamline and, where appropriate, integrate our processes

---

<sup>4</sup> *Shaping UBC's Next Century*, p. 52