REPORT

ADVISORY TASK TEAM
ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF
GRADUATE STUDENT SERVICES

Prepared for
Dr. Carl G. Amrhein
Provost and Vice-President (Academic)

May, 2009
TERMS OF REFERENCE

The aim of the task team is to provide guidance to the Provost and the University community on confirming the model for the administration of graduate students on campus. To this end it will:

- review the self study created by FGSR and the Administrative Unit Review report (March 3, 2008), and the FGSR written response to this report (April 18, 2008)

- consult with the Interim Dean of FGSR to obtain his perspective on the issues under consideration by the task team;

- provide advice to the Provost on the overall response to the administrative review and how to frame next steps;

- consult appropriately with key stakeholders to ensure the right model is established for the University of Alberta, especially on all matters related to structure and support of the model;

- identify offices and organizations which affect graduate students and provide recommendations on how they can communicate and cooperate effectively;

- provide a final report within four months which shall be made public;

MEMBERSHIP:

- Deputy Provost, Chair: Dru Marshall
- Vice-President (Research), or delegate: Renee Elio
- Two Graduate Students, selected by the GSA: Ben Whynot and Crystal Levesque
- One faculty representative from APC, selected by the Provost: Ed Blackburn, Campus St-Jean
- One Dean, selected by the Provost: Rob Holte, Science
- One Chair, selected by CCE: Horacio Marquez, Engineering
- Two members from FGSR Council, selected by the Provost: Katherine Moore, Nursing and Joan White, Business
- One representative from existing and active University of Alberta student services supporting graduate students: Frank Robinson, Interim Dean of Students
- Ex-Officio:
  - Vice-Provost and University Registrar: Gerry Kendal
  - Interim Dean of FGSR: Mazi Shirvani
- Other representatives, as deemed appropriate by the Chair to ensure appropriate Tri-Council representation: George Pavlich, Arts and Law and Chris Cheeseman, Medicine & Dentistry
- Support: Donna Herman
TASK TEAM PROCESS

MEETINGS HELD:

Date: Tuesday, February 3
Date: Tuesday, February 24
Date: Monday, March 9
Date: Thursday, April 2
Date: Wednesday, April 15
Date: Tuesday, April 28

PROCESS FOLLOWED:

Issues from the Unit Review Report of FGSR were identified, and the Response from the Faculty to the Unit Review Report was reviewed. At each 90 minute meeting, an average of 3-4 items was discussed, and additional information requested by the committee was presented and discussed. The process to develop recommendations was iterative, as often items were re-visited after additional information was presented.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RECEIVED:

Appendix A: Administrative Unit Review – Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research Executive Summary of the Report of the Unit Review Team April 23, 2008
Appendix B: Average Processing Time for Graduate Applications 1-Jan-2005 to 12-June-2008
Appendix C: Results of the 2004/2005 University of Alberta Graduate Studies Survey & Graduate Student CVs
Appendix D: Processing Times (of Graduate applications on data collected since 1 March, 2008)
Appendix E: Graduate Students – A Presentation by the FGSR to PEC (President’s Executive Committee, 22 January, 2009)
Appendix F: The Average GPA of Applicants to Whom an Offer of Admission was Made and Registrants Versus those who did not come
Appendix G: (Grad) School’s Out from Inside Higher Education – February 12, 2009
Appendix H: FGSR Organizational Chart December 10, 2008
Appendix I: Major Tasks of the Communications and Information Systems Units of FGSR
Appendix J: Postdoctoral Information at Major Canadian Universities
Appendix K: President’s Advisory Committee of Chairs (PACC) Brief Notes from Meeting of January 17, 2008 – FGSR Initial Discussion of Future Direction
Appendix L: Background History on the PDF Office
ISSUES DISCUSSED:

Vision for FGSR on Campus

The task team agreed that an overall vision for graduate studies on campus was needed.

Registrarial Role of FGSR

- Registrarial functions are defined to be application, admission, course registration, records, and transcript handling.
- The task team engaged in considerable discussion and debate regarding the registrarial functions of FGSR.
- The Registrar and Interim Dean of FGSR indicated that the Registrar’s Office could, in principle, handle admission and registration. However, with planned 20% growth in graduate students, their view was that this function may be potentially better served by FGSR.
- Decentralization of the admissions process was discussed; however faculty representatives agreed that the work currently being done by department admissions committees is appropriate and works well; they are satisfied with the role of FGSR as the final decision-making authority on admissions.
- Students require clarification regarding the appropriate unit through which they apply (FGSR or a department); however, admissions occur in different ways and there needs to be flexibility with potential graduate students as well as with timelines.
- With respect to the admissions functions, both departments and FGSR have roles to play. The task team agreed it is critical that the institution makes admission offers to students earlier than is occurring now. Scholarships deadlines are too late and notification to departments and students has to be timelier once the process is started. Recruitment and admissions is discussed in further detail as a separate topic below.
- The task team agreed that the registrarial functions should continue to be handled by FGSR.
- Electronic student file would be extremely useful for all stakeholders.

Academic Role of FGSR

- The task team discussed that the Dean of FGSR must advocate generally for graduate programs of the institution.
- The task team agreed that FGSR should: (1) provide facilitation to support and encourage graduate program excellence in all departments; (2) set minimal standards for all programs (i.e., serve an oversight and evaluation function); (3) adjudicate scholarships; (4) facilitate recruitment of students.
- The FGSR Council needs to review standards regularly.

Dean and Vice-Provost?

- The title of “Vice-Provost” would provide the Dean of FGSR with different opportunities in the senior administrative structure than Deans of other faculties.
- There may be perceptions that the additional role as Vice-Provost implies that the Dean would not be independent of the Provost’s Office.
- The title can open doors to international meetings and events.
- The additional function of Vice-Provost allows the Dean of FGSR to interact and collaborate with other senior administrators in the Provost’s portfolio, allowing the Dean to understand how the institution works and to understand policies that can affect graduate students from all faculties.
- The task team considered whether the position should be “Dean” or “Vice-Provost” or “Dean and Vice-Provost”. The consensus was that the position (and title) should be “Dean and Vice-Provost”.

Role of Dean in Dispute Resolution

- The issue of whether the Dean is an advocate for graduate students or an advocate for a fair dispute resolution process was discussed.
The GSA indicated that, generally, they find it useful to have the Dean of FGSR play a mediating role. The task team thought that language within the GSA collective agreement needs to be reviewed and clarified, if necessary, to ensure that the Dean avoids conflict of interest.

Governance and Organizational Structures

- The Interim Dean indicated that an internal reorganization is underway in FGSR, including a review of the communications and information technology unit, and provided an organizational chart (Appendices H and I).
- The internal reorganization includes consideration of staff roles, quality of service, increase of graduate students, metrics such as admissions timelines, timeline enforcement for milestones such as candidacy exams, and reports on scholarships/awards received.
- Advisory committees have been set up in FGSR Council for scholarships and recruitment.
- FGSR Council should return to their mandate for setting direction and establishing policy.

Student Recruitment and Admissions

- Clarity is required with respect to the FGSR role and the department/faculty role and the individual faculty supervisor role.
- Extensive online information would be useful for all stakeholders.
- A standard admission letter template that also stipulates the institutional commitment for the student’s program will make our admissions offers clearer and more competitive.
- A review of timelines on entrance scholarships is needed to ensure that admissions offer letters can include an entrance scholarship as part of the admissions offer package.
- The Dean of FGSR presented data suggesting that we are missing out on the recruitment of high-GPA students (Appendices D and F). The task team questioned whether the institution communicates effectively with these students, fast-tracks their admissions, and encourages interaction with potential supervisors.
- The task team would find it useful to compare our recruitment success with that of other institutions.

Enrolment Management and Scholarships

- Enrolment management is more than recruitment. It includes management of growth, funding, space, life cycles, years to completion, retention of students, completion rates.
- An overall coordinated strategy for enrolment management needs to be developed and the role of FGSR in this process needs to be identified.
- In terms of international recruitment and collaborations, FGSR should work with UAI.
- The scholarship and recruitment committees of FGSR Council are just beginning their work – would be advisable to use these committees to assist in identifying and clarifying FGSR’s role.
- Retention of students is the responsibility of departments and researchers.
- Alternate funding models should be explored.
- Scholarship strategy for graduate students should reflect the new vision of FGSR and should align with Dare to Deliver.
- FGSR may be able to play a role in assisting students in applying for funding.

Space for FGSR

- The task team determined that the current space allocation and location is appropriate.

Communications and Website

- The FGSR has established the update of the website as a high priority and has reviewed websites of other institutions. It will seek input from campus stakeholders on the redesign of the website.
- There could be some collaboration in website updating with both the Registrar’s Office and the VP-Research Office.
- It is important to include links to departments and graduate programs on the FGSR website, while not repeating material found elsewhere.
Oversight of the Graduate Student Experience

- Subsequent to the receipt of the FGSR Unit Review report, there has been considerable discussion of the graduate student experience on campus.
- The task team discussed whether faculty workload related to graduate student supervision is an issue of relevance to FEC deliberations and whether it should be explored.
- Critical issues are the quality of supervision received by the graduate students and, in some disciplines, the number of students that an individual faculty member can effectively supervise.
- There are discipline-specific factors that need to be considered in supervision and there are skills and traits that should be consistent for all supervisors.
- There was a suggestion that FGSR should expand the workshops for new supervisors and discussion whether these should be mandatory.
- The task team agreed that FGSR should remain involved in answering general enquires from prospective students but should continue to refer discipline-specific enquiries to the appropriate area.

Quality of Graduate Programs

- The task team engaged in considerable discussion regarding an exit survey.
- Development of performance indicators was identified as critical.
- With the elimination of graduate program reviews, there is no formal mechanism in place.
- Existing opportunities to look at graduate programs occur in several processes – unit reviews, institutional access planning, institutional research planning (to be developed), exit surveys, accreditation.
- Given the resources required for existing opportunities, ideally would want a graduate program review process to take advantage of those and build upon them.
- Suggested a review process that FGSR assists with that could be requested by a Dean, a Chair or by the Provost. The FGSR would be tasked with developing an internal process for formative reviews of graduate programs within units. This process should take place soon after the unit review, using the relevant graduate data from the self-study input. This review should be conducted by a smaller committee of peers from within the University, but outside of the unit.

Professional Development (PD)

- Currently it is not clear how graduate student accesses information about available PD offerings on campus, how PD can assist in her/his program, or what PD means on a CV.
- With respect to direct teaching experience, there are great disparities among departments and programs. Some have many opportunities, some have few, and some actively prohibit graduate student teaching. Some scholarships (e.g., SSHRC) prohibit teaching in the very disciplines that require such experience to be competitive on the job market.
- Not all graduate students will take positions in an academic environment and it was discussed whether there should be different PD opportunities identified for other types of careers.
- Tri-Councils identify a set of 8-9 skills that should be common to a PhD graduate.
- A good supervisor should enable appropriate PD.
- The task team agreed that generic career-related skills development should be a component of all graduate programs; perhaps even a certificate program.
- PD takes a variety of forms and may be offered by the department, faculty, or University.
PDF office versus PDFA

- The task team debated whether it would be appropriate for either the FGSR or the VP-Research Office to be seen as advocates for PDFs when there is a PDF Association.
- Clarification on the history of the establishment of the PDF Office within FGSR was provided (Appendix L).
- Presently the Dean of FGSR is the final decision-making authority in both dispute resolution and disciplinary procedures for PDFs.
- The PDF Association has looked to the GSA for advice on advocacy.
- The issues that have come to the VP-Research Office or to the Provost’s Office related to PDFs have been high level research policy questions and human resource issues; the latter are referred to the Provost’s Office.
- There is a blending of administrative functions among the FGSR and PDF Offices (sharing of infrastructure is valuable).
TASK TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. VISION:

The Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research should lead a campus-wide discussion to develop a vision for FGSR and graduate education at the institution.

- To be completed by Spring, 2010.

2. ROLES:

On the basis of the vision, the roles of FGSR and Departments shall be clarified.

- To be completed by Spring, 2010.

3. FUNCTIONS:

The task team confirmed that FGSR is responsible for the following functions:

A. Registrarial (for all graduate level programming, including certificates);
B. Advocacy for graduate studies;
C. Marketing/promotion of graduate studies (internal and external);
D. Creating, enforcing and regulating;
E. Mediating and arbitrating conflict resolution; and
F. Managing awards and scholarship.

4. LEADER:

We recommend the leader of FGSR should be both a Dean and Vice-Provost.

- To be implemented during the upcoming decanal recruitment process.

5. CONFLICT RESOLUTION:

The Graduate Student collective agreement should reflect the role of the Dean of FGSR in formal dispute resolution.

- To be completed by June, 2009.

6. STRUCTURE:

A. The task team appreciates the restructuring completed to date, and recommends continued re-organization as planned. With a goal to further improve efficiency/effectiveness, the Dean should further refine roles and responsibilities of areas and individuals within FGSR.

- To be completed by Spring, 2010.

B. The Dean should identify qualitative and quantitative indicators to evaluate efficiency and effectiveness of operations. These measures should be taken on an annual basis and reported on in May of each year.

- To be developed by Fall, 2010.
7. ADMISSIONS:

A. The admissions processes at both the FGSR and departmental levels should be evaluated and refined to allow for faster decisions provided earlier in the admissions cycle, particularly for outstanding students.
   - To be completed by Spring, 2010.

B. FGSR can control admission deadlines, their processing time, and scholarship deadlines and decisions – it should be held accountable for these operations metrics.
   - Metrics to be part of May annual report.

8. ADMISSIONS:

At times during the admission process, faculty members cannot commit to supervising students without confirmation from granting competitions. The institution should consider developing a policy and a source for bridge funding to allow recruitment of graduate students prior to knowledge of research grant success. Researchers would then be required to reimburse this fund.

- Consideration of bridge funding to be given in the 2010-11 budget cycle.

9. SPACE:

The space that FGSR currently occupies is excellent. At this time, no new space is required.

10. RECRUITMENT:

Both FGSR and departments have a role to play in the recruitment of graduate students. We recommend the roles for each be clearly defined and coordinated. Full consideration should be given to the following roles for FGSR in the recruitment process: strategic institutional recruitment planning and coordination; profiling the University and graduate studies; and working with major institutions in other countries, in partnership with UAI, to establish working agreements. Further, we stress the departmental role of personal contact with students in the recruitment effort.

- To be considered by Spring, 2010.

11. FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND SCHOLARSHIPS:

A. Vision: The FGSR Dean’s advisory Committee on Awards should ensure the scholarship strategy for graduate studies reflects the new vision of FGSR.

   - To be completed by Fall, 2010.

b. Top-up awards: The concept of “top-up awards” is important for recruitment. FGSR should continue to collect relevant data to ensure “top-ups” are being used to maximum effect.

   - To be ongoing.
C. Scholarship advocacy: The Dean of FGSR has an important advocacy role to play with provincial, and other funders, on the importance of graduate studies.
   - To be ongoing.

D. Scholarships: The FGSR should continue with its institutional strategy to maximize the use of scholarships for recruitment purposes.
   - To be ongoing.

E. Differential Fees: If differential fees continue, we suggest FGSR consider enhancing the scholarship pool available for international students.
   - To be considered by Fall, 2010.

12. Website:
The FGSR website should be improved. The Task Force supports its redesign and suggests that a website advisory committee be formed to include both departmental and student representatives, and recommends the following for consideration (please note: this is not a complete list):

A. include a description of the roles and mandates of FGSR, and a brief history of the faculty;
B. include a message from the Dean;
C. include departmental/program links;
D. effective design for both internal and external audiences;
E. leverage the research website currently being completed by the Vice-President (Research);
F. ensure FGSR regulations are easily accessible;
G. clearly distinguish the advisory section from the regulations section;
H. include a tracking system for student status and progress; and
I. include a new site-specific search engine.
   - To be completed by Winter, 2010.

13. Electronic Records:
FGSR should continue to explore the use of electronic records with the goal of implementation as soon as possible.
   - To be completed by 2011.
14. Exit Survey:

FGSR should continue actively to evaluate its service to students. It should conduct an exit survey of all graduate students who successfully complete their degree programs, and ideally all those who are unsuccessful. The survey should collect demographic and economic data; include indicators of program quality and student experience; and assess the GSA support. FGSR Council should establish a subcommittee to develop the questions and methodology for the survey. This subcommittee should regard the survey in part as a service to programs, and explore means to include program specific questions.

○ To be completed by Spring, 2010.

15. PDF Office:

The reporting relationship of the PDF Office should be clarified to ensure that the Dean has the administrative reporting responsibilities, while the Vice-President (Research) retains the responsibility for budget.

○ To be completed by Fall, 2010.

16. Program Quality:

The task force recognizes the value of the previous graduate program review process, and the work that is involved in such reviews. We recommend that there is an alternative to the former graduate program review:

A. The annual submission required from each faculty for the development of the Institutional Access Plan (IAP) and Institutional Research Plan (IRP) should include an annual self-reflection on the graduate programs in each department, focusing on quality, comparators, and future plans.

○ To be discussed in Fall, 2009 at Deans’ Council and PACC.

B. FGSR should have the capacity to review a departmental graduate program upon request of the department chair, dean, or Provost. This review would draw on peers from across campus, but outside the Faculty of the department under review.

○ Process to be developed by Spring, 2010.

17. Oversight of the Graduate Student Experience:

We recommend that FGSR play a facilitative role in developing outstanding graduate student supervision by continuing to provide an annual “new supervisor workshop”. This workshop should include the identification of both general and interdisciplinary best practices. Further, we strongly recommend the university create a mechanism to enforce attendance of these workshops for new supervisors.

○ To be ongoing, with initial report to be provided in Fall, 2009.
18. **Professional Development**

We recommend that FGSR, in line with its vision, its advocacy role for high quality graduate experience at the institution, and with *Dare To Deliver* should clarify the core elements of professional development opportunities and how they can be delivered effectively at the institution through centralized delivery or through the creation of a professional development component within each graduate program.

- **To be completed by Spring, 2011.**

19. **Follow up:**

We recommend that FGSR provide a report of progress on the recommendations included in this document by April 30, 2010.