Second Response to External Reviewers' Report – November 2019

Introduction

The Faculty of Graduate studies and Research (FGSR) External Reviewers' Report received in March 2018 provides 15 recommendations across five themes including graduate education at the University of Regina (UR), organizational issues, operational issues, student experience, and mandate. An initial Response to External Reviewer's Report was presented by Dean Kathy McNutt in August 2018. This document, presented by Interim Dean Nick Jones in December 2019, provides an update on FGSR's progress responding to the reviewer's recommendations, taking into consideration feedback provided by CCAM and the Provost.

Over the last 16 months FGSR has been working to respond to the recommendations with a number of strategic actions that are student-centric and responsive to the institution's needs and priorities. Through a collaborative process, FGSR has developed a bold and actionable plan to become a leader in service-oriented graduate education administration. Successful implementation will be grounded in on-going stakeholder engagement, co-design, effective and efficient use of resources, and an encompassing approach to process improvement.

Reponses to Reviewers

1. Graduate Education at the University of Regina

Recommendation A: FGSR should be encouraged to engage in campus-wide consultations in order to develop an institutional plan for graduate education that articulates clear objectives and strategies for achieving those objectives.

Response A: Between January and May of 2019, FGSR developed and implemented its community engagement strategy. It included open town hall sessions, an anonymous survey, stakeholder meetings, and written submissions. Relevant stakeholders included students, faculty, staff, line faculties, and administrative units on campus. At the request of several line faculties, external stakeholders were not directly consulted. Internal staff were consulted about the resulting draft prior to release to other stakeholders for consideration.

110.2 Paskwāw Tower, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0A2
P +1 306.585.4161 E grad.studies@uregina.ca W uregina.ca/gradstudies

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There were 27 participants at four open sessions, 155 responses to the anonymous on-line survey, and 10 academic faculty and unit responses. Analysis of the data during Summer 2019 led to the development of FGSR's *Six Strategic Directions* (6SDs) and an associated action plan to align with the UR vision, mission, and values, and its current Strategic Plan. A draft of may be found in Appendix A. The directions and plan are currently being vetted by relevant administrative committees prior to a phased release to stakeholders in December and January and a planned university wide launch by the end of January 2019. A highly detailed internal version of the action plan will be maintained within the office of the Associate Dean (Strategic) to plan and monitor progress on actions associated with each direction.

2. Organizational Issues

Recommendation B. Maintain the current organizational model, but decentralize authority within the context of that model. Two specific items, to be discussed below, are critical in this regard. First, FGSR should no longer play any role in approving grades for graduate students. Approval of grades should be done in the Faculty offering the course. Second, FGSR should consider delegating authority for admissions to some or all graduate programs. This can be phased in as a pilot project, starting with units that are appropriately resourced to undertake this role.

Response B: FGSR delegation of approval of grades to Deans of faculties was **Completed Fall 2018.** We continue to communicate with Deans and Associate Deans to ensure the correct grading codes are being approved in unusual situations (e.g., DE vs. INC) to best serve students.

FGSR worked with the Levene Graduate School of Businesses to pilot transfer of admissions to their office starting in January 2019. While there were some unanticipated delays and FGSR is still processing acceptance letters on their behalf, full transfer is anticipated to be completed in December 2019. Staff from both faculties have been consulted about the transfer process in order to ease implementation with JSGSPP in the next transfer phase.

Technological improvements will also significantly enhance the admissions process and ease training requirements on a go forward basis. These technological enhancements are consistent with the 6SD pillar of *Keep the Pace* and will not only ease transfer of admissions to other adequately resources faculties, but will simplify and speed the admissions process for all involved. More detail on these improvements can be found in Response Fa.

Service provision tailoring and consultation are consistent with the 6SD pillar *Support the Lines*.

Recommendation C. Regardless of the organizational model adopted, it is imperative that there be clear communication with students, faculty members and other units on campus with respect to the role of FGSR relative to the role of graduate programs and line faculties.

> **Response C**: *Spread the Word* is one of pillars of FGSR's new 6SDs emphasizing communication. As part of the community engagement process, data was collected around stakeholders' understanding of FGSR's role, what they believed the role of FGSR should be, and their preferred forms of communication with FGSR. This information will serve as the foundation of the comprehensive communications plan and social media strategy to be developed by the Associate Dean (Strategic) during Winter 2020.

3. Operational Issues

Recommendation D. Rather than ceding FGSR's role in admissions, the Dean of FGSR undertake a pilot project delegating authority to admit to a limited number of graduate programs. Normally, delegated authority to admit allows graduate programs to make offers of admission on behalf of the Dean of Graduate Studies to any applicant who meets the graduate school's admissions criteria. Applicants who do not meet graduate studies minima for GPA or language proficiency require approval from the graduate school. Typically, the graduate school audits admissions at the program level in order to provide feedback to the academic to whom authority has been delegated, and the staff supporting that individual. Where delegated authority has been implemented, it has reduced turnaround times and duplication of effort.

> **Response D:** See Response B. As part of the pilot with the Levene School, FGSR continues to audit their program admissions and provide feedback to the School.

Approval of Grades

Recommendation: E. Authority for approval of grades in graduate-level courses and for graduate students be given to the Dean of the line faculty offering the course.

> **Response E**: See Response B. **Completed Fall 2018.**

Staffing and Internal Organization

Recommendation F. Review the staffing model to
(a) Ensure adequate resources are devoted to admissions and registration (both in the short and long term) and staff has sufficient systems expertise
(b) Align reporting relationships to allow the Dean to focus on academic leadership and enable the Faculty Administrator to deliver on operational accountabilities

Response Fa: A process improvements expert engaged in Fall 2018 failed to provide actionable recommendations for process improvement to admissions, registration, scholarships, and graduation. It is anticipated that the full review of policies and procedures to be undertaken in 2020 will significantly impact the amount and type of work that our registration staff do, and thus we hope to revisit workloads and the necessity of additional resourcing of positions over the 2020 calendar year. This review aligns primarily, but not exclusively, with the *Be a Champion* and *Keep it Simple* pillars of the 6SDs.

Technological improvements to the admissions process have been on-going and will continue reduce admissions staff burden and make their jobs more manageable. They include, among other things, a fully automated reference processing system implemented in July 2019, and a new document upload system that will go live in December 2019. These types of improvements align with the *Keep the Pace* and *Support the Lines* pillars of the 6SDs. These improvements have and will continue to benefit applicants and line faculties with submitting and processing applications. Other improvements overseen by our Office Administrator include implementation of URDocs and improvements to Banner workflow systems that will ease and speed processing of all student file requests for all involved stakeholders, including FGSR's admissions and registration staff and line faculties' graduate coordinators.

A new application tracking system implemented by our Admissions Coordinator identified processing emailed documents as the primary bottleneck slowing application processing times. The new document uploading system allows students to upload their own files directly to our systems, replace the current antiquated process of having students email files to admissions staff to manually download and then enter into our systems. The new system is long overdue. Not only it will significantly shorten application timelines, it will reduce admissions staff's workloads considerably and allow them devote more time to value added activities such as helping students with their applications.

A new Caspur report was created in January 2019 that allows us to communicate with applicants about the state of their applications and missing information to facilitate quicker processing. Faculties can also view the status of all of their faculty's applications should they choose to contact students directly about the status of their applications. Communication and training related to these new features are planned for 2020. Because slowness of processing applications and inability to see the status of applications were the primary complaints of line faculties, it is possible that these technological enhancements will reverse some faculties' desire to take admissions in-house.

A new form in Banner that will convert a WES GPA to an equivalent UR GPA to assist grad coordinators to better evaluate applications is currently being tested for areas that use WES (education, engineering, computer science). While moving to WES applications in 2017 helped to alleviate the second biggest bottleneck in processing applications - awaiting decisions from the academic units - the new Banner form will aid interpretation and thus further accelerate application decisions. The next phase in this plan is to convert GPAs for areas that do not use WES once our admissions staff's time is freed from manual file processing and training other faculties.

Our partnership with URI to provide support services to all International graduate students and visiting graduate students has successfully leveraged their expertise and is on-going. This has allowed our admissions and registration staff to devote more time to their assigned job duties.

Response Fb: The organizational structure of FGSR was changed with all CUPE staff (with the exception of the Executive Assistant to the Dean) and APT staff reporting to the Faculty Administrator. The Associate Deans, Executive Assistant to the Dean and the Faculty Administrator report to the Dean. In addition, the two Admissions Specialists report to the Graduate Admissions Coordinator and the Scholarships Assistant reports to the Manager of Scholarships and Awards. **Completed Summer 2018.**

The Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) started in his half time position in Fall 2018 and the Associate Dean (Strategic) began in her half-time role Winter 2019. A new Interim Dean started his role in June 2019.

110.2 Paskwāw Tower, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0A2
P +1 306.585.4161 E grad.studies@uregina.ca w uregina.ca/gradstudies

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Recommendation G. Be attentive to staff morale and engagement as changes are made.

> **Response G**: Increasing staff morale requires stable and consistent facilitation of a collaborative environment in which staff are empowered, mentored and coached.
>
> The reality is that staff in this office have gone through yet another year of leadership change and associated uncertainty, with their previous and current Deans both currently serving in Interim roles. During the community engagement process, staff expressed excitement about the potential of the 6SD strategy, but also some skepticism about it becoming a reality due the faculty's continued lack of stable leadership. It is hoped that having a written plan that is attached to a unit review as opposed to a specific individual's priorities will increase the likelihood of it being implemented as a single unifying long term vision for the faculty.
>
> The Interim Dean and Associate Deans are cognizant of the uncertainty of staff, and make a concerted effort to encourage open communication and to take time to verbally thank and praise staff for their work on an on-going basis, including recognition of their expertise and on-going need to retrain academic leaders as they transition through the office. These simple affirmations and making staff feel safe offering criticism is a significant part of the current strategy for improving morale and culture within the office.
>
> Initiatives to make staff feel empowered in the form of UR Respect training, emergency protocol training, installation of a security hot button at the front desk, and academic leaders supporting staff when they believe that they have been treated inappropriately also signal that staff are valued and are tools being used to improve morale and culture. Such training and empowerment are central to the 6SD pillar *As One Who Serves* that focuses on service provision within the faculty.
>
> Team bonding and morale building activities have been on-going but inconsistent as a result of shifts in leadership. The Dean hosted a Christmas party and summer BBQ for staff in Winter and Spring 2019. Academic leadership, the Office Administrator, and some APT staff members have organized catered and potluck lunches with extended lunch time, an escape room event was used as a team building activity in 2018, while annual events like office holiday decorating are on-going with the help of the Office Administrator's and APT staff's guidance. Treats were provided throughout the major project implementation week for URDocs to recognize the extra stress and workload placed on staff by the transition, staff were also taken to lunch for administrator appreciation week and presented with small office desk gifts, and a holiday lunch is booked for December.

The first official retreat since this review is planned for March 2020 that will include staff training coupled with a social event with a second planned for Summer, as turnover in the Dean's office and activity facilitator availability stalled planning. Two APT staff members have taken the UR Leading program and others have received subsidies to attend national conferences and other professional development activities. While the total professional development budget has been significantly reduced, an emphasis is being placed on quality over quantity and allocation of resources in a way that maximizes training benefit for both employee and office.

Special Case PhD Program

Recommendation H: We recommend an internal review of outcomes for and governance of the Special Case PhD program.

Response H: FGSR's evaluation of the Special Case PhD is nearly complete. Consultations have been completed and report findings are being reviewed. Summary findings are expected to be reported in early December 2019. A few of the key recommendations include streamlining the application and registration processes, building community among students, enhancing supports for stakeholders, and considering an offering at the Masters level.

4. Student Experience

Comment: We noted that no data from the Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) were included in the self-study document, and understand that the University of Regina did not participate in the 2016 survey, which occurs once every three years (http://www.cags.ca/cgpss_home.php). This survey is a useful tool for identifying issues with the graduate student experience. If resources permit, we suggest participating in the 2019 survey.

Response: FGSR has participated in past CGPSS and did so again this year, with data collection being **Completed February 2019**. University Survey Management Committee delayed the launch of the community engagement survey to March 2019 as a result of the timing of the CAGS survey.

Some initial national CGPSS findings were presented at CAGS in November and our Manager of Special Projects will be able to use the complete data set to do in depth comparative analysis of UR versus national student response in the new year.

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5. Mandate

1. *Leadership in graduate education*: Graduate education is evolving relatively rapidly, with national and international conversations relating to the form and structure of the thesis, the rise of course-based Master's programs, and career trajectories of graduate students, among other issues. A critical function of the academic leader is to monitor and participate in these conversations, and ensure that they inform local decisions.

- **Action 1** –Both Associate Deans, the Office Administrator, and the Manager of Special Projects attended Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) in 2018. The Dean was scheduled to attend but was unable to make it at the last minute. The Interim Dean, Associate Dean (Strategic), and Manager of Special Projects attended in 2019.

- **Action 2** – The Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) attended the Western Canadian Deans of Graduate Studies (WCDGS) Annual Conference in 2019. Both Associate Deans plan to attend in 2020.

- **Action 3** – The Interim Dean attended Senior University Administrator's Course (SUAC) in June 2019. Both Associate Deans were provided with $5000 for professional development in January 2019 to further their academic leadership in graduate education. The Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) attended a Leadership Communications program offered through the Harvard Extension School in November 2019. The Associate Dean (Strategic) participated in an Academic Leadership Institute at Concordia University in July 2019 and has registered for the Senior Women Academic Administrators Conference (SWAAC) in Regina in March 2020. The Provost's Office has offered to supplement the Associate Dean (Strategic)'s participation in SUAC in June 2020.

Through immersion into the CAGS community, provision of professional development for its academic leaders, and implementation of the 6SD plan, FGSR is situating itself to not only *Keep the Pace*, but become a leader in innovative graduate education administration. One way in which our office has already been recognized as a leader is through our Manager of Special Projects' central involvement in establishing national guidelines for the annual graduate student 3MT competition.

2. *Communications:* An important role for a faculty or school of graduate studies is to ensure dissemination of information to graduate students. The information to be disseminated includes both routine administrative information (upcoming registration and scholarship deadlines, for example) as well as messaging about professional development and other opportunities, as well as carefully crafted messages designed to increase student success. The communications function is accomplished through maintenance of the website, as well as regular communications out to students (such as a weekly electronic newsletter aggregating all relevant information). A social media presence can also help to broaden the reach of the messaging.

- **Action 1** – See Response C with respect to the development of a comprehensive communications plan and social media strategy based on the community engagement process undertaken to create the 6SDs.

3. *Indigenization*: Understanding that the University of Regina is committed to indigenization of the institution, FGSR has a particular role to play in providing culturally appropriate supports for students in graduate programs, ensuring that rules governing thesis examinations are compatible with cultural norms, and leading a conversation about indigenization of the graduate student experience.

- **Action 1**: An investigation and consultation process regarding the implementation of an Indigenous graduate level cohort program was carried out, with a final report submitted in July 2019. A Job Evaluation Questionnaire (JEQ) has been submitted for two part-time facilitators to run an open cohort program for all Indigenous graduate students. It is anticipated that co-development of the program with students should begin by no later than Summer 2020.

- **Action 2**: A strategy that addresses the Universities Canada principles on Indigenous education has not yet been developed. It will be integrated into implementation of the 6SDs as part of the *Be a Champion* pillar.

- **Action 3**: An entrance scholarship program for Indigenous students was launched in Winter 2019 with the first 4 recipients beginning their programs in Summer 2019. Twenty two scholarships were awarded in total, with all students currently enrolled in their programs as of Fall 2019. $60,000 was originally budgeted with much higher uptake than anticipated. With a 100% success rate, the final budget will be $123,000. This is great news and our Manager of Scholarships and Awards is comfortable that we will be able to meet these obligations as necessary. The future of this program will be driven by the ability to secure an on-going stable funding source.

- **Action 4**: A professional development workshop for faculty supervising Indigenous graduate students has not yet been designed. With luck, the university's new EDI initiative may help us to secure resources to develop and facilitate such a workshop, and potentially develop an on-line offering of such a program in future.

4. *Professional Development and Student Support:* We understand that FGSR has recently started to provide some community-building and professional development programming, but we heard that there is demand for more extensive offerings, whether provided or coordinated by FGSR.

- **Action 1**: As part of a larger initiative to coordinate the various available writing supports on campus, and in partnership w URI and Student Success, a JEQ has been written to allow for the hiring a group of casual writing coordinators to assist graduate students with the unique requirements of graduate level research writing. It is anticipated that these supports will be fully in place as early as Summer 2020 and no later than the start of the 2020-21 academic year.

- **Action 2**: FGSR hosted an annual one day Graduate Student Conference in Fall 2018 and 2019 focusing on academic readiness, with a second one-day research-focused conference scheduled in Winter 2020.

- **Action 3**: In partnership with the Research Office and the Library, FGSR held a two-day research boot-camp in Fall 2018. This pilot project was unsuccessful. The winter conference mentioned in Action 2 is intended to serve as a trial for a potential replacement.

- **Action 4**: Based on an extensive review of the literature and best practice in existing programming, FGSR has increased academic and professional development workshops dramatically, and now offers many online. A larger proposal taking a 3 pillared approach to student development (academic, professional, and well-being) complete with resourcing requirements was submitted in Fall 2019 and is under consideration by the Interim Dean.

110.2 Paskwāw Tower, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0A2
P +1 306.585.4161 E grad.studies@uregina.ca W uregina.ca/gradstudies

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5. *Student advising*: At many institutions, Faculties/Schools of Graduate Studies play an active role in providing advice for graduate students, particularly in thesis-based programs, and in resolving student-supervisor conflict. Given the complexities of the student-supervisor relationship, it is important that graduate students have access to advice and support from a party outside the Faculty where their supervisor holds an appointment. This role is typically taken on by one or more Associate Deans, sometimes supported by a staff member with expertise in student advising. The availability of such advising is particularly important for graduate students who may be intimidated by the university system; indigenous and international students are more likely to fall into this category.

- **Action 1** – The Interim Dean and Associate Deans have worked to ensure that students know that they will be heard and believed when they come to FGSR with a supervisory issue. FGSR has not yet looked into the feasibility of offering dedicated student advising beyond the decanal level, as we are first prioritizing supervisory development, as discussed in more detail below.

6. *Supervisory development* – During our visit, we heard that the new process for accrediting supervisors has been welcomed by the university community. To build on this success, there is scope for FGSR to cooperate with the unit on campus that provides development opportunities for faculty members relating to teaching to also provide development around graduate supervision. Programming aimed at graduate supervisors can ensure both that supervisors are familiar with institutional expectations around supervision, and also support them in working productively with students within the supervisory relationship

- **Action 1**: During the 2018-19 academic year, FGSR worked with the Director of the CTL to design a graduate supervisor professional development day that ran for the first time in April 2019. There were 28 participants, many more expressions of interest, and feedback was extremely positive. The program was put on hiatus during the CTL closure of Fall 2019. A meeting with the Director of the CTL was held on Nov. 20th to plan the next iteration of the program for Winter or Spring 2020. The program will be evaluate in terms of current content and expansion potential for the 2020-21 academic year.

    FGSR is devoting considerable attention to improving our infrastructure and policies for training supervisors and students about their mutual rights and responsibilities. This is a top priority of the 6SDs *Be a Champion* pillar and first steps include the hiring of a student in November 2019 to conduct a review of best practices in Canada and beyond, with particular emphasis on those at University of Calgary, identified by CAGS as a national leader in the area.

A complete review of FGSR policies and procedures will also include ensuring student safety and voice within the supervisory relationship. Should that process demonstrate clear benefit in resourcing a new internal advising position, a request will be made to the budget committee in future.

FGSR worked with the President's Office to nominate Dr. Thomas Hadjistavropoulos for the CAGS Outstanding Graduate Mentorship Award for 2019 to showcase one of the many exceptional graduate supervisors that we have on our campus. Dr. Hadjistavropoulos was also one of four panelists asked to share their best practices in managing the student-supervisor relationship at our inaugural graduate supervisor professional development day.

Acknowledgments

On behalf of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research we continue to thank the UR Vice President Research, the Provost and Vice President Academic, and the Office of Resource Planning for their support and guidance throughout the process. We are deeply appreciative of the thoughtful and valuable feedback provided by the external review team composed of Dr. Paula Wood-Adams, Professor and Dean of Graduate Studies, Concordia University and Dr. Lisa Young, Vice-Provost and Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Calgary). The advice and insight in the External Review Report will further enhance the long term success of the students, staff and our relationship with the University and community.

External Reviewer Recommendation Implementation Plan					
Recommendation	Actions	Original Response		Updated Response	
		Development	Completion	Updated Actions	Completion
Graduate Education at the University of Regina					
FGSR should be encouraged to engage in campus-wide consultations in order to develop an institutional plan for graduate education that articulates clear objectives and strategies for achieving those objectives.	Design an engagement strategy	September 2018	April 2019		May 2019
				Develop a plan for graduate education	October 2019
				6SD & Plan launch	January 2020
Organizational Issues					
Maintain the current organizational model, but decentralize authority within the context of that model. FGSR should consider delegating authority for admissions to some or all graduate programs. This can be phased in as a pilot project, starting with units that are appropriately resourced to undertake this role.	Partner with Business, Social Work, Nursing, and JSGS	4 pilot projects with authority delegated to the Dean of the faculty	January 2019	Business pilot launch January 2019	December 2019
	Provide line faculty training	Taskforce established to ensure the decentralization process do not negatively impact student experience and the quality of graduate education		Technological improvements to the admissions process	On-going
	Develop an audit process				

Recommendation	Actions	Original Response		Updated Response	
		Development	Completion	Updated Actions	Completion
It is imperative that there be clear communication with students, faculty members and other units on campus with respect to the role of FGSR relative to the role of graduate programs and line Faculties.	Associate Dean's portfolio	January 2019	On-going	Communications plan and social media strategy development	March 2020
Operational Issues					
Authority for approval of grades in graduate-level courses and for graduate students be given to the Dean of the line Faculty offering the course.	Request registrar change DOME to eliminate the Dean of FGSR role from the grade approval process	Summer 2018	September 2019		September 2018
Align reporting relationships to allow the Dean to focus on academic leadership and enable the Faculty Administrator to deliver on operational accountabilities	Staff reorganization	July 2018	August 2018		August 2018
Be attentive to staff morale and engagement as changes are made.	Team-building activities Professional development activities	On-going	On-going		On-going
An internal review of outcomes for and governance of the Special Case PhD program.	Evaluation design and scope	September 2018	February 2019	Full report with recommendations	December 2019

Recommendation	Actions	Original Response		Updated Response	
		Development	Completion	Updated Actions	Completion
Mandate					
Leadership in graduate education	Attendance and participation at global, national and regional graduate education conferences	On-going	On-going		On-going
Communications	Associate Dean Strategy will design communication plan	September 2018	On-going		March 2020 then on-going
Indigenization	Indigenous cohort program	September 2018	September 2019 (launch)		May 2020
	Indigenization strategy that addresses the Universities Canada principles on Indigenous education.				TBD
	Entrance scholarship for Indigenous students				May 2019
	Supervisory development				TBD

Recommendation	Actions	Original Response		Updated Response	
		Development	Completion	Updated Actions	Completion
Professional Development and Student Support	Develop partnerships	July 2018	On-going		On-going
	Design programs			Long term 3 pillared proposal	October 2019
				Coordinated writing supports	May 2020
	Deliver Programs				On-going
Student advising	Associate Dean (Graduate Studies) will develop plan	On-going	On-going		TBD
Supervisory development	Consultation with Associate Deans research and graduate studies	January 2019	On-going		On-going
	Development of workshop				March 2019
				Delivery of workshop	April 2019 then on-going

Appendix A: FGSR Six Strategic Directions

✓ Be a Champion
✓ Support the Lines
✓ Keep it Simple
✓ Keep the Pace
✓ Spread the Word
✓ As One Who Serves

The Six Strategic Directions Explained

Be a Champion: for our graduate students on all fronts. We will advocate for improved funding models, ensure that they are being treated fairly, and help ensure that there doesn't have to be a choice between quality of education and quality of life.

Support the Lines: in the ways that they want to be supported. We will explore ways to meet the diverse needs of our faculties while maintaining campus-wide service and quality standards.

Keep it Simple: We will work to simplify policies, procedures, and communications in order to make it easier for all of our stakeholders to navigate the graduate student journey from applicant to alumnus.

Keep the Pace: with national and international graduate education standards.

Spread the Word: about what we're doing. We are committed to ensuring strong communication with all of our stakeholders and sharing the successes of our graduate students with the world.

As One Who Serves: We will commit to be as helpful, timely, and pleasant in delivering our services as we possibly can.

Our Organizational Strategic Context

The focus of our strategic directions are founded on recommendations from the External Review of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research and the University of Regina Strategic Plan. Our directions are designed to be consistent with the existing mission, vision, and values of the University of Regina (U of R). A truly focused strategy chooses particular areas of focus rather than trying to be all things to all people. It is also focused on areas that will move the organization forward in a positive way. As such, our strategy is focused on being "a welcoming and rewarding academic work environment for students, faculty, and staff" that "serves and engages a diversity of students with a particular emphasis on Aboriginal learners and global citizens" (select elements of the U of R mission). Our directions focus primarily on the themes of Student Success and Research Impact, while recognizing their interconnectedness with the themes of Commitment for Our Communities and Indigenization (U of R Strategic Plan 2015-2020). When the university's next strategic plan is unveiled, we will revisit how to best align our strategic directions with those of the broader university community.

These strategic directions are meant to be ongoing rather than time delimited and our action plan will be a living document that is updated on an ongoing basis as items are achieved.

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The Action Plan

✓ **Be a Champion (for funding & students)**

First Moves:

a. Strategize and formulate potential new funding models for grad students on campus to propose to the budget committee
b. Update policies and practices to better protect graduate students from inequity and power imbalances

Down the Road:

c. Develop/update supervisor, student, and committee handbook material
d. Develop a comprehensive training and mentorship program for graduate supervision
e. Evaluate the potential of providing in-house advising to students in the form of navigating the student-supervisor relationship, particularly for Indigenous and international students
f. Look at ways to make our policies and procedures better fit student realities, with particular emphasis on our Indigenous and international students

✓ **Support the Lines (tailor support to faculties as desired)**

First Moves:

a. Consult with all line faculties to see what services they would like centralized and which ones they would prefer to manage in-house within the context of existing fiscal realities and available resources
b. Look at the feasibility of facilitating all thesis defenses, including Masters level, according to line faculty demand

Down the Road:

c. Develop a long term plan for decentralizing some services as appropriate and desired by faculties, with a focus on those faculties that have the existing resources available to undertake those roles
d. Tailor services to faculties to suit the levels of service provision they want (e.g., outsourced, supported, decentralized) , provided that they have the existing resources available to undertake those roles
e. Move from the one size fits all model of service provision while still assuring general quality principles

The Action Plan

✓ Keep it Simple (policies & procedures, clarity in communication)

First Moves:

    a. Ensure that information is easy to find and understand
    b. Add how-to videos and workshops for students and faculty

Down the Road:

    c. Streamline and update policies to better fit current academic realities
    d. Revisit polices to consider what is necessary, helpful, or potentially creating unnecessary barriers

✓ Keep the Pace (update policies & procedures, IT, and support services)

First Moves:

    a. Continue with initiatives to update application systems and to ensure that faculties have timely access to applicant information
    b. Review policies and procedures around alternative thesis requirements and formats
    c. Continue to build on graduate level academic and professional development offerings

Down the Road:

    d. Look at ways to provide more formalized recognition of student participation in professional development activities
    e. Explore partnership formats like cotutelle degrees and 3+2 partnerships
    f. Gauge campus-wide interest in increasing accessibility of international opportunities for students at the graduate level

✓ Spread the Word (communication and reputation building)

First Moves:

    a. Ensure open and clear two way communication with all stakeholders about FGSR's role and purpose, and our service activities
    b. Be sure to provide updates to all stakeholders about progress on initiatives designed to enhance the graduate student experience

Down the Road:

    c. Develop and implement a comprehensive communications plan using an appropriate variety of communication channels in line with stakeholder feedback around preferred forms of communication with FGSR
    d. Ensure open and clear communication with all stakeholders about issues of relevance to graduate students on campus
    e. Work with the campus community and communications office to build the profile of graduate programs and research on campus
    f. Work with the advancement office and other campus units to better track our graduate alumni, maintain strong relationships, and celebrate their long term successes.

✓ As One Who Serves (timely, helpful, and polite service)

First Moves:

a. Commit to providing the best possible service experience at all touchpoints with all stakeholders at all times within the bounds of available resources
b. Consult staff on any potential changes being considered to determine the operational and service level impacts of such changes
c. Seek advice from staff on potential process and service improvements and how we might implement any such positive changes as seamlessly as possible

Down the Road:

d. Provide staff with the necessary training and tools to provide excellent service to all of our stakeholders at all touchpoints at all times (e.g., EDI related, cultural sensitivity training)