



Factsheet: Improvements to Graduate Studies

The University of Toronto competes for the best graduate students from across Canada and around the world. As the academic and economic landscapes shift, so do graduate education and the needs of graduate students. The School of Graduate Studies (SGS), in collaboration with the University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union (UTGSU) and with Faculties and departments, is working to provide the information, programming, and support that will attract and retain top candidates and help them thrive and succeed in their academic and professional endeavours.

This factsheet provides a sample of recent initiatives to improve graduate student experience; for more information, please visit the Current Students section of the SGS website (www.sgs.utoronto.ca).

University-wide, Faculty-wide and Graduate-unit improvements and initiatives

Funding transparency:

Clear information about funding helps graduate students make decisions and plan more effectively. A number of new measures have improved transparency:

- New or enhanced SGS website pages: Financial Aid & Advising, Understand Your Funding, Funding Complaint Process, Managing Your Award, Scholarships and Awards
- Funding letters: SGS asks all departments to provide their students with annual funding letters to inform them of their funding amount and composition. Letter templates are available from SGS.
- Annual funding data: SGS now collects and publishes data, including annual base funding amounts and actual average income.
- Financial advising and student aid & financial aid support staff: SGS has hired staff to assist students in all aspects of financial management and to advise students and departments on the full range of funding programs and services.
- Funding complaint process: UTGSU and SGS have launched a process for students to bring forward concerns about their individual funding packages.

Time to completion:

Giving students the support and resources they need to complete their academic programs in a timely manner has significant benefits for students' experience during their studies and for their professional opportunities upon graduation. SGS now collects and publishes time-to-completion data for departments, and has published best-practices guides for time to completion, and supervision guides to facilitate the relationship between graduate student and supervisor.

The Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering (FASE) is committed to reducing dwell time for MAsc and PhD students, and accelerating time to completion. Initiatives include:

- Hosting Graduate Research Days, an event where prospective graduate students visit U of T, its graduate units, talk with current graduate students and meet with potential supervisors. This event helps ensure the best match between student and supervisor and



reduces time to completion. Prospective students receive advice on how to select a supervisor according to SGS guidelines.

- Ensuring that graduate units facilitate and monitor the frequency of supervisory committee meetings. These committees are critical in providing guidance for students in the MASc and PhD programs and reducing time-to-completion.
- Continuing to develop detailed data on time-to-completion, fast-tracking and scholarship success rates with the goal of identifying best practices to further encourage timely degree completion.

Wellness initiatives:

- The School of Graduate Studies building at 63 St. George Street has been renovated to create more student-friendly space, including a new student lounge, new meeting rooms, and new thesis defense rooms, and to offer enhanced support services, including counselling services.
- New or enhanced SGS grants, bursaries and emergency funding are available, including the Emergency Grant, Emergency Loan, and Summer Gym Bursary.
- Support for parents: a new SGS Parental Grant provides financial support to graduate students on approved parental leave of absence (with additional support for birth mothers).
- The Graduate Conflict Resolution Centre, created in partnership by UTGSU, SGS, and Student Life, is a tri-campus resource for conflict resolution and dispute prevention.

Student experience initiatives:

- Courses, workshops, and writing centre consultations at the Graduate Centre for Academic Communication help graduate students develop skills they need to communicate sophisticated information to relevant audiences.
- The Graduate Professional Skills program has expanded offerings to help graduate students communicate effectively, plan and manage their time, learn entrepreneurial skills, understand and apply ethical practices, and work effectively in teams and as leaders.
- To complement the existing Prospective Professors in Training (PPIT) program, FASE developed OPTIONS (Opportunities for PhDs: Transitions, Industry Options, Networking, and Skills), a PhD career development program to support engineering PhD candidates and postdocs who have career aspirations outside of academia. This program was piloted through the Institute for Leadership Education in Engineering (ILeAD) in fall 2017.
- FASE Vice Dean, Research, organizes an annual workshop for early-career faculty members on recruiting and mentoring graduate students. Panel discussions include graduate students and senior faculty, including a previous recipient of the JJ Berry Smith doctoral supervision award.
- New FASE Annual Graduate Career Fair (held for the first time in 2017 with 29 companies and 500 grad students). All graduate units have committed staff to help organize this Faculty-wide graduate student-only job fair.



- The Graduate Engineering Council of Students (GECoS) is now a formal organization which serves as an advisory group to the FASE Vice Dean, Graduate Studies. GECoS co-organizes events with the Vice Dean, Graduate Studies, such as the new Annual Graduate Career Fair and Graduate Research Days.
- To further nurture entrepreneurship among interested graduate students in the Faculty and across the University, The Entrepreneurship Hatchery has established the Hatchery LaunchLab to provide support to engineering graduate student- and faculty-led research-based startups.
- FASE has developed and participates in several new agreements with foreign universities to offer graduate students additional opportunities and funding for international research exchanges.
- FASE continues to enhance and broaden academic offerings across all graduate programs. Among some of our newest programs are:
 - MEng in Biomedical Engineering, now piloting a project for the Faculty in which a Mitacs business development specialist who resides in the graduate unit identifies industrial partners, helps students develop proposals to fund industrial internships and runs various workshops for students on topics such as CV and interview preparation.
 - MEng emphases in Aerial Robotics, Analytics and Forensic Engineering
 - Collaborative Master's Specialization in Psychology and Engineering